

HAMNET

CREDITS/TITLE OVER BLACK

FADE IN:

0 EXT. FOREST - DAY 0

Opera: Purcell's When I Am Laid In Earth.

A RED EGG is nesting on a bed of fallen leaves, surrounded by circular tree roots.

We are in an ancient forest of Britain. The overwhelming soundscape begins to merge with the opera, as if the thick canopy has swallowed the mournful singer. Her voice cries to us through the patterns of the forest - bending, contorting, flowing in an ever-ending circle of life and death.

Is this a dream? It doesn't feel completely real, yet it seems more substantial and potent than reality.

The heaven shines through the trees, but we don't linger there. We descent, slowly, like a fallen leaf, towards a hole in the wet forest floor, a dark, mysterious, bottomless void -

1 INT. HEWLANDS - STUDY - AFTERNOON 1

THE LATIN TUTOR leans against a window in a dim room with heavy ceilings. A cut is above his eyebrow. His knuckles are white pressing against the metal frame of the window. His nails are stained black with ink. Behind him, THREE FARM BOYS are reciting a Latin phrase over and over.

BOYS (IN LATIN)

I must essay a path whereby I, too,
may rise from earth and fly
victorious on the lips of men.

The air in the room is thin. The Latin tutor is agitated, trapped, hungry. He's a man of letters. But beneath the restraint is a storm of animalistic urges. This is Will.

Something catches his attention - near the edge of the forest A HAWK is circling the sky, searching for its prey...

2 EXT. FOREST - ANCIENT TREE - AFTERNOON 2

In the heart of the forest is an ancient tree. A YOUNG WOMAN is asleep, nesting amongst its massive roots. Her hair is long and dirty. Her cheeks sunburnt. She wears a worn dress in dark red, like a fresh organ. This is Agnes.

She stirs in her sleep, curls up even smaller, as if trying to disappear into earth. So restless, troubled, we wonder what she is dreaming.

A change in the air wakes her up. She looks to the sky -

Her hawk appears above the tree-line.

She smiles and gets up, puts on an old glove, ready to receive her hawk.

Her stand is strong. But her eyes reveals fragility. A thought ripples through her mind. A distant memory that makes her breath shallow. She slowly takes off her glove, rolls up her sleeve, and exposes her bare hand to the sky instead.

She waits. Her hand trembles. She wants this. She yearns for this. SHE WANTS TO FEEL EVERYTHING.

The hawk dives down, faster than usual, as if carrying an important message. It lands HARD on her bare hand and wrist, surprising her with its force.

She winces, steadying herself, feeling the burn under the grips of sharp claws. She breathes deeper now. A sense of calmness from the adrenaline.

AGNES

Found your prey?

She smooths the hawk's feathers with her fingers.

AGNES (CONT'D)

You flew down fast. What ails you?

Is something the matter?

She looks up. The wind ruffles the leaves. Each tree moves at a different tempo, bending, shuddering. A restlessness is in the air. Something feels wrong. She hurries away.

3

INT. HEWLANDS - STUDY - AFTERNOON

3

The Latin words roll on and on, scraping at the walls.

Will turns to give the boys the correct pronunciation.

WILL (IN LATIN)

I must essay a path whereby I, too,
may rise from earth and fly
victorious on the lips of men.

The boys continues on. Will turns to the window. He sees -

Agnes walks through the field towards the garden, her hawk hunched on her fist.

Who is this striking girl? He stares at her disappearing into a blooming orchard.

Dread washes over him. He must stay here, in this room, to pay his father's debt, maybe for the rest of his life. But time stops. He can't hear the boys, as if he's underwater.

Air. He needs air. To breathe. He rushes to the door -

4

EXT. HEWLANDS - GARDEN - DAY

4

Hot. Pollen in the air. Constant buzzing of the bees.

Will hurries through animals and puddles. He sees Agnes. He doesn't know how he got here from the dark study, except he has to go towards this girl in red, like an arrow heading towards its mark.

Agnes ties her hawk to a make-shift perch. She senses Will and turns to look at him approaching.

Who is he? She watches with intrigue. He slows down when he sees her staring.

They stare at each other. Both feeling the intense pull. The world starts to fall away.

WILL

Good day to you.

AGNES

Good day, sir.

She waits for him to talk. The heat inside of her builds, but he stays quiet, staring at her. She wants to look away, to move away, but she can't.

AGNES (CONT'D)

What brings you to Hewlands?

WILL

...I am tutoring the boys here.

AGNES

The new Latin tutor. I have heard of you.

He smiles and stays quiet again. His silence makes her uncomfortable and his steady gaze confuses her.

She looks away and back. He's still staring at her. Something in his eyes feels urgent.

She touches the falconry glove on her arm for comfort.

AGNES (CONT'D)

...What brought you to the garden?

Nothing. She laughs, releasing pressure.

AGNES (CONT'D)

It is just a question.

WILL

Yes....I suppose the air is so fresh out here. And I saw you with your bird

AGNES

He is a hawk.

He takes a step towards the hawk, raising his hand.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Don't get too close. He does not know you.

Will looks at Agnes - there is no sign of her stopping him. He tries to read her. He's good at reading people - something he has developed to survive in his house. He can tell that she dares him to touch the bird.

Will holds his breath, trying not to look afraid. The bird's sharp beak is so close to his flesh. He steadies his breath. He has some experience taming a wild beast - the one within himself.

He lets the noise of the world fade around him and steadies to his own heartbeats.

She watches him, intrigued.

With this steadiness, he reaches out and touches the hawk's feathers. The bird lets him, accepting his touch.

AGNES (CONT'D)

(impressed)

Hm. He likes you.

Will smiles and relieved he has passed the test. He suddenly feels more confident, as if he's granted permission from the hawk to pursue its mistress. He turns to Agnes, eager to get to know the girl who can tame such wild creature.

WILL

What is your name?

His closeness alarms her. She wants to run, but she is frozen in her place.

WILL (CONT'D)

Your name -

AGNES

I shan't tell you.

WILL

You shall.

AGNES

I shan't.

Pressure builds.

WILL

You'll tell me when we kiss.

AGNES

We'll never kiss.

He takes a step closer. So close.

WILL

We will.

She regards him at their new proximity. His presence overwhelms her. She is about to explode. She needs to understand why this stranger is making her feel this way.

She puts her hand to his and takes hold of the skin and muscle between thumb and forefinger, and presses hard.

He is shocked and draws in his breath.

AGNES

Hmm...

WILL

...What are you doing?

He is dizzy and slightly aroused by her strangeness.

She leans towards him, as if sniffing at him like an animal. She is feeling him, trying to find out everything about him.

The pressure between them is so intense he gets nervous that something will break.

WILL (CONT'D)

Why...why are you...I...

Without warning, she presses her lips to his - it is an emphatic kiss, like bringing a seal down on a document.

AGNES

Agnes. My name is Agnes...

Will is stunned by the kiss and by her boldness. This is a woman who acts on her feelings - a rare breed in his time.

WILL

Agnes...

(so excited)

May I see you again, Agnes? I shall return tomorrow. Will you be here?

Agnes frowns. Where else would I be?

WILL (CONT'D)

Where are you from?

He doesn't know who she is...She looks away. He doesn't notice the shift in her mood. He is eager to get to know her.

WILL (CONT'D)

I'd like to see you again -

AGNES

No.

She turns to leave. He takes her arm and stops her.

WILL

Wait -

AGNES

No.

She pulls away. Her eyes meeting his are angry and cold.

AGNES (CONT'D)

You may not see me again.

She goes, leaving him confused and alone in the garden.

5 INT. HEWLANDS - KITCHEN - DAY

5

Agnes enters, overheated. The kitchen is in pristine order. At the table sits JOAN, her stepmother.

Joan is brushing the hair of one of her DAUGHTERS. She is proud of how neat and pretty they are. Her TWO BOYS are copying Latin at the other side of the table. The children are too well behaved for their age.

BARTHOLOMEW, Agnes's younger brother, is carving a small horse wooden toy by the window.

Agnes hurries to get a glass of water. Joan's eyes are glued on Agnes and all the leaves in her hair.

JOAN

Where have you been?

AGNES

(drinks)

In the field helping Bartholomew. A newborn lamb is unwell.

JOAN

I went to the field. I did not see you there.

AGNES

Tell her, Bartholomew.

BARTHOLOMEW

She was there.

JOAN

Have you seen the new Latin tutor?

Agnes finishes her water and catches her breath.

JOAN (CONT'D)

The glover's son. The boys said he just ran out and never returned. He is supposed to give them lessons to pay off his father's debt -

AGNES

I have not seen him.

Agnes avoids Bartholomew's gaze. Of course he knows she is lying. He shakes his head and goes back to making the toy.

JOAN

I shall have a word with the
father. Should've known better.
Like father, like son.

Joan's happy with her daughters lovely hair and pretty
ribbons in them.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I do believe you two are the
prettiest girls in the parish. None
come close to you two. One day I
shall need my wits with all the
suitors that will come for you.

CATERINA

But, Agnes is the eldest. She will
marry first -

JOAN

She will not if she keep running
into the forest like a gypsy.

The girls exchange looks, anticipating a reaction from Agnes.
But Agnes stays quiet, still lost in the feeling from her
encounter with the Latin tutor.

Even Joan is surprised by the lack of reaction from Agnes.
She keeps going to fill the tense silence.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(to her daughters)

You are good christian girls. You
will never bring any shame on this
family -

BARTHOLOMEW

That is enough.

Bartholomew speaks softly but firmly.

Joan shakes her head and goes back to her task at hand.

Agnes glances at Bartholomew, but quickly walks out of the
kitchen. She doesn't want her brother to see through her.

6

EXT. RIVER AVON - EVENING

6

Will paces along the riverbank. A FISHERMAN and TWO WOMEN
WASHING LAUNDRY.

He walks into the river for a swim, cooling the heat under
his skin. He dives in, disappearing underwater.

7 EXT. STRATFORD - EVENING 7

Will walks into town. LOCALS. Evening chores. Carts and animals. Timber-framed houses with vending windows open. A towering church in the distant. This is Stratford-upon-Avon.

8 EXT. HENLEY STREET - EVENING 8

Will walks to a house on the corner. This is his home.

9 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - PASSAGEWAY - EVENING 9

Will enters into the dark passageway. The air is even thinner here. This is the home of a glover - leather, oil, sharp tools and machinery. The murmurs of a prayer.

Will is different now, as if the house has turned him into another creature. He drags his feet towards the dining room. He waits for the prayer to end and enters.

10 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 10

The room is filled with heavy furniture. At the table sits MARY (40s), her children, GILBERT (16), ELIZA (14) and EDMOND (9). Everyone seems to be talking at the same time, except for the patriarch, JOHN (40s), silent at the head.

MARY

Where've you been? We expected you hours ago. Your supper's near cold. Sit, sit.

Will sits down. He and Gilbert go for the remaining bread on the plate and they fight over it.

MARY (CONT'D)

Boys, boys, there's enough for all.

Will wins. He downs the bread, realizing how hungry he is.

MARY (CONT'D)

How go the lessons at Hewlands?

WILL

They are no scholars.

MARY

I wonder at the notion of such learning. Latin for boys who will be naught but sheep farmers. It's just putting on -

Gilbert makes a grab for something on Will's plate. They tussle. There is laughter - a good-natured fight between two brothers until -

JOHN

That will do!

The boys stop. A tense silence falls.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You heard your mother. There's enough for all.

(to Will)

You coming in late, expecting your supper to be laid out for you as if you're lord of the manor -

WILL

I don't -

JOHN

Don't speak over me. Who puts food on this table, food you're more than happy to eat, eh? I deserve more respect -

WILL

(under his breath)

Respect is earned, not deserved.

JOHN

What did you say?

Will pushes his words down, shakes his head.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You speak ill of the boys at Hewlands. 'They are no scholars'. Shall I tell you something? They will ever be more of a man than you are. They are put to honest work. Unlike you - useless, trade-less. All that education, not an ounce of sense -

WILL

I'm tutoring to pay *your* debts to that family, am I not? Your immeasurable mound of debt -

ELIZA

(touches Will's arm)

Will -

WILL
(snaps at Eliza)
Stop -

John suddenly grabs the back of Will's neck and slams his head hard against the table. The loud bang silences the room.

John is fuming. He looks at Mary who stares at him with such cold intensity, it makes him sit back down. He pours himself some ale. Mary tries to fill the tense air with words.

MARY
...What of the rest of the Hewlands family? Have you met them?

WILL
The mother only.

Will keeps his eyes down and starts eating slowly.

This is how this family deals with violence - carrying on as if it didn't happen.

MARY
Not the eldest daughter?

Will shakes his head.

MARY (CONT'D)
Best be wary of her. It is said the girl is the child of a forest witch. They say she is passing strange, touched, perhaps mad.

Eliza joins in, keeping the conversation going to avoid any interaction between John and Will.

ELIZA
I have seen her once, wandering the backroads at will, with a hawk on her arm -

Will looks over at Eliza, surprised.

MARY
A hawk. At Hewlands?

ELIZA
Yes! People say she takes off into the forest with it, unaccompanied -

WILL
(quietly)
Are you certain, Eliza?
(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

The eldest daughter keeps a hawk?
Not a servant girl -

ELIZA

Yes. And I heard she is able to
foresee illness, birth of children,
fortune and...I was told that she
once clasped the hand of a man and
said that he would die within a
month, and the very next week he
was struck down by an ague. Dead.

Will looks down at his own hand. Oh god.

He feels Mary's gaze on him and keeps his head down, afraid
his mother's watchful eyes may uncover his secret.

11 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - NIGHT 11

When the humans in the house go to sleep, the other beings
wake up. We don't see them but we can feel them:

The residue in the air next to the fireplace carries secrets
burned away long ago.

The sharp tools in the workshop whisper to each other.

The layers of stains on the wall tell tales of repeated
bursts of violence.

12 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - PASSAGEWAY - NIGHT 12

The long, dark passageway seems empty. But we can feel
something moving. A deeper shade of black. A void. A tunnel
into the unknown.

13 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - NIGHT 13

The attic is filled with three wool bales.

Will is lying on one of the bales. Next to him are old candle
stubs, a folding knife, a bottle of ink, curls of paper with
words. This is where he writes.

He has fallen asleep. His hand pressed against his forehead
as if he is trying to calm his mind. He is mumbling,
dreaming...

This is how he hears the world. Like a heartbeat with one soft beat and one strong beat repeated five times - the iambic pentameter.

Then, something disturbs the rhythm. A voice humming a tune.

19B

EXT. FOREST - DARK PATH - DAY

19B

Through the shadowy trees Will finds Agnes foraging.

He watches her, she gathers herbs roughly, twisting them off of the branch with a flick of the wrist and adds them to her basket. She smells twigs, licks the sap from a tree and tastes flowers.

He can't take his eyes off her.

She stops, looks to the sky. She sees her hawk. She rolls up her sleeve and sends her bare arm towards the sky again.

What is she doing? Will looks up, the hawk is circling, diving down -

WILL

Agnes!

He shouts after her, stopping her from receiving the hawk. It startles her. She backs away.

The hawk sees her arm lowered and swoops back into the sky.

They stare at each other, both wide eyed.

WILL (CONT'D)

What are you...why are you not wearing your glove?

He rushes towards her, concerned.

AGNES

I...left it at the farm...

She backs away, pulling down her sleeve.

WILL

I brought you this.

He takes something from his bag - a new falconry glove and hands it to her. She takes it from him slowly.

WILL (CONT'D)

My family...makes gloves...I thought you needed one.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

A better one to protect your hand.
But now I can see it will not work.

AGNES

What do you mean?

WILL

You hurt yourself on purpose. Why?

Embarrassment washes over Agnes. She pushes the glove back into his hand and walks away.

He follows her. She picks up speed. He keeps up.

She tries to run away but wishes that he would follow.

19C

EXT. FOREST - ANCIENT TREE - DAY

19C

They come around the boulder and arrive at the ancient tree.

WILL

Agnes!

She stops and turns around.

WILL (CONT'D)

I know who you are -

AGNES

Who am I?

WILL

I am sorry, I don't know...I've only heard things about you and I -

AGNES

That I'm the daughter of a forest witch?

WILL

Yes. People say that but I -

AGNES

I'm my mother's daughter. I have learned many things from her.

He keeps his gaze on her. He seems to have no fear of her.

AGNES (CONT'D)

What are you looking at?

WILL

...You.

(she stays quiet, but
moved)

I wish to see you, Agnes.

AGNES

Why?

Why not? He carefully choosing his words, not wanting to spook her more.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Are you not supposed to be a man of words, master tutor?

WILL

Yes. But conversing with people sometimes is...difficult for me.

AGNES

Tell me a story.

What?

