

SCRATCH AUDITION

SCENE 1

3

2.

*A bar. Scratch and Cuddy Banks.
Back in the flow of time.*

CUDDY

The devil?

SCRATCH

Your soul, blood-pact, endless riches.

CUDDY

Endless?

SCRATCH

Power: reckless, abusable. Fame!

CUDDY

Fame?

SCRATCH

Have to pick, can't have it all, but sure, fame.

CUDDY

Huh.

(pause)

I don't know why you're coming to me. I've never even gotten in trouble with the law.

SCRATCH

But you want to.

CUDDY

But I haven't.

SCRATCH
(shrugs, easy)

I'm just as interested in what you *want* as what you *do*.

CUDDY

You been to my father's place?

SCRATCH

Nah.

CUDDY

Sir Arthur, he owns the castle.

Nope. SCRATCH

He's super important, everybody knows him. CUDDY

No. SCRATCH

My dad is a real son-of-a-bitch, you haven't been to his place? CUDDY

He lacks imagination. SCRATCH

...Oh. CUDDY
(a little flattered)

You, on the other hand, have potential. SCRATCH

Cuddy gets a little excited by this.

I perform in a Morris troupe, actually, if you want to know. Me and my friends do Morris-dancing, maybe you've heard of us, maybe you've seen us, maybe— CUDDY

I didn't mean the dancing. SCRATCH

...Oh. CUDDY

Although it's good to have hobbies. SCRATCH

It's not a hobby, I keep —
my dad says that all the time too, I'm like
Dad
this is not a *hobby*
this is *my life*. CUDDY
[having to explain that]

SCRATCH

—Of course.

CUDDY

The Morris dance is very intricate
very raw and intricate.
It's like... seriously underrated.

SCRATCH

I stand corrected.

Pause.

CUDDY

Who else have you been to?

SCRATCH

In my lifetime? In the world?

CUDDY

In Edmonton.

(this is loaded:)

Frank Thorney?

SCRATCH

Who?

CUDDY

(in love and equally in hate)

Everybody is all, "Ooh Frank Thorney."
My dad is like, obsessed with Frank Thorney.
He found him working in a field and like, took him to our castle
and for the past five years he's always like
"You should go hiking, Frank loves the outdoors"
"You should eat more meat, Frank eats meat"
"You should go on more dates, girls love Frank"
and it's like, uhh, hello, I'm your *son*
what's the BFD with Frank??

(beat)

So...in the whole town, just me?

SCRATCH

You're one of the few.

CUDDY

(he's never been special before)

Oh...

Who are the others?
(then – jealous)

Does it matter?
 SCRATCH

The old witch Sawyer?
 I bet it's Sawyer.
 CUDDY

Why do you say that?
 SCRATCH

Everyone says she makes the crops wither
 Everyone says she makes the cows dry up
 Everyone says she dances with the devil in the pale moonlight.
 And that's you, right? So...
 CUDDY

*Scratch sees Cuddy's insecurity and
 prepares for the kill.*

I can't confirm or deny that right now, Cuddy.
 SCRATCH

Do you guys hang out all the time?
 Do you, like, fly around on her broomstick together?
 Just nod your head.
 If it's Yes just look to the right.
 Or if it's Yes, cough twice.
 Or if it's Yes—
 CUDDY

The real question at hand is: what do *you* want?
 SCRATCH

...Me?
 CUDDY

Some men want wealth. Some men want land.
 And some men... many men... want love.
 SCRATCH

*Cuddy hastens to dispatch this train of
 thought.*

SCRATCH AUDITION

SCENE 2

14

4.

*Elizabeth's country cottage. Shabby, poor.
Scratch has just arrived.*

ELIZABETH

The devil?

SCRATCH

Blah blah blah your soul etc.

ELIZABETH

My soul?

SCRATCH

Ripe for the picking.

ELIZABETH

Why *mine*?

SCRATCH

Everybody says you're a witch.
You're not, of course. But! would you like to be?

ELIZABETH

I was warned about you.

SCRATCH

Everybody is warned about me, it doesn't seem to make much of a difference.
Mind if I sit down?

ELIZABETH

As a matter of fact, Yes.

SCRATCH

(coaxing)

Offer me a drink. Common courtesy! Can't hurt, can it?

ELIZABETH

Nobody sits in my cabin but me.

*A moment. Scratch elaborately leans but
doesn't sit.*

SCRATCH

How would you like me to fuck up some people for you.

How would you like...revenge.

ELIZABETH

You want me to sell you my soul.

Men make it sound like they're doing you a favor when what they really want is a favor done for them.

SCRATCH

Astute! That's very astute, and I hear you.

But I would say - think of it as more an exchange between friends.

