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ARANEA

Written by

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*Don't let the bed bugs bite.*

EXT. UK COASTLINE / SOUTH WEST - DAY

To the West, the sun is a dying ember, smothered by the grey Devon clouds. Below, the mouth of the PLYMOUTH SOUND churns.

The Celtic Sea of the Channel throws salt spray against the limestone ramparts of the coast.

EXT. COVE / TAMAR VALLEY - DAY

Deep within the silt-vein of the valley, we come to a HIDDEN COVE where the brackish water thickly swells.

The tide is retreating, exposing jagged ribs of black shale that seep with oily moisture. Isolation here is absolute.

But there is something human that lies blackened by fire. A VOLVO, lying crumpled against the shale, a discarded husk.

It has plummeted from the HIGH-ROAD ABOVE, its roof crushed into the chassis.

And propped against the driver's side door is a BODY.

A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN. *THE MOTHER.*

In another life, she could have been a beauty queen. Now she is a wreck of mangled, bare limbs and torn fabrics.

Her face a cast of frozen shock. We move in on her. Her throat is pulsing, with a wet thrumming beneath the skin.

And then her jaw SLACKENS.

A serrated and glistening LEG parts her blue lips.

It is obsidian, like a nasty spider. It twitches in the night air, a sentient curiosity. Then the creature fully emerges.

It is an ARACHNID/ARANEA, beautifully translucent but slick with a venomous sheen. It moves with a jerky grace.

It secretes a thread of BLACK SILK. Gradually weaving a shimmering veil across the DEAD WOMAN'S OPEN MOUTH.

It seals the passage there, as if finishing a meal.

A sliver of MOONLIGHT pierces the clouds, reflecting this magical insect's artistry in the waters of the rising tide.

And then the creature scuttles down The Mother's chin, disappearing under her jawline.

And reappearing at the vulnerable hollow of her LOWER NECK.

It doesn't just bite here, it rips, a fibrous TEAR. And it feeds on the GRISTLE, burrowing into the fleshy muscle.

The Mother's head rolls back, like a victim crying their last. Her dead eyes stare up at the high road she fell from.

INT. VW ESTATE / COUNTRY ROADS - DAY

An old car, a tomb of stale tobacco and unwashed upholstery. It sways loudly round bendy lanes of the deep West country.

ELI BRAY (10), an introverted but expressive boy, is pressed against the front passenger window.

He watches the world pass by through a small, raised pair of BINOCULARS.

Through the circular vignette, the Tamar Valley is a blurred, green-grey smudge of valleys and tall hedgerows.

The car lurches, and Eli hits the door.

EDWARD (early 40s), his Father, a man barreling into a mid-life crisis, steers with a knee while rolling a cigarette.

Tobacco flakes fall into the muddy footwell. He has yellowing teeth and a golden canine crown that glistens when he grins.

EDWARD

Put those down. You'll puke.

ELI

The world is more interesting close up.

EDWARD

There's nothing to see here, wait until we get there. Don't be like your mother was, always restless, always complaining, always wants the next best thing.

ELI

Why do you speak in the present tense?

EDWARD

You know what I mean.

ELI

I'm not restless.

EDWARD

Then sit still.

Eli puts the binos on his lap and stares straight ahead.

ELI

I don't think mum thought I was like her.

Edward's jaw tightens. He licks the rolling paper, a slight reptilian sound. He glances at Eli.

EDWARD

She never knew what she wanted.  
Never really did. Because she was  
never really well. Too many issues.  
And now you don't have to worry  
about them.

ELI

I know what she wants.

EDWARD

What?

Eli shoots a quick look at his Father.

ELI

Peace.

Eli stares out the window and starts to tune out.

EDWARD

Peace? Fine. But I don't think  
that's what she ever wanted. Well,  
she's got it now, probably, not  
that that's what she deserves. But  
it's time to move on, forget about  
the past. Don't let that become a  
burden. Especially not this  
weekend. Do you hear me? *Elias*? Do  
you hear?

Eli turns and gently nods, but does not make any eye contact.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Do not mention anything about her  
this weekend. Your uncle has kindly  
invited us to his shoot, for a bit  
of fun. And the big *Chief* of all  
people knows how to have a good  
time. He's a play-hard-work-hard  
kind of guy. Although it's a bit  
play harder than work hard.

Edward lights the cigarette. Yellow-ish smoke curls out of a slit in the driver's window.