AGNES (CONT'D)

Tell me a story that moves you.

This is a test. She says silently - show me who you are.

Will is caught off guard. No one has asked him to do this before. He watches her leaning on the roots, waiting. He likes the challenge. He clears his throat.

WILL

Do you know the story of Orpheus and Eurydice?

She shakes her head.

WILL (CONT'D)

Orpheus is a man of music whose playing of the kithara, it's a harp-like lyre, is so divine that the birds, the beasts, even the stones and the trees listen to the rhythm of his songs.

Will suddenly transforms into a different person. His eyes are softer. His frown is gone. His body more relaxed. He clearly feels safe in his stories and Agnes sees it all.

WILL (CONT'D)

Orpheus falls in love with the lovely nymph Eurydice. He loves her so dearly. He can charm wild beasts and silence the wind with his music but he plays only for her. But soon after their marriage, she is bitten by a viper. The poison courses through her body and kills her. Filled with grief, Orpheus journeys to the underworld to bring her back. He charms Cerberus the three headed dog and beguiles Hades until he is allowed to take his love back with him to the world of the living. But under one condition...

AGNES

(eager)

What is it?

WILL

She must follow behind him as they emerge from the Underworld, and he must not turn to look at her.

Agnes holds her breath. A dread looms inside of her.

WILL (CONT'D)

As they begin their ascent. He can't hear her footsteps. He listens and listens, but all he can hear is his own heartbeat...and the rest...is silence...As he approaches the gate of the Underworld, he can't stop himself...he turns back to look at her and she is trapped in the Underworld forever.

AGNES

Why does he look back?

WILL

Why do you think?

Will is now in front of Agnes. He is happy to see that she is moved by his telling of the story. He has passed the test. He has closed his distance to her.

Later, she goes to the waterfall of tree roots and takes out her hidden treasures.

They sit together. She has gathered some fresh herbs.

She uses a knife to remove mugwort leaves from the stem. She takes a grinding stone, with a smaller pebble, grinds it into a paste. She murmurs the ancient Nine Herbs Charm.

AGNES

Remember, Mugwort, what you brought
to pass, what you readied at
Regenmeld. You're called Una, the
most ancient plant. You defy three,
you defy thirty, you defy venom,
you defy air-illness, you defy the
horror who stalks the land.

She adds fresh plantain and dry yarrow to the mix.

WILL

What are they?

AGNES

Mugwort, yarrow, plantain. The
power of three. Stops bleeding,
infection, swelling...

He watches her work - the way her small hands grip around the rock, the rotation of her thin wrist, her stained fingers testing the texture of the paste. He is so turned on by her he can barely contain himself.

He looks down at his own hand.

WILL

Is it true? You know everything
about a person just by touching
them here?

AGNES

Not everything.

She stops working and takes his hand. He lets her. She feels him, going deep.

WILL

...You touched my hand. What did
you see?

AGNES

A landscape.

WILL

A landscape?

She drops in. Remembering the dream she had last night.

AGNES

...Spaces, caves, cliff tops,
tunnels, oceans, undiscovered
countries...rises and
falls...and...voids...I couldn't
see it all...I couldn't grasp. The
edge of you. It's big...

She gets overwhelmed as if she is experiencing her dream now.
Her strangeness only intrigues him more.

WILL

Will I go there? This landscape?

His question makes her emotional. She keeps on feeling his
hand, speaking in a way that would confuse and scare many.
Her eyes are closed. She speaks softly, like sitting a dream
while walking.

AGNES

My glove...my glove belongs to my
mother. She stepped out of the
forest, like her mother did and her
mother before. Each got their skin
locked in a door and handed a glove
so that the desire from the sky
could strike them while they held
their sleeves against the howling
spiders who had cut off their right
hand. I don't need a new glove.
This is my flesh. My skin. My hawk.
I do not want something that does
not even fit you.

(opens her eyes, looks at
him)

No, you will not go there. Not yet.
Something is tethering you, holding
you back.

Somehow he knows exactly what she means.

AGNES (CONT'D)

You are taller than your father's
glove, are you not?

She takes the paste and applies it to the wound on his brow
that carries so much pain through generations.

His heart pounds. The smell of the herbs, the smell of her,
the smell of the possibility of a new life. A heat builds in
his stomach. Her medicine, her chants, her depth has seeped
into his blood stream. He turns to her, takes her into his
arms and kisses her deeply.

She is moved beyond words. She had shown the depth of her to him and he didn't run away. He is still here.

19D EXT. FOREST - LIGHT PATH - LATER 19D

She puts on the glove he gave her and extends her arm into the sky. He takes a few steps back, nervous.

The hawk dives down and lands on her wrist gracefully, flapping its wings.

Will gets closer, in awe of the large bird.

She takes his hand to touch the hawk's feathers. It turns its head and looks right at Will. The chants of Latin...

20 INT. HEWLANDS - STUDY - DAYS LATER 20

BOYS (O.S.)(IN LATIN)
Thus by law of fate all things
speed towards the worse and,
slipping away, fall back.

Will stands by the window, waiting for the redness of his heart to appear. The sound of Latin begins to form the rhythm he found in the forest.

He sees Agnes walking through the garden, laden down with two full milk pails. He leans towards the window, yearning for her. She stops and looks up at him -

21 EXT. HEWLANDS - GARDEN - SAME 21

From her perspective, he looks so small, trapped behind the metal window. She wants to go to him, to free him from his prison. But for now she must go.

22 INT. HEWLANDS - STUDY - SAME 22

He watches her go, turns to lean against the window, framed by its metal edges. The heat in his stomach is burning. Something has to change.

23 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - WORKSHOP - DAY WEEKS LATER 23

The leather work is as repetitive as the Latin lessons. Will turns over pair after pair of ladies' gloves. The heat keeps building and building. He is so full he's about to burst.

He looks over at Edmond, stitching belts and their father, cutting a squirrel skin into narrow strips, drunk.

John goes to Edmond.

JOHN
Nay, nay, make those stitches
smaller, even smaller.

John sees Will looking his way, shaking his head.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Useless.

Will suddenly stands up and heads towards the door.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

John suddenly lashes Will about the face with the leather in his hand. The pain is like an adrenaline shot, the last hit Will needed to tip him over the edge. He pounces on his father, seizing the older man in a tight grip, pushing him all the way against the wall with a hard slam. His strong arms locking his father in a painful embrace.

WILL
That was the last time you will
ever hit me.

He pushes his father off of him and heads out.

24

EXT. HEWLANDS - GARDEN - DAY

24

Will is back in the garden. He knows what he must do. He finds Agnes adding compost to a newly dug garden patch, muddy and sweaty.

WILL
I wish to be hand-fasted to you.

She stays near the ground and gazes up at him.

WILL (CONT'D)
I must be hand-fasted to you,
Agnes. No one else would do. I
cannot have it any other way.

She wipes her hands. Her eyes bright.

WILL (CONT'D)
I will speak to your stepmother and
your brother.
(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

Of course they will not agree but I do not care. I have no talent for waiting! I cannot abide waiting -

AGNES

What about your parents? Will they agree?

Will tries to answer but reality sinks in.

Agnes gets up and walks away -

WILL

Wait -

AGNES

Follow me.

She heads towards a shed at the edge of the garden.

25

INT. HEWLANDS - APPLE SHED - DAY

25

They are crushed into a low space filled with apples in near-darkness. Their bodies close together. The hawk is hooded, sits on a stand. It turns its head towards Will.

Agnes leans back against a platform where apples are put out to dry. She undoes a lacing on his jerkin, looking at him to see if he understands. He does.

WILL

Are you certain?

AGNES

(she's not)

We must take matters into our own hands.

His eyes are wide. The hungry animal inside him is about to burst out. He is afraid what it may do.

She rubs his tense shoulder and touches the back of his neck. She is so nervous but she tries to look strong, as if she knows what she is doing.

His hands find their way to her hips. Soft touches first. Then they grip onto her hips, pressing hard, holding, moving a little, pressing again, as if he is letting the animal inside of him breath a little to release the pressure.

She feels the pressure. She can't move. She is in his hands. He leans into her, looking deeply into her eyes. He suddenly seems so towering.

Her active hands withdraw from trying so hard and rests in front of her. The pressure he applies on her is so powerful she lets out a long held breath, one she has held most of her life, and surrenders into the presence of her lover. Just a little, but enough to finally release the animal inside of him.

With a low growl, he lifts her up by the waist and lays her down onto the platform. He lowers down to kiss her, placing himself between her legs. His hand finds its way under her dress. He kisses her breasts through the thin fabric, pressing into her, always applying pressure.

The more pressure he applies, the more she relaxes. When her mind wanders and she becomes tense. He slows down and blows air on her overheated skin.

He stands up, removing his shirt. She looks up. He is almost unrecognizable. She understands the movements of his hands around his breeches. She is suddenly terrified, of what is to come. He leans in, closer and closer. She grips onto his bare arm and buries her face into his elbow.

Then, she sees them - long healed scars, some wide and some thin, randomly marked on his inner upper arm like the long healed cuts on a tree when saps are drawn.

A heavy thud in her chest. She pushes herself up and takes his arm into her hands.

Confused at first, he soon realizes he has exposed himself. He tries to pull away but she holds onto him with all her strength. She will not let him turn away.

Tears well up in her eyes. She traces her gentle fingers along his scars, sending so much love to them.

It makes him uncomfortable. He has never felt love like this, not towards his wounds because he has never shown them to anyone. He tries to pull away again but this time she reaches for his face and holds him there. She can tell he is running away, back to his prison, to hide. She won't let him.

AGNES (CONT'D)

I see you.

Her loving, accepting gaze is undeniable.

AGNES (CONT'D)

I know you are afraid.

She opens her legs and draws him closer to her. Slowly, he finds strength in his hands again. His fingers grip the curve of her back, drawing her even closer.

She feels him at the entrance of her heart. She is scared but she has made a decision.

AGNES (CONT'D)

I choose you.

WILL

Say it again.

AGNES

I choose you.

And with that commitment she surrenders fully, to him, to their connection, to all her fears and uncertainties, she shall have all the strength she needs to carry it through.

She asserts her body, welcoming him. She feels him inside of her. Their bodies fit so well, so right...

26 EXT. FOREST - DAY

26

The erotic pause of the forest in the summer. Nature is sexual and orgasmic. It's continuously having sex with everything around it to create new life...

27 INT. HEWLANDS - KITCHEN - DAY 17 YEARS AGO

27

Rowan's kitchen is as wild as the forest, filled with hanging herbs, plants, tree barks, stones. She is heavily pregnant, for the third time. She is sitting at a long table, making a paste with a grinding stone, the same one we saw Agnes using by the tree.

Agnes (9) is watching her mother work, learning. Rowan gives Agnes her hand. Agnes leans in to smell the scent of the herbs in her mother's palm. They chant the Nine Herb Charm.

ROWAN/AGNES

*Remember, Mugwort, what you brought
to pass, what you readied at
Regenmeld. You're called Una the
most ancient plant.
You defy three, you defy thirty,
you defy venom, you defy air-
illness, you defy the horror that
stalks the land.*

Bartholomew (7) has a cut on his hand. He has stopped sniffing and chants with them.

ROWAN/AGNES/BARTHOLOMEW

*And you, Waybread, plant-mother.
You open to the East, yet mighty
within. Carts creaked over you,
women rode over you. You withstood
it all and you pushed back. You
withstood venom, you withstood air-
illness, you withstood the horror
who travels over land...*

Richard is fixing a tool by the fire, watching his wife and children, a happy man.

Rowan carefully applies the paste onto Bartholomew's wound.

ROWAN

There, Bartholomew, it will heal.

BARTHOLOMEW

Will I have a scar?

ROWAN

You may. But that's no bad thing.

BARTHOLOMEW

Why?

ROWAN

*Well, when a tree is hurt, it first
has to stop the bleeding fast, keep
little creatures from getting in.*

She blows air onto Bartholomew's hand. It tickles him.

ROWAN (CONT'D)

*The second part of healing takes
longer, sometimes years and years:
it grows a beautiful scar over the
wound, for protection, and soon the
scar becomes part of the tree and
of its story.*

AGNES

Why does it take so long?

ROWAN

*Because if it covers over too fast,
it won't heal properly...*

A dull pain. Rowan puts her hand on her belly. It goes away quickly only Agnes notices. She goes to her mother.

AGNES

Mama? Is all well?

ROWAN

*Your little sister is readying
herself for the world.*

AGNES

*How can you be so certain it's a
girl?*

ROWAN

I dreamed about her.

*She gently touches Agnes's third eye with her fingertip and
then the center of her heart.*

ROWAN (CONT'D)

*Pay attention to your dreams,
Agnes. They will always guide you.*

*Agnes smiles, satisfied, leaning into her mother's belly and
listens to the life within.*

28 INT. HEWLANDS - KITCHEN - MORNING PRESENT DAY 28

The same kitchen, the same table, the same fireplace, but this one is clean, organized, presentational. There is no sign of the forest. Agnes is sitting at the same place, lost in her memories. She puts her hand on her belly. She knows.

She looks up at her stepmother -

Joan is kneading dough at the counter. She has managed to make a messy process seem orderly.

Agnes knows what she needs to do.

29 EXT. RIVER AVON - DAY 29

Will swims against the current, pushing himself to his physical limit.

He dives under, fully immersed, tumbles through the bubbling, light-filled underwater world.

He emerges, gasping. He gives up and floats. His strong and youthful body is carried by the water. His legs, hands, the curve of his back. Like a poem, a beautiful offering.

30 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY 30

Agnes is in front of the large metal framed window, waiting, her heart is full.

Mary glances over at Agnes in horror, holding a charm at the end of a chain she wears as a belt - her secret rosaries.

John is by the fireplace, his face in the shadows.

Bartholomew is unusually tense. His gaze lingers around the dim room, trying to figure out what it is about this house that bothers him.

Will enters, hair wet from a swim, surprised.

WILL

Agnes? What...what's happened?

MARY

Her mother banished her from their house.

AGNES

Stepmother. She didn't banish me. The house belongs to my brother. I chose to leave.

Will looks over at Bartholomew. The two men regard each other for the first time.

MARY

She is with child. Says it's yours.

Agnes lets a half smile show.

Will feels his heart bursting with so many emotions. He clutches her hand.

MARY (CONT'D)

Is it? Yours?

They don't answer her, whispering to each other.

MARY (CONT'D)

The child in her belly! Did you put it there?

WILL

I did.

He faces his mother finally.

WILL (CONT'D)

We are hand-fastened. There is no sin in it. We shall wed -

MARY

You will need our consent and we will never give it, never! You have been bewitched. I will send you away. I would rather you went to sea than marry this wench -

John gets up suddenly. Everyone turns to him.

JOHN

There's no need for that. I'm in no doubt we can come to an arrangement-

MARY

But, John -

JOHN

Hush, woman.

(to Agnes)

My son made you a promise, did he?

AGNES

We made a promise to each other.

JOHN

And what does your mother - your, stepmother - say to this match?

AGNES

She is not in favour. But I do not care.

John surveys Agnes with a look of satisfaction. Pleased.

JOHN

The boy wants to marry the girl,
the girl wants to marry the boy.
Who are we to forbid this union?

He is unusually friendly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(goes to Bartholomew)

I'm certain you are eager to have your sister at the altar, in her, condition -

BARTHOLOMEW

I'm certain you'd be just as eager not to have your boy dragged before the bawdy court.

JOHN

Now, it shouldn't come to
that...they mean to wed. They said
they are hand-fasted.

BARTHOLOMEW

Only if I say so.

Bartholomew gives Will a look.

JOHN

(leans in)

The baby must be born in wedlock,
not on the wrong side of the sheet.
Many weddings are brought about
thus. It is nature's way. And...we
have matters to discuss, I believe.
The terms, the dowry. The debt -

Bartholomew can't stand the airless room and John's words
anymore, he walks out.

Agnes gives Will a look - leave it to me - and follows her
brother out.

OPTION TO PLAY:

Agnes takes out two gifts and goes to John.

AGNES

*For you. Valerian tincture. Good
for soothe and calm.*

To Mary.

AGNES (CONT'D)

*For you. Honey. Put a spoon in hot
milk. Helps sleep.*

*Mary takes it carefully as if it's poison, hiding her
surprise that Agnes knows about her sleep troubles.*

31

EXT. HENLEY HOUSE - EVENING

31

Bartholomew walks out of the door, taking a deep breath.
Agnes follows behind.

AGNES

Will you see to my hawk?

(he nods)

I'll be sure to return as often as
I can to fly her.

(MORE)

AGNES (CONT'D)

(he stays quiet)
You're angry with me.

BARTHOLOMEW

I don't understand why you would choose this place. That father of his...it is all about money, money, money. And that mother...

AGNES

She's just afraid.

