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Amen Omen

*Thump. Thump. Thump.*

Listur's heart raced with fear as he found his way through the dead foliage. Whether it was fear, purpose, or pure adrenaline, he ran like hell through the maze of what was once maize, now replaced by weeds and dying brush. Once a lush beauty, the now desolate plantation rolled across land hundreds of acres across.

*Thump. Thump. Thump.*

Listur wanted to escape from the circumstances of his. Whether that be from the foolish society that would surely seek his head on a pike when they discovered his sin, or from the twisted judgement of his God soon to rain upon him in retribution.

His mind was racing, as were his legs, but he had no other choice than to run. He had to if he wanted to escape. His foot snagged onto a gnarled and dead root, and he was thrown into the bone-dry dirt. He put a hand to his waistband just to ensure the blade in his pocket remained-*Elenora*. She hadn't moved an inch.

He remained on the ground for a moment, debating to himself whether or not it was a fitting permanent resting place for him. Then he felt a tap on his shoulder. This touch by a freezing hand-as if it were the touch of death itself-shook him from his deep thought.

Listur peered up, and his mouth nearly fell open. A blank-faced man stood before him, but the man had a pale blue glow to his entirely transparent being. Steel-blue flames quietly flew off the man's form-as loose feathers from a bird might-and fell to his feet just below the shackles that rested at his ankles, before silently sizzling away on the cool soil. Strangely though, the embers burned cold. One would more likely receive frostbite than a burn from the chill of these flames-a chill that sent a terrible shiver down Listur's spine as he watched their elegant dance before disappearing into the night air.

The man himself wore a handsome white gold-studded suit, and his stout figure showed he had his needs met in excess in life. Conversely, his clothes were tattered. Listur noticed the shackles and leg irons on his wrists and ankles with dark scars on the pale skin just below them. On the man's back, rips in his tailored suit showed both open and scarred over lashes, and contorted skin. In fact, all over him, blisters and cuts were present. They looked as though they were handed to him with a vengeance.

The apparition stood as frozen as the frigid air around him, staring at Listur-nay-through him. While his gaze remained squarely on Listur's face, it seemed as though it wasn't his growingly impatient expression that the spirit was looking into. The man simply stood there, peering into Listur's soul.

Listur had enough after just a few minutes. He stood up, and glared back at the ghost, giving it a dirty scowl. The spirit didn't react to this at all, standing as if he hadn't move, besides his eyes changing to match Listur's new position. Listur closed distance between him and the spirit. One step. Another step. Step three.

Listur smirked at the spirit.

As if by muscle memory, he pulled out his edge, and took a wide swing at the ghost.

*Elenora* glittered in the moonlight, as it made contact with the spirit's intangible form.

The spirit bled. Blue blood gushed out from the slash across its chest. Still, the ghost didn't make a single move. The blue ectoplasm just continued to rush. Listur chuckled at the spirit, then half-turned away from the ghost to continue his journey onto the manor. However he noticed half-turn that something about the ghost seemed different for the first time since meeting. The air around the spirit itself had changed. Previously a frigid wind tingled the hairs on Listur's arms, but an uncharacteristically dry-heat began to emerge from the cold night air.

The embers around the ghost began to flicker more wildly. They burned bright and red, bringing Listur to a horrified sweat as the spirit was inches from setting the entire field ablaze with how dry the vegetation that remained was.

From the shadows of the tall grasses, other flaming spirits began to close in on Listur, These spirits themselves were negligibly threatening, as they stumbled as if in a zombie-like state, some even falling to the ground and continuing toward Listur on their hands and knees. But their wild flames waving off of them licked the dry shrubbery in their approach, and started the dangerous spread of the fire's red dance through the dry plants of the farm field. Listur was sweltering standing in the burning night.

The spirit of the dapper man spoke almost unintelligible english, but his booming voice echoed throughout the field, competing even with the sound of the fire's deep breath.

“Black... of the.... of the.... the... heart. Darkness.... Darkness within.... Within *you*...”

Listur was taken off guard for a moment, but thought it might be a good idea to take the hint. Starting with a hop, a skip, and a dash as he practically flew toward mansion, the slow

moaning spirits were obviously not what he was running from. Rather, the real danger came from the plantation itself going up in flames. No matter his speed the fire tugged at his collar. The screams of spirits were a dull cacophony as distance did them part.

