

Two

Ephesians 5:22-23: *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.*

Mark 10:8: *and the two shall become one flesh*

Abigail is in a jam and she doesn't like it. She doesn't like being married to Ethan or moving into the house downtown with him and his grandmother. She doesn't like his grandmother much, even though his grandmother bought the house with the idea they could live there with her and pay no rent. She doesn't like that she has put her psychology degree on hold to find a job which she says is because she is unsure of the degree, but she knows is really to save enough money that she can find a place to live and end her marriage to Ethan and get out from under his grandmother's scrutiny. She doesn't like being in this jam at all. But otherwise, she's happy.

She doesn't like that she has a second glass of wine now every evening. It's not a lot, but she doesn't like it. That probably has contributed to the weight she has added over the past two years. She doesn't like that either. But otherwise, she's happy.

She doesn't like that she can't turn to her family, who are still disappointed that she left their evangelical church and became "worldly", living with Ethan before they were married for one thing, and drinking alcohol, for another, and not attending church or professing any belief either, that's a sore point too. Her parents and her sister are polite to her but the relationship is minimal and unless she was going to show interest in returning to the church, they had let her know that they would have little to do with her. But otherwise, she's happy.

She was happier two years ago before she married Ethan.

The move to the house on Second Avenue took place two weeks ago, to a two-storey brick home second on the left from where the street met the canal. Abigail didn't realize it when they moved in but when Ethan revealed it had been the scene of a murder two decades earlier, it dawned on her that she knew the story, even vaguely knew the people involved.

"A woman drowned her mother in a scalding hot bath," Abigail was telling her close friend Susan. "Held her under. The water was so hot that the daughter's hands and wrists had second degree burns."

Susan let out a whoa. "But don't the real estate agents have to tell you that someone was murdered in the house?"

“They did. Ethan and his grandmother knew. They didn’t care. They also didn’t bother to tell me but if I’m honest, I don’t care either. I’m just focused on what I can do to get the hell out of the house and away from Ethan and all that.”

“I wish I had space at my place,” Susan said with a tinge of guilt. She shared a two-bedroom apartment with her husband of two years and their two-year-old daughter.

“No, no,” Abigail waved her hand in the air. “You must stop saying that. I know you would but there’s no room. I’ll work this out and leave my child for good.” She had taken to referring to Ethan as her child for his juvenile behavior and his demanding nature. Her face suddenly turned red and her voice became angry. “Do you know what he has started calling me?”

“What?”

“Abs. I thought he was being cute, that he was just shortening my name, then he said it was because I don’t have them anymore. Abs. Too much fat on my ribs he said.”

“What an asshole.”

Abigail lowered her shaking head down. “What was I thinking marrying that guy?!”

“So what about the people and the murder?” Susan asked cheerfully, changing the subject.

“Ya, it was shocking. No one saw it coming. They were nice people, went to the church I grew up in. The woman, Ruth, was married to this guy, I forget his name, and they lived with her parents. She had like 6 or 7 brothers and sisters and they all got married in the church and had big families but she didn’t have any kids and so it seemed to fall to them to live with the parents. Then out of the blue she fills a tub with super-hot water and drops her mom in and kills her.”

“Like, out of the blue?”

“So it seemed. No signs of trouble. From what I knew or heard, they were pretty normal. For an evangelical family that is. The male hierarchy and all that, so Ruth was a typical stay-at-home woman.”

“That’s repressive,” Susan said with more than a little judgement in her voice.

“To us, yeah. But it was normal for them and if they want to live that way, that’s okay. Their choice. And I never heard anything about mistreatment or abuse. They were as normal as it gets for that type of family.”

“She was charged?”

“Oh yeah,” Abigail confirmed. “And convicted. But she died in prison. Not sure how. And that’s the last I heard or thought of it until now. Wow, I can’t believe I live in their house!”

And then the conversation turned to the challenges of raising a two-year-old and the price of wine and whether the canal would freeze enough to go skating this year, and Abigail didn't give Ruth another thought.

Until the next day.

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"I'm a freeloader?" Abigail shouted back. "We're living for free on your grandmother's dime here in this house. All she asks is your eternal devotion and you get to live here at no charge. So don't you call me the freeloader!"

Ethan raised a finger and waved it in Abigail's face. "At least I have a job! I contribute!"

"Yes you do. Congratulations. At this moment in time you have a job and I don't. Whoop-di-doo."

Abigail walked from the bedroom into the ensuite bathroom and picked up her toothbrush. She turned on the cold water but Ethan followed her in. "Between me and my grandmother you have it pretty cushy. You don't even need to work, you could just stay home and look after the house. You should be grateful."

He left and stomped back into the bedroom. Abigail knew he hated it when she argued back and didn't just accept what he had to say. She turned off the faucet and followed him. "First of all, that is not the life I want. And second, speaking of your grandmother, it's a good thing she doesn't hear too well anymore, I can't imagine her approving of the way you speak to me, the way you demean me."

"I think my grandmother would say that wives should have more respect for their husbands," he shot back. "Look what I've done for you. Look at how easy you have it!"

"I don't want this!"

"You have no choice!"

Abigail raised her eyebrows dramatically. "You don't think so? Oh, I have a choice!"

"You wouldn't dare!" Ethan shouted. He took a step toward her. "You're too pathetic, too weak. You're a loser! I'm all you've got!!"

Ethan was about to keep shouting when his eyes shifted beyond Abigail to the bathroom. "What was that?"

Abigail looked at him with resentment, with disdain. As a reflex she said, "What was what?"

"Something moved in the bathroom."

“You’re full of shit,” she said and walked into the bathroom, slamming the door.

Abigail picked up her toothbrush again and touched the cold water tap. She pulled her hand back quickly when it burned her finger. “Fuck!” Then she noticed the sink was full, and steam rose from the water. She touched the edge but it was too hot to put her finger in any further. The sink was filled with incredibly hot water!

There was something else. A feeling, a notion. Something in the room. Slowly, deliberately, Abigail raised her gaze from the sink to the mirror. Standing right behind her, over her shoulder, long, flowing, voluminous dark black hair, her head lowered, her face obscured, a purplish aura, a middle-aged woman was right there. Abigail studied her, more frozen in interest than in fear. This woman was close enough to touch her, but she felt nothing, only the warmth emanating from the hot water in the sink. After ten seconds of motionlessness, Abigail turned around.

She was gone! Abigail looked left and right, but nothing was out of order. All seemed normal again. She turned back around. The sink was empty. It was dry. She touched the tap. It was room temperature.

“That’s a cool trick,” she whispered to anyone who might be listening.

Abigail stayed in the bathroom hoping to see her visitor again, but she remained alone. Then she stayed until she knew from his breathing that Ethan was sleeping. She crept into bed, her mind alert and intrigued. She didn’t sleep. Was this Ruth?

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Over the next two days Abigail’s intuition told her she was being watched. It was a feeling of being stalked, but not by a creepy ex-boyfriend, more like being spied on by a curious pre-teen. She would see a trail of dark hair turning a corner at the other end of the hall when she entered, or a reflection of purple in the sunlight when she entered a room, or a movement as she looked over her shoulder. She wasn’t alone.

Most often Abigail saw or felt Ruth in Ethan’s grandmother’s room. She had seen a purple glow from the hallway, she had seen a shadow that could have been long dark hair slipping in just as she would turn to look. When Ethan’s grandmother spent time sitting in the living room with a book or napping, Abigail would sit on the bed. She was getting comfortable feeling a presence near her. She felt the presence was getting comfortable too.

A google search resulted in little more than she already knew. Reports and quotes from those that knew the family had one thing in common: an inability to explain Ruth’s actions. No one seemed to know why she killed her mother. One quote was from the next-door neighbour, a woman who still lived there, but other than sympathy for the husband and son-in-law, it revealed little. A psychiatric assessment was ordered after Ruth’s arrest but no further mention of that was found. The trial was short due to Ruth’s guilty plea. An obituary ten years later also gave no clue to Ruth’s reasons, just as it gave no cause of death. The obituary did list her siblings and their families and her father as the surviving family members, and her mother as a family member who had died before her, but there was no mention of her surviving husband, he wasn’t named.

Ruth's father's obituary was also easy to find. He had died only two years prior. That was likely the reason the house became available for them to buy.

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Ethan walked into his grandmother's room and saw Abigail sitting on the edge of the bed. She hadn't heard him come home and was taken by surprise, and she looked guilty as he stared down at her.

"What are you doing in here?"

"Just having a little sit, that's all," she tried to sound nonchalant.