BARTHOLOMEW

Why marry a pasty-faced scholar?
What use is he?

AGNES

He has more hidden away inside him than anyone I've ever met.

Bartholomew knows there is no room for his plead. Agnes takes his arm. They walk in silence for a moment.

BARTHOLOMEW

Everything will change.

He doesn't look at her. She is surprised to find tears in his eyes. He swallows his words, unusually rocked.

BARTHOLOMEW (CONT'D)

You, you will change.

AGNES

I'm already changing.

BARTHOLOMEW

It is too fast. You are too hasty...It's...too quiet in there.

AGNES

Where?

BARTHOLOMEW

In that house.
(looks at the house)
There is something in there. Some stench. I don't know what it is...I can't see it. No good will come of it...

Agnes considers this but shakes the thought away. She takes her brother's hand into hers.

AGNES

Do you remember what mama would say
when we were afraid and uncertain?

BARTHOLOMEW

...Live with an open heart.

BARTHOLOMEW (CONT'D)

Shut it not in the dark but
turn it always to the sun.

AGNES

Shut it not in the dark but
turn it always to the sun.

They share a smile.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Everyone is so afraid, Bartholomew.
She never was. Because of her we
know what it feels like to be
properly loved. This is my chance.
He loves me for what I am, not what
I ought to be. Mama would have told
me to seize it with both hands.

BARTHOLOMEW

Then marry him you shall.

He's still unsettled. She starts to walk with him again and
chants the Nine Herb Charm.

AGNES

(tries to make him smile)
Remember, Mugwort, what you brought
to pass, what you readied at
Regenmeld. You're called Una the
most ancient plant.
You defy three, you defy thirty,
you defy venom, you defy air-
illness, you defy the horror that
stalks the land.

Bartholomew looks around, a little embarrassed. His sister is
so weird but that only makes him love her more. He gives in,
and starts to chant with her. She smiles wide.

AGNES/BARTHOLOMEW

And you, Waybread, plant-mother,
You open to the East, yet mighty
within. Carts creaked over you,
women rode over you. You withstood
it all and you pushed back. You
withstood venom, you withstood air-
illness, you withstood the horror
who travels over land...

32 INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

32

The chanting continues as a secret wedding is held inside a church at night. It's rushed and hushed. A few candles are burning. Two families pour in quietly, all in their day clothes, moving in and out of darkness like ghosts.

Agnes is holding a branch of Rowan berries. She grows uneasy inside the church. There are dark stone arches on both sides of her. She feels watched by the voids in them. She keeps chanting the Nine Herb Charm under her breath but soon she is overwhelmed by a sense of dread, much like Bartholomew was. What is it? What is it that she is not seeing?

She tries to calm herself and looks at her husband-to-be ahead of her. She stares at him, willing him to look back.

AGNES
(to herself, afraid)
Look at me. Look at me.

And he does exactly that. His head turning, his face revealing itself to her. He smiles.

She smiles back, relaxing into his steady gaze as she leaves one life and begins another.

33 INT. HENLEY STREET - ATTIC - MORNING 7 MONTHS LATER

33

DREAM SEQUENCE (shot separately)

Agnes wakes with a start, to find herself in her curtained marriage bed, on the upper floor of Henley house.

Will is asleep beside her, having a nightmare, whispering in his sleep.

WILL
Xxxx...

Agnes is heavily pregnant - several months have passed since the wedding, and it is now late spring. She rises with difficulty from the bed, leaving via the curtains, taking care not to wake Will. She walks to the window.

AGNES
(murmuring to herself)
The branches are so dense. The
branches. You cannot feel the rain.

She presses a hand to her stomach, as if checking something she already knows. Then she moves through the room, taking up a basket and some length of linen, then she goes downstairs.

(33A) INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - MORNING (FOR LATER, SAME LIGHTING SET UP)

Will, still sleepy, picks up the paper and reads the string of broken letters, written in a slanted fashion.

WILL

Branches...cannot feel...rain...

He can not follow at first. Then something hits him.

34 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - PASSAGEWAY - DAWN MONTHS LATER 34

The dark long passageway. The ever-present void. A flicker of candle and it's gone. It's Agnes walking towards us, as if she had travelled through time. She is heavily pregnant and she carries a small basket.

She stops, pressing a hand to her stomach. She is holding back the pain of contraction. Sweat dripping down her face.

She puts her hand against her mouth. She must not scream. She must get to the forest...

35 EXT. FOREST - LIGHT PATH - MORNING 35

Agnes walks towards the heart of the forest.

She leans against a tree to rest when the pain begins to travel from her lower back, deep between her legs...

36 EXT. FOREST - ANCIENT TREE - DAY 36

Agnes lowers herself to the ground. She is panting but happy. She is where she needs to be.

She feels another pain coming, driving towards her, getting closer, like thunder over a landscape. She turns, crouches, pants through it, holding tight to a tree root. It's agony. Her hands gripping the soil and moss.

She is worried now. Nothing could have prepared her for the relentlessness of the pain. Never has she been more sensitive of her weakness, of her inadequacy. Her body is one of resilience: she is all muscle beneath smooth skin. But this is something else. It laughs at her attempts to master it.

She begins to fear that it will overtake her. But she can pull strength from the earth, from the trees. She raises her head and sees, the silvery trunk and delicate leaves of a small rowan tree growing out of a boulder.

And like that, she is ready. She plants her hands in front of her, on all fours, like a wolf, and submits to another pain.

37 EXT. FOREST - ANCIENT TREE - MORNING 37

Will and Bartholomew find Agnes dozing against the tree roots, with A BABY GIRL tucked at her breast, wrapped in the baby blanket.

Will takes the baby gently. Bartholomew cuts the umbilical cord, hoists Agnes into his arms.

As they walk away, Will falls behind. His eyes are fixed on the blood and matter of birth on the wet ground Agnes left behind and then at the fragile life in his arms - his daughter.

Before he can enjoy this tender moment, something else catches his attention. He turns his head and his eyes fall on the large hole under the ancient tree, circled by its root system. It's eerie and unsettling.

Will holds his daughter closer, but he can't look away.

Inside the darkness of the hole he sees a deeper void, watching him, waiting...

38A EXT. RIVER AVON. - DAY A YEAR LATER 38A

The river flows. We find Will standing on the bank, lost in thought.

38 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - WORKSHOP - DAY A WEEK LATER 38

The banging of a hammer. Intricate shots of making a pair of gloves. Stripping of the animal skin, tanning, cutting, stitching, sewing on intricate beads, etc.

John's rough hands pouring so much love into the gloves - the love he can never show his children - a gentle side of him we have never seen before.

Will watches his father for a moment and goes back to work on the glove. The work is meaningless to him. It drives him mad.

39 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 39

Agnes is doing chores in the kitchen while playing with Susanna, a year old now. Small wooden toys are lying around - a bird, a cow, a horse.

Mary is also doing her chores. She has accepted Agnes's presence in her household but not without great hesitation.

Agnes smells something. She is sniffing the air, curious.

AGNES

Do you smell that, Mary?

MARY

What?

AGNES

There is a strange smell.

MARY

I don't smell anything.

AGNES

Like food gone off or...unaired linen.

Agnes sniffs her own cloth, her sleeve. Nothing.

Mary gathers her things to go to the backhouse. Agnes, carrying Susanna with her, stops Mary to smell her.

MARY

What are you doing?

AGNES

It's not you.

MARY

Certainly -

AGNES

Has Gilbert's dog dragged in something?

Mary shakes her head at her daughter-in-law's strange behavior and leaves the room.

Agnes goes around the room, inspecting. Everything seems to be in order. She comes back to the table, burying her face in her child's neck and inhales again.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Susanna? Is it you?

(smells her)

No. It's not you.

Will walks in. Agnes turns to look at him. He kisses her and Susanna. He then takes a cup and pours water from a pitcher.

She watches him drinking it and then another, before slumping into a chair by the fire.

Agnes looks at him. She feels herself breathe in, then out, in, out, like a tree filling with wind. The sour, damp smell is coming from her husband, it drifts off him, like smoke.

She examines him. His face is sallow, pale. His eyes seem hooded and have purplish shadows under them. He seems to not see anything before him.

AGNES (CONT'D)

My love?

He doesn't answer.

AGNES (CONT'D)

My love?

He raises his chin and looks at her.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Are you ill?

WILL

Me?

It seems to take him a long time to hear her, to articulate a response.

WILL (CONT'D)

No. Why do you ask?

AGNES

You do not look well.

He smiles with effort, rubs a hand over his brow, his eyes.

WILL

Do I not?

She stands, shifting Susanna to her hip. She touches his forehead. He twists out of her grasp.

WILL (CONT'D)

All's well...Don't fuss -

AGNES

What ails you?

WILL

Nothing. I'm tired. That is all.

He stands, scraping the chair against the floor.

WILL (CONT'D)

I'm going back to bed.

AGNES

Why don't you eat? Some bread?
Honey?

WILL

I'm not hungry.

AGNES

Remember your father wanted you to
go early to -

WILL

Tell him to send Gilbert. I'll not
go anywhere today.

He heads for the attic. Agnes watches him go.

40

INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - NIGHT

40

In the still of the night, Agnes wakes up from a dream. She slowly puts her hand on her belly, realizing she is with child again. She sees the space next to her is empty. She looks up and sees her husband hunched over his writing desk.

Will is at the desk, cutting feather after feather. He is drinking, whispering something under his breath.

AGNES

My love. Come to bed.

She calls to him. But he stays still.

WILL

They're not right. See? Too long,
too short. Too thin... It splits
and scratches the page.

He looks manic. She observes him from the bed.

AGNES

You need to rest.

WILL

No. I need to work.

He keeps focusing on shaping the feather in his hand.

AGNES

There is no use working at this hour. Come to bed. You'll feel better in the morning.

Still nothing. Concerned, she goes to him, tries to connect with him.

AGNES (CONT'D)

What are you writing?

WILL

Nothing of note.

AGNES

It's never nothing.

WILL

(tries to remain calm)
When it's finished perhaps.

AGNES

(reaches for a page)
Read me what you have written -

WILL

Agnes. It's not finished -

His hand slips and ruins the feather. Suddenly, a dark anger rails inside of him. As if he is possessed, he hurls the whole lot at the wall, ink pot and all.

WILL (CONT'D)

Is it too much to ask for a man to have a working quill?!

Agnes steps back. Susanna starts to fuss from her pallet bed. Agnes rushes over to calm her down. (No need for real baby)

Will is shaken, overwhelmed by shame. He sits back down onto the chair. His body hunching, withdrawing into itself.

WILL (CONT'D)

(under his breath)
Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry...

Once Susanna stops fussing, Agnes comes back to Will. She gently touches the back of his neck, trying to sooth him. But he turns his head away, wiping any tears he may shed. He will never let her see him weak.

WILL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I've had too much to drink.

She takes his hand. He flinches.

WILL (CONT'D)
(controls himself)
Please. Not now.

AGNES
What are you afraid I will see?

WILL
I'm a violent, dangerous man.

He is holding all the emotions in. They are threatening to burst out of his chest and kill him.

AGNES
You're none of that. You're a good man, a good man.

He puts his arm around her waist. He lets her rub her fingers through his hair, soothing him.

AGNES (CONT'D)
Is it...are you...do you wish we had not...wed? Is that it?

He looks up at her, his face pained, aghast.

WILL
No. Never. How could you say such a thing? You and Susanna are all I live for. Nothing else matters.

AGNES
What is it, then?

WILL
...I don't know. I'm lost. I have lost my way, Agnes. The landscapes you saw...
(changes his mind)
It's nothing. It's nothing.

She knows what he means. Those landscapes she saw haven't been realized, and it's torturing him. But he says no more after that.

AGNES
...What can I do for you?

WILL
Nothing, my love. Nothing.

She is now at a complete loss.

WILL (CONT'D)

Please go back to sleep. I need to work. All is well. I just need to work.

He turns back to his desk, his eyes darting from item to item. These things make sense to him. He takes another feather and begins to sharpen it.

She slowly walks back to the bed, lost in thoughts, her hands gently rubbing her stomach.

41

EXT. HEWLANDS - FIELD - MORNING

41

Bartholomew's dog is herding sheep between pastures.

He whistles. The dog runs back to him, darting across the meadow, happy. They go back to the wooden fence where Agnes is sitting, eyes resting on the forest beyond.

Bartholomew gives his dog a treat, eyeing his sister.

BARTHOLOMEW

What is it?

AGNES

...He can't sleep. There is a sour smell about him, like mold. He is not well... He is losing -

BARTHOLOMEW

Has he ever lost his temper with you?

AGNES

No. No!

BARTHOLOMEW

Agnes. If he ever raises a hand -

AGNES

He has never - he's only angry with himself! He is sick with himself. He is a good man. He is a good husband and father but it's not enough for him -

BARTHOLOMEW

What could he possibly need? He has you!

AGNES

He needs to go to London.

BARTHOLOMEW

London?! What's in London?

Bartholomew tries to remain patient.

AGNES

London is where the whole of the world gathers! He could extend his father's business there. Who knows what he may find -

BARTHOLOMEW

You are being hasty again -

AGNES

He needs more! He is not of this world!

BARTHOLOMEW

(frustrated)

What he needs is proper work! A man needs proper work. Not all that -

AGNES

This little town, this little house, his little attic will crush him! He needs distance from his father -

BARTHOLOMEW

And you will go with him? To London?

AGNES

No...I'll wait until he's settled. And there will be more of us soon.

BARTHOLOMEW

Another child?

AGNES

Yes, by summer's end -

BARTHOLOMEW

Then now is not the time to send him away!

AGNES

His mind, Bartholomew, if only you would sit with him for a while! He has so much inside of him.

(MORE)

AGNES (CONT'D)

I have seen him write like a man
possessed, disappear to places,
countries that haven't been found,
whispers to himself in his
sleep...stories...landscapes...
(to herself)

I dreamed of these landscapes when
we met. I fed them to him. It's now
torturing him...he -

BARTHOLOMEW

He does not concern me! I only care
about you!

AGNES

But our mother told us to trust our
dreams -

BARTHOLOMEW

Our mother is dead. And we are not
children anymore.

Those words surprise them both. They look away, gathering
themselves. Both trying to calm down.

BARTHOLOMEW (CONT'D)

Agnes -

AGNES

I will lose him...

Agnes is near tears. She is pleading.

BARTHOLOMEW

You will lose him if you send him
to London...

AGNES

I know that the love that we have
will keep us steady...

She hides her uncertainty.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Please. Will you talk to his
father? If you suggest it, he may
agree to send Will to London.
Please...

Bartholomew shakes his head. He doesn't want his sister to be
left alone but he also feels bad about the things he said.

BARTHOLOMEW

As you wish...

Bartholomew walks away to calm himself. Agnes watches him go. Maybe Bartholomew is right. She has changed. She can't seem to see anything clearly anymore.

42

INT. HENLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING MONTHS LATER

42

Agnes's pregnancy is showing. She is at the table wrapping food up for Will to take on the road. She is sitting still, putting all her focus into tying each item with the greatest care, trying to hide her feelings from him. The separation is harder for her than she expected.

Will is pacing, anxious and excited about leaving. He looks lighter, more groomed.

WILL

...It will take four days of walking to reach it, perhaps less, if some farmer would take me some distance on his cart. Then I shall need to find lodgings. It'd be near the river, not far from the tanneries.

AGNES

I see.

WILL

The river is said to have dangerous currents. I'm told whenever you cross, you must engage an experienced boatman.

Agnes looks up, alarmed.

WILL (CONT'D)

And I will be sure to do exactly that. Every time. And I will be back before you know it and I will think of you, and Susanna, every passing moment. And I shall find a dwelling for us in London and we will all be together again.

Will goes to Agnes and puts his hand on her belly, anxious.

WILL (CONT'D)

Do you still not know if it's a boy or girl?

AGNES

No.

WILL

Have you not seen the child in your dreams?

AGNES

No. I have not had many dreams lately. I do not know why...

WILL

Perhaps you're not meant to know this time. Don't worry. Boy or girl, it's all one to me. All shall be well. Have you not said that you will have two children?

AGNES

Yes. I will have two children at my deathbed, I know it...

WILL

Well, then. Here is the second, ready and waiting. All shall be well. I know it.

They kiss. Not wanting to part.

WILL (CONT'D)

I shan't go. I can't leave you now -

AGNES

You shall go. You must. You need to find us a new home in London.

WILL

And what if I fail? What if I can't expand father's business? What if -

AGNES

You won't fail. I know it.

This gives him the final push he needs to move. He takes a step away, difficult for both. She remains still.

AGNES (CONT'D)

I won't say goodbye.

WILL

No. We won't say goodbye.

