The Presence of Guilt

by David Muncaster

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The Presence of Guilt

Based on The Turn of the Screw by Henry James

Characters

JULIAN (M) (Forties) The children's uncle and guardian. Wealthy, charming but with an unexplained unwillingness to be close to the children.

ALEX (F) (Late 20s/early 30s**)** A young but experienced home tutor taking on the role of Private Governess. Intelligent and empathetic.

MRS GROSE (F) (Late 50s) Long time housekeeper who has more recently become foster mother to the children.

FLORA (F) (13) Creative, observant and quite innocent but with a strong emotional intelligence.

MILES (M) (16) Bright and charismatic but manipulative when necessary. Recently expelled from school under unclear circumstances.

SAM: (F) (Similar age to Alex) Alex's friend. Voice only. If preferred, she could be on a different part of the stage.

PETER QUINT (M) (Forties) Former employee.

MISS JESSEL (F) (Forties) Former governess.

The Presence of Guilt

ACT ONE Scene One

JULIAN's apartment in London. He sits in an armchair. ALEX sits opposite him. She has brought a notebook she has not yet opened. JULIAN studies her.

JULIAN: You seem nervous.

ALEX: A little.

JULIAN: Good.

ALEX: Good?

JULIAN: People who aren't nervous in these situations don't understand the challenges that await them.

ALEX: I'm sure I will get along with the children fine.

JULIAN: You are jumping ahead. I was merely referring to the interview.

ALEX: Oh.

JULIAN: That was a joke.

ALEX: (*With a smile*.) I know.

JULIAN: According to your CV, you have never taught in a school?

ALEX: I did when I was training, but I went straight into homeschooling when I qualified.

JULIAN: Why?

ALEX: It gave me more flexibility. I was caring for my father at the time. He's dead now.

JULIAN: I'm sorry.

ALEX: I'm afraid that I don't have much interest in teaching in a school. Perhaps it is a little selfish, but I don't think I would enjoy teaching a classroom full of kids that I can never really get to know. But now that I have no ties, I thought I would find something full time.

JULIAN: It's a bit of a leap, isn't it? Going from a few extra lessons after school to being a private live-in governess.

ALEX: I wanted to try something different. The house has been sold so I can live anywhere, and, anyway, it wasn't a few extra lessons after school. I taught mainly children that, for one reason or another, couldn't go to school.

JULIAN: Such as children that had been expelled?

ALEX: Yes.

JULIAN: Are you trying to impress me?

ALEX: No, I'm just…

JULIAN: Why not? Isn't that the point of attending an interview?

ALEX: I am just explaining what experience I have.

JULIAN: Well, you do.

ALEX: What?

JULIAN: Impress me.

ALEX: That's reassuring.

He laughs.

JULIAN: So, apart from the teaching degree, you have further qualifications in child psychology and youth mentoring.

ALEX: Yes.

JULIAN: No children of your own.

ALEX: No.

JULIAN: No husband.

ALEX: No.

JULIAN: Or wife.

ALEX: No.

JULIAN: Free as a bird.

ALEX: That's one way of describing it.

JULIAN smiles.

JULIAN: My niece and nephew live in Essex in the house they were born in. Both parents are dead, making me the legal guardian. It’s a large house. Very rural. Plenty of

rooms to play in. There is a live-in housekeeper who has been with the family since before Miles, the eldest, was born. She has taken on the role of foster mother to them both. She adores them, and I'm quite sure that they adore her. Losing both parents is, of course, a terrible thing but I've done my best for them. Under the circumstances, they are a lot better off than many other children. They have everything they need that I am able to supply.

ALEX: I've looked through the information.

JULIAN: Then you know they've already had several tutors.

ALEX: Yes.

JULIAN: Why do you think they left?

ALEX: I imagine isolation.

JULIAN: Yes! Exactly that, pure boredom. (*Pause.*) Oh, and maybe teenagers.

ALEX: (*Smiling*.) Can you tell me a little about the children?

JULIAN: Miles is sixteen. Flora is thirteen. They're both bright. More resilient than most people give them credit for.

ALEX: They lost their parents.

JULIAN: Years ago.

ALEX: People don't stop losing their parents.

JULIAN regards her for a moment.

JULIAN: You might be just what they need.

ALEX: I hope so.

JULIAN: Me too.

A beat.

ALEX: Can I ask about the school?

JULIAN: Which school?

ALEX: Miles' school.

JULIAN: Of course.

ALEX: The report says he was expelled.

JULIAN: Yes.

ALEX: It doesn't specify why.

JULIAN: No.

ALEX: Do you know?

JULIAN: They wouldn't tell me.

ALEX: That seems unlikely.

JULIAN: You think I'm lying?

ALEX: I think schools usually tell guardians things.

JULIAN: Usually.

Another beat.

ALEX: And they didn't?

JULIAN: Not in terms that were useful.

ALEX: What does that mean?

JULIAN: It means they told me he was a disruptive influence. A corrosive presence. A risk to other pupils. Acting inappropriately after lights out. Whatever that means. Then they wrapped it all up in six pages of educational jargon.

ALEX: Would you like me to look at it?

JULIAN: No.

ALEX: I could translate.

JULIAN: I don’t need translation; I understand it perfectly well. They have gone to great lengths not to say anything.

ALEX: They didn’t tell you anything specific.

JULIAN: No.

ALEX: What about Flora?

JULIAN: She couldn’t get herself expelled from anywhere if she tried.

ALEX: She’s never been to boarding school.

JULIAN: Always homeschooled.

ALEX: Is there any particular reason?

JULIAN: No.

ALEX studies him. It's impossible to tell whether he's lying.

JULIAN: Before we go any further, I want to make something perfectly clear. This is important. They will be your responsibility. I don't want progress reports. I don't want weekly updates. I don't want emotional check-ins. I don't want administrative emails. You will deal with things. If something breaks, you fix it. If there's a problem, you solve it. If they're unhappy, you make them happy. Understood?

ALEX: And if I need help?

JULIAN: You won't.

ALEX: That's optimistic.

JULIAN: It's a condition of employment.

A beat.

ALEX: Why?

JULIAN: That’s not important.

ALEX: It is to me.

JULIAN: That’s not my concern.

ALEX: It’s important to the children.

JULIAN: All right. I'll tell you. I want you to know that I am telling you this because I think you will be good for the children and don't want you to be distracted by something that is of no real consequence.

ALEX: Go on.

JULIAN: It is because every time I've tried to get involved in anything I've made things worse.

ALEX: That's an honest answer.

JULIAN: No. It's the truth. Honesty doesn't come into it. I am their legal guardian, and it comes as a surprise to most people that they don't live with me, but believe me, they are better off where they are.

ALEX: You never considered adoption.

JULIAN: I don't think that is any of your business.

They look at each other.

ALEX: When do I start?

JULIAN: You are assuming I'm going to offer you the job.

ALEX: I think that if you weren't you would have thrown me out by now.

A beat.

JULIAN: Tomorrow.

Blackout.

ACT ONE Scene Two

Bly House. An old country estate. Classic. Expensive. Silent. MRS GROSE waits. ALEX enters carrying luggage.

MRS GROSE: You found us.

ALEX: Eventually. The sat-nav tried to convince me I was a tractor.

MRS GROSE: That happens a lot around here. I'm Mrs Grose.

ALEX: Alex.

MRS GROSE: Tea?

ALEX: Please.

MRS GROSE: Good. You're human. The last one asked for kale juice. She didn't last a week.

Alex laughs.

MRS GROSE: Come into the kitchen. You don't have much luggage.

ALEX: That's just my overnight bag. The rest is in the car.

MRS GROSE: You want to check us out first, eh?

ALEX: No, I…

MRS GROSE: I'm joking, dear. Sit down; I'll get the tea.

ALEX: Thank you.

MRS GROSE: (*As she is preparing the tea.*) Did Mr Harper explain the arrangements?

ALEX: To a degree.

MRS GROSE: In other words, not at all.

ALEX: He said that the children adore you.

MRS GROSE: That was kind. I like to think they tolerate me, at least.

ALEX: Oh, well…

MRS GROSE: Sorry, you will get used to my sense of humour. I suppose I have become a kind of surrogate mother to them, although I never had children myself. Flora has always had a live-in tutor, but now Miles is here too, we need someone a bit more… well, a bit less flaky than the last one. (*She puts down a tray with a teapot, cups, a milk jug and a sugar bowl*.) Give it a moment.

