

**Act One, Scene One- Nowhere/ Elizabeth's Bedroom**

*We hear a distant sound of joy, but the winds and sounds of the desolate path tell us that this is but an illusion. We are at a ferry across a small river on an abandoned road. The Souls are the eyes in the trees. From a distance, we hear William approaching. He calls out:*

**William:**

Boatman! Boatman! Hold, I pray you!

**Ferryman:**

Passage is a half-pound sterling.

**William:**

Half-pound?! The river is no more than quarter-league across.

**Ferryman:**

Half-pound.

**William:**

I've no money on me.

**Ferryman:**

Penniless?

**William:**

No.

**Ferryman:**

Liar, then?

**William:**

My pockets are empty. Not my home.

*We hear footsteps. The Souls call out as if a searching mob. William begins to remove his shoes.*

**Ferryman:**

You won't make it.

**William:**

I've swam further.

**Ferryman:**

Turn back.

**William:**

No.

**Ferryman:**

No passage without payment.

**William:**

Then I will swim.

*William dips a toe in the water. He screams and retreats. Souls fall silent and turn squarely in on William, with laser-focus.*

**Ferryman:**

You didn't listen.

**William:**

Where am I?

**Ferryman:**

The edge of the wood.

**William:**

The water is boiling.

**Ferryman:**

Should it not?

All water boils at this depth.

**Ferryman:**

All gardens have fences.

Keeps the pests at bay.

Keeps the weeds from the roots.

Keeps the lock from the key.

*A pause.*

Half-pound.

**William:**

I don't...

**Ferryman:**

Your pockets.

*William turns them out. Two silver coins.*

**William:**

I...

*William pauses.*

**Souls:**

*As the souls speak, William cannot make out where the voices come from. They are disembodied, but sincere. The ferryman is unaware of their talking.*

He doesn't always give a gift.

I begged for one.

Not even then.

It would upset the order

Open the door to chaos.

Run for it, William!

**William:**

How do you know my name?!

**Ferryman:**

*All souls, in a stern but calm whisper-shout:*

Half-pound.

*He pays Ferryman, who helps William onto the small ferry. They depart from the shore.*

State your case, Mr. Morin.

**William:**

Where am I?

**Ferryman:**

State your case.

**William:**

Why did you give me the coins?

**Ferryman:**

State your case.

**William:**

Where are you taking me?

**Ferryman:**

State your case.

*William bends over to the water, as if to jump back to shore, but feels the heat and retreats.*

Two banks to the river

One or the other.

It does not matter to me.

Only to you.

State your case, Mr. Morin.

*William stands stunned, he considers jumping again. The ferryman begins to crumble, fire appears to come from his eyes, the comfort fades, his hand extends towards William, who tries to run, when the ferryman touches William, he begins to speak but not of his own accord.*

**William:**

I come before you as a weary man.  
A traveler who from the path has strayed.  
Who's blinded by the blackness of this world,  
And, by the hand of God, been crushed to dust.  
Yea, I have touched the stars and killed their flame.  
And live only to die without my soul.  
I wander lest I stop and know my end.  
For I am victim-culprit all in one.  
If still your ears are burning for my tale  
Then be well-warned, for joy will not prevail.  
*A distant bell rings twelve times, the Ferryman turns.*

**Ferryman:**

Ah! That bell!  
The sinner who with rusty voice doth sing.

**William:**

They follow then, and quickly on my tail.  
But the river, she protects us sir.

**Ferryman:**

Surrounds us.  
Nothing more.

*Pause.*

**William:**

A rose upon a bramble sits like jewel  
That's laid within a lady's silver crown,  
But thorns await to prick the passing fool  
And add a drop of blood to red-green-gown.  
The same of women trapped within their homes,  
For they are thorn'd by beautiful design.  
Of them great men have penned within their tomes,  
A warning for us fools on every line.  
They wait like black-red spiders in their webs

And pounce with cupid's bow when we are caught.  
Their beauty and their danger flows and ebbs  
Then we are pawns to queens who rule our lot.  
So was the ward of lord Eric MacNeil

**Ferryman:**

Elizabeth?

**William:**

You knew her?

**Ferryman:**

Know her.

**William:**

How?