Ethan was quick and sharp with his reply. "This isn't your room. You can't just have a sit in Grandma's room. You have no right."

"Really? Would you care if she sat on our bed for a moment?"

"You're up to something," he continued, leaning forward and sounding more accusing. "Are you looking for a will? You're not in it, I can tell you that already!"

Abigail laughed. "Are you serious? You are deluded. Anyway, I'm in here all the time to clean, it's not like your grandmother has a lock on the door."

Ethan glared at her for a few seconds, then turned to walk out. As he did he muttered "Jesus Christ!"

BANG! The largest book from the bookcase slammed hard on the floor. Ethan spun around, as did Abigail. They both saw a brief movement, a brush of flying dark hair, the faint trail of purple, but some red was there as well. "What the fuck did you do that for?" Ethan yelled at Abigail, ignoring any apparition-like figure he might have thought he saw.

"Me? How could I, I'm sitting right here?!"

He shook his head and clearly did not believe her. "You and your god damned tr---!" but before he could finish the next word the door to the washroom down the hall slammed shut so hard they both could feel the vibration. Ethan's grandmother yelled what's going on up there from the living room. Ethan was still glaring at her and finished ... "... tricks." And he walked out and down the stairs and Abigail could hear him telling his grandmother it was nothing.

Abigail remained seated on the edge of the bed. Ethan and his grandmother were conversing quietly downstairs so she felt no rush to leave. After a few minutes there was a muted wave of movement and Abigail knew she had company in the room.

Leaning forward on the edge of the bed, and with a mischievous grin, Abigail said softly, "I'm sorry to do this, but ..." Then with a little more voice: "Jesus Christ!"

Abigail was abruptly and roughly given a two-handed push so that she fell backwards onto the bed. Simultaneously movement continued out the room and the bedroom door slammed shut. Surprised, Abigail sat up again and was still for a few moments then put her hand over her mouth to suppress a laugh. She found the push funny, not threatening, though she was intrigued by the colour of the aura that had left. It wasn't just purple. Like when the book had been thrown on the floor, she saw some red also.

Ethan could then be heard yelling from downstairs. "That's enough. I won't stand for that sort of behaviour in this house!"

Abigail opened the bedroom door and stood in the hallway. "I'm sorry. I won't speak that way again," she said, not to Ethan but to what appeared to be an empty hallway. Then she went downstairs to see how worked up Ethan had become.

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She raised her hand to the front door and gave it an authoritative rap-rap-rap. Fairly quickly Abigail heard steps approaching from inside and the door opened. An older woman looked at her suspiciously.

"Ms. Parker? My name is Abigail, I've moved in next door and thought I should say hello and introduce myself."

"I know who you are. Your husband's grandmother has said plenty when we met on the street."

The conversation was only one exchange each and already Abigail was taken by surprise and flustered. She thought she could have an innocent conversation and find out about the events from twenty years ago and the family involved, but this was going off the rails almost before it started.

"I'm sorry? I just wanted to say hello. You know what exactly?" Abigail sputtered.

Norma Parker's fists were on her hips. "You modern girls think you know it all. Well you don't know your place, I can tell you that." She backed up from the door a couple of steps. "And my name is *Mrs.* Parker. I was married for forty years and I am not now nor will I ever be a 'Ms.'"

And she closed the door on Abigail.

Turning slowly in the direction of her house, Abigail caught sight of a shadow at the window. She smiled. "Do you feel my pain?" She said out loud. "That didn't exactly go as planned."

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Over the next two days Abigail made a point of stopping at Ethan's grandmother's door any time she wasn't there. In whispers she talked to Ruth. She could feel her around the corner. There was no doubt in Abigail's mind that Ruth was close and she was listening.

She sensed Ruth in other rooms as well, in the kitchen, on the stairs. She sensed Ruth following her, staying close to her and waiting for Abigail to say more to her.

Abigail kept the topics light. She talked about her memories of her own childhood, of the church life she had known with her parents and sister, of her studies at school, of her plans and what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. It made her feel nostalgic and she missed the good days with her family.

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It had been two months since Abigail had spoken with her mother, but she decided to call her to see what she remembered about Ruth and her family. Abigail was hoping the conversation would go better than the one she had with Mrs. Parker. It didn't.

"Hi Mom," she started.

"Hello dear," was her mother's usual response. "Why are you calling?"

Straight to the point, Abigail thought. And she knew why. She was anxious to hear Abigail say that she missed them, she missed her evangelical upbringing, and that she wanted to return to that life. It was the unsaid condition of their future connection.

"Mom, we are living in the old Steeves house, where that terrible thing happened between Ruth and her mother. I was just wondering if I could ask you about them?"

There was a pause, a long one. Abigail took comfort in how long the pause was, even though the response was not promising. "I don't think so, dear."

"Please Mom."

"No, I can't."

"Because of Dad?" Abigail guessed.

"I follow his spiritual direction dear, you know that. If you were to feel differently, maybe come out to a prayer meeting ..."

Abigail didn't pause. "No, thank you anyway."

"I'm sorry you feel that way."

"I know. You too. Good to hear your voice though."

"Good-bye dear" her mother said and they both hung up.

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Later that same day, Abigail called out to Ethan's grandmother, "I'm going to be cleaning in your room today." She waited for the room to be unoccupied then took her dusting and cleaning supplies in.

As she moved around the room she felt Ruth's presence: unthreatening, subdued, something existing just the other side of certainty. Abigail accepted that, and as she cleaned, she spoke quietly to whoever or whatever she felt was there.

"You know Ruth, I get the feeling you are curious about me. I've got to tell you, you have me pretty intrigued as well. Not just from this ghost perspective..." She checked herself a moment and laughed. "Though that's kind of freaky, don't you think? No, Ruth, I wish I could find out more about you, find out more about who you were. Were you happy? What happened between you and your mother? What was going on with your husband and father too I suppose. I remember seeing you at church and I think you were nice."

Abigail paused, stopped dusting the side table. "You were pretty. The dresses you wore were pretty too. I was a little girl but I remember you had a very nice purple dress. Is that your favourite colour? That's my guess, and that's probably why I always see some purple when I see you, you're wearing your purple dress."

Setting the duster down and moving the other cleaning tools and supplies to beside the door, Abigail began attending to changing the sheets on the bed. "I don't think I will be getting any information out of *Mrs* Parker," she said, exaggerating the *Mrs* part of her name. "I wonder what she's heard about me. Who goes around saying nasty things like that to a neighbour you've just met? Who does that, Ruth?" She stood up straight and nodded. "You and me both know Ethan and his grandmother do, that's who! They're not very nice, are they? I'm glad I have Susan to confide in about this. And now I have you too!"

There was a shift right beside Abigail, movement paused to become a frame with dark hair. In the purplish light that hovered for that very brief moment Abigail saw a face, and it was smiling. Then it moved, to the right or left or up or down, she couldn't tell, but it moved though it was still in the room and it felt happy. To Abigail, it felt happy.

"Wow," Abigail said. "Nice to see you smile." She stayed still for a short time, then continued with the bed.

"Like I said, I wish I could find out more about you. This is the strangest thing I've ever known," she said as she stepped around the bed so that she was in a corner and pulling the sheets from the far side of the bed. "The strangest friendship someone could ---" Abigail stopped and let out an OW! And lifted her right foot quickly. It felt like it had just been burned!

Abigail looked to the floor to see what it was and there, running from the baseboard closest to the corner was a small amount of water. Hot water.

"What's going on with this?" she said out loud, softly. "Ruth, are you doing this?"

There was no answer, no movement. Abigail felt like something was expected of her. She crouched down to the floor and looked more closely. The baseboard where the water came from looked uneven. Afraid it would be hot from the trickle of water (it wasn't) she pulled on it carefully and it was loose, she was able to move it. It slid away from the wall with almost no effort. She reached inside the drywall, preparing to be scalded with hot water but all was dry, completely dry. She felt around and soon her fingers touched something solid, some fabric, the cover of a book. She turned it sideways so that it would fit out of the hole where the baseboard had been and held up a small journal to take a closer look. It was small, six inches by three inches and only an inch thick. Abigail opened it and saw writing, skimming it to observe lots and lots of tiny writing from the first page to the last. She reached back into the hole but there was nothing else so she put the baseboard back. There was no more water on the floor.

Abigail stood up and held the book carefully in both hands. She looked around the room. "Oh Ruth, what are you trying to tell me?"

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The sheets were in the wash and the cleaning concluded as fast as Abigail could go. Then she found a place where she would not be disturbed and opened the little book and began to read.