ALEX: Did she really only last a week?

MRS GROSE: Oh, yes. But she was really quite unsuitable. I don't know what Julian was thinking of.

ALEX: Before her?

MRS GROSE: Well, as I am sure you know, we've had a few tutors, some better than others, but it's quite a lonely life out here. Not for everyone. And of course it is a rather unusual situation that neither of their parents are here to lay down the law when it is needed. I can't really blame anyone

for deciding it is not for them. Do you have anyone missing you while you are here?

ALEX: Not really. I've no living relatives that I know of and no close friends either. Apart from Sam.

MRS GROSE: Sam?

ALEX: A friend from uni.

MRS GROSE: You are not planning to go running off to him at weekends, I hope. This isn't a job with normal hours.

ALEX: Her. And no. She is living in Japan now. Teaching Japanese kids to speak English.

FLORA: (*Offstage.*) Is this the latest one?

MRS GROSE: Flora, don't be rude. Come in and say hello to Miss Douglas.

FLORA enters. She carries a sketchbook under one arm. She studies ALEX with unsettling concentration.

ALEX: Please call me Alex.

FLORA: Hello Alex. You're younger than the photograph.

ALEX: What photograph?

FLORA: The one on the CV.

MRS GROSE: How did you get hold of that?

ALEX: It doesn't matter. How old did it make me look?

FLORA: Thirty-seven.

ALEX: Oh dear.

FLORA: You only look about thirty-four in real life.

MRS GROSE suppresses a smile.

ALEX: Well, that's something, I suppose. Thank you.

FLORA: You're welcome. Are you staying?

ALEX: That's the plan.

FLORA: They all say that.

MILES enters with headphones around his neck.

MILES: Is this the latest victim?

MRS GROSE: Miles!

MILES: What? I'm welcoming her. (*To ALEX.)* Take my advice. Run. Now. Before the doors automatically lock and you are trapped in here forever.

ALEX: (*In mock horror*.) The doors automatically lock!

MILES: No. I just wanted to see if you'd check.

ALEX: Oh, try to trick me, would you?

MILES: I don't think it would take much effort.

ALEX: (*Going along with it*.) You think I'm a pushover?

MILES: I expect you probably are.

ALEX: Because I am so young?

MILES: I don't know about that?

ALEX: So innocent?

MILES: (*Losing confidence*.) Maybe.

ALEX: I can see that my life here is going to be a living hell.

MILES: I was…

ALEX: What am I to do? I can't go back to my village, not after what happened. I can't go abroad because I am wanted by Interpol. I shall just have to stay here and take whatever happens.

ALEX puts her hand to her forehead in a "woe is me" style. MILES grins.

MILES: I quite like this one.

Blackout.

ACT ONE Scene Three

Later that evening. The four of them have just finished dinner. FLORA is drawing on her sketch pad.

ALEX: Do we always eat in here?

MRS GROSE: We don't use the dining room anymore.

MILES: That's shorthand for "yes".

MRS GROSE: What I was about to say is that it is up to you whether you want to eat your evening meal with us. Some have; others have preferred to eat on their own.

ALEX: I think it is nice to all eat together.

FLORA: We used to have a cook.

MRS GROSE: We still do. Me.

FLORA: You don't shout at us.

MILES: Or cry.

ALEX: You had a cook that cried?

MILES: Three of them.

ALEX: Three?

MILES: As a rough estimate.

MRS GROSE: There was only one.

MILES: It felt like three.

A beat.

ALEX: So, what do you do all day? Apart from lessons, I mean.

FLORA: I draw, mostly.

MILES: I fail to fulfil my potential.

ALEX: From what I understand you've had plenty of practice.

MILES: Years.

ALEX: What exactly happened at school?

MILES: Wow! Straight in. You've not even been here twenty-four hours. The last one was here a week without asking me.

ALEX: Well, I'm not "the last one."

MILES: Didn't Uncle Julian tell you?

ALEX: Not much.

MILES: Then I'll tell you the exact same amount.

ALEX: You were expelled.

MILES: Apparently.

ALEX: Apparently?

MILES: I wasn't consulted on the matter.

MRS GROSE: Miles.

MILES: What? It's true. What have you imagined?

ALEX: I haven't imagined anything.

MILES: Everyone does. Violence? Drugs? Cybercrime? Murder?

ALEX: Murder seems ambitious.

MILES: Thank you.

ALEX: For sixteen.

MILES: Now you're just being ageist.

Alex laughs despite herself. MILES notices. A small victory.

ALEX: Your uncle said something about inappropriate behaviour.

MILES: One man’s meat is another man’s inappropriate behaviour.

ALEX: What does that mean?

MILES: Different strokes for different folks.

MRS GROSE: Miles.

ALEX: Are you trying to tell us something?

MILES: Or each to their own. I suppose that idiom is better suited to a boy’s school.

ALEX: Flora, why don’t you go into the other room with Mrs Grose.

FLORA: No.

MRS GROSE: (*Warning*.) No.

MILES: No.

An awkward pause. All eyes are on ALEX. She decides now is not the time. She notices FLORA's sketchpad.

ALEX: Can I see?

FLORA: No.

ALEX: Because it's unfinished?

FLORA: Because it's mine.

MRS GROSE: Don't be silly, Flora. Show Miss Douglas your picture.

ALEX: It's Alex, please. (*Turning her head and squinting.*) Oh, it is a drawing of us, sitting here at the table. It's very good, Flora. You are very talented. But, who's that? Stood in the corner.

FLORA violently rips the page out of the sketchpad and crumples it up into a ball.

MRS GROSE: Flora!

FLORA: I TOLD YOU NOT TO LOOK!

FLORA quickly exits the room.

Blackout.

ACT One Scene Four

ALEXS's room. ALEX calls her friend, SAM, using her laptop. SAM's voice is via the laptop speaker.

ALEX: Konbanwa.

SAM: Ohayou, more like. I've not had breakfast yet.

ALEX: Oh, yes.

SAM: So?

ALEX: So what?

SAM: Come on, Alex. What's it like?

ALEX: Massive house. Strange family.

SAM: Define strange.

ALEX: Well, the family consists of a quite charming sixteen-year-old sociopath, a thirteen-year-old with mood swings and an absent billionaire uncle who seems allergic to responsibility. All in all, they seem broken.

SAM: Sounds like normal aristocracy.

ALEX: It's sad, really. They lost their parents, remember.

SAM: If anyone can fix them, you can. Any other staff?

ALEX: Just a housekeeper who seems relieved every time she sees me.

SAM: Why?

ALEX: Because I'm still here, I suppose.

SAM: You are not thinking of quitting already?

ALEX: Of course not. You know me.

SAM: So, why don't they live with their uncle?

ALEX: He made it quite clear that he doesn't want them.

SAM: Is it even legal?

ALEX: Mrs Grose is actually their foster parent.

SAM: Oh, so not just a housekeeper then.

ALEX: It is a bit of an odd arrangement. She is obviously fond of them, and they are fond of her, and yet, there seems to be a distance between them.

SAM: I suppose if she was their housekeeper for years, it would be hard to switch roles.

ALEX: Could be. It doesn't help the situation, though.

SAM: So, do you think you can fix this broken family?

ALEX: Funnily enough, that's what the uncle said to me. If something needs fixing, then fix it.

SAM: There you are, then.

ALEX: What?

SAM: Perhaps he thinks that what the kids need is a mother.

ALEX: What are you talking about?

SAM: He's a billionaire.

ALEX: Yes.

SAM: And single?

ALEX: Don't even go there.

A ping.

SAM: What's that?

ALEX: My phone. I've installed this app that notifies me when the security cameras pick up any movement.

SAM: Head of security now, are you?

ALEX: It just seems like a sensible precaution.

SAM: Given that you are in the middle of nowhere, it is most likely a fox.

ALEX: No. There is someone. A man, I think. Oh my God. He's watching the house.

SAM: What's that?

ALEX: There's someone outside. (*She zooms in on her phone*.) Yes, it's a man.

SAM: The billionaire uncle?

ALEX: No. Someone is watching the house.

SAM: That doesn't sound good.

ALEX: Someone must have left the gate open.

SAM: What's he doing now.

ALEX: Nothing. He's just watching.

SAM: Call the police.