Think of it kind of like a pot-luck.

ELIZABETH

(despite herself)

...A "pot-luck"?

SCRATCH

A pot-luck is what happens in the future, when people don't worry about food.

And instead of everybody just eating their own food as fast as they can find it, people get together, usually outside, usually somewhere uncomfortable and on a patio and with too many bugs, and everybody pretends not to notice how many bugs there are, they talk about the sunset, and they eat each other's food. Slowly. Over a great deal of time. And everybody wants to go home long before they actually do.

ELIZABETH

Oh.

SCRATCH

Something to look forward to!

You could practice, with me.

I bring power and reckless lack of consequence. You bring your soul.

A beat.

ELIZABETH

If I "pot-luck" my soul...

SCRATCH

Yes?

ELIZABETH

—And that's a big *if*—

SCRATCH

—pure hypotheticals, I understand—

ELIZABETH

What do I get?

SCRATCH

Oh! Well that's an easy one. That's where it gets easy.

ELIZABETH

Okay...

SCRATCH

You tell me. The villagers who are cruel to you? Make a list. Their cows get pox. The girls who giggle behind their hands? Warts on the hands. I mean, it all sort of depends on you, at that point.

ELIZABETH

And what would you do with it? My soul?

SCRATCH

What have *you* done with it so far?

ELIZABETH

Nothing much, I guess.

SCRATCH

Then you won't miss it.

ELIZABETH

Nobody wakes up in the middle of the night? Nobody gets an earache or a toothache or a weird uncanny ache-ache that won't seem to go away?

SCRATCH

Nobody's reported those kinds of symptoms.

ELIZABETH

Oh.

SCRATCH

So, what do you think?

ELIZABETH

Can I change my mind? If I say Yes, can I change it back?

SCRATCH

Oh! no. No no. No take-backs.

ELIZABETH

And what if I say No?

SCRATCH

You know, people ask me this sometimes. And my sort of standard – the answer I like to give – I mean, I can get dramatic, I can be like: *I tear you apart, I rip you limb from – you know? – I burn your entire –* like, I can do that, but honestly, the answer I like to give is: I leave. I just leave. And your entire life continues on, exactly as it was, zero change, as if I were never here. And one day, maybe next week or maybe ten years from now...or maybe on your death-bed... One day you ask yourself why is it that you have been so relentlessly miserable, why is it that you never ever, not even once, had the chance to make yourself less unhappy. And then at that moment, whenever it comes, you think of this. You think of this conversation. And you think: *Oh. I did have the chance. I did have it. I just said No.*

A long beat. And then:

ELIZABETH

No thank you.

SCRATCH AUDITION

SCENE 3

46

Well, you're doing pretty well so far.

They drink.

ELIZABETH

You look very young.

SCRATCH

I know.

ELIZABETH

Did you choose that guise for some practical purpose? Or do you just like to look young?

SCRATCH

Do you want the real answer, or the politic answer?

ELIZABETH

Do you think you're in the hut of a politic person?

Scratch acknowledges the humor.

SCRATCH

(a little self-conscious)

Well, there is something about young men. A certain... luminosity, if you know what I mean. A young man is a creature with a whole future ahead of him, and things might be hard for him at some point, but generally he will succeed, and the hard things will only be the things he had to master on his way to success. So when you look at a young man, who is making you an offer – you feel good inside, subconsciously I mean, you feel like you are participating in a story about possibility and a bright future. You feel like maybe those things could apply to you too. Do you know what I mean?

ELIZABETH

(soft)

Yes I know what you mean.

SCRATCH

Does it tarnish the picture for you, hearing the reasoning behind it?

Elizabeth looks at him closely.

ELIZABETH

No, I still feel it. A certain... aura of success. It's palpable.

SCRATCH

You know, I used to appear as a woman much more often, back in the day. First I tried being very beautiful, and then I tried being much older, kind of weathered. And then I just stopped altogether and I started being a man.

ELIZABETH

Why did you stop?

SCRATCH

(honest)

I didn't like how people looked at me.

Day to day, being looked at with a kind of...

I don't know, either way it got under my skin, I had to stop.

(A moment, in which her silence speaks. He realizes:)

I'm so sorry.

That was –

indelicate // I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH

(a little raw)

Why are you sorry? That's your whole pitch, isn't it?

All the ways that people look at me, all those sad ugly ways – I could upgrade for the price of a soul?

SCRATCH

Yes... but I wasn't making a pitch right then. We were just... having a night-cap.

ELIZABETH

(genuinely probing)

Are we? "Just"?

SCRATCH

There's a time and a place for business. I thought we were off the clock right now.

Tell me if I'm wrong?

This means something to her.

ELIZABETH

...No.