"You read the whole thing?" Susan asked the next day.

"Yes. It took a while but I wanted to read it all as soon as I could."

"So did she say why she drowned her mother?"

Abigail shook her head. "No. The entries aren't dated so I don't know when they started and stopped but my guess is that it covers a period of a couple of years up to the murder, I'm just not sure how close the last entry is to the murder."

Susan leaned forward eagerly looking for more detail. "So ...?"

"A few odd things. Most of it was dull. Day to day things. Lots of stuff about her faith, what she was praying about. Lots to do with her daily life with her husband David and her parents. She really wanted to get pregnant but it didn't happen, and then her husband cut off sex from her."

"That sounds salacious! Now we're getting some good stuff," Susan said excitedly.

"That part is, for sure. Here, look," Abigail opened the book at one of a number of bookmarks she had put in.

"David told me today that not getting pregnant was God's will. He has said that to me before and of course I know it is true and I trust the Lord to do what is best for us. But now David has said we should not be joined that way so that we aren't testing the Lord's will. I'm not sure I understand that but it is his decision and I know I must accept his authority. This may be a failing on my part and I must pray for understanding."

“Whoa, nasty! Maybe he is saying that because he is getting some on the side.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Abigail said. “She doesn’t say anything about that or talk about any suspicions. She just said they should stop trying.”

“She’s like his servant. His handmaiden. This is so old-fashioned.”

“I suppose but don’t judge, it just how they choose to live,” Abigail said with a smile while she scolded Susan.

“I guess.”

Abigail continued. “There are quite a few entries about things that Ruth says she doesn’t understand, mostly family decisions made by her husband or father where she or her mother don’t have much input. Like how she spends her free time or who she can be friends with. She even says she is told to stay slim and attractive to be pleasing for her husband. I sense some frustration, but she generally sounds like she is willing to accept it and needs to pray to understand it. So there’s some tension over the dynamic but no anger or rebellion. Sometimes she wonders why her mother isn’t more pissed off with being told what to do though.”

“Really?”

“Ya. I didn’t read anything about David mistreating Ruth in any overt way but her mother seems to take some crap from her father and she also said her father was a little too friendly with that neighbour, the one who was telling me off.”

“No kidding!”

“Ya, I know!” Abigail nodded, and showed Susan another journal entry.

“Some of the things father and David decide for us are hard to understand. Like telling me who I can have fellowship with, or minister to. I know mother very much wants to be more a part of it, but father tells us it our role to support. Mother rebuked me harshly when I asked her why we couldn’t do more with the gifts we have been given, even rebuked me when I said I would pray that maybe father and David would soften their view. She says I must accept their spiritual leadership. But I will pray anyway. I wish I knew why we are given so little to do and why mother is so accepting.”

Abigail closed the book after Susan was done reading the passage. “See, nothing scandalous. Ruth writes in a very controlled and respectful way. I doubt that she ever swore. She probably never touched alcohol or had a drag on a cigarette. She wore her purple dresses to church and helped with the house and wrote a lot about the people she saw at church retreats or what was covered at bible studies.”

Susan looked disappointed. “Is that it?”

Abigail raised an eyebrow. “Well…”

“Oh?”

“I don’t know what to make of this. Ruth mentions someone she knows, someone named Rebecca. But she doesn’t seem to like Rebecca. She calls her a wicked person with evil thoughts. And she says that Rebecca has been abused by her mother. She doesn’t use the word abuse, but Ruth says Rebecca’s mother burned her hand in boiling water as a punishment for not being obedient. Ruth says that Rebecca screamed and screamed and then that she knew she was wicked after that. Can you imagine that?”

“That’s awful! Is that where Ruth gets the idea to scald her own mother?”

Abigail shrugged her arms. “Not sure. I don’t know if this happened when Rebecca was young, or what. I can’t even figure out how Ruth knows her. But it gets even more weird. There are a handful of entries, four or five, all in the last third of the book, and they are in a heavier handwriting and bigger, like much taller handwriting. Like someone found Ruth’s book and added to it.”

“What does it say?”

“That’s the thing. They’ve all been scribbled out. If Ruth found someone else had written stuff then maybe she scribbled all over them to erase what was said. I can read a few words here and there and one word I could read was ‘*bitch*’ and that’s not a word Ruth is likely to use. There’s too much scribbling to know what it was about. The words I could read, the style, it just all looks angry, which is very strange. Oh, and one more thing,” she said, remembering. “Every time after the sections that are scribbled out, that’s when Ruth starts writing about Rebecca.”

“Rebecca? Is that one of her sisters?”

Abigail shook her head. “Not a sister. I don’t know who that is, there’s no relative by that name. Maybe someone from church, it’s a biblical name so it’s not an uncommon church name like Joy and Esther and Grace ... and Ruth.”

“So that’s all you got from the book?”

“Pretty much,” Abigail confirmed, then quickly added: “One more thing! Ruth decided she should show kindness to the neighbour who was sweet on her father, and she found her weakness ... coffee cake!! She would invite Mrs. Parker over for coffee cake and she couldn’t refuse. I think it was a way to stay close to someone who was a threat to the family unit.”

“So, in summary, no sex but she’s praying about it, mommy should be mad with daddy and isn’t, but she’s praying about that too, and she’s got lots of church friends who are likely praying their little souls off as well. Sound like the one they should be praying for is Rebecca, especially for writing in someone else’s diary. Now *that’s* a sin in my book! There’s a few good things in there but all in all, a bit of a letdown,” Susan sighed, clearly feeling letdown herself.

“I suppose. Her life is pretty normal for a youngish wife in a strict evangelical church, but it seems happy and people I knew in that life genuinely were and are happy. The letdown I feel is that I thought Ruth wanted to tell me something and directed me to the journal but there is nothing in there that would explain her suddenly killing her mother in such an awful way.” Abigail stared into space for a long minute, pondering this. “Maybe she was just sharing with me because I’m her new friend.”

“She’s dead,” Susan reminded her. “I’m not sure you two can be friends.”

Abigail smiled. “I know. But I think we are.”

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Abigail was asleep until she felt the hand on her back. Fingers moved up her shirt and massaged her shoulder blades, gentle and soothing, but they were unexpected and brought her out of her sleep. Her eyes wide open now, she rolled over quickly, whispering “Ruth!”

Ethan blinked in the darkness. He withdrew his hand. “Ruth?”

It took a moment for Abigail’s mind to clear and to be fully awake. “I said ‘you.’”

“You said Ruth.” In fact, though it was quite dark in the room, Abigail could see a purple glow in the corner. Of course they weren’t alone.

“I meant to say you.”

“Well of course it’s me. I was just wondering if you might want to ...” Ethan’s voice, more soft than usual, trailed off.

“No,” Abigail said quickly, then realized it sounded too quick. “No, I don’t think we are in a good spot to be doing anything intimate.”

Ethan rolled over without a word. Abigail knew that he was hurt, was sulking now, but could not bring herself to make him feel better. Her dislike for him was strong. And more than that, she did not feel comfortable having sex when she knew Ruth was in the room.

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“Mrs. Parker?” Abigail called to her neighbour who had just turned up her front walkway and was still within earshot of Abigail. Mrs. Parker hesitated, and a disapproving look clouded her face and she seemed very much like she would turn again and walk away from Abigail.

“We got off on the wrong foot and I would love to be able to have a chat. My mother always told me I had much to learn from those older than me. Would you please join me for tea this afternoon?”

Mrs. Parker's demeanor had not changed and she was about to reply negatively, Abigail was certain, so she quickly added "I've made a delicious coffee cake and am afraid I might eat the whole thing myself. Won't you join me for some coffee cake and tea?"

The hard look on Mrs. Parker's face was still there but a look in her eye betrayed it. In the few seconds that she paused, Abigail felt certain that Mrs. Parker was beginning to salivate and was afraid to open her mouth to answer.

"Two o'clock?" Abigail suggested.

Mrs. Parker gave a subtle nod and then turned back up her walkway and went into her house.

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Having never made coffee cake before, Abigail did not want to disappoint Mrs. Parker so she was preparing two different cakes from different recipes, trusting that at least one of them would turn out tasty.

Ethan's grandmother entered the kitchen and looked over her shoulder to see what she was making. "Is that a cake?"

Abigail tilted the bowl so that she could see. "Coffee cake."

"Is there a special occasion?"

"No, it's just something I wanted to try. It will be ready by the time you get back." Today was her weekly visit to see her friend Betty who was living in a home for seniors. Knowing that Ethan's grandmother would be out gave Abigail the chance to have Mrs. Parker in and to speak with her in private. Ethan would also be out, at work during the day.