ALEX crosses to the window and looks out. Unable to see anything, she picks up her phone again and looks at the screen.

ALEX: Oh.

SAM: Alex?

ALEX: He's gone.

SAM: Where?

ALEX: I don't know.

SAM: Alex, I'm worried. What if he is looking for a way in?

ALEX: Hold on, I'm checking the doors. All the doors and windows have smart locks. You won't see my face for a bit.

ALEX is checking things on her laptop.

SAM: Alex?

ALEX: Wait.

She continues to check. Eventually she goes back to the messaging app.

SAM: Well?

ALEX: All the doors and windows are closed. So is the main gate. No alarms and nothing showing on any of the cameras.

SAM: That's a relief.

ALEX: It's not.

SAM: Why not.

ALEX: I replayed the footage of him watching the house, and he's not there anymore.

SAM: What do you mean?

ALEX: It just shows the garden. He's not there.

SAM: You must have the wrong bit.

ALEX: No. It is timestamped. Hang on. (*She does something with her phone*.) The notification has gone as well.

SAM: Are you sure there was someone there?

ALEX: Yes. And you heard my phone ping. Something triggered the security camera.

SAM: And you are sure that you are looking at the right bit of footage?

ALEX: Yes, and anyway, why would the notification disappear? It's like the whole thing never happened.

SAM: Perhaps you need to get the system checked.

ALEX: He was there, Sam. I saw him clear as day.

SAM: So why is he not on the footage?

ALEX: I don't know; he must have replaced it. Hacked into the system, or something.

SAM: Like I said, you need to get the system checked.

ALEX: I need to check something.

Blackout.

ACT ONE Scene Five

The following morning. Breakfast. MRS GROSE pours tea.

ALEX: I saw someone last night.

MRS GROSE puts the tea pot down.

MRS GROSE: Someone?

ALEX: Outside. A man. Looking in.

MRS GROSE: In the garden?

ALEX: Yes, next to that oak tree near the wall.

MRS GROSE: A burglar, do you think?

ALEX: Maybe.

MRS GROSE: Well, he can't have got in; everywhere was locked. I checked myself.

ALEX: Then he disappeared.

MRS GROSE: You are sure there was someone there?

ALEX: Yes, he triggered the cameras. I got a notification on my phone.

MRS GROSE: Show me.

ALEX: He's gone; I told you.

MRS GROSE: I mean show me the footage.

ALEX: The footage is gone. When I go back to the timestamp, he's not there anymore.

MRS GROSE: Oh, you did have me worried. It was obviously just your imagination.

ALEX: In that case, what triggered the camera?

MRS GROSE: I don't know. A fox?

ALEX: It wasn't a fox. I saw him very clearly. The security lights were on. There was a man standing there, I swear on my life.

MRS GROSE: What did he look like?

ALEX: Dark hair. Long dark woollen overcoat. Thin face. In his forties, I'd say. Clean-shaven, scraggly hair. No mask or anything. No hoodie. He wasn't dressed like a burglar.

MRS GROSE: No.

ALEX: What?

MRS GROSE: No.

Silence.

ALEX: You know who it was.

MRS GROSE: No.

ALEX: Mrs Grose.

MRS GROSE: No! (*Pause*.) Describe him again.

ALEX: Dark hair. Woollen overcoat. Scraggly hair. Needed cutting.

Silence.

ALEX: You know who it was, don't you.

MRS GROSE: It's ludicrous.

ALEX: Who was it?

MRS GROSE: Peter Quint.

ALEX: Who?

MRS GROSE: He used to work here.

ALEX: You're sure?

MRS GROSE: I think so. I mean, who wears woollen overcoats these days?

ALEX: What happened to him?

MRS GROSE: He died.

Silence.

MRS GROSE: Been dead three years.

ALEX: How… How did he die?

MRS GROSE: He hung himself. From the oak tree.

Blackout.

ACT ONE Scene Six

The garden. FLORA is sitting on her own. ALEX approaches unnoticed.

FLORA: I'm not playing that. (*Pause*.) It's not fair. (*Pause*.) No, I'm not playing.

FLORA suddenly notices Alex.

FLORA: Were you listening?

ALEX: Who were you talking to?

FLORA: Nobody.

ALEX: It didn't sound like nobody.

FLORA: She's not very talkative.

ALEX: I see.

FLORA: It's a joke.

ALEX: Yes, I got it.

FLORA: You didn't laugh.

ALEX: What's her name?

FLORA: I told you; Nobody.

ALEX: That's her name?

FLORA: That's what you can call her.

ALEX: Why.

FLORA: Because she isn't here.

ALEX: I see. That's clever.

FLORA: Do you think I'm weird?

ALEX: No!

FLORA: Be honest.

ALEX: Lots of children have imaginary friends. I had one myself.

FLORA: Nobody isn't imaginary.

ALEX: No, of course not.

FLORA: If you had a friend and she died, would she be imaginary?

ALEX: I… Well… Who died, Flora?

FLORA: Nobody!

ALEX: Yes. Yes, I think I understand.

FLORA: No, you don't. No one understands.

ALEX: Do you sometimes think what it might be like if you went to school?

FLORA: Children like me don't go to school.

ALEX: Not all schools are the same. There are some you only go to one day a week, for example.

FLORA: I don't think I'd like that.

ALEX: You might make some friends.

FLORA: I don't want friends! Stop trying to fix me. You all try to fix me. Leave me alone.

FLORA starts sketching. A figure appears under the same tree where Quint appeared. It is MISS JESSEL, a former tutor. She watches FLORA. ALEX is about to leave when she notices.

ALEX: Flora, come here.

FLORA continues sketching. The woman does not move.

ALEX: Flora, come here, quickly.

FLORA: Why?

ALEX: Now.

FLORA stands and moves to ALEX, who looks down at FLORA and then back to the woman. The woman is gone.

FLORA: What's wrong?

ALEX: There was… No, sorry, I made a mistake.

FLORA: Tell me.

ALEX: I thought I saw someone.

FLORA: Who?

ALEX: I don't know.

FLORA: Where?

ALEX: It doesn't matter.

FLORA: Where!?

ALEX: Over there, under the tree.

FLORA: Was it a woman?

ALEX: Yes

FLORA: That was Nobody. You've seen her!

A beat.

ALEX: Flora. That thing you said about someone who died…

FLORA: Miss Jessel. Miss Jessel died. She's Nobody.

Blackout.

ACT ONE Scene Seven

The kitchen. Later.

ALEX: Who was Miss Jessel?

MRS GROSE: Where did you hear that name?

ALEX: Who was she?

MRS GROSE: She was Flora's tutor.

ALEX: What happened?

MRS GROSE: She died.

ALEX: How?

Long silence.

MRS GROSE: She took her own life.

A beat.

ALEX: Like Peter Quint?

MRS GROSE: Yes.

ALEX: She hung herself…?

MRS GROSE: She took an overdose.

ALEX: When?

MRS GROSE: Two days after Peter Quint.

ALEX: Were they..?

MRS GROSE: They were close.

ALEX: In a relationship?

MRS GROSE: Something like that.

ALEX: What does that mean?

MRS GROSE: Some people fall in love. Others build an alliance. They built an alliance.

ALEX: I don't understand.

MRS GROSE: They had something that bound them together, I'm sure of that. But it wasn't love.

ALEX: What was it then?

MRS GROSE: I don't know. They acted like they had something that was troubling the pair of them. Something bad. A shared burden.

ALEX: How long were they here?

MRS GROSE: Oh, a long time. Miss Jessel came first, when Flora was nearly four. Their parents were still alive then. Julien employed Peter Quint as a sort of handyman/security guard a year later when their parents were killed.

ALEX: How did they die?

MRS GROSE: Haven't you read the information pack?

ALEX: It didn't give details.

MRS GROSE: They died in a car crash. Head on collision with a drunk driver. He's still in prison. May he rot in there.

ALEX: Why does a family home need a security guard?

MRS GROSE: You'd have to ask Julien that.

ALEX: Did Jessel and Quint know each other before they worked here.

MRS GROSE: Not as far as I know.

ALEX: Mrs Grose, something very peculiar is happening. I can't explain what, but last night I saw someone in the grounds who you swear looked just like Peter Quint. And just now I saw a woman that Flora said was Miss Jessel.

MRS GROSE: Flora saw her?