Then, he is gone. She makes sure she can no longer hear his footsteps before breaking down crying.

43 EXT. RIVER AVON - DAY MONTHS LATER 43

A STORM. The river bank is broken. Water rushes onto land.

44A INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - DAY 44A

Agnes is on the floor, alone, trying to find a comfortable position. She is very pregnant. She knows it's time. She needs to get to the forest.

44 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 44

Agnes hurries into the kitchen to gather her things. A wave of pain comes. She grips the back of a chair when Mary enters, looking at the basket in her hand.

MARY

Going somewhere?

AGNES

No.

(panics, tries to lie)

I mean, yes. To, to the -

MARY

You're not going to the forest.

Agnes paces, trying to get away.

AGNES

I must -Stage

MARY

No, you must not. Gilbert!

Gilbert rushes in to help. Agnes struggles.

AGNES

No! You must let me go!

She is hit by another wave of pain. They hold onto her and move her towards the dining room.

MARY

The river has burst its banks.
There is no way to the forest. We
have everything ready for you.

(to Gilbert)

Go for the midwife!

45 EXT. HENLEY STREET - DAY 45

The flood has reached the town. Down the middle of the street runs a filthy mix of floodwater, effluence, rubbish.

46 OMITTED 46

47 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - PASSAGEWAY - DAY 47

Water creeps under the door, flooding the floor.

48 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY 48

Eliza is helplessly sweeping water out.

Agnes's contractions are worse. Mary and the MIDWIFE hold her on the pallet bed. Agnes tries to free herself.

AGNES

I can't...I won't give birth in here. Not in here. You must let me go...

It is hard to order and command her thoughts. She sees muddy water moving across the stone floor towards the pallet bed.

She looks down the long passageway towards the distant door.

She would like a moment to herself, alone, without pain, so that she can think clearly about everything.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Why did I do it...why did I send you away, please... Please, please, I need you. Please...

(delirious)

...Such gloves they need. Long gauntlets for fighting, fine gloves with jewels for kings and queens...

It is to her husband she speaks, in her disordered mind, not to the trees, not the magic cross, not even to her mother.

She looks down at the water again.

AGNES (CONT'D)

The river...

MIDWIFE

Hush.

AGNES

The river is dangerous. He may be swept downstream -

Her words are cut off from a SCREAM in pain. She tries to get up, to go towards the door, to reach for him. Mary stops her.

MARY

All is well with him! Do you not recall his last letter?

MIDWIFE

Stop your screaming. You'll wake the whole town.

AGNES

He sounded...different.

MARY

He had good news for us. The theatre! He has a contract at the playhouse, making gloves for the players, imagine!

They get Agnes back into the room. Agnes takes to the floor, bracing herself with her palms flat to the boards, her legs folded either side of her, crouched.

Mary sits down on the birthing stool and holds out a muslin cloth, ready to catch the baby.

AGNES

...Such gloves, such gloves. Soft gloves for ladies...

MARY

(to Eliza)

What is she saying?

ELIZA

She remembers his letters, word for word. She bid me read them to her four, five times.

AGNES

Soft gloves for ladies but...but...
(she screams in pain)
I can't remember! What comes after that? I can't remember -

MARY

Hush now! He is happy. He is doing well. And his father is pleased. No more of rivers and drowning, and screaming!

The midwife gets down on the floor, looks up Agnes's shift.

MIDWIFE

It'll soon be over. Bear down.

The labour intensifies. Agnes growls. Mary puts a hand to Agnes's shoulder, the other to her arm.

A baby emerges. The midwife catches it, cuts the cord.

MARY

(overjoyed)

A boy, a boy!

Mary wraps him in the baby blanket. The midwife helps Agnes onto the pallet bed. Agnes reaches for her son, but puts a hand to her back and moans.

MARY (CONT'D)

What is it?

The midwife presses a hand to Agnes's belly.

MIDWIFE

She's starting again. You're having twins, my girl.

Agnes is shocked. She lies back in the bed, exhausted. Her limbs slack. She stares at Mary and the midwife.

AGNES

Two of you...

MIDWIFE

What was that?

AGNES

Two of you..

MARY

Agnes, come to the stool. It is ready. It is here. We shall help you.

Agnes is gripped by a pain, her body twisting, her fingers snatch at the sheet, pressing it to her mouth. The cry that escapes her is ragged and muffled.

AGNES

...Two of you standing at my deathbed...I always thought they would be my children..it turns out to be you...

MIDWIFE

This baby is coming! We need to get her up off that bed!

They haul her to the stool. Agnes is weak and delirious.

AGNES

I cannot...I should never...I got it wrong...He's not here...I cannot..

MARY

You can. And you will.
(cups Agnes's face)
Your husband was born here. In this room. He took his first breath here, near this window.

AGNES

(moved in tears)
Please, please, let this child live. Let him come back and be with his children...Let him think kindly of me...

MARY

What is it, dear?

AGNES

(remembering)
Mama...mama...

49

INT. HEWLANDS - DINING ROOM - NIGHT 17 YEARS AGO

49

Young Agnes (9) peaks into the dark room and sees -

Like a gothic painting, in the middle of the room, Rowan is lying on a blood soaked bed, lifeless, her belly still swollen. She has died in childbirth.

A MIDWIFE is placing the tiny pod of the stillborn child, wrapped in a red baby blanket, into Rowan's arms.

THREE VILLAGE WOMEN are in the shadowy corner, all looking away, their heads covered. A younger Joan is amongst them. They whisper to each other.

VILLAGE WOMEN

There was nothing to be done...Midwife did her best to save her...We all did...Tried to turn the baby, again and again...That is the way of it sometimes...Poor woman, got weaker and weaker...She knew it was coming, she knew her end was nigh...Nothing to be done..

A PRIEST wearing long robes is swinging a burning bowl over Rowan's body, muttering a prayer. Richard sits by the window, devastated, head down.

Agnes's eyes are wide, like a crazed animal. Her gaze doesn't waver from her mother.

The priest speaks to Richard. His voice is low but Agnes can hear pieces.

PRIEST (ON AND OFF SCREEN)

Best not speak of her to the children...They are safer with a different mother...So young...They may not remember her, in time...

Rowan is wrapped in a white sheet, her face covered last.

AGNES

No! Stop!

Agnes runs to her mother. She needs to see her face. She needs to remember her.

Joan holds onto Agnes, with the help of the other two women.

AGNES (CONT'D)

No! Let me see her! Let me see her!

Agnes kicks and screams but the adults are stronger. They pull her back into the dark passageway -

51 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM -PRESENT DAY

51

The pains come without interval, on and on. Agnes, like a swimmer going under, cannot catch her breath. Her screams, by the end are ragged, hoarse, desperate.

Mary holds her, her own face wet with tears.

Finally the midwife pulls A TINY BABY out.

MIDWIFE

It's a girl. She's...

Her voice trails when she realizes the child is LIFELESS.

AGNES

...Why isn't she crying?

The midwife slaps the baby's bottom, once, twice. Nothing.

MARY

She lives not.

AGNES

Let me have her...

MIDWIFE

It's bad luck, you should not look upon it.

AGNES

Give her to me.

MIDWIFE

I will make sure it gets a decent burial -

AGNES

Give my child to me!

Mary nods. The midwife hands the lifeless baby to Agnes. Agnes looks at her lifeless child. She will not look away.

MARY

The girl's gone to heaven, Agnes. You have a baby boy. Let me bring him to you and you may feed him.

AGNES

...She has not gone to heaven. I made a vow the night my mother died. I will go to your church but I shan't say a word there.

She looks down at the baby in her arms. She remembers the pain, the confusion, but also the power and clarity.

Then, suddenly, a thin cry. Mary and the midwife rush over.

Agnes smiles through her tears. The baby girl has come back to life, drawing in air.

FADE TO:

52 *INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - MORNING TIME PASSING* 52

Music...A woman's body after having given birth.

Camera sees her as it sees the forest. Stretch marks that look like lightening bolts across her hips, on the side of her breasts. Skin folds around her belly like the beautiful wrinkles of a tree that document the passage of time. A thin line of hair growing from her belly to her breasts.

Every tear, every scar, every bruise, every patch of redded, flushed, broken, marked skin, all beautiful, all natural - this is a body written upon by the power of creation.

FADE OUT.

53 *INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - MORNING 11 YEARS LATER* 53

A Latin lesson board, a school bag, small quills and rolls of paper scattered on the floor.

The baby blanket from the twin's birth on a pallet bed by the wedding bed.

TWO CHILDREN are whispering to each other by the window. They are JUDITH and HAMNET (11), Agnes and Will's twins. We can't hear what they say, their breaths carry their secrets, moving between them.

They switch their clothes, hats and shoes. Hamnet helps Judith to pin her long hair up to hide under his hat. They look at each other, giggling - they have become each other.

JUDITH

Good day to you, Judith.

HAMNET

Good day, Hamnet.

54 OMITTED

54

55 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY 55

The twins run down the stairs through the dining room.

MARY

There will be no running in this house. Conduct yourselves please like gentlemen and gentlewomen -

56A INT. HENLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 56A

They run into the kitchen, almost crashing into their older sister SUSANNA, who is doing chores.

JUDITH

Sorry, Susanna!

They go to their mother who is drying apples. She looks at them, smiles knowingly.

Judith puts her finger on Agnes's lips - our secret.

HAMNET

(looks down the passageway)
Father is back!

The twins hurry to sit down and begin to peel apples in perfect unison.

Susanna shakes her head at them, whispering to Agnes.

SUSANNA

We all know they've swapped clothes. How long are we going to pretend we don't?

AGNES

We shall pretend for as long as they still think they are the same -

Will walks into the kitchen. He is older, well dressed, living the life he needed. He has found what he was looking for in London. He leans against the door, watching them.

Hamnet and Judith, still dressed as each other, see him and both sit up straighter.

Will and Agnes give each other a look, hiding their smiles.

Will walks up to the twins, pretending to frown.

JUDITH AS HAMNET

Father?

WILL

Hmm?

JUDITH AS HAMNET

Will you help me with the Greek passage from yesterday's lesson?

WILL

I thought you'd learned it?

JUDITH AS HAMNET

I didn't...because I left my primer at school.

WILL

Hamnet. You need to take your studies seriously. How can you -

HAMNET AS JUDITH (IN GREEK)

Let me not then die ingloriously and without struggle -

Will gasps, pretending to be surprised.

HAMNET AS JUDITH (IN GREEK) (CONT'D)

- But let me first do some great thing that shall be told among men hereafter.

WILL

You fiends! You rascals!

JUDITH/HAMNET

Did we trick you?!

WILL

Of course you did! Swap places to hoodwink me again!

Will hugs them both. The twins giggle and shriek. Susanna looks up from her work and rolls her eyes.

WILL (CONT'D)

Hamnet and Judith. The same brow, the same lips, identical eyes. And remember, always remember, you have shared a life together that began before anything else. Come here, Susanna.

Will waves Susanna over. He and the children whisper.

Agnes watches them, curious.

56B EXT. HENLEY HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

56B

Agnes walks out of the back door. Her eyes are covered by Will who follows behind.

WILL

One more step. Here. Stop. Ready?

AGNES

(laughs)

What is it?

He lowers his hands. She adjusts her eyes to the light -

Her three children are decorated with sheets, sticks, random objects from the house - their endearing attempts to dress like witches. They are acting out some lines their father has been writing. This is something they clearly often do in the family where Will "rehearses" his ideas with his children and they all love it.

Hamnet walks towards Agnes from the left side of the garden.

HAMNET

When shall we three meet again? In
thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Judith walks towards Agnes from the right side of the garden.

JUDITH

When the hurly-burly's done, when
the battle's lost and won.

Susanna walks towards Agnes down the middle of the garden.

SUSANNA

That will be ere the set of sun.

HAMNET

Where the place?

JUDITH

Upon the heath.

SUSANNA

There to meet with Agnes.

HAMNET

I come, Graymalkin!

JUDITH
Paddock calls.

SUSANNA
Anon!

They gather together, whispering, like one unit.

HAMNET/JUDITH/SUSANNA
Fair is foul, and foul is fair,
fair is foul, and foul is fair,
fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy
air!

The children give a big finish, happy with themselves.

Agnes bursts out laughing. She and Will give the children a round of enthusiastic applause.

Later, Will is teaching Hamnet how to do a play sword fight.

Agnes and the girls are working in the herb garden. She is showing them how to xx. She gives them her hands, stained with herbs. They lean in to smell her palms, like Agnes once did with Rowan.

Then, a change in the air catches her attention. She looks around, concerned.

SUSANNA
Mama?

Agnes is suddenly short of breath. She puts her hand on her tight chest. She looks up at the sky. Something is amiss...

57A EXT. FOREST - ANCIENT TREE - THE NEXT DAY

57A

Agnes's hawk, lifeless, lies in a hole in the ground, surrounded by branches, herbs and flowers. A small burial.

Agnes puts the glove Will made for her into the earth next to the hawk. Her fingers stroke its feathers.

AGNES
Good night, sweet friend.

HAMNET/JUDITH
Good night. Good night.

Will covers the hole with dirt. Agnes, Susanna, Hamnet and Judith take LILY OF THE VALLEY BULBS from a basket, planting them into the soil above the hawk, a sweet offering.

57B EXT. FOREST - LIGHT PATH - DAY

57B

The family walk in a line down the path covered with tall plants. They sing together a song named 'Robin is to the Greenwood Gone'.

FAMILY

*My bonny Robin to the greenwood
will go, where the oak and the ash
and the briars do grow. How will my
love fare as the darkness falls,
there within those tangled walls?*

Agnes braids a flower crown. Susanna and Judith already each wears one. Hamnet tickles Susanna with a long stemmed plant. She takes it off of him playfully.

FAMILY (CONT'D)

*The greenwood is near and the
greenwood is far, and many a danger
befalls men there. I pray that
those trees will return my boy, for
sweet bonny Robin is all my joy.*

Agnes places the finished flower crown on Hamnet.

FAMILY (CONT'D)

*I pray that those trees will return
my boy, for sweet bonny Robin is
all my joy...*

58 EXT. EDGE OF FOREST - DAY

58

They leave the forest through a bed of tall ferns. Agnes and the kids run ahead into the meadow, playing catch.

Will falls behind watching them. He grows wary.

Hamnet notices and goes back to him.

HAMNET

Is all well, father?

Will puts a hand on Hamnet's shoulder.

WILL

Yes...Listen, I want you to stay
away from your grandfather. He'll
not hit your sisters but it's you I
worry for. I need to know you'll be
safe when I'm not here.

HAMNET

Are you going back to London again?

WILL

Tomorrow.

HAMNET

Tomorrow...Will we go with you this time?

WILL

No. Not yet.

Hamnet nods, hiding his sadness. He turns to go.

WILL (CONT'D)

I'll miss you, my boy.

Hamnet looks back at his father - the older man is frowning deeply, eyes lowered.

WILL (CONT'D)

But I have to go. I have to.

HAMNET

I know, father.

Will looks up at his son.

HAMNET (CONT'D)

I understand.

Will is surprised by the tone in Hamnet's voice. The boy suddenly seems older.

WILL

You know everything, don't you?

Hamnet smiles shyly. Will messes up the boy's hair.

WILL (CONT'D)

That's good. Because I need you to look after your mother and your sisters.

Hamnet nods, standing up straighter.

WILL (CONT'D)

Will you be brave?

HAMNET

Yes.

Will scoops Hamnet into his arms and swings him around.

WILL
Will you be brave?!

HAMNET
Yes!

WILL
I can't hear you -

HAMNET
Brave! I'll be brave!!

Laughters. Hamnet wraps his arm around his father's big shoulders, smiling wide.

WILL
Good boy.

Will puts Hamnet down and messes up his hair.

HAMNET
Father. Will you bring something back from London?

WILL
Anything you want.

The boy feels shy to ask. Will knees down and presses their foreheads together.

WILL (CONT'D)
Tell me.

Hamnet leans in and whispers something into his father's ear. Will listens, considers, smiles and nods - you got it. We would never know the words the boy said to his father - a secret between them forever.

59

INT. HENLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

59

Agnes and Will are sitting by the small fire. The silence of the night is loud. They've been together for 13 years now. So much is sad and unsaid in that time.

WILL
I've looked at houses, you know, for us in London. I've seen myself taking Susanna on my shoulders to look at the river, when she was still small enough to sit on my shoulders...I'd show her houses, boats, bears, palaces.

AGNES

Autumn is coming and children fall
ill...

WILL

I see a kitchen with two candles.
My wife bending over the fire. A
yard where she keep hens and
rabbits. The five of us, maybe more
in time. Some nights when I'm in
bed alone I can almost smell it,
the beeswax on the table surface,
the curdled-milk smell of our
babies, the starch of the laundry.
You, humming to yourself as you
work. I'll sit at the hearth,
surrounded by family...