Grandma studied the batter on the counter for longer than Abigail would have liked. "Don't overmix it," she finally advised.

"Okay."

There was another pause as Grandma stared at the busy and messy counter. She said: "Ethan will like this. You could do more to please him. He takes on a great deal and is under considerable stress."

Abigail thought about countering that her life had a great deal going on as well, or would be if she was still in school, and was every bit as important, but she also thought, what was the point? Grandma was on Ethan's side.

"It's not the same for us girls," Grandma said firmly, as if reading her thoughts. Then she turned to leave. "I feel like someone is flooding this neighbourhood with Christmas lights that shine in our window. Have you noticed it, the purple light?" she commented over her shoulder as she exited through the door that was a shortcut to the back steps.

“Nope, I haven’t seen that.”

The kitchen door swung shut and Abigail returned to perfecting her coffee cake masterpieces.

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At the appointed time the doorbell rang and Abigail went to greet Norma Parker. “Please come in.”

Mrs. Parker met her eye for a moment but it was with a suspicious view. Abigail was not expecting the conversation to be easy and was intent on keeping the mood positive. She invited her back to the kitchen and Mrs. Parker sat at the little table that had four chairs.

It was a big kitchen, a common thing in these old downtown homes. One wall where the counter and sink were also had windows overlooking the driveway and Mrs. Parker’s house next door. Each of the other three walls had entrances, one from the front hall, another from the dining room, and the third was a door leading to a mud room and the back door to the yard. The table was in the corner between the dining room and front hall doors. Large pantry cupboards and shelves were in an alcove between the door to the dining room and the back entrance. The kitchen was as big as a small apartment!

Mrs. Parker had brought her large purse and she set it in the middle of the table where it occupied a large portion of the surface area.

“I’ll just pour us some tea,” Abigail said.

In a dry voice Mrs. Parker responded: “I prefer coffee.”

Abigail pretended to be delighted to brew her some coffee. “Of course!” She found a pod for the coffee machine which Ethan and his grandmother used and asked if it would be okay.

“If that’s what you have then that’s fine.” Mrs. Parker nodded, unwilling to be overly conciliatory.

As Abigail got the coffee pod working, she asked Mrs. Parker about her history on the street and learned that she had moved there when she was first married more than forty years ago, they had raised a daughter and a son who had since moved out, and that her husband had died suddenly about ten years ago. She had seen neighbours come and go and was generally unhappy with most of them.

“But the folks living here before us were good people?”

“Yes, they were,” Mrs. Parker said, accepting her coffee. “John Steeves was a good man and I liked that son-in-law of his, David. Good people.”

“And Mrs. Steeves and their daughter Ruth?”

“They were okay.”

As Mrs. Parker answered, there was a wave of faint purple light that passed through the room. Abigail saw it, she felt it. Mrs. Parker saw it too. “Is there something wrong with your lights?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Why do you want to know about them anyway? You’re not one of those morbid persons that looks at places where bad things have happened are you?” she asked sharply.

“No, no,” Abigail answered with a light, sweet voice. “I’m curious because I went to the same church as they did so I remember them from when I was a little girl.”

“You certainly don’t seem like the kind of girl that attended their church. Those Steeves daughters were wholesome and respectful girls,” Mrs. Parker said in a voice that was rising slightly in volume and she didn’t try to hide it’s judgmental tone at all.

“Ruth too?”

The sound Mrs. Parker made was like a snort, and as the conversation deteriorated, she was getting more and more cross. “Hardly. She murdered her mother. Look what she put her poor father through.”

Without missing a beat Abigail set the plate of her best coffee cake on the table, nudging the purse to one side, and added “well that was a long time ago now.” Then she realized she had not set out anything to put the coffee cake on. “Can I get you a plate?” But it was too late. Mrs. Parker had picked up a piece and taken the first bite and shook her head to indicate that it was not necessary.

Abigail let her chew while she retrieved her tea from across the room, and the coffee, and then returned and sat down across the table from her guest. She also indulged in a piece of coffee cake as Mrs. Parker reached for her second.

They sat in silence but Abigail could see a thaw, a relaxing, across from her. The coffee cake was putting Mrs. Parker into her happy place. When she finished swallowing the last of the second piece, she looked around the big kitchen. “I’ve been in here many times over the years. I like how these big old. All you young people want open concept these days, but this is so lovely. And so functional for entertaining. You can be preparing in here, then carry food out there” (she waved at the door to the dining room) “and get to the front door or out the back. It’s just so practical.”

“Did the Steeves do a lot of entertaining?”

“Oh yes. But not parties of course,” Mrs. Parker quickly corrected in case Abigail had the wrong idea. “They were a sober family, very serious about their faith. They would have other church

members over and sometimes we would be invited. John and David could carry the most interesting conversations and make everyone feel welcome and involved.”

“What about Ruth and her mother?”

Mrs. Parker gave her a stern look. “They were here in the kitchen,” she said like it was a stupid question. Abigail once again saw the purple light circulate in the room but Mrs Parker didn’t notice, too focused on Abigail for asking such a silly question.

“Of course,” Abigail said in agreement. “And were the other ladies in here sometimes with Ruth and her mother?”

“No, not really. John wanted us at the table or in the sitting room. We were the guests but he also wanted to talk with us. And in my case he wanted me to be there,” and here Mrs. Parker paused and leaned a little closer, looking like she was about to share a secret. “My husband was not the most social you see,” she said, expecting Abigail to understand what she meant. “He didn’t add anything to the conversation.”

“I see,” Abigail had leaned closer also, encouraging her.

Mrs. Parker smiled and put her fingers around another piece of coffee cake. “John appreciated my company.” She said bluntly. Abigail unintentionally raised her eyebrows but Mrs. Parker was distracted by light, mostly purple but definitely some red as well, moving suddenly in the kitchen. She dropped her cake to the table and stood up. “What was that?”

There was no point in Abigail ignoring it. “I saw it too! I’ll have to ask Ethan to check these lights. Maybe there’s a surge.”

Mrs. Parker was standing and was not satisfied with the explanation. “The light was moving. I saw it move across the room and back.”

“Oh look, you’ve dropped your cake.”

Mrs. Parker sat down and looked at the piece of cake that was alone on the table, it had broken in two when she had dropped it. She picked up the smaller piece and put it in her mouth.

Abigail leaned forward, hoping to resurrect the tangent they had just been on before Ruth let herself be seen. “You were saying about you and John ...”

Mrs. Parker’s eyes sparkled for a moment at whatever she was remembering about she and Ruth’s father, but when she met Abigail’s inquiring look, she took on a bitter stare. “There was nothing between me and John! Is that what you’re suggesting?”

“Not at –” Abigail tried to say.

“He was a Christian, I was a faithful wife. How could you suggest such a thing!!” She said in a loud voice. “Those women did not appreciate what a good man they had, a man that knew how

to lead a home!! It was no wonder that the daughter killed her mother!!” Mrs. Parker began to stand up again, but a wave of red light pushed her back down in her chair. “What?!” she cried.

Abigail stood in shock. She could see purple light all around, it felt as though Ruth was everywhere in the room, but there was a red figure that felt menacing, and it had just made contact with Mrs. Parker, who was now getting back on her feet. “I don’t know what you’re doing!” she screamed at Abigail. “Your questions! Your accusations!” and she started to move toward the door.

That’s when Abigail saw the red light by the sink and the faucet turn, then the hose extended and the nozzle came to life. A strong, straight shot of water flew from the nozzle and hit Mrs. Parker in the face. She ducked away and turned in Abigail’s direction. Her right cheek was blistered and bleeding! Then it registered in Abigail’s mind why. The hose was shooting boiling water! She felt the heat as it went past her. Mrs. Parker struggled to stay on her feet and tried to back toward the door to the dining room. Water shot from the hose again. Then again. It connected with Mrs. Parker on her shoulder, on the back of her head, on her other cheek when she turned to see what was happening. Mrs. Parker screamed in agony again and again. Water hit Mrs. Parker’s purse and blew it violently from the table and the purse and it’s contents fell all over the floor.

Abigail had been frozen, so surprised at what was happening, it had started so suddenly. She could now see Ruth at the sink. She could see that she held the hose and nozzle. She could see her anger even though her face was mostly obscured by her black hair which was waving wildly. But it was not a purple light around Ruth. She was red, a vibrant, deep red: red clothing, red aura, red angry eyes. There was purple light in the room as well, moving side to side, almost uncontrollably, but there was not time to focus on that as Ruth was shooting scalding water at Mrs. Parker over and over as she tried to escape.