ALEX: No, just me. But she said that she'd been talking to her, and then when I said I'd seen someone, she said it was Miss Jessel.

MRS GROSE: You shouldn't go scaring her like that.

ALEX: Have you ever seen either of them? Quint or Jessel.

MRS GROSE: No. Of course not.

ALEX: I'm not talking about ghosts; I mean someone impersonating Quint or Jessel. Pretending to be them.

MRS GROSE: No, I haven't.

ALEX: Someone is trying to scare the children. I don't know why, but that has to be what it is.

MRS GROSE: The children haven't seen them.

ALEX: It's only a matter of time. I'm going to call Julien.

MRS GROSE: Don't.

ALEX: Why not?

MRS GROSE: Remember what he said. You will deal with things. If something breaks, you fix it. If there's a problem, you solve it.

ALEX: How do you know that he said that?

MRS GROSE: He's said it to everyone. If you don't think that you can cope, then please leave before the children get attached to you.

ALEX: I can cope.

MRS GROSE: Good.

ALEX: Why aren't you taking me seriously?

MRS GROSE: I believe that you think you saw something, but I can't help wondering why all this has only started since you arrived.

ALEX: Do you mean I am the cause?

MRS GROSE: No. I'm sorry to be frank, but, quite honestly, I think your imagination is playing tricks on you. Perhaps it is the stress of starting a new job?

ALEX: It was not my imagination. I saw what I saw, and I'm going to get to the bottom of this. The first question is; why would anyone want to scare the children?

MRS GROSE: Why does anyone want to scare anyone, for that matter?

ALEX: To stop them from… That's it. The children know something and someone is trying to stop them from telling anyone.

MRS GROSE: I think you are getting a bit carried away.

ALEX: Do you have any better ideas?

MRS GROSE: There has to be a logical explanation.

ALEX: I'm sorry to ask this, but can I trust you?

MRS GROSE: Trust me? What does that mean?

ALEX: Do you have any idea why someone would want to do this?

MRS GROSE: No.

ALEX: Something that's happened in the past…

MRS GROSE: I said no.

Blackout.

ACT ONE Scene Eight

ALEXS's room. ALEX is talking to her friend SAM via her laptop.

SAM: You are sure you saw someone.

ALEX: Yes. Both times. You were here for the first one, remember.

SAM: Well, I wasn't exactly there.

ALEX: You know what I mean.

SAM: But I didn't see anything.

ALEX: So, you are calling me a liar?

SAM: Whoa, calm down, sister. I'm just wondering if it is Pareidolia.

ALEX: What?

SAM: It's where shapes kind of morph into something familiar. Like seeing the face of Jesus in a piece of toast.

ALEX: What are you talking about?

SAM: We all do it. Our brains are wired to recognise common objects. So, for example, we see what looks like a face in the bark of a tree.

ALEX: That's not what I saw. It wasn't just a face.

SAM: OK, I believe you.

ALEX: Sorry. I guess I am getting pretty worked up. That Mrs Grose has made it perfectly clear that she thinks I'm off my rocker.

SAM: Well, I think you are right. It must be someone trying to frighten the children. Dressing up as dead people to scare the shit out of them.

ALEX: But Flora wasn't frightened at all. She seemed to quite enjoy having this… this apparition around. Even though she didn't see her, she didn't seem at all fazed by the fact I'd just seen Miss Jessel.

SAM: What about the other one.

ALEX: Miles. I don't know. I've not really spoken to him about anything much yet.

SAM: Perhaps he is the one who holds the key.

ALEX: What do you mean?

SAM: Well, he got expelled from his public school, didn't he?

ALEX: Yes.

SAM: And no one will tell you why.

ALEX: No.

SAM: Well, it's got to be something horrendous. People don't get expelled from public school. They tend to be

happy to overlook pretty much any kind of behaviour so long as the fees get paid every term.

ALEX: So, what do you think he did?

SAM: What are the worst crimes you can think of?

ALEX: I don't believe it.

SAM: It wasn't me that called him a charming little psycho.

ALEX: I didn't say that. I said sociopath.

SAM: The difference being?

ALEX: Sociopaths are just reacting to their environment. Change the environment, and you can change the way they behave. Psychopaths are born that way. There is nothing you can do for them.

SAM: Well, there you are then. You just have to fix… er…

ALEX: Miles.

SAM: Miles, and all your problems are solved.

ALEX: I'm not sure he is the cause of everything.

SAM: He's maybe not the cause, but he's the key. I'm sure of it. Find out what is troubling his poor little soul, and suddenly everything will make sense.

ALEX: But the… people, visions, whatever you want to call them. They weren't children. They were grown adults. It's not kids from his school that are doing this.

SAM: It doesn't have to be. Talk to him. Get him to open up to you. You're good at this sort of thing, remember.

ALEX: I thought I was.

Blackout.

ACT ONE Scene Nine

The next morning. MILES and ALEX each have a copy of Macbeth open.

ALEX: You do know this isn't punishment?

MILES: That's exactly what someone administering punishment would say.

ALEX: It's literature.

MILES: That’s worse.

ALEX: Today we're discussing guilt.

MILES: That’s an interesting place to start.

ALEX: What do you mean?

MILES: This is my very first lesson. The first time you have taught me. Ever. I can just imagine you sitting in your room last night working on your lesson plan. What should the subject be? Joy? Love? Loss? Triumph? Disaster? Ambition? Fear? Hope? Oh, I know. Guilt.

ALEX: Do you think I chose the subject deliberately?

MILES: I do.

ALEX: Why would I do that?

MILES: You tell me.

ALEX: I didn’t.

MILES: Because you think I have something to feel guilty about.

ALEX: Do you?

MILES: Tut, tut. You don't think I'm going to break that easily, do you?

ALEX: What makes you think that I'm trying to break you?

MILES: So that you can fix me. That's what you want, isn't it?

Beat.

ALEX: I didn't choose the subject. There's a thing called a syllabus. I know that is an alien concept in public schools.

MILES: Ooh! Reverse snobbery. We are getting it all this morning.

ALEX: Act two, scene two, line fifty-eight, "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?"

MILES: Oh, we're back to Shakespeare.

ALEX: What does Macbeth mean by that?

MILES: Seems like a bit of an overreaction, to be honest.

ALEX: To murder?

MILES: To getting caught.

A beat. ALEX studies him.

ALEX: All right. Let's imagine for a moment that I did decide that my first lesson with you would be about guilt.

MILES: We're getting to the truth, at last.

ALEX: Why would I do that?

MILES: Because you want to know if I feel guilty.

ALEX: About what?

MILES: You tell me.

ALEX: Do you feel guilty about something?

MILES: No.

ALEX: Nothing at all?

MILES: No.

ALEX: Can you explain that? Most people feel guilty about something.

MILES: I don't believe guilt exists. Not how you mean it. As an emotion.

ALEX: Really?

MILES: I think fear exists. Shame. Regret, even. But guilt? No. Guilt is just something people pretend to feel.

ALEX: That's a bit bleak.

MILES: It's true, though.

Silence.

MILES: Do you want to know why I was expelled?

ALEX: If you want to tell me.

MILES: Don't lie. That's what this is all about.

ALEX: Is it?

MILES: Of course it is. You asked me about it the moment you first saw me.

ALEX: Not quite.

MILES: Nearly.

ALEX: I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that. I've realised that I should trust you to decide whether you want to tell me or not.

MILES: I won't be manipulated.

ALEX: I'm not trying to manipulate you, Miles. It is up to you if you want to talk about it. Honestly. Don't tell me unless you think that I should know.

MILES: OK. I won't.

ALEX: That's fine.

Beat.

MILES: Guilt.

ALEX: Yes…

MILES: That's why I was expelled.

ALEX: Guilt.

MILES: Yes.

ALEX: But you just said it doesn't exist.

MILES: That's right. Thank you for listening. But if you remember, I also said that people pretend to feel guilty. That's what got me expelled.

ALEX: Who pretended to feel guilty?

MILES: Ah, that's for you to work out.

ALEX: I'm not playing games with you, Miles.

MILES: Aren't you?

ALEX: I have a duty of care to you, and to Flora. If I thought that someone was trying to harm you then it is my duty to try to understand why.

MILES: Do you? Think someone is trying to harm me?

ALEX: I don't know.

MILES: Well. Do let me know once you have decided.

Blackout.