AGNES

(feeling guilty)

You know Judith is still not strong
enough. Her skin will flush with
rashes in a city. And her chest is
often congested. What if she...We
will go to London one day -

WILL

No, you won't. You'll never come.
You've waited for the heat of the
summer to pass, the dryness of
autumn to be gone, the snow, the
cold, the wetness of the spring...
You do not believe Judith will ever
survive London and you'd do
anything to keep that child alive.

AGNES

Is that not what a mother is
supposed to do?

WILL

Of course it is. So, I've decided
to spend the money I've saved, not
in a house in London, but here, on
some land outside Stratford. And
that's where you shall live with
the children.

She is surprised and relieved. She is grateful to him.

AGNES

Thank you...

She reaches over and holds his hand for a moment before letting go.

He closes his eyes, finally giving up the dream of a life in London with his family.

60 EXT. HENLEY HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

60

Will is leaving. The children cling to him.

He watches them walking down the street, Hamnet walking backwards waving, until they disappear into the doorway.

He stands there staring at the empty street, unable to move for a moment before finally turning and walking away.

61 EXT. HENLEY HOUSE - GARDEN - LATER

61

Agnes finds Hamnet alone in the garden. The boy is playing with his wooden sword. He looks so sad and alone.

AGNES

Hamnet?

Agnes goes to him. He tries to hold back tears.

AGNES (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Hamnet...

She pulls him into her arms. He starts to cry, embarrassed.

She takes his small hand and gently presses at the skin between thumb and fingers.

HAMNET

What do you see?

Hamnet looks at her, sniffing, curious.

AGNES

Hmm...you, grown, tall and very strong. You are in London, working with your father.

HAMNET

Really? In the theatre?

AGNES

Yes. At the playhouse.

HAMNET

What will I be doing?

AGNES

What do you wish to do, Hamnet?

HAMNET

I wish...I would like to be one of the players with...a sword!

AGNES

A sword?

HAMNET

Yes, and I will clash it against the sword of the other player.

AGNES

Show me.

HAMNET

(acts it out)

Like so, and like so, and there will be a terrible fight and everyone watching will be frightened out of their wits.

AGNES

And who will win?

HAMNET

I shall, of course!

Agnes smiles, watching Hamnet playing out a fencing match against an invisible opponent.

62 EXT. LONDON - RIVER THAMES - AFTERNOON TWO WEEKS LATER 62

The fast flowing water of river Thames.

Will eats a pie, watching the water, restless. There are tents near by. TRAVELERS and LOCALS hiding from the plague.

He throws the rest of the pie to a homeless dog anxiously waiting near by and walks off.

63 EXT. LONDON - CHARTERHOUSE - ROAD - EVENING 63

He walks through a narrow, busy road towards his apartment. He tries to silence the noises from people, animals and machines, putting them into a rhythm that's comfortable to him. The heart beat. Turning it into something pleasant.

A loud noise and clamor cuts through the rhythm. He stops.

Bedding is being thrown out of an upper window and hurled on to a fire in a small yard.

WATCHMEN WEARING BIRD SHAPED PLAGUE MASKS hammering boards over the door and windows of the house. The people inside are wailing and imploring.

Through the flames, a corpse being wheeled away on a death-cart by TWO WATCHMEN.

Will hurries through the small yard into a dark archway. Through the dark archway he arrives at -

64

EXT. LONDON - CHARTERHOUSE - COURTYARD - EVENING

64

This is the courtyard where his apartment is located. Four tall walls. Small windows. Stone ground. One singular tree in the middle, a dot of green in a world of grey.

A GROUP OF TRAVELERS has settled in one corner of the courtyard. Tents, a bonfire, pots steaming on metal stands.

A SHADOW PUPPET SHOW is starting in front of the lone tree, drawing other TRAVELERS and RESIDENTS to gather. The PUPPET MASTER wears a colorfully painted version of a plague mask. TWO MASKED MUSICIANS are playing the flute and hand drum.

Will feels unease but joins the crowd to watch.

The shadow puppet show: a boy is on a docked ship with an evil-looking CAPTAIN. The captain kicks the boy so that he falls down the gangplank.

CROWD

Boo!

An old man with a crooked back approaches. He has a monkey on a chain. The boy doesn't see them at first.

CROWD (CONT'D)

Look behind you!

The monkey scratches himself and sneezes. The music is playful now. The boy is thrilled to see the monkey. He tries to pet it but it draws back in fear. The boy holds out a gentle hand and slowly the monkey takes it.

The boy puts out his arms and the monkey climbs into them. They embrace. The monkey then climbs on the boy's head, scratching. The boy claps his hands, happy.

The old man turns and pulls the chain hard. The monkey falls to the ground, reaching for the boy as if asking to be saved.

The boy tries to grab the monkey back, but the old man pulls it away roughly. The monkey hobbles off with its master.

CROWD (CONT'D)

Boo! No!

The ship is out in the ocean now and the captain is at the wheel, scratching himself, sneezing, just as the monkey did. He then falls ill, shaking and trembling.

The angel of death floats down and touches him. The boy pushes his body into the waves.

Some of the crowd cheers. Others look worried.

The boy is home now, embracing his family. The fiddler's tune turns sad and dramatic.

The family begins to scratch and then sneeze. They all fall ill, trembling. The angel of death appears again, touching them - they are all given wings as they ascend to heaven.

The boy is left alone, sitting on a chair. The ghost of the monkey, also with wings, flies across the sky above him but the boy is unaware.

The crowd is puzzled and disconcerted by this tragic ending.

Will, in contrast, is mesmerized. He sees the puppet master staring at him, through the dark holes in his plague mask...

65

EXT. HEWLANDS - GARDEN - DAY

65

A SWARM OF BEES are massing in the orchard - a blackish stain spread that vibrates and quivers with outrage.

Agnes is eyeing the swarm. Bartholomew at a distance.

AGNES

Something has upset them.

BARTHOLOMEW

What could it be?

AGNES

The weather, a change in the air perhaps. Better tell Joan to keep the children inside.

Bartholomew nods and heads for the house.

Agnes suddenly feels restless. She ponders this feeling and tells herself not to be foolish. A bee lands on her cheek. She fans it away.

66 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - DAY

66

Hamnet climbs into the attic, dropping everything on the floor - bag, cap, jerkin.

HAMNET

Jude!

He sits next to Judith who is asleep on the bed, holding onto his baby blanket.

HAMNET (CONT'D)

Wake up. The baker told me her cat had kittens. Shall we go and see?

Judith opens her eyes and stares at her brother as if from a great distance.

HAMNET (CONT'D)

Jude?

JUDITH

I'm sleeping...

He closes his fingers about hers, his bigger, wider, grimier.

HAMNET

You are warm.

She stirs. Her chin lifts, revealing A SWELLING at the base.

Hamnet stares at it. His trembling fingers lift up the cover - there is another where her shoulder meets her neck.

A pair of quail's eggs, under her skin. Pale, ovoid, nestled there, as if waiting to be hatched.

67 OMITTED

67

68 OMITTED

68

69 OMITTED

69

70 EXT. HENLEY HOUSE - DAY 70

Agnes appears through misty rain.

71 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 71

She enters, unloading a bundle of rosemary, a jar of honey, a hunk of beeswax.

HAMLET (O.S.)

Mama.

She turns to see Hamnet walking in, pale and troubled.

AGNES

What is it? What's happened?

HAMNET

Judith...

It's all Agnes needs to hear. She drops everything and rushes towards the attic.

72 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - DAY 72

Judith's eyes are shut. Agnes loosens Judith's shift, and sees the buboes.

AGNES

How long has she been like this?

HAMNET

Since I returned from school.

Agnes checks Judith's fingertips and her feet.

HAMNET (CONT'D)

She's got...it. Hasn't she? She's got...the pestilence, hasn't she? Mama?

Agnes feels a great thud in her chest, an animal hurling itself against its cage of bones.

AGNES

Go and find Grandmama. She's in the cookhouse. Bid her come. Now!

73 OMITTED 73

74A INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

74A

Fire is blazing in the fireplace.

Mary is working the bellows. Susanna hands her wood.

Eliza is rushing around the room to light all the candles to bring more warmth.

Judith is lying on a rush mattress in front of the fire, wrapped in blankets. She is noticeably worse.

Agnes spoons medicine into Judith's mouth, trying to get the girl to swallow tinctures and tisanes.

She murmurs some words to her daughter, something soft and soothing.

Judith intermittently convulses. The bubo in her neck is so large, it may burst.

Hamnet watches. Holding onto Judith's hand. He wants to help, but there is nothing he can do. He is too small, too young...

74B INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

74B

Time has passed. The night falls.

Agnes is sitting on the floor by the pallet, next to Judith, a cloth in her hand, her cheeks have scarlet spots from the heat of the fire. She has been there for hours but Judith isn't getting better. She dips the cloth into the bowl of water and wipes Judith's brow, her arms, her neck.

Mary brings her some water but Agnes won't drink.

MARY

Agnes, you have done all that you can.

AGNES

It cannot be...I will not have it...I will not let Judith cross over...

Mary mutters a string of words under her breath, a prayer of sorts. She watches Agnes gripping Judith's limp fingers, as if trying to tether her to life.

She knows this urge. She feels it. She has been the mother by the pallet too many times.

75 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

75

Mary enters and finds Eliza at the table, her head bowed as if she is praying and Susanna pacing like her father.

Susanna stops when she sees Mary's expression. Eliza looks up.

MARY

Eliza. Go write to him.

Eliza knows what this means and hurries away.

SUSANNA

Has she...

MARY

Not yet. But her fever has not broken...We have done everything we can. She is not getting better.

SUSANNA

Will she die?

Mary's silence is the answer.

SUSANNA (CONT'D)

How much longer?

MARY

It may be tonight. Nighttime is the most dangerous for the sick.

Susanna does not allow herself to break down. She looks around for more things to do.

SUSANNA

Then we shall prepare for her...we need to...we need to wash her body. We need a comb, a comb, to brush out her plait..

She is taking up a pitcher, a cloth, a plate, anything. Then, a thought creeps into her mind and she stops.

She looks over at Mary, who sits by the window, quietly wiping her eyes.

SUSANNA (CONT'D)

Grandmama? You had three daughters who were taken. Were they...did they...

MARY

Anne was seven. The other two were just babies. They all had fever and swellings like Judith...

Susanna comes over and puts her hand on Mary's shoulder.

MARY (CONT'D)

Your mother is trying to keep a grip on her child. It will not work. What is given may be taken away, at anytime. We can never let down our guard. Never take for granted that our children's hearts beat, that they draw breath, that they walk and speak and smile and argue and play...Never for a moment forget they may be gone...

76 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - DAWN

76

Hamnet drifts to the surface of sleep. He lies for a while, wondering why nothing feels right, why he feels so dry of mouth, so heavy of heart, so sore in the head.

HAMNET

Jude...

He suddenly remembers and lurches upright, pulling the bedclothes with him.

His head, his eyes, his whole body is in pain. He crawls from the bed, dragging the sheet with him.

He has to find his sister.

77 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAWN

77

The room is dim with the new light of the day from the window, thin and pale as milk. The fire is reduced to a heap of idling ashes. The candles have burnt out, drowned in pools of themselves.

Hamnet makes his way down the stairs, which seem to sway in front of him, one step at a time. He has to turn to face the wall because everything around him is in motion.

He makes his way to Judith. He sees his mother bent forward, her head on the pallet, asleep, a cloth gripped in her hand.

And Judith is looking right at him.

HAMNET

Jude...

He realizes his voice doesn't seem to be working. It rasps and prickles. He drops to his knees and crawls to reach her.

Her eyes glitter with a strange and silver light. She is dying. He can see this. He finds Judith's hand, their fingers twine together.

He sees Judith's eyes roll back in her head, once, twice. Then they open wide and slide towards him with great effort. Her lips curve upwards in what might be a smile.

JUDITH

(whispers)

Don't cry, Hamnet.

Tears fall down his face.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

You shall be well.

HAMNET

I shall not. Not without you.

It is then, Hamnet sees it - DEATH - it's in the room - hovering in the corner near the ceiling, a void, an ever-watching void...

HAMNET (CONT'D)

It's here...Do you see it, Jude?

Judith is too weak to turn her head.

HAMNET (CONT'D)

It's watching us...I'll tell it to take us both. We'll go together.

JUDITH

No. You'll stay. They need you.

HAMNET

Not without you...

Suddenly, an idea strikes Hamnet. He glances up at the tunnel of dark beneath the ceiling. The blackness is depthless, soft, absolute.

HAMNET (CONT'D)

(to the darkness)

Turn away. Close your eyes. Just for a moment. Turn away...

He gently moves Judith sideways, towards the fireplace. She watches, still gripping onto his baby blanket as Hamnet lays himself down in the dip her body has made, as he takes her place, as he pulls the sheet up over both of them.

JUDITH

Hamnet...

HAMNET

Don't make a sound. It'll make a mistake. It can't tell us apart.

JUDITH

No...

Judith shakes her head. Hamnet smiles at her, holding the sheet fast, stopping her from rising.

HAMNET

You will stay, Jude. And I will go.

He breathes these words into her, determined.

HAMNET (CONT'D)

Breath with me. Breath with me,
Judith.

They begin to breath together, both slowly calming down.

JUDITH

Hamnet...

HAMNET

This is my life. I give it to you.
I give it to you, Judith.

Judith seems to have drifted off.

HAMNET (CONT'D)

(whispers to himself)
Take me. Take me...

The void remains at the ceiling, watching, waiting.

Hamnet squeezes his eyes shut, imagining being in his father's arms, safe, loved.

HAMNET (CONT'D)

I'll be brave. I'll be brave...

78 EXT. ROAD - DAWN 78

An empty road in the field. Will is riding a horse as fast as he can in the dusky light.

He arrives at a makeshift livery, jumps off the horse and hands it to a LIVERY WORKER.

WILL

Fast as you can!

He steps into the field, catching his breath. He's shaken, holding back tears and rage. Something catches his attention. He looks up -

The silhouette of a hawk is circling the sky, as if watching over him...

79 INT. GLOBE THEATRE - FOREVER DAWN 79

Hamnet is looking up at the sky -

A hawk is circling. But this sky is different from his father's. It's cloudy. Its bottom edge is framed by a half circle, like a dark moon.

And unlike his father, Hamnet is in what appears to be an ancient forest, in thick fog. This place is not real, not yet, not in ways we understand.

This is the Globe Theatre before it was built.

Hamnet walks around in this strange place with wonder. He stops when a singular tree appears in front of him, standing alone in the fog.

He suddenly feels a strong yearning to see his mother -

80 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAWN 80

Agnes's head jerks up, her lips in the middle of forming a word. She looks down at herself, disorientated. Then, it comes to her in a rush.

She lifts the sheet. There is someone on the pallet with Judith - it's Hamnet. Two of them, curled up together.

She checks on Judith. Her fever seems to have lowered. She gently wakes Hamnet next to his sister.

AGNES

Hamnet...You shouldn't be down here. Hamnet?

She turns the boy over - his skin is so pale it is colorless. His eyelids are half open, with the eyes rolled up under the lids. His lips, white and cracked, are open and he is taking tiny half-sips of air.

She stares at the twins. One is very sick, about to die. The other looks healthy, recovering. Except they have switched places with each other.

At that moment, as if feeling the cold air, Judith opens her eyes. She looks pallid but her eyes are alert.

JUDITH

Hamnet...

81 INT. GLOBE THEATRE - FOREVER DAWN

81

Hamnet feels tired. The green branches of the lone tree offer a nice shelter.

He gives in and lowers himself down on the ground, under the tree. He closes his eyes, just for a moment. He's not going to sleep. He will carry on. He will be brave.

He opens his eyes again, to reassure himself the world and the green canopy above is still there, and then lets them close. Just for now...

82 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - MORNING

82

Death is violent. Death is a struggle. The body clings to life, as ivy to a wall and will not easily let go.

Hamnet's body writhes, twists, buckles and strains.

Agnes tries to feed him rosemary and mint jelly but he won't eat at all.

Eliza is feeding Judith some broth at the other end of the room. Judith is still weak but she is now taking food.

Agnes tries to apply the poultice to Hamnet's swellings but he is trembling so much the mixture will not stay in place.

Agnes panics. She has tried everything. She tries to think of something else.

AGNES

Go and get the stone. There is a stone by his bed with a hole! I must place it under his pillow. Bring it to me!

Susanna hurries off to fetch the stone.

AGNES (CONT'D)

And...salt, yes, salt, we must place salt in his bed...
(to Mary, desperate)
We need salt.

Mary shakes her head but goes to the kitchen.

Agnes swabs Hamnet's brow, his limbs, with damp cloths.

