

JOHN

Dear? Are you decent?

CECILIA

Hm? Yes, of course.

*JOHN opens the door, and enters with a new small stack of books. He sighs contentedly, and approaches her.*

JOHN

There she is, the sweetest creature by daylight.

CECILIA

Hello, dear.

*JOHN approaches and kisses her on the forehead, and sets down the books on the sill.*

CECILIA (cont.)

Are those for me?

JOHN

They are indeed. You are a bright woman and deserve bright things.

*She picks up a title and looks it over, holds it up in the light.*

CECILIA

It's - a nature book.

JOHN

It is indeed. I have admired your wonder for the nature of the estate since we first arrived. I think it's marvelous how grounded you're becoming already.

CECILIA

Are there no works of fiction?

JOHN

Fiction?

CECILIA

The--

*Pauses.*

Fancies.

JOHN

Ah. I see. Darling, you are doing so well without them. It is the absolute best for you to wean yourself away.

CECILIA

But I like them. How is that fair? I like to read them, John. Have you ever read a Dickens penny novel? An Edgar Allan Poe? There's this *marvelous* English playwright no one talk about, John, her name's Suzanne Centlivre-- imagine that. Women - writing for the stage --

*JOHN stamps his foot down on the floor. It stops her right in her place. The NARRATOR looks back over at her, and scratches their nails at the book. They shift in their chair, uneasy.*

JOHN

*Cecilia.* Do you hear yourself? You are a grown woman of much sensibility, nervous depression or not. Do you *hear yourself*?

CECILIA

I do.

JOHN

Have you no shame?

CECILIA

Have *you*? Are your precious patients doing so well? Do you bring them books about flowers and offer them fresh air for medicine? Really, what *do* you do while I am away, Doctor?

JOHN

-- would you *like* me to get angry?

CECILIA

I *might*.

*Recoils.*

-- no, *no*.

JOHN

Ah - thank you for reminding me. This is why we're here.  
Your mind is growing frail once more, and I worry about you so dearly.

CECILIA

I am not -- just - look at the walls, John. Look at the walls for me. For a moment of your precious time.

JOHN

The walls? What on Earth about the walls?

CECILIA

The wallpaper.

*She turns him by the shoulders, and points over his shoulder.*

It tells stories.

JOHN

It is just a bit old. I hardly found it to be so pressing to renovate the house if we're only here for the summer.

CECILIA

No, but look *closer*. Do you not feel watched? Do you not feel scorn for what you see? Its hue, its smell, its --

*She turns him yet again. His steps are stiff, but he goes regardless.*

Look at the eyes, John. Look at the way her neck bends. Like a withering willow does it bend over me. It gave me such a fright.

*JOHN wrings out of her grasp and turns back around, and lays a gentle hand on her face. She flinches.*

JOHN

You are the only tale to tell here. And you. Must. *Rest.*

NARRATOR

~~The roses that grow up their walls are covered with thorns. The stories to be told are not the brightest ones to shine. This is her garden box to be locked away in. Look at the way he holds her. It is a precious, precarious thing. Something that daylight will show its cracks, and moonlight will not know how to heal.~~

*The lights begin to slowly*