ACT ONE Scene Ten

The garden, early evening. FLORA sketches. ALEX approaches.

ALEX: Can we talk?

FLORA: You start, and I'll decide if I want to join in.

ALEX: You shouldn't really talk to me like that.

FLORA: Is this a lesson?

ALEX: No.

FLORA: Because school time is finished.

ALEX: I know.

FLORA: Which means that you are not my teacher at the moment.

ALEX: That's an interesting way of looking at it.

FLORA: People are different things at different times. Except Mrs Grose. She is always the same.

ALEX: I wanted to talk to you about Miss Jessel.

FLORA: Miles is always being rude to you. Even during lessons.

ALEX: That's something I'm working on.

FLORA: He's rude to everyone.

ALEX: I've noticed.

FLORA: What about Miss Jessel?

ALEX: Tell me about her.

FLORA: She was my teacher.

ALEX: Did you like her?

FLORA: Yes. She was a good teacher.

ALEX: What about the times when she wasn't your teacher?

FLORA: She is nice.

ALEX: Did she live here in the house the same as me?

FLORA: She used to. I don't know where she lives now.

ALEX: Flora…

FLORA: I know she's dead; you don't have to worry about that. But she still visits.

ALEX: Do you know that is not possible?

FLORA: But she does.

ALEX: The woman we saw yesterday…

FLORA: I didn't see her.

ALEX: The woman I saw, then.

FLORA: Miss Jessel.

ALEX: Does she come every day?

FLORA: No. She only comes when I'm sad. She knows how to cheer me up.

ALEX: Were you sad yesterday?

FLORA: Yes, a bit.

ALEX: Have you ever seen her?

FLORA: No.

ALEX: And she doesn't talk to you?

FLORA: No, but I always know when she is there.

ALEX: Why were you sad yesterday?

FLORA: I was feeling a bit lonely, that's all.

ALEX: And that is when Miss Jessel visits you?

FLORA: Yes.

ALEX: What does she do when she visits you?

FLORA: She plays with me.

ALEX: She plays games?

FLORA: Yes, but she always wants to play hide and seek, and that's not fair.

ALEX: Why?

FLORA: She's invisible. That's cheating, isn't it?

ALEX: I suppose it is. Flora, does anyone else know about Miss Jessel?

FLORA: Of course. I talk to Miles about her all the time.

ALEX: Has he seen her?

FLORA: No. He can't see her either… You are the only one to have seen her.

ALEX: Will you tell me if she comes again?

FLORA: Why?

ALEX: I would like to see her again.

FLORA: You can't.

ALEX: Why not?

FLORA: She's not yours. She's mine. You shouldn't see her. You're not allowed.

ALEX: Flora, behave. I want you to tell me when she comes again.

FLORA: No! I won't! I won't! You'll take her away from me. You can't. She's mine!

Blackout.

ACT ONE Scene Eleven

Later. ALEXS's room. ALEX is talking to her friend SAM via her laptop.

SAM: Stranger and stranger.

ALEX: I think Flora could be bipolar. She suddenly just snaps.

SAM: And she talks to dead people.

ALEX: At least she doesn't see them. Something happened with Miss Jessel; I know it.

SAM: Likely.

ALEX: And Quint.

SAM: Well, they both took their own lives.

ALEX: And everybody refuses to discuss it.

SAM: Do they? Or do they just prefer not to? You've only been there a couple of days; they're hardly likely to take you into their confidence already.

ALEX: No. It's not just that. They are actively refusing to answer my questions.

SAM: Give it time.

ALEX: Jessel and Quint are still here.

SAM: Psychologically, you mean?

ALEX: Maybe.

SAM: Then what? Come on Alex; I know that you don't believe in ghosts.

ALEX: (*Lightly*.) I might be about to change my opinion.

SAM: Not you!

ALEX: But supposing someone is trying to get at the children? They've somehow planted this idea in their heads Jessel and Quint are watching them.

SAM: To scare them, you mean?

ALEX: Or keep them silent.

ALEX: Can't the housekeeper tell you anything? She's their foster mother, and she's been there forever, hasn't she?

ALEX: I've tried.

SAM: And?

ALEX: She knows more than she is letting on.

SAM: No wonder nobody lasts long there.

ALEX: I'm determined to get to the bottom of it.

SAM: That's my girl.

ALEX: There has to be a logical explanation. I saw someone pretending to be Peter Quint on the camera and then he somehow swapped the footage. And I saw someone

pretending to be Miss Jessel. These people are trying to put the frighteners on and I'm going to find out who and why.

SAM: Be careful.

ALEX: The children act like everything is fine, but it's obviously not. They're damaged somehow, and it must be to do with why Jessel and Flint took their own lives. I'm not going to let the children suffer any longer.

SAM: My hero.

ALEX: This is serious.

SAM: Sorry, I didn't mean to be flippant. Keep me posted.

ALEX: I will. (*Alex's phone vibrates*.) Hang on a sec.

SAM: What is it?

ALEX: A message. Number withheld. It's a picture. This house. (*The phone vibrates again*.) Quint. He's with Miles. They're on bicycles, like they are about to go off for a ride. (*And again*.) This is Flora with Miss Jessel. Sketching in the garden. (*And again*.) Now a message, "Happy families".

SAM: Why would someone send you that?

ALEX: You tell me.

SAM: I assume Miles has a phone.

ALEX: Yes. Do you think he sent it?

SAM: From what you've told me about him.

ALEX: It should be easy enough to find out.

Suddenly voices come from the phone, causing ALEX to drop it. SFX alternating PETER QUINT and MISS JESSEL shouting. "Alex, "Alex" with different intonations, angry, accusing, pleading, etc. ALEX stares at her phone. The voices morph into SAM's voice on the laptop.

SAM: Alex! Alex! What happened.

ALEX: I won't be frightened. I won't!

There is a hammering on the bedroom door. The voices repeat from outside the door. "Alex", "Alex" etc. The lights flicker, the is a humming sound that gets louder and louder until it suddenly ends with a blackout.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO Scene One

The Kitchen the next morning.

MRS GROSE: You think I'm hiding something.

ALEX: Are you?

Long silence.

MRS GROSE: Yes. Peter Quint. He wasn't a monster. That's the problem. Everyone wants monsters. They're easy. You point. You name them. You lock them up. (*A pause.)* He was wonderful. The children loved him. Miles loved him. We trusted him.

ALEX: But?

MRS GROSE: But sometimes when he was speaking to Miles... I'd walk into the room and feel I'd interrupted something. Something I couldn't quite explain.

A beat.

ALEX: What are you saying?

MRS GROSE: I don't know. That's the honest answer. I don't know.

Silence.

MRS GROSE: And because I didn't know... I did nothing.

A beat.

MRS GROSE: Then he died. And then Miss Jessel died. And the speculation began.

ALEX: Speculation?

MRS GROSE: Don't make me spell it out.

ALEX: Jessel was involved?

MRS GROSE: People assumed so.

ALEX: Who are these people?

MRS GROSE: There used to be other staff. Part-time. A cook, a gardener. Julien decided that they weren't needed.

ALEX: There was nothing in the information pack out this.

MRS GROSE: Did you really think there would be?

ALEX: Did anyone talk to Miles about it?

MRS GROSE: His uncle.

ALEX: No professionals?

MRS GROSE: No. Just his uncle. Just once. Then everyone agreed never to talk about it again.

ALEX: It doesn't sound healthy.

MRS GROSE: It isn't.

ALEX: What happened then?

MRS GROSE: A new term started. Miles went back to school, and Flora got a new teacher. And Julien stopped coming.

ALEX: He used to visit?

MRS GROSE: Regularly.

ALEX: Why did he stop coming?

MRS GROSE: You'd have to ask him that.

ALEX: I'm asking you. Why do you think he stopped coming?

MRS GROSE: Perhaps he felt it was no longer necessary. Or it was no longer possible.

ALEX: What does that mean?

MRS GROSE: I don't know. I don't seem to be able to arrange my thoughts into anything coherent.

ALEX: Last night…

MRS GROSE: It was just a power cut.

ALEX: The humming.

MRS GROSE: The generator.

ALEX: It was so loud.

MRS GROSE: No more than usual.

ALEX: Are power cuts usual?

MRS GROSE: We've not had one since Peter died. That's why the generator didn't last for long. Nobody had thought to put any diesel in it.