**Ferryman:**

*The following is to be spoken by one of the souls, the rest present the story in movement, dance, or puppetry. It is through this pantomime that we are introduced to the cast of our play.*

The high hill hall was built so long ago  
When sun was bright and joyous in the sky  
Before the clouds and rain began to come  
And take from it the light which burned inside.  
The master Eric, young and strong and keen  
Was rare as any, finer far than silk.  
Slow to anger, steady, kind, and strong,  
A man who fed himself with life's own milk.  
They knew his heart was gold but never went  
To look behind the gilding he'd present.  
They say Calais was where he met his wife,  
A maiden filled with sun and joy and life  
She filled his days with laughter, and the nights  
Were spent in sweet delights and ardent throes.  
He bound her with a ring to be his bride  
Atop the hill the house became a home

The garden's paths he planted full of flowers  
Peonies and lilacs lined the way  
The garden home was filled with happy hours  
And joyous life filled Eric's every day.  
Emily was called the height of beauty,  
They say her only rival was the rose.  
All men who saw her wished that she were theirs,  
But Master Eric never once did share.  
From passion came their first and only child,  
Elizabeth, a fair and fitting name  
For by her oath was she made deep and wild;  
Like Emily, her beauty was her fame.  
The child was her mother's fav'rite jewel,  
Elizabeth and Emily the same  
In face and features nothing was amiss  
A sin, for sure, but she was not to blame.  
The daughter grew in love and love became  
The sustenance which fed her every inch  
But seasons move regardless of our whims  
And Father Time is deaf to all our tears.  
Autumn drops her leaves o'er all the ground  
And winter leaves fair trees all cold and bare  
The bitter frost blew in, and she grew cold.  
And rubies dripped from out her smiling lips.  
They called the doctors in from every town,  
Who poked and prodded her as they'd a corpse.  
Her lungs grew weary day by dying day  
And in the Autumn's eve she slipped away.  
The great Hill Hall revealed its peeling walls  
The flowers fell, all eaten by the fly  
The gad who carries off what's left behind,  
Who disappears when last the streams run dry.  
The Master did all that a husband could,  
But Emily could find no way to stay  
Poor Master Eric never left her side,  
He held her close as heaven called his bride  
He kissed her as she grabbed the reaper's hand.

Elizabeth and Eric, clothed in black,  
Went down to Morgue du Mori in respect,  
They covered her in roses, brass, and lace  
And made for her a shroud without defect.  
Persephone, in shame did hide her face,  
As Hades bent to kiss the maiden's hand  
For even loyal men were swayed by her –  
Emily, the rose of every land.  
The hill hall's shutters clanked and barred the world –  
Eric hid behind the weed-made hedge  
His garden grew more mangled, mean, and curled,  
He stayed within the peeling plaster's edge.  
Elizabeth wore black for thirteen months  
A cloud which followed Eric every day.  
For even saints can have a heart of stone  
Once who they've made themselves gets pulled away.  
Elizabeth was kept behind locked doors,  
Away from Eric, lost in grief and guilt.  
He would not look upon his only child,  
He tried to make his mem'ry dry and wilt,  
But fantasy, the demon, still was running wild.  
The moon was high when she began to grow,  
Eighteen years had passed since she arrived.  
Eric, worn by woe from wine to wort,  
Had run away to where he met his bride.  
Elizabeth was kept within the home,  
The staff and grounds were all and fully hers  
But there's an ending writ in every tome  
And every garden rose is flanked by burrs.  
A prison's walls are always met with hate  
No matter how they gleam and glow and shine  
A lesson Eric learned too well too late  
A daughter who would drown in Satan's brine.  
Elizabeth, abandoned in her prime  
Did steal away from home that dark, dank night  
The tavern made her happy with its ale,  
But when it shut, she wandered alley streets.



The darkest corner hid a single lamp  
Which lit a chemist, healer, doctor-priest.  
To the young girl he gave a fairy green  
A tincture-tonic made to dull the mind.  
The drink was small, but full of vengeance mean  
One single cup was all it took to blind.  
She drank the fire y water in one go,  
The grief and pain as quickly went away.  
All inhibition fell in one sure blow  
And she began to seek a way to stray.  
The coin sang out its song and she pursued,  
Following to where the women cry  
For four small coins she slipped from gown to nude  
And with a man in lust she went to lie.  
When dawn had broke no words could dry her tears  
No soap could scrub the sin from stained hands.  
So there and then she set to run away  
To find a life off far in distant lands.  
But Eric didn't leave her to her own design,  
He had her set to be raised by the nurse.  
An Irish catholic, so strong and fine  
To sinners, though, a sick and awful curse.  
She worked to wed her off to someone new  
To rid her of this self-inflicted curse.  
But she was not so easy to be sold -  
As revenge became the deed she sought to do.  
She thought to take back what she thought was stole  
By selling sacred things to sinful men.  
But every sin, no matter why it's done  
Is costly when at last its course is run.

*We are now in Elizabeth's bedroom. She is grown. Elizabeth steps out of the Souls and sits at her vanity, examining a rose.*

**Elizabeth:**

If you are the embodiment of love,  
I fear it.