Trying not to be hit by the scalding water, Abigail grabbed Mrs. Parker by the shoulder and pulled her toward the door that went out the back. The hot water was still being projected at them but it only connected with Mrs. Parker who had stopped screaming but was now sobbing in pain. Abigail pushed the door open and they both fell out onto the back steps. Mrs. Parker was trying to get to her feet and so Abigail helped her, and helped her stumble toward her house next door when that was clearly where she was intending to escape to.

As they made their way up the front walk to Mrs. Parker’s front door, Abigail realized this was something she was going to have to deal with, to explain, especially to the emergency workers that needed to be called.

“Mrs. Parker, I’ll call 9-1-1,” she said but Mrs. Parker began pushing her away.

“You need medical attention,” she said as they got to the front door. Mrs. Parker pushed it open with strength that Abigail didn’t think she had, but she batted Abigail’s helping hands away from her. She turned and faced her and Abigail could see the full damage. Skin was blistered and peeling and bloody all over her face, in her hair, on her arms.

“Leave!!” she screamed and shut the door.

Abigail stood there for a moment. She didn't know what to do. She couldn't just leave her like that, she could die without medical help. She looked at her hand, the one that had gripped Mrs. Parker's shoulder as she pulled her out of the kitchen and there was skin all over it. Not hers. Mrs. Parker's skin. She wiped it on her pants.

She called 9-1-1 right there from her cell phone.

When asked about the nature of her emergency she said "I think my neighbour has had something happen to her. I saw her through a window. It looks bad, I think she might be dying!" Abigail knew the lie would be challenged when Mrs. Parker gave her side of events, but she went with it anyway.

Rather than wait for the ambulance or whatever services were going to arrive, Abigail went back to the house and cautiously looked in the back door. There was blood on the door frame from Mrs. Parker but all else seemed quiet. She stepped in slowly, looking around. "Ruth?" but there was nothing. And then she realized the floor was dry. The hose was retracted into the faucet where it belonged, and everything looked to be as it was before the attack began. Mrs. Parker's purse and contents had been collected and it sat peacefully on the table. Even the dropped piece of coffee cake had been placed back on the plate.

"I don't know what you've done," Abigail said in a hushed voice. "I don't know why you've done it. Was she a threat? Was she that bad? Why did you do that to her?"

Then she heard the sirens coming down the street. She shoved the purse under her shirt and she went back out to meet them.

"Did you call 9-1-1?" a fireman asked as he and a partner walked up the front walk of Mrs. Parker's house.

"Yes."

"What's the emergency?"

"I don't know exactly. I saw her inside, it looks pretty bad."

He felt the door handle and it turned. He pushed it partially opened but it was being blocked. "Give me a hand here, she's fallen against the door," he said to his partner. They managed to move her aside then get the door fully open.

Very quickly it was obvious to the firefighters that Mrs. Parker had had something terrible happen. The blistered skin, the missing skin, the mess of her body. She was unconscious and the two men went about assessing her as an ambulance arrived as well. Abigail stood well back from the doorway but heard some of the comments from the first responders over the twenty minutes or so before they were able to load her into the ambulance. "Burns" was mentioned more than once. She also heard "shock" and "cardiac arrest".

As they wheeled Mrs. Parker out Abigail offered to close the door behind them and as she did, she dropped the purse unnoticed off to the side just inside the entryway.

Before leaving, the firefighter who had first spoken to her pointed her out to a police officer who was also now at the scene.

“What made you call 9-1-1?”

Abigail tried to keep her voice even and she made up something that might make sense. “I thought I heard something, like someone in distress. I could see her partially through the window as she went by, maybe trying to get to the front door I guess. She didn’t look right so I thought I should call.”

“Good thing you did,” the officer said. “Much longer and she would have died.”

“She’s going to live?” Abigail asked, perhaps too quickly.

The officer shook her head. “I’m not sure, that’s not for me to say. I just know what the team that worked on her said, which was she wouldn’t have lasted much longer lying there on her own.” She had an iPad ready to go. “I need your personal information for the report.”

After satisfying the officer with what she needed, Abigail went back to the house and carefully cleaned up any trace of blood or skin, and she threw out the remains of the coffee cake and carefully washed the coffee mug and put it away. Like it had never happened. But it had.

“Ruth. Why did you do that?” she said more than once as she cleaned.

*

Ethan and his grandmother returned home two hours later. It seemed like a regular evening, nothing amiss, everything quiet ... especially Abigail.

In the evening Abigail saw Ethan’s grandmother on the street two doors away having a conversation with a neighbour but she didn’t want to ask her what that was about when she returned.

She didn’t sleep that night. For the first time since she had been there, since she had met Ruth, she was frightened.

*

“Holy shit. *Holy shit!!*” Susan exclaimed after Abigail had told her the whole story.

“I know.”

“How is she?”

“I’m not sure. Ethan’s grandmother heard about it from other neighbours so I’ll let her get the updates,” Abigail said. “I don’t want to be asking because I’m terrified of the police coming and asking questions. It’s probably best I keep a low profile. I mean, how the hell do I explain what happened?”

Susan leaned back in her chair and shook her head. “You can’t.”

“And I haven’t seen or felt Ruth since. Not last night, not this morning before I came over to see you.”

“So why did she do it?”

Abigail thought about this for a moment. “The obvious answer is because she was pissed off with what Mrs. Parker was saying. And it wasn’t nice but come on, it wasn’t that bad either.” She paused and reflected some more before continuing. “It’s like when she killed her mother. It was sudden and unexpected. Maybe some little thing triggered it back then but what she did to her mother, what she did yesterday, it was a total over-reaction.

“You have to get out of the house,” Susan suggested.

“I’ve thought about it. I’m almost afraid enough to. But I’m still curious. And if the police find out Mrs. Parker was at our house then I move out suddenly, it will look suspicious. I need to stay for now.”

“I don’t care how full our apartment is. If you need to, just get out.”

Abigail smiled and felt appreciation for the offer. “Thanks, that means a lot.”

*

It was mid-afternoon when Abigail returned to the house, a little after two. She was hungry and reluctantly went to the kitchen to find something to eat. She stood in the middle of the room, glanced around at the three doors, and the table where Mrs. Parker’s purse had been, at the sink and the faucet that had been weaponized on an old lady.

Suddenly the door from the dining room opened and Ethan’s grandmother walked in. Thinking she was just there to attend to something in the kitchen or to fix a bite of food, like her, Abigail didn’t even acknowledge her until she walked right up to Abigail and looked her in the eye.

“Is there anything you want to tell me?” she said with a hint of a sneer.

“Pardon me?” Abigail responded slowly.

Ethan’s grandmother leaned right into Abigail’s face. “I know what happened to Norma next door. She’s barely alive! And I know that you called the police, I know that she was coming here for coffee cake yesterday, right before this all happened.” She pointed at her again. “So, is there anything you want to tell me?”

Abigail blinked twice and thought hard for a way around this question. “No,” was all she said in a flat voice.

“I expected more from you.” Then she added with a more sinister look on her face, “I thought Ethan would do better.” She turned and walked back to the door, then turned around and faced Abigail. As she spoke to her, Ethan’s grandmother was not aware that a purple figure had materialized just behind her, shifting slightly, looking at her. Ruth was back. “First thing tomorrow I’m going to tell the police what I know so you’ve got until then to spill your beans to me.” Then she turned and walked past Ruth and out the door.

*

During her first glass of wine of the evening, Abigail spoke in hushed tones to Ruth, trying to understand her, asking for explanations. While she knew Ruth was there, the purple glow was ever present and occasionally Ruth would be visible and could be seen, but not for long. Her head was always lowered and Abigail asked her if she was ashamed of what she had done.

“With your Christian upbringing, you know that what you did can’t be right. You must feel some remorse, some guilt for hurting Mrs. Parker.” Ruth could be seen for a moment, her head still down, no other acknowledgement, then the wisps of purple moved slowly across the room and hovered by the stove, looking unsettled but calm. “Did you feel guilty about your Mom? I just don’t understand this Ruth.”

Abigail poured a second glass of wine. She had the journal on the table and turned the pages as she re-read the different passages. “There’s nothing here that even hints at the outburst yesterday. Or that would make anyone suspect you could kill your mother.” Suddenly a handful of pages turned and the book was now open to a page where most was covered by the other handwriting, the large writing, the writing that had been scribbled out. Abigail looked at it but it was impossible to know what had been there before erased with the flurry of lines in all directions.