ALEX: We should get that sorted.

MRS GROSE: Already done. I telephoned Hawkins. He owns the farm down the lane, and he came over and filled it up for us.

ALEX: Kind of him.

MRS GROSE: It was a business transaction.

Silence.

ALEX: Miles will never be able to move on. Suppressing something just makes it worse.

MRS GROSE: I don't think he is ready yet.

ALEX: I'm not sure anyone is ever "ready".

MRS GROSE: Don't rush him. He's a good boy.

ALEX: I know.

MRS GROSE: And all the tutors have loved Flora.

ALEX: But they still left.

MRS GROSE: Their own fault. They all thought they'd won the lottery when they got the job. It didn't take them long to realise that being stuck out in the country, miles from anywhere, in a cold, draughty house with only a

cranky old woman for adult company wasn't the dream they'd hoped it would be.

ALEX smiles.

ALEX: I'm not going anywhere.

MRS GROSE: The children like you. Miles is cheeky and arrogant, and Flora has her mood swings, but they are good kids.

ALEX: I know they are.

MRS GROSE: I hope you can fix them.

ALEX: "If something is broken, fix it."

MRS GROSE: Now you know what Julien meant by that.

Blackout.

ACT TWO Scene Two

MILES and FLORA are alone.

FLORA: Do you think she's frightened?

MILES: She should be.

FLORA: She’s the only person to have seen Miss Jessel.

MILES: She’s the first to mention it.

FLORA: You think others have seen her?

MILES: It’s possible.

FLORA: You’ve never seen her.

MILES: No.

FLORA: If anyone was going to see her, I’d expect it to be you.

MILES: Why? Surely, it should be you.

FLORA: I don’t need to see her; I already know she is there.

MILES: Would you like to see her?

FLORA: No. I prefer not to.

MILES: Why?

FLORA: I’m afraid it wouldn’t look like her.

MILES: Why wouldn’t it?

FLORA: You never see Peter?

MILES: No

FLORA: I think he is here, though.

MILES: I do too.

FLORA: I wish Miss Jessel would talk.

MILES: Are ghosts allowed to talk?

FLORA: They do sometimes. In stories.

MILES: That's just in stories, though. These are real.

FLORA: In stories, ghosts are always trying to tell you something.

MILES: I don't think Miss Jessel or Peter are trying to tell us anything.

FLORA: Maybe not us.

MILES: Who then?

FLORA: Her, perhaps.

MILES: Alex?

FLORA: Yes.

MILES: Be careful of her. She's not your friend.

FLORA: I like her.

MILES: So do I, but we don't know if we can trust her yet.

FLORA: When will we know?

MILES: They'll tell us.

FLORA: Miss Jessel and Peter?

MILES: Yes, they'll let us know, somehow.

FLORA: Do you think Alex will see Peter?

MILES: She might.

FLORA: Why do you think they don't want us to see them?

MILES: You know.

FLORA: They're ashamed?

MILES: Miss Jessel, maybe. Peter feels guilty.

FLORA: You don't believe in guilt.

MILES: Not when we're alive.

FLORA: What do you mean?

MILES: The instinct for self-preservation is too strong. We can regret doing something, but we can't feel guilty about it because our instinct is to protect ourselves. If someone really felt guilty about something that they had done, then they would have to be prepared to accept any consequence. Humans aren't made like that.

FLORA: But ghosts are?

MILES: Ghosts have no control over their destiny; therefore, they are able to feel guilt.

FLORA: Do you think about him?

MILES: Of course.

FLORA: What would you say to him, if you could talk to him now?

MILES: What would you say to Miss Jessel?

FLORA: I talk to Miss Jessel all the time.

MILES: No, you don't. Not about anything important.

FLORA: Because she can't answer.

MILES: What if she could?

FLORA: I'd ask her why she did it.

MILES: Very practical.

FLORA: You'd ask Peter the same question?

MILES: No. I know why he did it.

FLORA: What then?

MILES: I'd ask him what am I supposed to do now?

Blackout.

ACT TWO Scene Three

Later. Miles is slouching with an iPad in his hands. ALEX enters.

MILES: What does a teacher do when teaching time is over?

ALEX: May I join you?

MILES: It looks like you have.

ALEX: What are you doing?

MILES: Reading Shakespeare.

ALEX knows this isn't true. She sits.

ALEX: I can't imagine what it must be like to be away at school.

MILES: You get used to it.

ALEX: I promised not to push you on why you got expelled, but can I ask one question?

MILES: You can ask whatever you like; you might not get an answer.

ALEX: Did you try to get expelled?

MILES: Wow! You really don't mess about, do you?

ALEX: I find it easier to be straightforward with people.

MILES: All right. I will answer, but you won't like it.

ALEX: Go on.

MILES: I‘m not saying that I tried to get expelled, but the whole time that I was there, I was conflicted.

ALEX: Why?

MILES: I didn’t think I was there for the right reasons.

ALEX: Which were?

MILES: My education, of course. I didn’t think I was there for my education.

ALEX: Then why were you there?

MILES: To stop me from being here.

Silence.

ALEX: Why would you be sent away? What was the reason?

MILES: It was easier.

ALEX: Easier?

MILES: Easier than doing the right thing.

More Silence.

ALEX: Tell me about Peter Quint.

MILES: (*Flippant*.) He died.

ALEX: Did you like him?

MILES: He was alright.

ALEX: You spent a lot of time with him.

MILES: There isn't much to do around here, as I am sure you have noticed.

ALEX: Do you miss him?

MILES: Why are you asking me so many questions?

ALEX: I'd like to get to know you.

MILES: No, what you are doing is trying to make me think you are my friend.

ALEX: Don't you think it would be nicer if we got along?

MILES: Alright, let's do it your way. On one condition.

ALEX: What?

MILES: I ask the questions. We'll start with why do you want us to call you by your first name?

ALEX: Because calling me Miss Douglas makes me sound like an ancient spinster.

MILES: Have you ever taught in a school?

ALEX: When I was training.

MILES: Did the kids call you Alex there?

ALEX: It wasn't allowed.

MILES: Do you have a boyfriend?

ALEX: No.

MILES: A girlfriend?

ALEX: Your uncle asked me the same thing.

MILES: And?

ALEX: No.

MILES: Who do you speak to in the evenings?

ALEX: How do you know I speak to anyone?

MILES: This might be an old house, but some of the walls are paper-thin. They were put in afterwards.

ALEX: I see. It is my friend, Sam. We trained together.

MILES: Does she teach in a school?

ALEX: Yes, but not here; in Japan.

MILES: Sam in Japan.

ALEX: Yes.

MILES: Why did you apply for this job?

ALEX: I wanted to try something different.

MILES: Different from what?

ALEX: I thought it would be interesting to immerse myself into teaching just one, or two, children.

MILES: Don’t you miss your friends?

ALEX: I have spent the last few years caring for my father. After you have said no to your friends enough times, they stop asking.

MILES: Did your father die?

ALEX: Yes.

MILES: So, now you are lonely old Miss Douglas, the spinster.

ALEX: Hey. Not so much with the old.

MILES smiles. ALEX thinks they might have made a connection, but he's not finished.

MILES: Do you think I am bipolar?

ALEX: (*Somewhat taken aback.*) I wouldn't say that.

MILES: But you think Flora might be.

ALEX: It is rude to listen to people's private conversations.

MILES: Oh, I'm rude, am I? Well, I'll take that. What's another black mark against me?

ALEX: You don't have any black marks against you. Not from me, anyway.

MILES: Oh, come on.

ALEX: What?

MILES: You said I was a sociopath. Isn't that a black mark?

ALEX: I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that.

MILES: Why not? It's true.

ALEX: I meant it in an academic sense. It was not intended to be an insult.

MILES: I know that, Miss Douglas. I know that you are only here to further your career. I'm just a paragraph on your CV.

ALEX: That's not true.

MILES: Trying to make out you are our friend and that you want to help us. I don't believe it for a second.

ALEX: Miles, stop it.

MILES: What? Does the truth hurt?

ALEX: Do you always do this?

MILES: Do what?

ALEX: Start acting like a prick the moment someone makes a connection with you?

MILES: I don't think you are allowed to call me a prick.

ALEX: Why not? I mean, I could use plenty of other words, but prick sums it up nicely.

MILES: What's this? You tried being nice, and that didn't work?