Eli cranks his own window, desperate for the fresh air.

Through the binoculars, he spots a large oak tree at the edge of his UNCLE'S ESTATE with a multitude of giant branches.

And upon one a CROW hangs upside down, tied by blue twine. It is dead. Stiff. Placed there on purpose, God knows why.

Rotating softly in the evening breeze...

EXT. MANOR HOUSE / COURTYARD - DAY

The house looms through the light fog, a bleached skull of a building overlooking the cosy rolling valley.

UNCLE ROBERT (late 40s), a man convinced that his hubris is merited, waits on the gravel like a statue of Gallos.

His expensive tweed aids his imposing figure. Edward and Eli approach him from the car parked up in the courtyard.

Robert's first move is to squeeze Eli's hand, the poor boy feels his knuckles POP. Robert loves a crushing handshake.

ROBERT

Taller, but thinner. We'll put some meat on those bones this weekend.

Robert pulls Edward into a proper hug, shoulder SLAPS him.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Edward.

EDWARD

Hello, Chief.

ROBERT

Come on.

He leads them both inside. The low sun dips behind a cloud.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Eli chews his thumbnail. The smell hits him, an immediate sensory overload of beeswax and chemical perfumes.

He covers his nostrils with his sleeve. AUNT EMILY (30s), a wire of neurotic energy, stands at a huge limestone island.

She is flatteringly dressed, considering what she is prepping. SQUELCH. She flips a slab of beef in marinade.

Her hands are stained in the mucus of it down to her wrists.

EMILY

Edward! Just in time. And Eli.  
Welcome. Welcome.

Robert takes a gulp of red wine from his glass on the table.

ROBERT

Reared and bled on the farm. The best organic meat in the county. A taster of what's to come for tomorrow's dinner.

EDWARD  
Lavish as always, Chief.

ROBERT  
Of course, *Edouard*.

EDWARD  
Best in the country. Not county.

ROBERT  
That's right, across the Isle. I  
like to be a modest man.

EDWARD  
Of course. You are. Very humble,  
Chief.

The brothers share a smug smirk at the sarcasm.

Edward peers at the wine bottle label and sniffs it under the pretence of being a connoisseur. He really has not a clue.

Eli stares at the meat. To his sensitivity, and under the glare of the lights, the fibres of the dead thing TWITCH.

He firmly blinks and the movement goes, his vision reset.

ROBERT  
Why don't you show Eli to his room.

Emily runs her hands under the jet sink. She turns and gives Eli a bracing smile, so much for a woman to do around here.

INT. TOP FLOOR LANDING / ELI'S ROOM - DUSK

The stairs narrow, air gets colder. Emily points Eli to a sparse room under the eaves at the north end of the house.

Featured on the wall is a photo of ROBERT'S CHILDREN holding RIFLES. A teenage boy and girl.

EMILY  
Your own space away from the  
adults. Cosiest bedroom in the  
entire house.

But Eli is not so sure, it feels lonely up here. And even a bit damp. He drops his rucksack and pulls out his binos.

ELI  
How many bedrooms are there?

EMILY  
Why do you ask?

ELI

Dad said there would be hundreds of guests tomorrow.

EMILY

Oh, no, he's exaggerating. We only have about 15 bedrooms. So no more than 30 or so guests. Dinner in twenty minutes!

She leaves. The latch CLICKS.

Eli opens the window an inch, but is blasted back by a CAAAW from the gable that makes his sensitive frame recoil.

He has just about righted himself, neurologically speaking, from sudden noise, when the bedroom door BURSTS open.

Edward. He stands there, silhouetted in the cramped space.

ELI

Where are you sleeping?

EDWARD

Downstairs. In a master guest suite. Emily's finest.

ELI

Why can't I sleep on the first floor.

EDWARD

Trust me you would not sleep a wink.

ELI

But I used to sleep there with you and-

Eli drops out. Mum, cannot even mention her. Edward's spine goes rigid, as he breathes back his insatiable well of anger.

EDWARD

Not a word about her, remember.

ELI

I know.

EDWARD

I just don't want you to have to hear about it. It's for your own good. You hear?

ELI

I know.

EDWARD

At least not for some time yet. Someday you will understand. I remember when I was your age how hard these things were. I remember it like yesterday. Age makes no difference, the years are just experience, and most of it rotten. In fact I can almost remember being a baby, that's how short life is. So let's not regret it, and be wise enough to keep our mouths shut.