Let's keep it ...off the clock.

The air changes.

SCRATCH

Cheers to off the clock.

Cheers.

ELIZABETH

Pause.

Why haven't you ever left?

SCRATCH

Where would I go?

ELIZABETH

SCRATCH

There are so many places, I don't know how to answer that.

ELIZABETH

But you need a ticket, yes? to go anywhere.
Or a horse, or a donkey, or a donkey-cart.
And for any of those things, you need money.
And for money you need an income, and for an income you need employment
and for employment, you need employers
and for employers, the first thing you need
is not *skill*, contrary to what you would think
(skill is acquired after all)
but a *reputation*.

SCRATCH

You've thought about this.

ELIZABETH

No, I've lived it.

(beat)

I used to be a maid in the castle, when Sir Arthur's father was alive.

SCRATCH

I didn't know.

ELIZABETH

It was a long time ago. And it didn't end well.

(beat)

Sir Arthur and I were... There was a time...
Very young, very stupid, but...
I thought we'd get married and then it wouldn't matter, the whole thing of my reputation.
(beat)

We didn't, as you can see, get married.

SCRATCH

Ah.

ELIZABETH

Or rather, *he* did. Just not to me.

(beat)

It made me very unwelcome at the castle, and later in the village, understandably.
Deflowered, etc. Tarnished.
How easily we jump from tarnished to untouchable.

SCRATCH

(means it)

I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH

It's so strange to talk about myself.

SCRATCH

Am I prying?

ELIZABETH

Yes, but don't you mean to be?

SCRATCH

A little, but I'll stop if you're uncomfortable.

ELIZABETH

I'm not uncomfortable.

(A pause and then Elizabeth sort of blurts:)

You're very good-looking.

SCRATCH

(startled, a little flushed)

I change shapes, as we // discussed

ELIZABETH

discussed, yes, we did.

SCRATCH

So it's cheating. You know?

I'm not luck-of-the-draw. I just chose this one.

ELIZABETH

Some people know how to dress themselves. That's a skill-set too.
Wouldn't you say?

SCRATCH

I don't like compliments.

ELIZABETH

Just say: Thank you.

SCRATCH
(after a moment)

Thank you.

SCRATCH AUDITION

SCENE 4

93

14.

*Scratch, alone. In a narrow focused light.
Similar to the way Elizabeth was in the
beginning. His aria.*

SCRATCH

I really appreciate everything you've done for me?
but I think I just
am maybe having a little difficulty
at the moment
in this particular industry
and
I don't want this to be like, I'm *quitting*
but
maybe I just
need to take a time-out...?

(beat)

I've been thinking about, you know,
what I want to do instead and
I'm not, let's face it, the most *organized* [person]
which is why, you know, that *paperwork...* [wasn't on time]
(so sorry about that)
uh
but maybe I just wanna travel for a while.
Like, see the world, and not have to engage in any kind of
transactionary thing, but like
have some croissants and go whale-watching...
And I know things are all falling apart, the whole thing is
coming apart at the seams
which is rife with opportunity, I mean I understand what kind of
moment we're in
so maybe I'll just go on vacation for a little bit
and then if I start to feel better, maybe I can come back then
and we can talk about resuming on a part-time basis?
Or like a free-lance thing, or...?

(beat, without meaning to:)

I'm having a really hard time sleeping.
I just lie awake all night and
there's a particular color that exists
in the span of time right before the sun comes up
this particular shade of blue that's almost bruise
and I see that color every morning now.
And I try to do all these exercises, like I take deep breaths
or I do the thing where you relax your muscles in groups
your feet, then your calves, then your thighs,

like you work upward until your brain is relaxed and you fall asleep –
 but every time I get to my heart area, I start to feel like I'm having a
 sort of slow-motion panic attack
 for hours
 so I never get to the part where you fall asleep.

(*beat*)

I know you can't really answer this, because
 we just should do our jobs, and I get it, entropy is the point anyway,
 but
 I have no idea if there's anything better coming down the pike
 or if *this is it*, if this is what it is forever -
 but then also,
 if this *is* what it is
 then shouldn't we just learn to live with it?
 Be happy in small ways
 Be lucky in small ways?
 A person could love a person and
 that could be enough
 couldn't it?

(*beat – raw, from the heart*)

But
 what if there is something *amazing* ahead
 and all we have to do
 is burn down everything we know
 to get to it?

But maybe these aren't the right questions.

There is a single question that I have been asking myself
 over and over again
 all night, until everything turns that one alarming color
 and all day,
 I keep asking myself this question, and...

(*beat – raw, anguished – a question of
 sorts:*)

I find it so hard to have hope right now.
 I just find it so hard to have hope.

*Black out.
 End of play.*