ALEX: What would it take, Miles?

MILES: What do you want?

ALEX: I want to help you. You and Flora.

MILES: How?

ALEX: By getting to the bottom of what is going on around here.

MILES: And what do you think is going on?

ALEX: I think someone is trying to frighten you.

MILES: You're wrong.

ALEX: What then?

Silence.

ALEX: Miles?

MILES: If you want to help us, you need to work out who is on your side and who is not.

Blackout.

ACT TWO Scene Four

EVENING. ALEX, MILES and FLORA are all in the living room. There is a raging storm outside. The lights flicker a few times. A hum is heard. It gets louder and louder until it suddenly stops and the lights go out. ALEX picks up her phone. Her face can be seen from the light on her screen.

ALEX: No signal.

MRS GROSE enters with a lit candle. There is just enough light to see the characters.

MRS GROSE: The generator's failed.

ALEX: Not out of diesel again?

MRS GROSE: There is plenty of diesel. There must be a fault.

ALEX: Can it be fixed?

MRS GROSE: Not in this weather.

FLORA: Good.

Everyone looks at her.

FLORA: It's quieter.

MILES: That's one word for it.

MRS Grose lights more candles. Thunder and lightning outside.

MRS GROSE: I'll go to see to the Aga.

MRS GROSE exits.

MILES: Can I ask you something?

ALEX: Of course.

MILES: Do you think I would be accepted at another school?

ALEX: What?

MILES: Because I've been expelled from one, does that mean I can't go to a different one?

ALEX: Is that what you want?

MILES: Well, I've been thinking about it.

FLORA: Why?

MILES: Don't be upset. I'd still see you in the holidays.

ALEX: Are you unhappy here?

MILES: No. That's not what I said.

ALEX: Then why?

MILES: Because everyone seems to think that's an end to it. I will be educated at home now.

ALEX: Your education won't be neglected.

MILES: That's not the point.

ALEX: Then what is the point?

MILES: Everyone acts as though there is no alternative, but nobody tells me why.

ALEX: You know why.

MILES: Do I?

ALEX: You were expelled.

MILES: I was.

ALEX: They must have had a reason.

MILES: No doubt.

FLORA: She means it would have been the same at a different school.

MILES: Is that what you mean?

ALEX: Until we acknowledge the reasons why you were expelled, we can't do anything to address them.

MILES: Do you know why I was expelled?

ALEX: You know that I don't.

MILES: Well, neither do I.

ALEX: You must have a suspicion.

MILES: Oh, I did a few things.

ALEX: Yes?

MILES: But which one of them got me expelled? I have no idea.

ALEX: Stop trying to be clever.

FLORA: He's always like this.

MILES: I want you to talk to my uncle?

ALEX: I've got no signal, and there's no internet.

MILES: Now who's being clever? Talk to him tomorrow.

ALEX: And tell him that you want to go back to school?

MILES: Yes.

ALEX: Why don't you tell him?

MILES: He'll just tell me that it's impossible.

ALEX: I expect he'd say the same to me.

MILES: Probably.

ALEX: So, what is the point?

MILES: That's what I'd like someone to tell me.

ALEX: Miles...

FLORA: He means that if you ask, Uncle Julien might give you a reason.

ALEX: Is that correct?

MILES: He might.

ALEX: I can't. I have already talked to your uncle about why you were expelled, and he told me that he doesn't

know. If I start asking him again, it could put my position in jeopardy. I want to help you, Miles, really I do, but asking your uncle if you can go to another school isn't going to do any of us any good.

MILES: You want to help me? You think I need help?

ALEX: You just asked me to help you.

MILES: And you refused.

ALEX: Because it wouldn't have helped anyone.

FLORA: Miles. I think we should trust her.

MILES: Perhaps.

ALEX: Of course you can trust me.

FLORA: Miles?

MILES: I'll think about it. Tomorrow. Maybe.

MRS GROSE enters.

MRS GROSE: Come on, children. I'll take you up to bed.

ALEX: Do you want me to do it?

MRS GROSE: Better I do. I know my way around in the dark.

MRS GROSE, MILES and FLORA exit with the candle. It goes dark. ALEX opens her phone to have some light. In the silence there is a voice.

QUINT: Alex.

ALEX spins around; there is nothing there. Thunder and Lightning. The candles go out. Alex uses the torch on her phone to look round the room.

ALEX: Quint. Peter. What do you want?

As she moves the beam around the room, she catches sight of Quint, but the momentum carries the beam past him. When she goes back, he is gone.

ALEX: Who sent you?

The torch on the phone goes out. Black. Silent. There is a crash of thunder and lightning which reveals Quint standing by the door.

QUINT: Alex.

ALEX: Please just tell me what you want.

QUINT holds a torch to his face.

QUINT: Come.

The torch on ALEX's phone starts to work again and she follows QUINT out of the room.

Blackout.

ACT TWO Scene Five

Immediately later. QUINT is standing outside the door to MILES' bedroom, still lighting his face with a torch. He points to the door.

ALEX: You are not going in there.

QUINT continues to point.

ALEX: What do you want?

The light goes out. QUINT is gone. ALEX knocks on the bedroom door. No answer. She enters. Miles is sat by the window, lit only by the moon.

MILES: You saw him.

ALEX: Yes.

She sits beside MILES.

MILES: So, he is here.

A beat.

MILES: Are you OK?

ALEX: I think so.

MILES: Do you think it was really him?

ALEX: I don't know what to think. I was sure it was someone trying to frighten us, but how did he get inside the house?

MILES: I have felt his presence here ever since he died; like he is watching over me.

ALEX: Do you believe in ghosts?

MILES: Do you?

ALEX: I'm running out of logical explanations.

MILES: I did that a while ago.

ALEX: Tell me about him. Quint.

MILES: You want a simple answer.

ALEX: I want the truth.

MILES: People always say that. What they mean is they want a version they can live with.

A beat.

MILES: He came when I was eight. I went to school in the village then.

ALEX: Miss Jessel didn't teach you?

MILES: No, she was just for Flora. Because Flora is… Well, you know.

ALEX: This was after your parents were killed.

MILES: Yes.

ALEX: What was he like?

MILES: Everyone says that he was too free with people.

ALEX: What does that mean?

MILES: He didn't hold back. If he wanted to say something, he said it. If he wanted to do something, he did it.

ALEX: Did he hurt you?

MILES: Sometimes. Not deliberately.

ALEX: How?

MILES: By being too free with people. He was a very clever man. There is no doubt about that. He somehow made ordinary things feel strange. Important. He had a way of making you think that he knew something that he shouldn't know, and he wanted you to know it too.

ALEX: Like what?

MILES: He wasn't like other grown-ups. He treated me as an adult. He believed that I was entitled to know things that other grown-ups kept hidden from children.

ALEX: Is that why you liked him?

MILES: He had a way of drawing you in. He would tell me things to make me trust him.

ALEX: I asked you just now if he hurt you.

MILES: (*Upset.*) He was not a monster. Everyone said he was, but he was not.

ALEX: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you.

MILES: I think you should go now.

ALEX: One last question. Why did Peter Quint kill himself?

MILES: I don't know.

ALEX: I think that you do.

MILES: Why do people usually kill themselves?

ALEX: There are lots of reasons.

MILES: Why do you think Peter Quint killed himself.

ALEX: Guilt.

Silence.

ALEX: Do you agree?

MILES: I've told you what I think about guilt.

ALEX: Yes, and I think you are right. Most people do just pretend to feel guilty, but someone who really does feel guilt might not be able to live with it.

MILES: Can you go now, please.

ALEX raises an arm to MILES' shoulder as the lights fade.

ACT TWO Scene Six

The following morning. The storm has passed. ALEX sits alone in the kitchen. The curtains are closed. MRS GROSE enters.

MRS GROSE: Goodness, you gave me a shock. Have you been here all night?

ALEX doesn't answer.

MRS GROSE: Let's let some light in. (*She opens the curtains. It is daylight but not especially bright.)*

MRS GROSE: Shall we have some tea before the children descend on us? (*She sets about making it*.) I'll see if I can get someone to come and look at the generator now that the electricity is back on. It was one hell of a storm last night.

ALEX: You told me that you have never seen Miss Jessel or Peter Quint.

MRS GROSE: Well, not since they died.

ALEX: You don't seem very concerned that Flora and Miles believe that their presence is here.