Eli nods, OK.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Can you promise me that?

Eli nods, again.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Say it. Speak, you can use your mouth to speak sense!

ELI

Yes, dad.

EDWARD

What?

ELI

I promise not to talk about-

EDWARD

Good.

ELI

About it.

EDWARD

Good, good.

Edward itches his nose, a harsh scratch. Eli wonders how his Father's nose is so strong, as his is not.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Well done, *Eelei*. You understand well. Now be on your best behaviour this weekend. You are lucky that people here have proper manners and will listen to you.

And then Edward licks his finger with a SLURP. Gross. Eli cannot bear to look at it, nor hear more brainsick ramblings.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

When I was your age, nobody listened to me.

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)

They just put food down my neck and clothes on my back and then sent me off to boarding school. So count yourself lucky, to be here, to have a family that cares. And even you've got a room all to yourself. Privacy. The number one freedom of our society, and land to nurture. A pocket of Great Britain all to ourselves, there is no greater luxury.

Edward gazes at the view across the land from the high window. He relishes the countryside, the home-land.

But a second later his mind races off again, and he turns.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

OK, *Eely*.

ELI

Can you stop calling me nicknames?

EDWARD

Oh, Elias. Come on. I have so many great names for you.

ELI

They're stupid.

Edward nearly chews through his lip.

EDWARD

Don't you dare answer back to anybody else tonight. You're just like your-

He reels. He thuds back to the doorway.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Just make sure you eat your meat at dinner. It's been prepared especially for us. And a half-share of it is probably worth more than my car.

ELI

But I don't like it.

EDWARD

You don't know that. And even if it does make you sick like you want to throw up, sometimes we just have to do things we don't like.

Edward departs and descends the stairs. Eli stands alone.

A reflection of his outline begins to form in the darkening window. Night is upon them.

Behind him, in the corner of the ceiling, a single STRAND OF WEB drifts in the draft of the open door, as if beckoning.

Up close we see that the web is silky and blackened, just like the mysterious arachnid on the beach was.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Across the long oak table, wine bottles, glasses, silverware, and beef giving off its intense iron scented aroma.

Eli, Edward, Robert, and Emily eat dinner. Silence, except for the CLATTER of cutlery assaulting china plates.

And then a BUZZ from the intercom. Robert sees to it.

Moments later, SIMON (40s), a man of medicine, is ushered in by Robert. Simon shakes Robert's hand, peer to peer.

He is classy, sleek in a tailored cashmere jumper, it makes Edward's soot-stained top look like a rag.

SIMON

Appallingly sorry. I took the wrong turn off somewhere near Exeter.

ROBERT

You need a mobile phone.

SIMON

No, thank you. I beg your pardon but I work with my hands and don't want them corrupted by that technology.

Emily is right away amused, clearly there is a fancy here. Whereas Edward chortles at what he perceives as a bad joke.

Emily's eyelids flutter as Simon locks onto her for a beat. She simply cannot hide her attraction, but for looking away.

Simon belatedly shakes Edward's hand and notices the grease under Edward's fingernails. His smile masks the contempt.

SIMON (CONT'D)

The righteous carpenter?

EDWARD

We have met.

SIMON

Indeed- I do wish I was quite the artisan with a chisel, I can only marvel-

And there is the false modesty, a staple of British society.

EDWARD

Not so easy to get by though.

ROBERT

Well, family loans help.

This hits a nerve in Edward's neck.

EDWARD

With 5% interest? You must be joking, Robert.

ROBERT

That's not true, old boy.

They leave it there. Anyhow, Robert is annoyingly calm, he saunters off to fetch the beers.

He opens a bottle, high-pitched CLINK. Whilst Emily begins to serve out Simon's dinner.

But then he steps in, taking over from her, and offering a pleasant smile that makes her spine tingle.

Moments later, all are sat. Eli stares at his plate.

The steak sits in a widening pool of blood-juice. The white ceramic may as well be an operating table.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Reared on the north acreage, and butchered on the south. North to south.

SIMON

It is a real privilege.

EDWARD

Always a privilege.

ROBERT

You won't find marbling like that anywhere else.

SIMON

Marbling?

EDWARD

The fat.

ROBERT

No, the intramuscular fat. An evenly distributed spread is the best sign of quality.