The house came more and more into view, and with every step, Listur's tunnel-vision subsided, but in its place, the truth of his surroundings began to fill themselves in. This building that he found himself near wasn't just a simple dwelling. It was a monolith of a home. One so expansive the title of mansion wouldn't be fair enough of an estimate. The word "mcmansion" only quantifying the half of it. But this house wasn't a home, he knew that much. While of course externally decrepit, a great evil was said to be housed within. Stories tell of a witch known as The Dark Lady, who plays a trick on lost souls who are unlucky or foolish enough to venture into her mansion.

Listur only had a moment to remark on the plaque near the massive front door of the mansion before sprinting inside: "Give rapture to the innocent. Bring capture the blackened." Listur was certain which side he was playing for. Still, without hesitation, he shouldered through the door with the broken lock, and shut it hard.

*Thump. Thump. Thump.*

Listur was able to take in the scenery of the mansion halls. The halls themselves were befitting of a southern mansion of such make. Wide, but not too tall. Because of this however, Listur felt very cramped He didn't quite have to crouch, but between his head and the roof was less than a foot of space. Listur peered out the window past a dark ornate curtain. By this point, the fiery hellscape that chased him inside had grown starved. Few smouldering flames remained as the fields were bare outside of an inch thick layer of soot.

The walls of the house were far from bare, housing portraits of people from long before Listur's time. However these images were odd in that they were altered, as the faces seemed to be ripped out. Even more strange, dried black and red stains were found on some of the walls and floors as he made his way through the house, searching.

Listur knew what his purpose was, and could only focus on that purpose. He would almost come to think about the truth of his situation, and with that his hands would start to tremble, his teeth chattering despite him as if he was fighting a war for custody over his own body. Just as these thoughts would come however, Listur quickly forced them out of mind. He put them in a bubble, just as he did with the many other twisted traumas within his mind.

If he completed his mission, his sins would be washed away from him he thought. He checked the red-stained knife in his pocket once more. After all this time, she was the only one who remained by his side-*Elenora*.

Listur began prowling through the mansion. The house was huge, but something seemed off to him still. It seemed as if every few doors he'd end up in a certain room. This room was a short hallway, and in the center parallel with the right wall, was a table and a picture atop it. Listur looked at the picture for a moment, at the bottom, a nameplate that read as follows:  
*Montresor*.

He saw a plump man, smiling and wearing a handsome gold-studded suit. Listur thought back to the poker-faced ghost he saw in the plantation.

Listur continued on, but kept finding himself in that same room. Even when the room was immediately previous to itself, he'd find himself inside it's clutches again. After running through multiple copies of this wretched room however, Listur made note that Montresor's

portrait was now replaced with a single silver mirror. Listur peered into the mirror peeked into it. His face turned into one of pure awe and disgust. It wasn't himself that he saw in that mirror. It was something beastly, something unnatural, some kind of terrible red-eyed demon inside following his every move.

*Thump. Thump. Thump.*

His heart was racing hard. He pulled out the knife shakily, almost dropping it, or rather *her*. In the reflection of the pale moonlight hitting crimson, it almost looked as if faces were appearing in the ruby stains, making as if they were screaming in silent anguish. Listur in one thrusting motion forced the knife into the mirror, and he was thrown back with the same force he attacked with. The mirror shattered, rendering it unusable, but through the cracks of what was left, a red liquid began to ooze.

Listur backed away from the mirror's bloody tears, accidentally backing into what appeared to be a new door, directly across from the mirror table. He went for the door knob; it was icy cold.

Listur opened the door, and a woman was behind it. With her back to him, she was tending to a cauldron, and chanting. Every once in a while announcing herself as she'd add a new ingredient.

“Root of peach... Ashes of cotton...”

Listur analyzed the knife once more. In the knife, through the crimson drops, he saw only his own reflection.

Listur grinned.

He approached the woman, not even completely silent, but she made no effort to turn. Perhaps all this time had made her go senile?

He was right behind her. He shut his eyes. And he went for her. With one swift swipe to the nape, he was... he was not done. For a moment, all he heard was the sound of the cauldron bubbling.

He heard the door behind him shut with a violence. Still, his eyes remained closed. A cold air began to blow on him in rhythm. Breath. His eyes remained closed.

“You’ve come to absolve yourself of sin, haven’t you?”

Listur had nothing to say for himself but to nod, and it was with this that she tore into him.