AGNES (CONT'D)

You shall feel better soon, my boy.
I promise you. You shall be well soon...

Mary comes in with salt and Agnes starts to pack the bed with it. Susanna comes in with the stone and Agnes places it under Hamnet's pillow.

She finds some herbs and feathers from the useless remedies scattered all around them and places them on Hamnet's chest.

She lifts his hand - her eyes widen, her heart sinks - it is blue-grey along its side. She presses it to her cheek -

Suddenly, his shaking gets worse. Everyone takes notice.

Mary is kneeling at the end of the pallet. She holds onto his ankles. She knows this moment too well.

MARY

Eliza. Take Judith upstairs and stay with her.

Eliza scoops Judith in her arms and takes her out of the room. Judith kicks against the clutches of her aunt.

JUDITH

No. Let me stay with him! He needs me! He needs me! I must speak to him!

Susanna watches her brother, convulsing, her mother fussing around with her useless paste and bandages.

Agnes holds onto Hamnet and tries to keep him still, tries to keep him here.

AGNES

Please, please, Hamnet, please,
don't leave us, don't go, stay,
stay my boy, please, please stay -

SUSANNA

Stop! Enough! Let him alone!

Susanna presses her fierce fists to her eyes. She can't look anymore.

SUSANNA (CONT'D)

Can you not see it's too late for
that?!

Then, all at once, Hamnet stops shaking and a great soundlessness falls over the room. His body is suddenly motionless, his gaze focused on something far above him.

Agnes is holding on to him, her cheek pressed to his. She listens...

Hamnet draws in his last breath, he lets it out. Then there is silence, stillness. Nothing more.

83

INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

83

Cloths are draped over the panes, dimming the room.

The silence is slowly broken by small bubbles of sound.

A BREEZE threads through the room, stirring the air, toying with drapes, mantel-cloth, dust.

The room has been cleaned up. Eliza and Susanna are preparing - white sheets, strong thread, sharp needles, bowls of warm water and clothes.

THREE VILLAGE WOMEN are trying to convince Mary to let them help. Mary listens, trying to stay patient.

VILLAGE WOMEN

We will help with the laying out...We asked but she won't let us...But the boy must be prepared for burial...There is no time to lose...The town decrees that any who die of the pestilence must be buried quickly, within a day...Is she not aware of the ruling?

MARY

She is aware.

Like a painting, Agnes is curved over and the nape of her neck exposed.

Before her is the body of her child, resting on a door lifted from its hinges and placed on two barrels.

She grips his hand in hers. The heat from her own skin is giving itself to his. She must grip the hand tighter. She must keep her hand on his hair, which feels as it always did: silken, soft, ragged at the ends.

Her fingers press into the muscle between her son's thumb and forefinger. She kneads the muscle there, gently, in a circular motion, and waits, listens, concentrates. She is like her hawk, reading the air, listening out, waiting for a signal, a sound.

Nothing comes. Nothing at all.

Hamnet's hand is silent. Agnes listens. She strains. She tries to hear what might be under the silence, behind it. Could there be a distant murmur, some sound, a message, perhaps from her son? A SIGN OF WHERE HE IS, A PLACE SHE MIGHT FIND HIM?

Someone has arrived next to her. She doesn't need to look to know it's Bartholomew. The breadth and weight of that hand on her shoulder.

BARTHOLOMEW

Agnes.

She holds herself very still.

BARTHOLOMEW (CONT'D)

Agnes. We must lay him out.
The women are here, to help you.

Agnes shakes her head, mute.

BARTHOLOMEW (CONT'D)

We must prepare him. He must be buried. The town will come to take him if we do not.

AGNES

No. Not yet.

BARTHOLOMEW

(lowers his voice)

Agnes. It's possible that word may not have reached him. He would come, if he knew. I know he would. But he would not find it amiss if we were to go ahead -

AGNES

We will wait. Until tomorrow. You may tell the town that. And I will lay him out. No one else.

BARTHOLOMEW

Very well.

He can barely look at Hamnet's body. He turns to go, to be of service. But he feels a pressure. He looks down, Agnes has reached out for his hand, holding the joint by his own scar.

AGNES

You tried to warn me. I should have seen it coming...

84 EXT. HENLEY HOUSE - BACKYARD - MORNING

84

A morning drizzle. Bartholomew burns the bedding, the mattress and the linens in a fire.

He looks at Hamnet's baby blanket in his hand for a moment and gently places it into the fire.

85 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

85

Agnes wets her hands in a bowl and draws her fingers through Hamnet's hair.

She wipes his closed eyes, his cheeks, his lips.

Mary walks in. Agnes is alarmed by the intrusion.

Mary's face is wet, her eyes swollen.

MARY

I saw the light. I was not
sleeping.

Agnes softens and nods. Mary comes in to join her.

Agnes dips the cloth, washes and dips it again. She washes
his legs, his ankles, his feet and dries them.

Mary changes the water.

Mary picks up a folded sheet, holding a corner in each hand.
The sheet unravels and Agnes is faced with its startling
white expanse. She takes it, pressing her face to it.

MARY (CONT'D)

I washed it, with juniper, cedar
and lavender soap.

A little surprised, Agnes looks at Mary for a moment. Then,
she helps Mary to lift Hamnet's legs and then his torso, to
slide the sheet under him.

Mary goes to the kitchen as Agnes continues to carefully fold
Hamnet in. She returns with rue, comfrey, chamomile,
lavender, thyme and a handful of rosemary.

She brings them to Agnes. Agnes stares at her, more confusion
grows. The sight of Mary carrying bundles of herbs is strange
but also strangely fitting.

MARY (CONT'D)

Let's see. No heartsease. Hamnet
dislikes the smell. No angelica
since...it didn't save him. And no
milk thistle. Too spiny and sharp.

She tucks the dried plants into the sheet, nestling them next
to his body. She meets Agnes's wide eyes.

MARY (CONT'D)

...I knew your mother. Not well.
But...sometimes when my children
were ill and the physician could no
longer help, I'd go to her. She
would at least have something to
ease their sufferings.

Mary stops for a moment. Her hand rests onto the middle of
Hamnet's chest, where his heart once beat.

MARY (CONT'D)

She had more kindness in her than
anyone in this town.

Agnes lets her tears fall.

MARY (CONT'D)

I was afraid when you chose my son.
I was afraid for us all...

Mary hands a needle to Agnes.

MARY (CONT'D)

You can do this. You must.

Agnes takes the needle, grateful. In this moment, Mary is a mother to her. A very different mother but a mother nevertheless.

Agnes threads the sheet with thick twine, beginning at the feet, drawing together the sheet to make a shroud. Like a sailor, stitching a sail to prepare a boat that will carry her son to the next world.

Something makes her look up. Her heart clenches like a fist -

Judith is standing by the stairs. The same face, but this one is alive, trembling.

MARY (CONT'D)

(rushes over)
Back to bed, now, you must rest.

AGNES

No, let her stay.

Judith runs to Agnes and hurls herself against her mother.

JUDITH

It is my fault, mama. It is my fault.

AGNES

It is no fault of yours, Judith.

JUDITH

But he changed places with me. He tricked it.

AGNES

He tricked what?

JUDITH

Death. Hamnet saw it coming for me and he tricked it. It took him when it came for me.

MARY

Do not ever speak those words to anyone else, Judith. The fever came for your brother and took him -

AGNES

Do you want to see him?

Judith nods, timid. Agnes brings her closer to stand beside her brother.

JUDITH

...Is it really him?

AGNES

Yes.

JUDITH

It doesn't look like him.

Judith touches the cheek of her twin.

Agnes reaches for Judith when A THUDDING is at the door. She covers Hamnet with the sheet.

AGNES

Do not open the door! It's not morning yet. We have yet to prepare him properly -

The thudding gets louder. The door leaps on its hinges and then, it swings open.

Rapid footsteps. Then, suddenly, appearing at the doorway is her husband.

Will's clothes and head are all wetted and dark with rain. His face is sleepless and crazed.

WILL

Am I too late?

He sees Judith and a smile breaks out.

WILL (CONT'D)

You!

He strides across the room, holding out his arms.

WILL (CONT'D)

You are here, you are well. I was worried - I couldn't rest - I came as soon as I heard but now I see -

He stops. He sees the board, the shroud, the bundled figure. Confusion at first, then a realization settles in - he had felt something was coming deep inside of him when he last parted with the boy. But it can't be. It's too ironic to have seen it all coming but to have done nothing.

WILL (CONT'D)

No...no....

He is in denial, finding himself half smiling at the irony of it all.

WILL (CONT'D)

Where is he?

The women's silence shuts down his last bit of hope.

The sound that comes out of Will is choked and smothered, like that of an animal forced to bear a great weight. A noise of disbelief and of anguish. He moves to the bundled figure and pulls back the sheet.

And there is his son's face before him. He cups a hand to Hamnet's cold cheek. His fingers hover, trembling.

WILL (CONT'D)

No, no, no, God in heaven, my
boy...my boy...

He whispers something to Hamnet we can't hear.

He looks up at Agnes. She keeps her distance, frozen, unable to bring herself to go to him.

86

INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - DAWN A DAY LATER

86

Agnes is a woman broken into pieces, crumbled and scattered around. She stays in bed, sleepless, frozen.

She can hear her husband pacing at the other end of the attic. There is no other sound. No crying, no sobbing, no sighing, just the scuff-thud, scuff-thud of his restless feet, walking, walking, like someone trying to find their way back to a place for which they have lost the map.

AGNES

I did not see it.

She speaks into the dark space between them.

WILL

No one did.

AGNES

But *I* did not. And I should have. I should have seen it. I should have understood it was a terrible trick, making me fear for Judith, when all along it was -

WILL

(goes to her)
You're not to blame, Agnes.

AGNES

Judith was so ill. I wasn't thinking. I should've paid more attention to him. I always thought she was the one who would be taken. I was so blind, so stupid. I'm the worst kind of fool. I saw only Judith. I didn't see him. I didn't see him...

WILL

Ssh...You did everything you could. There is nothing anyone could've done to save him. You tried your best and -

AGNES

Of course I did.

She is suddenly furious, wrenching herself from his touch -

AGNES (CONT'D)

I would have cut out my heart and given it to him. I would have -

WILL

I know, I know -

AGNES

You don't know. You weren't here. I couldn't stop it. I tried, I tried so hard...

WILL

You did.

AGNES

He died in agony. Agony...He cried out and I could only watch. There was nothing I could do...

WILL

You tried your best...The sickness
was too strong.

AGNES

You don't know...you weren't
here...you weren't here...

She keeps on murmuring, finally drifting to sleep after
staying up for days.

He lies awake, restless. Her words echoing in his mind.

87

INT. HENLEY HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY THREE WEEKS LATER

87

Will finds Judith sitting on the bench in the garden with
Hamnet's wooden sword in her hands.

He sits down beside her. Her eyes are red. She begins to cry,
again, silently. It breaks his heart.

Susanna comes out with a basket of laundry. She sees Judith
and grits her teeth.

SUSANNA

Stop it, stop it, Judith.

JUDITH

What?

SUSANNA

You have cried every moment for
three weeks. I can't stand it -

WILL

Susanna, leave her be -

SUSANNA

It's just...I hate...I cannot...

WILL

You should rest -

SUSANNA

I won't. There's laundry to do.
Dinner to prepare. Chickens to
feed. There is work to do.

WILL

It can wait -

SUSANNA

It cannot! I must work. I must work
hard...

Susanna pushes down her feelings and storms off. Will watches
her go, seeing himself in her.

JUDITH

Father?

WILL

Yes...

JUDITH

What is the word for someone who
was a twin but is no longer a twin?

Will thinks but doesn't speak.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

If you are a wife and your husband
dies, you are a widow. If your
parents die, you are an orphan.
What is the word for what I am
without Hamnet?

WILL

I don't know.

JUDITH

If you don't know, perhaps there
isn't one.

WILL

Perhaps not.

JUDITH

Will Hamnet never come back?

Will can't bear anymore, not his child, racked with grief.

WILL

No, he will never come again.

88

INT. HENLEY HOUSE - PASSAGEWAY - EVENING

88

Will runs into John coming into the house from the side door,
holding a roll of leather. The two men regard each other.

John stares at the ground, wanting to offer comfort but
doesn't know how. He scratches his chin, moves past Will and
disappears into the workshop.

Will listens to the sound of leather work beginning, and walks towards the other end of the passageway. There, he sees through the dining room door - his mother sitting by the fire, quietly wiping her eyes.

He hesitates to go to her. He has nothing left. He is stuck in the passageway for a moment. Then he looks behind him at the door at the other end - the door out of this house, the door back to London.

89

INT. HENLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING NEXT DAY

89

Agnes is preparing breakfast. The skin around her eyes is red and dry. She is not focused. There is no joy or purpose in her movements, just habits.

Will appears beside her. He watches her for a moment. She doesn't see him.

WILL

Agnes. I will send word.

AGNES

Send word? To whom?

She keeps her eyes down, not paying attention.

WILL

To you.

AGNES

I am here.

WILL

I meant I will send word when I have reached London.

AGNES

London?

She looks up at him for the first time.

WILL

I must leave.

AGNES

(almost amused)

Leave? You cannot leave.

WILL

Agnes, the world does not stand still. There are people waiting for me.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

The season is about to begin and my company will return from Kent any day now and I must -

AGNES

How can you think of leaving?

He bows his head. She sees his bag at his feet.

WILL

I must go...now.

AGNES

Now?

WILL

There is a traveling party leaving today. They have...a spare horse. It is...I need to... Look after the girls....I will send word. And hope to return before Yuletide.

There are tears in her eyes, but she can't look at him anymore. She turns away and goes back to work.

Suddenly, he is behind her, arms around her waist. He embraces her desperately. They stand together for a long moment, breathing in the other. Then she extracts herself.

AGNES

Go then, if you are going. Return when you can.

FADE OUT.

90A EXT. THE FOREST - TIME PASSES

90A

The forest in the winter. Death is everywhere.

The red egg is covered by dead leaves.

SUSANNA (O.S.)

When I do count the clock that tells the time, And see the brave day sunk in hideous night...

90B EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

90B

Hamnet's grave - small, quiet, on the edge of the graveyard. In front of the gravestone, Lily of the Valley are blooming out of the moist soil. Its sweet, bell-shaped white flowers are glistening in soft rain.

SUSANNA (O.S.)

When I behold the violet past
prime, And sable curls all silver'd
o'er with white...

91 EXT. HENLEY HOUSE - BACKYARD - MORNING MONTHS LATER 91

Agnes's garden is grey and crisp.

SUSANNA (O.S.)

When lofty trees I see barren of
leaves, which erst from heat did
canopy the herd, And summer's green
all girded up in sheaves, Borne on
the bier with white and bristly
beard...

92 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - MORNING 92

Hamnet's Latin board and papers are still on his desk, left
untouched. There is no sign of Will's belongings.

Agnes is sitting at Hamnet's desk. Her hair has grown some
grey. Her eyes sunken. She is utterly changed, at a loss.

She hovers her hand gently over the stones he had collected
and arranged on his desk. She is trying to understand the
reason behind this arrangement, carefully not moving any.

SUSANNA (O.S.)

Then of thy beauty do I question
make, That thou among the wastes of
time must go, since sweets and
beauties do themselves forsake and
die as fast as they see others
grow...

93 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 93

Susanna is reading from her father's letter - in it is a
sonnet he has written.

SUSANNA

And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe
can make defence save breed, to
brave him when he takes thee hence.

She puts the letter down and goes back to her endless chores.
Judith picks up the papers and runs her finger over her
father's writing.

JUDITH

Will you read it again?

SUSANNA

No. I've read it three times.

JUDITH

Do you think...father doesn't come home because of me?

SUSANNA

What are you talking about?

JUDITH

Because I remind him of Hamnet.

Silence grows. Susanna puts her work down and goes to her sister, sitting down next to her.

SUSANNA

He will come back to us. I know he will.

Agnes enters. The girls look at their mother, concerned.

SUSANNA (CONT'D)

Mama, the midwife came again asking for you. Her hands are giving her pain and she needs an ointment -

AGNES

Did you hear that?

SUSANNA

Hear what?

AGNES

A tapping. Do you hear it?

SUSANNA

I hear nothing. The baker's wife called in earlier and -

Agnes runs out of the kitchen into the dining room, to the fireplace, presses a hand to the stone, listening, desperate.

The girls watch her from the door.

AGNES

You may not hear it but I do. A tapping. rustling.

She presses her ear to the stone.

AGNES (CONT'D)

A definite noise. Can't you hear it?

SUSANNA

No. It's likely a jackdaw has come down the chimney.

Agnes is distressed.

AGNES

Well...if...a jackdaw? Then it cannot remain there. We must set it free...