“Okay,” Abigail said in a soothing voice. “So this has something to do with it. What then? One of your sisters? Rebecca? They made you angry? I don’t get it.”

Ruth was there, occasionally moving around the room, but didn’t provide any more help.

“Too bad you didn’t drink wine,” Abigail said, changing the subject. “I know that if I’m going to lose this belly fat I need to cut back, but it’s so fucking good.” She looked over at Ruth quickly and saw that she hadn’t moved. “Hey, you didn’t react when I swore. I guess you’re getting used to me. I thought I had gotten used to you, until yesterday. Look girl, if we’re going to stay friends, you need to chill.” Ruth’s head rose just a little, she stayed where she was, materializing a little longer. Abigail raised her glass in a toast gesture. “To friends!”

She heard the front door open and close and by that she knew Ethan was home. She put her glass down and she continued talking to Ruth. “Maybe we won’t be friends much longer if they take me away and lock me up. Grandma seems intent on turning me in!” she said with a laugh, but

Ruth shifted noticeably at that suggestion and Abigail was quick to calm her. “Relax, I’ll figure out how to deal with her.”

Ethan walked in. He looked around, didn’t see anyone. “Who are you talking to?”

“Ruth,” Abigail freely admitted.

“Ruth? Who is Ruth?” He looked around again. “There’s no one here.”

“Oh, she’s here,” Abigail said, and went to fill her glass again.

Ethan snatched the bottle from her hand just before it began to pour and set it down across the table, out of reach. “You’re drunk.”

“No, I’m not. I’ve had two glasses, that’s all. I’m being honest. Ruth is the ghost of the woman who drowned her mother. She’s here. I’ve seen her. You’ve seen her.”

Ethan picked up the wine bottle again and gave it a closer look. Satisfied it was only wine he moved it to a counter where he had earlier brought in two cases of bottled water. He pulled back the plastic covering the dozen bottles in one case and pulled one out.

“I don’t need water Ethan,” Abigail said. “I’m just telling you the truth. Ruth is here, she moves around, she’s shown me some things. I’m trying to understand her.”

She stopped talking because Ethan was starting to smile. He was giving her the kind of look you give to someone who is missing a brick and deserves your pity. He finally spoke and it was in a soothing voice. “Now, now. I haven’t seen a ghost. Let’s get you up to bed.”

“Ethan!” Abigail said crossly. “You’re not listening. You’ve seen her.”

“No, I haven’t.”

“The purple light, you’ve seen that purple glow move around.”

He seemed puzzled by that. “That’s just the lights.”

“That’s Ruth. She always wore purple to church.” Abigail then added a second time, more earnestly. “That’s Ruth.”

Ethan was not processing what he was hearing. He stood with one hand on the top of his head in confusion, the other holding the water bottle at his side. “Come on...”

“Okay,” Abigail said impatiently. “Let’s try this.” She stood up and looked around the kitchen. “Ruth, are we friends? We’re friends, aren’t we? I’m asking you a favour now, as a friend.” She paused and looked around again, looking for a trail of purple somewhere. She sensed Ruth was in the room but wasn’t sure where. “Ruth ... please show yourself to Ethan,” she said softly.

After a few seconds Abigail saw Ruth emerge from the area of the back door. She held steady, her head as low as it could be, her hair swept all across her purple dress, wavering just a bit, a purple aura all around her.

Ruth was behind Ethan, and Abigail nodded to him to look in her direction, but he could see the purple glow and knew which way to turn, which he did very, very slowly. He saw her. He looked at her. Then he exclaimed “Jesus Christ!”

The water bottle in Ethan’s hand exploded as a rush of red flew past Ethan and out of the room. “Oh no, not that, don’t say that!” Abigail cried at the same time as Ethan pulled his hand to his chest and screamed in pain. “Fucking hot! Fucking hot!!” he screamed. Then in reaction to what Abigail had said: “What?! What?!”

“You took the lord’s name in vain,” she said as she pulled his hand down from his chest and looked it over. “Quick, we need to run this under cold water. You’ve got a burn on your hand.”

“What the fuck was that?” he said confused, being led to the kitchen sink and having cool water run over his burned skin.

“That was Ruth. She killed her mother in this house, she still lives in this house, and I’m trying to make friends with her.” She ran the water over his hand and neither said a word. Ethan looked bewildered and let Abigail tend to his hand. Eventually he pulled it back and looked at Abigail. She spoke again, really just finishing her thought from ten minutes earlier, with an addition that was an understatement. “She’s also a little volatile.”

*

Lying in bed, fully awake, Abigail could tell that Ethan was awake as well. He may be coming to terms with what had happened earlier but that was just one interaction with Ruth. Abigail had experienced multiple interactions, some pleasant, but the more recent times had been violent, especially the attack on Mrs. Parker. She would have liked to share her thoughts, help him with what he was feeling, just talk it out. But that’s not who they were anymore. They weren’t really a couple. The emotional split had happened. They weren’t two. She was one. She didn’t want to do anything to pull either of them back in. They were apart in so many ways. There was no reason to fight it.

As the night wore on, the two of them lying in silence, shifting occasionally, listening to the sounds of the house. What sounds happen in the night when they would normally be sleeping? Sometimes traffic from outside. Maybe a bit of wind on the house. But also a constant back and forth. It felt like pacing, but unlike pacing there were no footsteps. Abigail could hear the sound of moving back and forth. It wasn’t Ethan’s grandmother, she had gone to bed unnoticed, and her footsteps would be heard. This was just movement. Slow and troubled and constant. Murmurs but no sound. Whispers but they weren’t. Unease. Dis-ease. Movement. What sounds happen in the night when they would normally be sleeping? This was the sound of unrest.

Well into the sleepless night Abigail and Ethan then heard some footsteps: Ethan’s grandmother. The sense of movement in the house stopped.

It was not unusual to hear Grandma getting up to go to the bathroom, flushing the toilet, walking back to her room.

They had heard her walk to the bathroom, but the toilet did not flush. There was silence. No movement either. Then a faint sound. The splash of water? Minutes passed. Unease. Abigail wondered. More silence. Ethan raised himself to his elbows.

“She’s been in there a long time,” he observed in a whisper.

Abigail blinked. In her mind two and two were coming together. She jumped out of bed! “Ethan! Check on her!”

The alarm in her voice caused Ethan to get out of bed quickly. He rushed out the door and down the hall to the main bathroom, Abigail right behind him. A red aura in the bathroom disappeared as they ran down the hall. He pushed open the bathroom door and turned on the light and almost immediately let out a scream!

His grandmother was submerged in the bathtub, eyes wide open, skin blistering, nightgown floating at the surface where steam rose from water. Ethan tried to put his hand in, but he pulled it back right away, burning his skin as soon as it even lightly touched the surface.

“Oh my god. Oh my god,” he started stammering in a shaky voice. He turned to Abigail who could only stare at his grandmother. “Abigail, what has she done? Why would she do this? Oh my god.”

Abigail collected herself and put her arms around him, moving him out into the hallway.

“We have to call 9-1-1.”

“We have to get her out of there!” Ethan protested.

“It’s too late Ethan. We have to call the police, an ambulance.”

Ethan looked angry, not wanting to accept what they saw. “No, we have to get her out of there.” he said determined, turning back toward the bathroom. Then he added, in frustration, “Now help me for Christ’s sake!”

The bathroom exploded, coinciding with a flash of red light!

Shards of bathtub stuck in the door, the trim, the drywall just outside the door in the hall, with hot water going everywhere! Neither Ethan nor Abigail was hit by the debris, or the water, they had been far enough into the hall, and now they froze, waiting for what might come next. But everything went quiet again.

They cautiously looked inside the bathroom. Ethan’s grandmother was lying on the floor, clearly dead. The bathtub was in pieces, large pieces where it had been and smaller pieces all over the

room. The bathtub was what had exploded. The rest of the room was intact except for pieces of bathtub, and water.

Once again Abigail pulled him back, away from the bathroom.

“Ethan, Ethan! This was Ruth. I don’t know if we are safe. We need to get downstairs, or outside, and call someone.”

“Ruth?”

“Yes. And no more swearing. I mean, no more saying you-know-what, Ruth doesn’t like it.”

She pushed him down the hall and he didn’t resist. They went down the stairs and out the front door and stood on the step. Ethan had his cell phone. He was about to press the appropriate numbers when Abigail raised a hand.

“What are you going to say?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, it looks like your grandmother drowned herself in scalding water then the tub exploded. Is that possible? I mean, we know what happened, as hard as it is to believe. But what will the police believe?”