What a life you've come thus far to lead,  
A spot of color on a bush of thorns,  
A point of peace amidst a stormy sea.  
Beauty, rose, is that what this is called?  
To sit and stay, and suffocate so soon,  
Gasping for a long-due breath of air  
Yet getting none, lest you be kept from view.  
Do expectations daunt you, my dear rose?  
Do they inspire or do they suppress?  
Your thorns, are they a burden to you now?  
Do they protect you still, or sit and choke?  
I envy you, my friend, for I remain  
While you can pass so quickly from this plane.

*Elizabeth breaks the rose. Enter Nurse, who again, appears from the Souls, she is aged,  
but not withered.*

**Nurse:**

Madam!

**Elizabeth:**

You frightened me.

**Nurse:**

The rose!

**Elizabeth:**

A consequence of fright.

**Nurse:**

They are not a thing to be broken.

**Elizabeth:**

And I am not a statue when I'm scared.

**Nurse:**

Nor are you a child.

**Elizabeth:**

All I do is not my own!

**Nurse:**

But so it can be, if only you would try.

*Pause.*

You are not dressed.

**Elizabeth:**

I am clothed.

**Souls:**

Dresses for the men, my dear.

Present yourself, love, make him smile.

Don't hide the gift your mother gave you, child.

**Nurse:**

You have a caller.

**Elizabeth:**

Send him away.

**Nurse:**

You would not.

**Elizabeth:**

Oh, I would.

**Nurse:**

You will not.

**Elizabeth:**

My father's will?

**Nurse:**

The family's.

**Elizabeth:**

But not my own.

**Nurse:**

Still, yours to do.

**Elizabeth:**

Am I not of the family?

**Nurse:**

Not its head.

**Elizabeth:**

A head which stabs its heart does not live long.

**Nurse:**

A heart would drive the head to do much worse.

**Elizabeth:**

I wish to be alone.

**Nurse:**

You've duties to fulfill.

**Elizabeth:**

The caller must return some other time.

**Nurse:**

But yet he cannot now be sent away!

**Elizabeth:**

Is it polite to keep him waiting, though?

**Nurse:**

'Tis better far to dawdle than decline.

**Elizabeth:**

Of all the Catholic swine we chose a mule.

**Nurse:**

It would do you no harm to be kind, miss Elizabeth.

*Pause.*

We can get through this quickly if you will only meet the man.

*Elizabeth concedes. Nurse helps her into her corset.*

**Elizabeth:**

*She winces as she is corseted.*

If I'm to speak I need to have my breath.

**Nurse:**

If you had not been late, I'd do it right.

**Elizabeth:**

How then am I to speak with this so tight?

**Nurse:**

Don't tempt me, miss. I've still a bit of line.

*With a final pull, she ties the corset.*

Now, set your hair my dear, I'll fetch your dress.

**Elizabeth:**

It is set.

**Nurse:**

Is it your intent to scare him off?

**Elizabeth:**

You've noticed.

**Nurse:**

It will be set by one of us.

**Elizabeth:**

*Handing Nurse a brush.*

Do your worst.

**Nurse:**

Stubborn girl.

*She takes the brush.*

**Elizabeth:**

I learnt from you.

Need you tear my scalp clean off my head?!

**Nurse:**

I must do now what I've been charged to do.

**Elizabeth:**

Am I so cheap to you?

**Nurse:**

I raised you, dear.

**Elizabeth:**

Then protect me!

**Nurse:**

From what?

**Elizabeth:**

Him.

**Nurse:**

The heir to half of heaven on this earth?

**Elizabeth:**

A man with lock and key and lustful eyes.

**Nurse:**

Not all men my dear will do you harm,  
Not all men go where fairies tend to play  
Not all men buy your heart instead of charm  
Not all men seek to lead the good astray.  
He simply wants to make of you a wife.

**Elizabeth:**

Then if I'd rather not be made a wife?

**Nurse:**

Some things in life are not ours to decide, dear child.

*A breath.*

Some things are just so.

**Elizabeth:**

Is this man any different from the last?

**Nurse:**

A banker with estates to rival any.

**Elizabeth:**

He wishes to own me.

**Nurse:**

Marry you.

**Elizabeth:**

And him?

**Nurse:**

His eyes are blue as ice on sunlit lakes,

His hair is black as coal and teeth are white.  
He speaks with velvet voice and satin words...

**Elizabeth:**

And he brought flowers with him, did he not?

**Nurse:**

Roses.

**Elizabeth:**

A vase is here already.

**Nurse:**

He has a poem.

**Elizabeth:**

As does every man who weds in haste!

**Nurse:**

Elizabeth...

**Elizabeth:**

Throw me to the dogs and let them bite if you so wish!

**Nurse:**

Miss...