She goes back upstairs, vacantly. Susanna goes to Judith and pulls her sister into her arms and hugs her.

94 EXT. HENLEY HOUSE - NIGHT 94

Some time past midnight, Agnes wanders in the street in front of her house, a shawl around her.

AGNES

Where are you, Hamnet?

She listens to the empty street, waiting.

95 OMITTED 95

96 EXT. LONDON - CHARTERHOUSE - COURTYARD - DAY 96

Will is pacing in the courtyard with a quill in his hand. Behind him, under the lone tree, TWO ACTORS (Hamlet and Ophelia) are playing out a scene. We'll stay with Will for the scene and won't see the faces of the actors.

A few pieces of theatrical furniture and props scattered around. RESIDENTS and TRAVELERS carry on with their daily life. No one pays attention to them.

OPHELIA

Could Beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with Honesty?

HAMLET

Ay, truly. For the power of Beauty will sooner transform Honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of Honesty can translate Beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

Will shakes his head, frustrated by the delivery. His anger builds. He's like a wild animal in a corner.

OPHELIA

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAMLET

You should not have believed me. For virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

OPHELIA

I was the more deceived.

HAMLET

Get thee to a nunnery! Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I -

WILL

No. No. No. Again.

HAMLET

I am myself indifferent honest but yet -

WILL

Again.

HAMLET

..I am myself indifferent honest -

WILL

Again!

HAMLET

I am myself indifferent -

Will suddenly goes up to the actors, aggressive. He takes over the line, showing them what he means by these words, with a history they'll never understand.

WILL

I am myself indifferent honest but
yet I could accuse me of such
things that it were better my
mother had not borne me.

He stares at them. We only see the back of their heads but we can tell they're shocked, fearful of him.

HAMLET

...I am myself indifferent honest
but yet I could accuse me of such
things that it were better my
mother had not borne me.

It sounds right. Exactly what Will wanted. Suddenly all the pressure is gone. But there is no relief. Will turns away and walks off.

97

EXT. LONDON - RIVER THAMES - DOCK - EVENING

97

The river is quiet tonight. There is no moon in the sky. No wind. There is a heaviness in the air. A doldrum.

Will wanders onto the empty dock. He is running lines in his head, barely noticing where he is going in the darkness.

Something catches his attention - he looks to the water. The water flows so quietly a part of it almost seems still - like a dark mirror, a void, staring at him...

He is suddenly filled with dread and hopelessness. In that moment, there's nothing he ever wants to do again. No one he ever wants to see again. He wants to go somewhere far away. Somewhere with long nights and cold water, dark cold water...

He paces the narrow dock without railings. We can't tell which way he will go but we feel the tension.

He finds himself at the edge. He closes his eyes and tries to listen. The city is unusually quiet. Too quiet. His body sways a little from the lack of sight. He doesn't care which way it will take him. He has nothing to lose.

Then, like a miracle, the wind picks up. Will catches its soft, benevolent whistle. The sound of flowing water returns. The dock creaks, once, twice, just enough for him to form his special rhythm again. The heartbeat that gives him life - to be, or not to be, to be, or not to be, to be or not to be...

98 EXT. NEW HOUSE - MONTHS LATER

98

A massive timbered house. An estate with at least fifteen rooms. Wild garden and pond in the front. Barns, animal sheds, greenhouses and fields on all sides.

A set of keys in Agnes's hand.

Her face, staring at the foreign building, confused. She looks older, her hair pinned up with more grey. This is a woman consumed by her grief.

Bartholomew stands behind her at some distance.

She looks back at her brother who looks indifferent, then looks down at the keys. They feel cold in her hand.

99 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - SAME EVENING

99

A celebratory dinner. Will is handing out gifts - hair combs, pipes, handkerchiefs.

WILL

(arm around Judith)

...And the innkeeper, who was by no means a small man, took the horse by the bridle and walked it right into the millpond, all the way up to his breeches, and what he didn't know of course was that the gate had been left open -

Everyone laughs, except Agnes. She is watching Will: the sound and sense of what he is saying recedes until the noise in the room is a blur.

WILL (CONT'D)

(opening a bag)

Presents. I have presents for all!
Hair combs...

(handing them out)

...for Eliza, and you, Susanna. A handkerchief for you, Mother.

He puts a wrapped bottle into his father's hands with nervous pride. John eyes it. He is old and very ill.

JOHN

What is it?

WILL

Flemish brandy.

Mary looks between her husband and son, carefully -

MARY

How wonderful! You always wanted a
bottle, John. What an expensive
delicacy this is.

(to Will)

We're so proud of you.

John fumbles with the wrapping and gives the bottle a long
look. Then, he reaches out and pats his son on the arm.

Will takes the brief moment in, bittersweet.

SUSANNA

Everyone in town is talking about
the new house. It's the biggest
house in Stratford. There are so
many rooms. One can get lost in it!

Will smiles, giving Susanna's shoulder a squeeze.

WILL

You shall keep the keys, Susanna.
You will manage the house well.

Susanna smiles, a rare occasion.

WILL (CONT'D)

And for Agnes...

Agnes receives into her hand a parcel wrapped in cloth. She
removes it to reveal a bracelet with a ruby setting.

ELIZA

A ruby, is it? That is finer than
any I have ever seen.

SUSANNA

Put it on, mama, put it on.

Agnes looks at the bracelet with an icy indifference.

She looks up and sees her husband looking at her. He glances
at the bracelet, then at her.

She rises and leaves the room.

100

INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - NIGHT

100

Will finds Agnes hovering over a half-burnt candle, drawing
remedy instructions in her book of herbs at his old desk.

Dried herbs, tinctures, seeds are scattered on most of the surfaces. She doesn't acknowledge him.

WILL

(holds out a fancy shawl)
I brought you this. In case you
were cold.

AGNES

I'm not.

WILL

(places it on the chair)
Well. It's here if you need it.

He moves closer to her, slowly.

WILL (CONT'D)

Did Bartholomew show you the new
house?

AGNES

Yes.

WILL

Do you...like it?

AGNES

Why didn't you show it to me
yourself?

Will looks for words.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Are you afraid I'd say I won't
move, because Hamnet died here, in
this house.

WILL

Would you...say that?

AGNES

He is not here. I've looked
everywhere. I can't find him.

Agnes lifts her face to look at him. His eyes skitter away.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Can't look me in the eye? I already
know. I can feel other women on
you. You can't just come back here
and offer gifts and act as if all
is well.

Will feels dizzy. He lowers himself to the floor beside her, holds his head in his hands.

They sit like that, together but facing away from each other, for some time. The silence swells between them.

WILL

How often do you think of him?

The question is not what she expected. Her hands gripping the book tighter.

AGNES

I think about him all the time.

WILL

I find that I am constantly wondering where he is. Where he has gone. Whatever I am doing, wherever I am, I am thinking: Where is he, where is he? He can't have just vanished. He must be somewhere. All I have to do is find him. I look for him everywhere, in every street, in every crowd, in every audience. I may run mad with it. Even now, a year on.

AGNES

A year is nothing. It is an hour or a day. We may never stop looking for him.

He reaches across and takes her wrist. She tries to pull away but he holds her fast.

WILL

I am sorry, Agnes.

She pulls to get away but he won't let her go.

WILL (CONT'D)

Did you hear me? I am sorry.

AGNES

For what?

WILL

For everything.

AGNES

You are caught by that place.

WILL

What place? London?

AGNES

That place in your head. You have gone to it and it is now more real to you than anywhere else. Not even the death of your child can keep you from it.

WILL

Agnes, please -

AGNES

Hamnet died. He had a horrible death. He suffered so. By the end, his body was wracked with pain, with agony. The poison coursing through him -

WILL

Please, enough -

AGNES

You could have been here with him. You could've bid him farewell.

Her words stab at his heart. But he still holds onto her hand, not wanting to let go.

She turns her fingers and grasps his muscle, like when they first met. He is too broken to try and hide.

WILL

What do you see?

AGNES

Nothing.

WILL

...Nothing?

AGNES

Nothing at all.

He gives a faint smile. The last bit of hope drains out of him. Her heart is shut now. She no longer sees him.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Go back to London. You don't need to concern yourself with us. We get along well enough without you.

He nods, giving up.

WILL

As you wish. Please, send word if
you wish me to return.

He slows down at the door, but forces himself to walk away,
leaving her alone sitting on the edge of their wedding bed.

FADE TO:

- 101 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - ATTIC - NIGHT A MONTH LATER 101
The attic is empty now. No wedding bed. No desk. No sign that
a family has ever lived here. This is the night before they
are moving to the new house.
- 102 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - PASSAGEWAY - NIGHT 102
Agnes walks quietly, slowly, down the passageway, looking
into each room, listening, feeling...
- 103 INT. HENLEY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT 103
Agnes stands at the door of the dining room where her son was
born and where he died. The stains on the wall. The
fireplace. Nothing seems to have changed.
Except he is not here. That much she knows.
- 104A EXT. LONDON - GLOBE THEATRE - TIME PASSES 104A
Shots of construction. Nature turned into materials to build
civilization. Both violent and miraculous.
- 104B I/E. LONDON - GLOBE THEATRE - DAY 104B
Will is standing alone on the stage, not yet complete,
looking at the newly painted backdrop - an ancient forest. In
the middle of the thick branches and dense canopies is a
mysterious void, a dark arch...
Will stares at the void. He's no longer afraid. He is
hardened. So hardened he no longer feels fear for the dark
depth that once haunted him...

105 EXT. NEW HOUSE - GARDEN - MORNING SIX MONTHS LATER 105

Agnes's garden is blooming. The apple trees have stretched out their limbs. The bees are skimming over the carpet of blooms. The lavender bushes are leggy in the knot garden.

Judith's cats have kittens now. The garden is filled with cats of various sizes and ages. The girl sits amongst the dynasty of cats, grooming them, communicating with them in a language of crooning and high-pitched entreaties.

The new fancy house doesn't change Agnes. She is still traipsing about the lanes and fields with a basket, her skirts wet and filthy, her cheeks flushed.

106 EXT. NEW HOUSE - WALKWAY - DAY 106

Susanna hurries through a walkway that connects the front and back of the house.

She is in charge of the house keys and wears them on a hook at her waist. Her face is tense as usual.

107 EXT. NEW HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY 107

Agnes looks up from her wild garden -

Following behind Susanna is Joan, who straightens her back after seeing Agnes.

Agnes stands to meet Joan. Susanna joins her mother, quickly plucks a leaf from her mother's messy hair.

Joan takes Agnes by the arm and plants a kiss on her cheek. Agnes resists the urge to pull away.

AGNES

What brings you to town?

JOAN

I must visit a friend who is unwell.

AGNES

What is the matter?

JOAN

A mere cold on the chest.

AGNES

I could gladly give your friend a tincture of pine and elder. I have some freshly made -

JOAN

No need. Thank you, but no. I'm very sorry about John's passing. How is your husband? It's a terrible thing to lose one's father.

AGNES

He's well, I believe.

JOAN

He writes to you often, I suppose?

AGNES

Naturally.

Susanna looks at her mother, too quickly. Joan catches it.

AGNES (CONT'D)

We heard from him a week or so ago. He is very busy. They are preparing a new comedy -

JOAN

His new play is not a comedy.

Agnes is silent. The animal inside her flexes itself.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It's a tragedy. But you knew that, I expect. Everyone in town is talking about it. My cousin, who came back from London yesterday, brought the playbill. I'm sure you have one but I carried it with me, just the same, for you.

Joan hands Agnes a curled paper.

Agnes looks down. It's a printed page with the word, right in the middle, 'HAMLET'.

Agnes's face is pale and confused, her fingers trembling.

Susanna tries to tweak it from her grasp but Agnes isn't letting go. She looks up at Joan with an animalistic rage.

Joan lifts her chin to compose herself.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I warned you about marrying him. We all did -

AGNES

Don't pretend you care for me. You're not my mother and you never were.

JOAN

Your heart was locked against me from the start, Agnes. You never would let me in. You think you know all, you think you can see inside everyone. But you cannot. No one can.

Joan turns to leave.

Agnes looks down at the playbill again. The animal inside scrapes at her innards with its needling claws.

Susanna finally takes the playbill from her mother. Upon seeing the title, she is shocked but she remains calm.

AGNES

How could he?

Agnes lifts up her face, staring at Susanna, desperate.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Why? Why would he do this? He has not written to us for months. How could he not tell us?

SUSANNA

I don't know, mama. But, do you not wonder what is in it?

AGNES

In what?

SUSANNA

The play.

108

I/E. GLOBE THEATRE - MORNING THREE DAYS LATER

108

The wind whistles through massive wooden beams. A lone tree stands on an empty stage. A HAWK sits on a post, hooded.

The void in the middle of the backdrop, waiting...

109 EXT. OUTSIDE LONDON - MORNING 109

London - a broken clutter of a city, the river winding through it, clouds pulling up threads of smoke.

110 EXT. LONDON - CHARTERHOUSE - DAY 110

The street is filled with noise and stench, humans and animals. The dead are pierced by long poles above the walls.

Agnes feels her whole body is ready to flee. Her back aches, her feet, her hands, her shoulders. But her eyes are fixed, not on the chaos around her. She needs to see her husband. She needs information.

Bartholomew follows behind, keeping watch.

111 EXT. LONDON - CHARTERHOUSE - COURTYARD - DAY 111

Agnes and Bartholomew go through the dark archway Will once did and arrive at the courtyard.

A window opens above them. A BOY (11) leans out.

BOY

Who are you looking for?

BARTHOLOMEW

William Shakespeare. We are his family from Stratford.

BOY

Go up the stairs. He lives up in the attic.

112 INT. LONDON - WILL'S ATTIC - DAY 112

The room has a low ceiling slanting inwards at all angles. There is a low bed, pushed up against the wall, a cupboard. There is no decorations, no sign of warmth.

BARTHOLOMEW

Why would the man who owns the largest house in Stratford be living here?

Under the light of the window there is a square table, with a chair tucked beneath.

There is a pen-case and inkwell. A collection of quills next to three or four table-books, bound by hand.

Agnes touches the words-filled pages, looks up.

AGNES

I thought he...I don't
understand...

She sees his nightshirt lying on the bed and goes to it. She picks it up and runs her fingers over the rough material. She is shaken, confused.

AGNES (CONT'D)

What shall I do...?

Bartholomew tries to think of something logical to say, what's going to cut this tie that brought his sister so much suffering. But somehow he can't in this austere room. He gives Agnes a hug and whispers their mother's words to her.

BARTHOLOMEW

Let your heart be as a plant. Shut
it not in the dark but turn it
always to the sun...

113 INT. GLOBE THEATRE - DRESSING ROOM - DAY 113

Will's eyes are closed. He's listening. The sound of players and the crowd outside. A crash, a curse, a burst of laughter, turning into his rhythm.

He stretches his body, puts on his costume, takes a paste of chalk and lime and spreads it over his cheeks, his nose, his beard. A ritualistic act.

114A EXT. GLOBE THEATRE - DAY 114A

The famed Globe Theatre - thirty meters in diameter - a towering round wooden temple.

A flag of Hercules with the globe is raised above the theatre with the Latin motto:

TOTUS MUNDUS AGIT HISTRIONEM (all the world is a playhouse)

Agnes stares at the imposing wooden structure as she and Bartholomew join the current of people paying their pennies.

The playbills are everywhere with her son's name.

114B I/E. GLOBE THEATRE - DAY

114B

As they come through the high doorway, they are greeted by the sight of row upon row of faces, hundreds of them, all talking and shouting in the enclosure. The pit is circular. The floor is covered in ash and clinker.

With Bartholomew's help, they slide between shoulders and bodies, A WOMAN HOLDING A CHICKEN, A MAN SELLING PIES from a tray, A WOMAN with A BABY at her breast.

Agnes looks up at the GALLERY AUDIENCE, better dressed with cleaner faces, more elaborate hair.

More and more people are pouring through the doors. On all sides, bodies and elbows and arms press in. Agnes keeps her footing and moves with the current. The crowd thickens and heaves, first one way, then the next.

Bartholomew shields Agnes from the movement. Agnes sees the WOMAN NEXT TO HER grinning with blackened teeth.

Agnes looks up at the scenery - the ancient forest as a backdrop. A lone tree on the stage. It brings her comfort.

A sudden, blaring noise makes her jump. Trumpets. The crowd surges into a ragged cheer.

114C I/E. GLOBE THEATRE - DAY [FIRST SCENE]

114C

The audiences are talking amongst themselves.

A LOUD trumpet. Everyone CHEERS, rushing towards the stage.

Agnes is being pushed. Bartholomew tries to keep people away but they are taken forward by the sea of people.

AN ACTOR walks onto the stage, holding a lantern.