They looked at each other in silence. Neither could think of an alternative.

Finally, Ethan spoke. “I think I have to call.”

“Okay. I guess we do.”

He dialed and said his grandmother had died in the bathroom. They waited for someone to show up.

Abigail looked up at the second floor. The window from Ethan’s grandmother’s room was occupied by a faint purplish figure, Ruth, very indistinct.

“How could you!” Abigail said in a low voice.

The purplish figure disappeared.

*

Police officers came, other emergency services came, neighbours were awakened by the commotion and stood on doorsteps, then two detectives, conversations began through the night past daybreak and well into the morning.

Abigail and Ethan were questioned together at first, establishing what had happened, *attempting* to establish what had happened. But after some discussions they could not hear between the police and others attending to Ethan's grandmother's body, they were told that Abigail would remain at the house with an officer for additional questioning, but Ethan would go with officers to the police station.

They both said, "Okay," wanting to appear helpful.

Then a detective nodded at Ethan's hands and the burns that were evident. "When did you hurt your hand?"

"Last night," he said. Then realizing the significance, he added: "Like, yesterday evening, much earlier last night."

The officer stepped closer with an evidence bag. "We would like to use this bag to protect your hand until we can check it out more carefully, both to make sure you're all right, but also for any evidence which could help our inquiry."

"Can you do that?"

The officer looked at him sternly. "Yes, we can. If we have reasonable grounds to suspect material evidence is on the person of a party to the incident, we have the right to protect the integrity of the evidence." He paused and if the sternness of his stare could increase, it did. "I am going to read you your rights now as well, so that you are aware of them and can make the appropriate decisions."

Ethan looked at Abigail helplessly as the bag was placed over his hand by one detective and the other read his rights to him. As the reading continued, Ethan's demeanor began to darken. As the rights ended and Ethan was turned to be led from the room, he looked back at Abigail again with an angry, angry glare.

*

"Do I need to know my rights?" Abigail asked when she and the detective left behind sat down at the kitchen table.

"Not at this time," was the answer, all business-like and unemotional.

The questions began. And she gave answers that were truthful.

She hadn't heard anything. She had gone to bed at ten. She was still awake at two, so was Ethan. No, they were just lying there, both were having trouble sleeping. No, she hadn't left the room. No, he hadn't either. Then they went to check on his grandmother. They went to check because they heard her walk to the bathroom which they often did, but then they didn't hear the toilet flush for a long time, it seemed odd, so they went to check. Yes, both of them. Because they were worried. Well, maybe there had been the sound of a splash, but she couldn't be sure. Yes,

they found her in the tub. No, the water was too hot to check. They heard the tub rupture when they left the room to call an ambulance.

The detective paused and looked at the notes he was taking. "You were saying that your husband had not left your room?"

"That's right."

"You're sure about that?" he insisted.

"Yes!" Abigail said in a louder, firmer voice.

"Not even to go to the bathroom?"

"No."

"You didn't get up to go to the bathroom either? You could have been in the ensuite for a few minutes."

"I didn't have to go. Neither of us got up."

The detective nodded in the direction of the wine bottle on the counter and the empty glass at the sink. "The wine didn't affect your judgement, and didn't make you need to pee?" He pressed.

"No! It was just two glasses, I didn't have to go, what can I say. I guess I have a big bladder. And my judgement is fine."

He scratched the side of his head with his pen. "You were just lying there, the two of you? Awake until 2?"

Abigail realized this was unusual, so she continued with her policy of being honest. That is, until it ventured into the supernatural, but here she was probably safe with honesty. "We had a fight, okay? Things aren't so good between us. So, we were lying awake because of that."

This seemed to satisfy him for the moment. "How did you get along with your grandmother?"

"Ethan's grandmother," Abigail corrected him. "It was fine but no, we weren't close. I didn't like living with her, but it wasn't awful either. It was fine. She was fine."

"Did Ethan like his grandmother?"

"Yes. He loved her. They were close. He would never hurt her."

"Did that bother you, how close he was to his grandmother?" the officer asked, catching Abigail off-guard but she quickly recovered.

“Hey, enough with this psych shit. I wasn’t jealous of that and I didn’t have a problem with his grandmother. The problems Ethan and I have are our own and are because of who the two of us are.” Then Abigail pushed another thought into the conversation. “While you’re on this psychology path, aren’t you going to ask me her state of mind?”

“Whose?”

Abigail threw open her arms. “Ethan’s grandmother’s!”

“You think she killed herself?”

The question from the detective felt off. She was offering too much information, too much opinion. He was more experienced at this than she was. “I don’t know. I don’t know what to tell you. We were awake, no one left the room, we went to check on her and she was dead. We don’t know how it happened. I don’t know how it happened.”

“Do you set the temperature on your hot water tank especially high?”

“No. I don’t. I mean, I don’t know.”

“Is it normal practice for someone to boil water for their bath?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you happy your grandmother is dead?”

“What?! No!” Abigail stood up. “No!” she repeated.

The detective stood up as well. “It seems very strange to have two people die from water burns next door to each other, a day apart, don’t you think?”

“What?” Abigail’s voice choked out the word. “Mrs. Parker is dead too?” she added in a voice that was scratching over a dry, tight throat.

He nodded. “That’s all for now. I may be back later.”

As he walked past her toward the door, Abigail regained a bit of her voice and reminded him: “and she’s Ethan’s grandmother. Not mine.”

*

After all the activity of the night and morning, the house was unusually quiet. Abigail sat in the kitchen. The second floor was off limits, there was tape across the bottom of the stairs, and an officer that sat silently in a chair in the hallway to make sure no one went up the stairs, though Abigail had been allowed to get a change of clothes, which she was now in.

With the police officer in the house Abigail had to keep her voice low, but she did talk, and it was to Ruth. She asked over and over why Ruth would kill again, what made her want to drown grandma, what made her attack Mrs Parker. "Are you protecting yourself? Are you protecting *me*? These acts are so brutal, and so sudden. What switch flipped in you to make you do them?" There was no response. No sign of Ruth, no purple aura. Still, Abigail felt certain Ruth was somewhere close, and was listening.

"You can't blame anyone else. It wasn't me; it wasn't Ethan. You're the only other one here. And I saw you with the nozzle. This is your doing." Still nothing.

Abigail thought about calling Susan. She needed somewhere safe to go and had reached the point where she would now go to her friend. She decided that would be best, after letting Ethan know, whenever he returned. She wondered how that was going, how he was feeling, especially if they were trying to corner him or get him to say something he shouldn't. She hoped he had called a lawyer. Does he know a lawyer? She hoped he would be all right. Eventually. On his own.

"Just so you know Ruth, I'm moving out. I'm done with Ethan; I don't want to stay in this house anymore with everything that's happened." Suddenly she felt Ruth come closer, come into the room. She saw purple in the corner, where she had been when she had materialized for Ethan. There she was. Abigail sensed turmoil. Ruth may be silent, but she seemed to be able to convey feelings. Abigail had felt them before, she had felt friendliness, unrest, anger, all at different times. Now she felt unrest again. Anguish. Desperation.

"I'm sorry, I have to," she said, a feeling of guilt rising in her, tears welling in her eyes. "Ruth, how can we be friends? Aside from the obvious, look at what's happened." She felt the grief from Ruth as well. Abigail felt awful, but with that she felt on edge, like Ruth could do anything unexpected at any time. As badly as she wanted to stay true to Ruth as a friend, she had now seen the other extreme, the two sides of the story, the two possibilities, the two ways this could end. The two sides of the coin.

"I've tried to understand you. I don't know what your journal was supposed to tell me. I don't know what Mrs. Parker has to do with it. I don't know why you're this lovely person in a purple dress then suddenly, you're in red and doing awful things." Abigail paused at this. She thought it over. Again, two and two were trying to come together in her mind. She looked up with surprise on her face. "I wonder —" she began, but the kitchen door behind her opened unexpectedly.

Ethan stepped in. "I can hear you," he said, then he lowered his voice to barely a whisper. "You think you're being quiet? If I could hear you, the cop out there probably can too."

"Are you okay?" Abigail asked in a normal volumed voice.

"No!" he almost shouted. Then he dropped his voice down to something that couldn't be heard outside the kitchen. "They think I killed my grandma!"

"But you didn't," Abigail said, continuing in a very quiet voice.

“Well, I can’t tell them it was your fucking spirit friend,” Ethan motioned toward the corner. He saw Ruth too. She could hear what they were saying.

“No, but that doesn’t mean you did it.”

“I have burns on my hand. They think that’s evidence.”