“I too was as naive as you at a point, Listur. I was a tortured soul, my life had been stolen from me by the Montresors and their plantation life, and so when I turned to the life of the cauldron, I didn’t care if what I was about to do was against the lord. I destroyed the Montresor creed and felt no remorse. It was pure euphoria I felt, as I was finally able to show the pain they forced me, my friends, my family to endure. I freed my people from their pain, Listur. And I was naive like you and thought that getting rid of those monsters was all I needed to have everything wrong I ever did overlooked.”

The witch stopped for a moment, there was a sparkle in her eyes, as if reliving those choice moments.

“But I thought, Listur, I thought and I realized myself that I had to make a sacrifice. That all of this wasn’t correct. I realized that even if all I loved could go free-that they could go back home to finish the lives we started before that accursed boat ride-it was I who had to stay. I had

to stay and I had to repent for the sins that I accumulated in all this time. Witchcraft, murder... so many of the highest level of sinful evil in this world.”

Listur was visibly bored with the Dark Lady’s speech. He rolled his eyes at her. She was brought to immense anger, her voice booming like thunder, as the cauldron began to flash all kinds of colors, firing beams of light that burned Listur to his soul if he made the mistake to look directly into them.

“And so you truly believe that killing I, The Dark Lady, will absolve you of your sin? You believe that with my death, the 7 innocent souls you took with that blood-stained edge will stop screaming out to you, and terrorizing your dreams? That your kinsmen will forget about your grievous crimes, and choose forgiveness over the rope? You idiot! You can’t repent for your sin by addressing the sin of others. I tried to guide you to the correct answer, Listur. I wanted you to be rise above yourself, but the fact that you can’t even own up to that yourself-the fact that you come to murder me, even after everything I’ve ever gone through-it’s all horribly sickening.”

The witch stared at Listur with fierce eyes, but in those eyes held a woman, pleading with Listur’s conscience.

But such emotion was lost on Listur. He’d seen those same pleading eyes far too often to care.

The witch broke eye-contact with Listur. The reflection in his eyes showed that he only saw her as wasting his time. She wasn’t insightful or even the slightest bit interesting to him at all. Pain showed in her own eyes, wincing as if she’d been stabbed a thousand times.



“You believe you’re staring into the eyes of the sin herself, that removing her from this realm is the service that will end the judgment of your own sin, but in truth, the beast of sin is the one who looks back at you in the silver mirror!”

Listur looked back at his knife once more. He saw in the knife-*Elenora*-the red-eyed dark beast of the mirror, copying his every move. Listur threw the knife to the ground in a panicked frenzy.

The Dark Lady wiped tears from her red eyes. She regained her poise and focus, and quickly turned from Listur and starting into familiar chants, falling into a trance.

“Give rapture to the innocent, bring capture to the blackened... Give rapture to the innocent, bring capture to the blackened...”

She started slow, but her speech only continued to accelerate. She started to flail her arms wildly, as a strange smell of ozone filed the room, overwhelming Listur. Listur saw black specs, then black splotches dance past his vision, and felt his ability to move escaping him quickly, until full body paralysis overcame him, and he fell into a deep sleep.

Listur awoke in a strange room. At the top of the wall, was a single brick near the low ceiling left unplaced, allowing sunlight and teardrops of rain to fall in. Around him, a macabre arrangement of bones and human remains among shackles. Shaking, he slowly approached one of the walls wall, on this wall he noticed a placard just barely legible from the small amount of light entering the room.

“For what fury the 9 circles of Hell have not for you, a special Hell just for your sins exists on Earth ‘til death do you part.”

Listur peeked out the empty spot in the brick wall. It gave him a view out of a tall hill which staring down upon a cemetery. Below, a funeral procession was being held, but it wasn't until Listur heard one phrase that the reason for his placement in this unholy solitary-confinement became clear.

“...We are gathered for the untimely burial of *Elenora*, wife of Listur. She met her demise, by way of a knife to her heart, by a killer at large.”

*Thump. Thump. Thump.*

It's said that screams were heard in the outer hills of that small Georgia town for days after *Elenora*'s funeral. Some say it was the shout of angels, crying out in tortured anguish for the loss of such innocent beauty in the world.

On the seventh night, the blood-orange harvest moon watched as the town below made their prayers for *Elenora*'s pure soul to make safe travel to the Heavens. The sleepy village rested that night as a final cry faded into the night. The distant screams were never heard again.