The crowd HUSHES.

BERNARDO

Who's there?

FRANCISCO

Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself!

Agnes watches them, confused.

BERNARDO

Long live the king!

FRANCISCO

Bernardo?

BERNARDO

*He. If you do meet Horatio and
Marcellus, the rival of my watch,
bid them make haste.*

FRANCISCO

*I think I hear them. Stand ho!
Who's there?*

Enter Horatio and Marcellus.

HORATIO

*What? Has this thing appeared again
tonight?*

BERNARDO

I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS

*Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy
and will not let belief take hold
of him touching this dreaded sight
twice seen of us.*

AGNES

(turns to Bartholomew)

*What are they saying? What has any
of this to do with my boy?*

BARTHOLOMEW

*I don't know. They seem frightened.
They watch for...a ghost...*

HORATIO

Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

BERNARDO

*Sit down awhile. And let us once
again assail your ears that are so
fortified against our story.*

HORATIO

Well, sit we down, and let us hear.

BERNARDO

*Last night of all, when yond same
star that's westward from the pole,
Marcellus and myself, the bell then
beating one-*

MARCELLUS

*Peace; break thee off! Look where
it comes again!*

BERNARDO

*In the same figure, like the King
that's dead!*

A GHOST appears from the void, covered in a white sheet and cracked earth as if he has just been dug up.

A collective gasp passes over the audience.

Agnes ignores the frightened people on and off stage. She keeps her eye on the Ghost.

AGNES

There you are.

The Ghost looks around the faces before him before exiting.

BERNARDO

See, it stalks away.

HORATIO

*Stay! Speak, speak! I charge thee,
speak!*

AGNES

(to Bartholomew)

It was him.

BARTHOLOMEW

Who?

AGNES

The ghost is Will. I know that hand, those eyes anywhere. He has hidden himself in the shape of a ghost. It was him...

BERNARDO

*Horatio, you tremble and look pale.
Is not this something more than
fantasy?*

HORATIO

*Before my God, I might not this
believe without the sensible and
true avouch of my mine own eyes.*

MARCELLUS

Is it not like the King?

HORATIO

*As thou art to thyself. Such was
the very armor he had on when he
smote the sledded Polacks on the
ice. This bodes some strange
eruption to our state.*

MARCELLUS

*Tell me why this same strict watch
so nightly toils the subject of the
land. What might be toward that
this doth make the night joint-
labourer with the day?*

HORATIO

*Our last king, whose image but even
now appeared to us, was dar'd to
combat. Our valiant Hamlet - for so
this side of our known world
esteem'd him -*

AGNES

Did you hear that?

BARTHOLOMEW

Yes.

AGNES

They said his name. Why did they
say his name?

Agnes pushes through the crowd towards the actor who spoke
her son's name. People protesting as she cuts through them.

Where is he? Where is my son? Who says his name in this open
black hole?

HORATIO

*-did slay his enemy, who did
forfeit with his life, all those
his lands which he stood seiz'd of,
to the conqueror.*

BERNARDO

*This portentous figure comes armed
through our watch; so like the King
that was.*

HORATIO

*A mote it is to trouble the mind's
eye.*

(MORE)

HORATIO (CONT'D)

*And even the like precurse of
fear'd events as harbingers
preceding still the fates and
prologue to the omen coming on,
have heaven and earth together
demonstrated unto us.*

Agnes pushes her way to the front of the stage. Her eyes searching the faces of the Players for an answer.

BERNARDO

*It was about to speak, when the
cock crew.*

MARCELLUS

*Some say that wherein our saviour's
birth is celebrated, no spirit dare
stir abroad, no planets strike, no
fairy takes, nor witch hath power
to charm.*

AGNES

(frustrated)

You, you are nothing to him, this
is nothing. Don't you dare
pronounce his name...

BARTHOLOMEW

Don't upset yourself.

HORATIO

*Break we our watch up; and, by my
advice, let us impart what we have
seen tonight to the young prince.
For, upon my life, this spirit,
dumb to us, will speak to him.*

The players exit.

The sound of a single flute and a drum...

114D I/E. GLOBE THEATRE - DAY [GHOST SCENE]

114D

Two masked musicians are playing flute and hand drum - the same ones from the puppet show.

Agnes and Bartholomew watch from the edge of the stage.

CLAUDIUS is speaking. THE FOOL carries a HAWK, moving around the stage, as if making fun of Claudius.

Staring at the Fool and its hawk, the nausea and dread grow inside Agnes.

CLAUDIUS

Though yet of our dear brother's death the memory be green, and that it us befitted to bear our hearts in grief; yet so far hath discretion fought with nature that we with wisest sorrow think on him, together with remembrance of ourselves. Therefore our sometimes sister, now our queen, have we, with an auspicious and a dropping eye, taken to wife. Take thy fair hour, Laertes. Time be thine, and thy best graces spend it at thy will!

AGNES

I see he's making a fool of us all.
I will not be a part of this jest anymore.

Agnes turns to leave.

CLAUDIUS (O.S.)

But now, Hamlet, and my son...

BARTHOLOMEW

Agnes, wait, look -

Agnes turns back and sees -

A YOUNG MAN walks onto the stage, dressed similar to Hamnet. His hair painted blonde like Hamnet's.

CLAUDIUS

How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

GERTRUDE

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off. Do not forever with thy veiled lids seek for thy noble father in the dust. All that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity.

Agnes's breath is emptying from her chest, her blood curdling in her veins. Something about this young man feels as if she is looking at her son had he lived and grown.

AGNES

My boy...

HAMLET

Aye, madam, it is common. But I have that within which passes show. These are but the trappings and the suits of woe.

CLAUDIUS

To persevere in obstinate condolment is a course of impious stubbornness; 'tis unmanly grief; it shows a will most incorrect to heaven.

Everyone leaves the stage except Hamlet. He is alone.

The musicians stop playing, silence falls.

HAMLET

...O God! O God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world! Fie on't. Ah, fie! 'tis an unweeded garden that grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature possess it merely. That it should come to this! But two months dead. Nay, not so much. Not two.

His distress is unbearable. Agnes wants to lay her hands on that boy to comfort him.

Then, the Ghost enters from the void again.

Agnes watches her husband and the young man he has chosen to play their son.

GHOST

I am thy father's spirit, doom'd for a certain term to walk the night, and for the day confined to fast in fires.

HAMLET

Whither wilt thou lead me? Speak, I'll go no further.

GHOST

Mark me.

HAMLET

I will.

GHOST

*My hour is almost come, when I to
sulph'rous and tormenting flames
must render up myself.*

HAMLET

Alas, poor ghost.

GHOST

*Pity me not, but lend thy serious
hearing to what I shall unfold.
List, List, oh list! If thou didst
ever thy dear father love -*

HAMLET

Oh God.

GHOST

*But soft! methinks I scent the
morning air. Brief I must be. Upon
my secure hour, as I was sleeping,
the juice of cursed hebona in the
porches of my ears was poured. The
leperous distilment, whose effect
holds such an enmity with blood of
man, that swift as quicksilver it
courses through the natural gates
and alleys of the body. And with a
sudden vigour it doth posset and
curd, like eager droppings into
milk, the thin and wholesome blood.
So did it mine.*

GHOST (CONT'D)

*A most instant tetter bark'd about,
most lazar-like, with vile and
loathsome crust, all my smooth
body.*

GHOST (CONT'D)

*O, horrible! O, horrible! Most
horrible. If thou hast nature in
thee, bear it not...*

AGNES

(to Bartholomew)

*Do you see it? He has made our
son's death his own.*

Agnes looks back at her brother who is moved by the scene.

The audience has turned into a silent, awed congregation. They know this pain - they all recognize the dreaded death-throes of the plague.

Agnes is gripping the wooden lip of the stage. Ahead of her is Hamlet, her son, had he lived and the Ghost, her husband, speaking in his voice. She wills her husband to look back at her, like on the day they were married.

GHOST

Fare thee well at once.

AGNES

(whispers)

Look at me. Look at me.

And the Ghost does exactly that, as if he had heard her soft call. He turns towards her and looks straight at her.

He is shocked to see his wife in the audience. His expression melds from disbelief to happy to grief and fear.

The long pause draws a tense silence from the audience. Then, he comes to himself and is the Ghost again.

GHOST

*The glowworm shows the matin to be
near, and 'gins to pale his
unaffected fire.*

He takes Hamlet's face into his hands and bids his son farewell - a chance he never had in life.

GHOST (CONT'D)

Adieu...adieu...adieu...

As the Ghost finally lets Hamlet go and exits, he looks to his son once more.

GHOST (CONT'D)

Remember me.

And with that, he is gone.

Agnes lets out a long held breath...

The Fool sends the hawk into the air.

Agnes looks up as everyone in the audience looks up, as the hawk flies up into the sky.

We have seen this sight before - the hawk flying in the circular sky of the globe - through Hamnet's eyes as he wandered the stage in the last moments of his life.

Time has collapsed into itself in this moment inside this temple his father built.

114E I/E. GLOBE THEATRE - DAY [BREAK DOWN SCENE] 114E

The Ghost hurries into the side wing. He is Will again and suddenly, the hard shell he grew around himself cracks and shatters to pieces.

He tries to take his make up off as usual, performing the rituals. But gradually, he begins to lose control. All the pain of grief, loss, regret and love floods through his veins. He is in pain, excruciating pain. His heart twisted into a knot. He breaks down, sobbing in the dark tunnel between front-stage and backstage, between fantasy and reality.

Music...

114F I/E. GLOBE THEATRE - DAY [TO BE OR NOT TO BE] 114F

Music...The stage play continues but we don't hear the words. We are now inside the void of the backdrop, floating out of its depth onto the stage. We visit the lone tree and linger on its greenness. We look up -

The hawk circles the playhouse, framed by the half circle of the globe - a dark moon. We realize this was Hamnet's view when he looked up from the stage. We realize we are him - the boy who has waited here for his parents to find him.

We find our way through the players towards the audience, towards Agnes standing on the edge. We watch her tear-stained face, the grey in her hair, the grief in her skin. Our sweet mother - when have you become so sad? She seems to feel us. She looks over right at us, as if she can pierce through this reality to the next. We try to touch her but we can't.

We leave her hesitantly, through the players and find Will in the wing. He is leaning against the wall of ropes. His makeup messy, washed off by his tears. He is open, raw. Our strong father - when have you lost your way? He seems to feel our presence and reaches out his white clay hand towards us...

HAMLET

To be, or not to be. That is the question.

In the side wing, Will listens - a question he asked himself at the edge of the water on a moonless night. A question that would be asked around the world for generations to come. A question that isn't meant to be answered.

HAMLET (CONT'D)

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them? To die, to sleep - no more; and by a sleep to say we end the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep; to sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub; for in that sleep of death what dreams may come, when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause. There's the respect that makes calamity of so long life.

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, The pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay, The insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit of th'unworthy takes, when he himself might his quietus make With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear, To grunt and sweat under a weary life, But that the dread of something after death, the undiscovere'd country from whose bourn no traveller returns - puzzles the will.

OPTION TO PLAY:

HAMLET (CONT'D)

(And makes us rather bear those ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of? Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all, And thus the native hue of resolution Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, And enterprises of great pith and moment With this regard their currents turn awry And lose the name of action.)

Agnes watches the young man, moved by his gentle curiosity about life, his bravery to face the void, to contemplate death, to be curious about humanity's deepest fear with a sweet innocence, a pure heart and an eternal hopefulness.

FADE TO:

114G I/E. GLOBE THEATRE - DAY [OPHELIA SCENE]

114G

OPHELIA is grieving under a rowan tree with a basket of herbs and flowers. Humming the tune of 'Robin to the Greenwood Gone'.

Agnes looks upon Ophelia - a mirror of herself in her own wild grief.

Will watches from the curtains at his wife.

GERTRUDE

Alas, look here, my lord.

CLAUDIUS

Pretty Ophelia. How long has she been thus?

OPHELIA

I hope all will be well. I cannot choose but weep to think they would lay him in the cold ground.

LAERTES arrives, distraught by his sister's madness.

OPHELIA (CONT'D)

'They bore him bare-fac'd on the bier, and in his grave rain'd many a tear-'

(speaks to Laertes)

Fare you well, my dove -

She picks up the basket of herbs.

OPHELIA (CONT'D)

(to Laertes)

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance - pray you, brother, remember.

Agnes looks back at Bartholomew. They both recognize themselves in these characters.

OPHELIA (CONT'D)

(to the Fool)

And there is pansies - that's for thoughts.

(to Gertrude)

There's fennel for you, and columbines.

(to Claudius)

There's rue for you, and here's some for me. O, you must wear your rue with a difference.

She looks back to Gertrude -

OPHELIA (CONT'D)

'And will he not come again?'

Gertrude shakes her head. Ophelia looks to her brother -

OPHELIA (CONT'D)

'And will he not come again?'

Her brother shakes his head, slowly.

OPHELIA (CONT'D)

'No, no, he is dead,

Go to thy death-bed.

(to the void)

He will never come again...'

Agnes looks to the audience. The collective grief is both overwhelming and purging for her.

FADE TO:

114H I/E. GLOBE THEATRE - DAY [FINAL SCENE]

114H

Hamlet and Laertes fence - fast and dangerous, with clashing swords, a fierce fight.

The crowd reacts.

Agnes watches with a smile and tears in her eyes, remembering her boy's dream to play a swordsman for his father.

Hamlet gains a hit on Laertes.

HAMLET

One!

LAERTES

No!

THE FOOL

A hit, a very palpable hit.

They fight again, with renewed vigor. Hamlet gains another hit on Laertes.

GERTRUDE

Our son shall win!

Gertrude takes the poisoned cup from the table and drinks.

CLAUDIUS

Gertrude, do not drink!

Too late - she drinks. Laertes wounds Hamlet with the poisoned sword.

Agnes flinches. The audience are calling out, swept along, desperate for a happy ending.

In the scuffle, Hamlet and Laertes swap rapiers. Hamlet wounds Laertes, unknowingly with the poisoned rapier.

Gertrude collapses, shaking, on the ground, poisoned.

HAMLET

How does the Queen?

CLAUDIUS

She swoons to see them bleed.

GERTRUDE

No, no, the drink the drink! O my dear Hamlet! I am poison'd...

HAMLET

O villainy! Ho! Let the door be lock'd. Treachery! Seek it out.

LAERTES

It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain. No med'cine in the world can do thee good; In thee there is not half an hour's life...The King - the King's to blame.

Hamlet stabs the king with the poisoned rapier, forcing the poisoned drink into his mouth until he dies.

The murder, revenge, insanity, suicide, depression and grief on the stage is like a storm blowing over the audiences.

Hamlet is in agony now, from his wound and from the poison.

HAMLET

*I am dead. Thou livest; report me
and my cause aright to the
unsatisfied. If thou didst ever
hold me in thy heart, absent thee
from felicity awhile, and in this
harsh world draw thy breath in
pain, to tell my story...O, I die.
The potent poison quite o'er-crows
my spirit...The rest is silence.*

He lowers himself down, pressing his cheek to the stage, in front of Agnes, and dies.

Agnes looks around. The dirty, scarred faces of the audience. Most are crying, silent tears coursing down their faces, their hands clasped. These strangers, pictures of grief and of shock, have lived through something together.

Agnes looks to the wing and finds her husband standing there watching her. They are far away but this is the first time in a long while they have not looked away from each other.

Will is devastated and grateful. He is suddenly a boy again - a boy who feels everything.

Agnes turns back to the young man in front of her - their lifeless child.

Come back. She whispers to him. Come back, even as a shadow, even as a dream. There you are in front of me. You are as you were, and ever shall be...the soldier you dreamt of, in the playhouse with your father...

She reaches out to him, from the realm of ready to the realm of fantasy. Their hands almost touching...

AGNES

Hamnet...Hamnet...

We suddenly find ourselves on the stage with Hamnet in the last moments before he died, as he wandered at the edge of this life towards the black gate that would lead him to the next. He looks back again, we wondered what he saw then, and we know now - he is looking back at his mother. Her calling of him has kept him at the edge of the gate, waiting, waiting for his father to build this temple and for her mother to find him.

Agnes feels her son's gaze and looks up.

There is her boy. He has been waiting for her. He has been waiting for her so she can let him go.

Hamnet smiles at his mother, turns and walks into the void.

Agnes watches him go. The darkness welcomes him, like a gentle embrace. Tears fall silently down her face, tears of heartbreak, of surrender and of acceptance.

The void, ever present, looks back at her, at us...

FADE OUT.

115

EXT. FOREST - TIMELESS

115

The forest is alive again in the spring. Nature always finds its way back to life after a long sleep.

The red egg. A crack on its hard shell. A sign of rebirth.

FADE TO BLACK.