“But they let you go. They must not think so.”

Ethan waved his finger at her. “They do!” he whispered. “I can tell. This isn’t my fault. It’s because of you and your friend!” He looked at Ruth again. “For Christ’s sake!” he hissed at her.

Ruth spun in a circle and the wine bottle on the counter beside the water bottles was smashed on the floor.

A voice from outside the room called out: “is everything okay in there?”

“Just a spill, no worries,” Abigail called back. Then she looked at Ethan in reproach and said in a hushed tone, “don’t be such a child. Don’t goad her.”

“Why? What have I got to lose? My life sucks. I know you’re leaving me. And maybe I’ll get charged with murder. What a way to top off the week!”

Abigail studied him for a few moments. This is the first time he had said out loud that she was leaving, and she didn’t correct him. His emotions were unstable, and she didn’t want to make it worse, not with Ruth also at extremes across the room.

“It’s true, isn’t it?” he said. “You’re dumping me.”

Abigail shrugged in confirmation.

Ethan’s face became angry and dark. “I knew it! Grandma told me you would! That you weren’t faithful to our marriage, you didn’t know your place, you wouldn’t stick by me like you should!”

“It’s more complicated than that Ethan. I’m not trying to hur –”

“I’m going to tell them I heard you go out of the room!” he said, cutting her off. “You want to leave me? I’ll fix you. I’ll tell them I fell asleep and I don’t really know whether you were in the room the whole time!”

Ruth was getting more agitated. Abigail saw this. She was also aware that Ethan’s voice was getting above a whisper. He was losing control.

“I will bury you!” he growled. “I’ve got the power. I have a lawyer. I will take you down. You will die in prison like your pathetic religious friend!”

There was a rush of red and purple light across the kitchen and Ethan was pushed violently against the wall. He staggered and straightened up again. Ruth went back in the other corner, clearly visible, swaying and spinning and distressed.

Ethan looked directly at her. "Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ!" he taunted. The light around Ruth separated into red and purple for a moment, and the kitchen window over the sink exploded loudly, glass everywhere, and the aura around Ruth intensified so that the room was overwhelmed, vivid, ablaze!

"Stop it!" Abigail yelled at both Ethan and Ruth.

There was banging on the kitchen door as the police officer was trying to get in. The door would not open for him. "What's going on?!" he shouted. "Let me in!"

Ethan turned his attention back to Abigail. "You will get blamed for all of this. You will die in prison!" He screamed back at her.

Ruth was red, her eyes like fire, shaking fiercely, and she grabbed a water bottle from one of the cases and it flew across the room and smashed into the wall inches from Ethan's head. The water splashed on them both. It was incredibly hot!

Abigail instinctively stepped in front of Ethan. Whether she thought she could protect him, she wasn't sure. Then she saw Ruth pull out two more water bottles.

"Ruth..." she said, in despair.

The water bottles sped across the room at head level towards Abigail, and Ethan behind her, but just before they arrived a purple figure appeared in front of them and the bottles burst just before they got to them. They didn't feel anything.

Ethan moved toward the door. Abigail wasn't expecting this, but she moved with him, in front of him. More water bottles came at them, steaming hot, fast through the air, their intent clear. The purple figure moved also and blocked the deadly bottles again.

The purple figure turned just enough for Abigail to see. It was Ruth! She looked back at the red figure across the room, shaking and spinning in fury and madness. It was Ruth as well!

"There's two of them!" Abigail said.

The light overhead shattered! The refrigerator door blew across the room, deflected by Ruth who was protecting them. The sink blew up like the bathtub had done!

Abigail was still staring at Ruth in her fury in the corner, taking more water bottles and sending the boiling projectiles across the room, bursting against the walls in the randomness and senselessness of her anger!

“You’re Rebecca,” Abigail said. The ghost stopped spinning and lowered her furious fixation on Abigail. “That’s who you are. You’re Rebecca!”

The red light intensified! Red Ruth came right at Abigail who raised her arm in desperation for protection!

The purple Ruth moved just as quickly, and Ruth and Rebecca met in a forceful collision of light and sparks and hot water and breaking furniture and falling drywall and chairs been driven across the floor and smaller items being smashed to the ground or against the walls as the kitchen was being destroyed piece by piece as Ruth and Rebecca fought! Red Ruth tried again and again to get at Abigail, or Ethan, or both, but Purple Ruth repelled her, turning and tussling and flailing in a mix of colour and light and rage!

Abigail pushed Ethan toward the door which opened and knocked the policeman down and all three fell in a pile just on the other side of the entry. Abigail looked back and saw the two Ruth’s spinning in a violent mass of two spirits, two persons, two sides, two purposes, two wills in a struggle for control. More and more of the kitchen was being demolished and then the doorway splintered in all directions, sending slices of wood into their skin in a few places, and they all did their best to hurry to their feet and rushed outside the front door.

Looking back Abigail saw the glow of the Ruth’s continue to engage, more sounds of breakage and destruction, until they were on the second floor in the room at the front, Ethan’s grandmothers room, Ruth’s room, and they could be seen in the window, each with their hands around the other’s throat, two sides trying to vanquish the other. The bed and the other furniture were thrown around the room, rotating and breaking around the fighting spirits, then the window blew out and bits from the room fell with the window to the front steps, Ethan and the policeman watched as well, they couldn’t take their eyes from it. Then the light started to fade. The red and the purple auras waned, still locked around each other. They never merged again, they were separate and still trying to end the other, fading as they wished the other gone. Then they faded from sight altogether.

There was silence on the street where they stood. It seemed that way, then Abigail was aware of the heavy panting from the policeman. “What the hell was that?!” he said.

Abigail didn’t answer. What could she say? She checked on Ethan. He had three splinters of wood in a cheek, boiling water blisters too. “Are you okay?”

“Ya,” he said, patting himself and not feeling anything else. Then he added. “You stepped in front of me.”

Abigail shrugged.

Ethan continued. “It would not have been good for me if you hadn’t. You saved me. Even after everything I said.”

“Ruth saved us both,” Abigail added. “At least the part of Ruth that was my friend.”

“Who was the other ghost?”

“That was Ruth too. A split personality. It had just dawned on me before all that happened.”

“You sure?”

Abigail smiled. “Yes. Psychology, remember?”

*

Susan was sitting on the edge of the coffee table, looking at Abigail next to her, tucked into some sheets on the sofa. “Are you sure this is okay with you?” she asked.

“You don’t know how good this feels,” Abigail said smiling.

“Really? It doesn’t look comfortable.”

“Compared to the lonely hotel I stayed at last night and everything that’s happened this week ... this is perfect. It really feels good. You guys have been great.”

“Where do you go from here?”

Abigail took a deep breath. “One step at a time, I guess. Ethan seems to be better about splitting, more understanding anyway. If you don’t mind me here for a while, I’ll see if the school will let me back into Psych. Slowly I hope life will go in a better direction.”

“Good,” Susan said. “What about your stuff?”

“Ya, that could take a while. The house is apparently a mess. The police still have a lot to sort through. And I’m not going back in there, not for my stuff, not for anything.”

“Do you think Ruth is still there?”

Abigail thought a few moments. Her smile faded to sadness. “I’m not sure.” And she immediately questioned her claim that she would never go back.

“So there were two of them? Two personalities?”

“That’s right. Ruth and the other side of her, who she called Rebecca. I felt sorry for Ruth, I liked her. We sort of had a friendship going, if you can imagine that. We all wondered if the reason for her violence was a religious thing, or an affair or some dirty secret, but it wasn’t any of that. Just a young woman suffering from mental illness. Same person, two sides to her, two personalities, two ghosts.”

Susan patted her shoulder. “You get your degree, maybe you can help people like that.”

“Maybe. One rule though: patients must be living!”

*

Despite saying that she would never go back to the house, one week later Abigail was standing on the sidewalk, looking in at the house, up to the bedroom window, the room that had been Ethan's grandmother's, the room that had been Ruth's.

The house was truly a mess. Broken windows had been boarded up. Crime scene tape protected the entire property. Abigail knew the inside was probably still as broken as when they tumbled out of there. Many of her personal items were still there also, but had been promised to be retrieved for her once the police had sorted through everything and some explanation could be found for the events on Second Avenue.

A few neighbours noticed Abigail standing by the house. Abigail paid no mind.

She was looking for Ruth.

There was no purple light, no red, no sound, no one looking out, no apparition, no ghost, no sign of Ruth visible in any way.

But Abigail could feel it. Moving back and forth. The pacing. The unrest. Abigail could sense the unrest.