MRS GROSE: I thought it was only Flora. Miles is probably only saying that to be supportive of his sister.

ALEX: I don't think so.

MRS GROSE: You must remember that Flora is a very lonely girl. Until Miles came home, she only had me and a

succession of tutors for company. It is hardly surprising that she'd want someone she could call a friend.

ALEX: So, you believe it is just her imagination?

MRS GROSE: Of course.

ALEX: That's not what you said the other day.

MRS GROSE: You didn't give me a chance. You were insisting that you'd seen her yourself. And Peter Quint.

ALEX: I saw Quint again last night. He wanted me to talk to Miles.

MRS GROSE: And did you?

ALEX: Yes.

MRS GROSE: I hope you didn't scare the boy.

ALEX: He opened up to me, for a while anyway.

MRS GROSE: About what?

ALEX: Him and Quint.

MRS GROSE: (*Putting ALEX's tea down a bit too forcefully*.) You should leave things alone.

ALEX: Can't you see the damage this silence is doing?

MRS GROSE: You don't know anything. Imagining ghosts. I'm going to call Julien.

ALEX: To have me removed? What are you afraid of?

MRS GROSE: I'm just worried about the influence you are having on the children. We were happy until you arrived.

ALEX: Miles has just been expelled!

MRS GROSE: That's got nothing to do with anything that happened here.

ALEX: What did happen here?

MRS GROSE: Nothing.

ALEX: You slipped up there, didn't you? Whatever is going on, you're in on it.

MRS GROSE: I think you should go. I'll tell Julien to pay you until the end of the month.

ALEX: No. Not until I find out what is going on here. I know that I'm not seeing ghosts. I'm not stupid. It is some sort of illusion, using actors, probably. And you are in on it. That's how "Quint" got inside the house.

MRS GROSE: Get out!

ALEX: Not until I have answers.

There is a scream offstage.

MRS GROSE: Flora!

Flora runs in and hugs MRS GROSE. She is scared out of her wits.

FLORA: I saw him. Peter Quint. I saw him. With Miss Jessel.

ALEX: What cruelty is this?

MRS GROSE: It's all right, Flora!

FLORA: Why have they come? What do they want?

MRS GROSE: I don't know, sweetheart.

FLORA: (*Shaking with fear*.) Have they come for Miles?

ALEX: How can you do this to her?

MRS GROSE: I don't know what is happening. Whatever it is, I'm not involved, believe me.

ALEX: Then why the conspiracy of silence? Something happened here, and no one will talk about it.

FLORA: She's right. Nobody ever talks about anything. No one ever talks about the accident or Miss Jessel or Peter.

MRS GROSE: I'm sorry, Flora.

FLORA: Can you fetch Miles, please.

ALEX: I'll go.

ALEX exits.

MRS GROSE: Everything's going to be all right, Flora.

FLORA: How can you know that?

MRS GROSE: Because I won't let you come to any harm.

FLORA: What about Miles?

MRS GROSE: Him too, of course.

FLORA: That's not what I mean. It's already too late.

MRS GROSE: Don't say that.

FLORA: It's true. You know it is.

MRS GROSE: I'll make sure he gets help. I'm sorry. I should have known that it is no good pretending something never happened.

FLORA: What do they want? Miss Jessel and Peter.

MRS GROSE: It's not really them, Flora.

FLORA: It is.

MRS GROSE: It's not. It's two people trying to scare you.

FLORA: It's them. I know it is. They are really here.

MRS GROSE: Do you mean that you know that they weren't really here before?

FLORA: It felt like Miss Jessel was, but whenever I turned to look at her, she wasn't there. Why have they come? What do they want?

MRS GROSE: I don't know, sweetheart.

FLORA: They were always so nice.

MRS GROSE: I know.

FLORA: Where's Miles?

MRS GROSE: He's coming.

FLORA: Why did you send Alex?

MRS GROSE: I didn't. She offered.

FLORA: I hope she has gone to fetch him.

MRS GROSE: What do you mean?

FLORA: They only came after Alex arrived. I think she might have brought them.

MRS GROSE: Perhaps…

FLORA: What?

MRS GROSE: Nothing.

FLORA: Tell me.

MRS GROSE: I think you could be right. Alex has brought them with her. She just doesn't know it.

ALEX and MILES enter.

MILES: What's happened?

FLORA: I've seen them. Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. They were together.

MILES: Where?

FLORA: Outside. Under the tree.

ALEX: The footage! I didn't think. (*She takes out her phone and opens the app*.) Movement detected, ten minutes ago. No. No, I can't see anything.

FLORA: Let me see.

MRS GROSE: No, Flora.

FLORA: Let me see! (*ALEX gives her the phone. She looks and is about to throw the phone down, but ALEX grabs it.)* There's nothing there.

MILES: You are sure you saw them?

FLORA: You don't believe me.

ALEX: I believe you, Flora.

MILES: So, do I. I just wanted to know that you were sure.

It suddenly goes dark. There is enough light to see the action but very little out the window. Thunder.

MRS GROSE: Another storm. It's as black as night out there. (*She goes to switch on the kitchen light. Nothing*.) The power is off again.

FLORA goes to the window.

FLORA: How can it get so dark so quickly?

MILES: Come away from the window, Flora.

FLORA: Why? (*She does*.)

MILES: Just to be safe.

A flash of lightning. Miss Jessel can be seen outside the window.

ALEX: (*Gasps*.) Jessel!

FLORA: Where?

ALEX: At the window.

Everyone turns. She is not there.

ALEX: She was there. Staring at Flora.

MRS GROSE: Don't frighten the child.

FLORA: Alex. You can fix this. You are the only one who can do it.

MILES: Flora?

FLORA: The living don't feel guilt. You understand that now.

ALEX: It's Jessel. She is speaking through Flora.

MRS GROSE: Stop this at once.

FLORA: End the silence.

MRS GROSE: Flora. Come here, sweetheart.

Instead, FLORA goes to MILES who embraces her. She is sobbing.

MRS GROSE: This has gone far enough.

ALEX: No. We are nearly there. We are nearly at the end.

MRS GROSE: I'm taking the children away.

ALEX: You won't. You mustn't. We must put things right.

A flash of lightning. QUINT and JESSEL are both at the window.

ALEX: There! You saw. You must have done.

QUINT and JESSEL remain at the window, but no one except ALEX will turn to look at them. FLORA leaves MILES and goes to MRS GROSE, who hugs her.

ALEX: Miles. He's here. Peter Quint. Look, he's here.

MILES: No.

ALEX: It's the only way to stop this. Look at him

MILES: No.

ALEX: What did he do to you, Miles?

Another flash of lightning. QUINT and JESSEL are gone.

ALEX: We can fix this, but we must end the silence.

MILES: No. No.

ALEX: What did he do, Miles?

MILES: Nothing. He didn't do anything.

ALEX: Tell the truth.

MILES: I don't remember.

ALEX: You do. You must do.

MILES: I just remember his face, his voice. He told me stories. We did things together. That's all.

ALEX: What sort of things?

MILES: Normal things. Good things.

ALEX: Miles…

MILES: Then…

ALEX: Yes?

MILES: There were other things. Things I don't remember. Things I was told he did. Other people said that he did.

ALEX: What did he do?

Another flash of lightning. QUINT and JESSEL are now inside the room. MILES runs to ALEX and hugs her but does not turn to look at QUINT.

ALEX: What did he do, Miles?

MILES: He came. At night.

MRS GROSE: Oh, Miles.

FLORA sobs.

MILES: He said it was alright.

ALEX: I'm sorry.

MILES: He said that no one needed to know.

MRS GROSE and FLORA sob. ALEX tries to remain professional.

ALEX: It's alright; it's not your fault. And you have nothing to fear.

Finaly, MILES turns to look at QUINT.

MILES: You don't understand. Not Peter. It was never Peter.

There is a huge flash of lightning. MILES collapses. QUINT and JESSEL are gone. ALEX, MRS GROSE and FLORA all kneel down to where MILES lies on the floor. They say his name, lift his head, etc. He is nonresponsive, but it is unclear whether he has just fainted. Another flash of lightning. Where QUINT and JESSEL were standing now stands JULIEN. The others don't see him. They continue to attend to MILES.

ALEX: It's over, Miles. He's gone. He has left you.

Blackout.

THE END