

THE THIN VEIL

Written by

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Based on a true story.

PREVIEW ONLY

FADE IN:

INT. ROSMA'S CABIN - NIGHT

Austere and filled with decrepit furniture. A single candle fights against the darkness.

The only other light is that of a lantern, held by CHARLES ROSMA (35), a bone-thin, bearded man with torn, dirty clothes and wild eyes.

He holds the lantern high while he scribbles hastily on his wall with a lump of coal.

A *CREAK* and Rosma turns, frightened. He lofts the lantern, limps forward, shines it in one corner.

ROSMA
Who's there?

The darkness gives way, reveals nothing except crazed scribblings covering every wall: rough sketches of a split foot.

He takes another step, casts light in the other corner. Again nothing.

Another step and he moves the lantern to the initial corner. This time the light reveals a FEMALE CHILD her head down.

Terrified, Rosma backs up.

ROSMA (CONT'D)
No, no, no.

As he does, three sets of children's legs emerge from the darkness hanging from the ceiling. He bumps into them and spins.

The light shows dead children hanging from nooses. They stare down at him. Blood covers their faces and their feet have been sliced down the middle.

ROSMA (CONT'D)
No!

He backs away, swings the lantern around, more children are revealed. Their faces bloodied and walk with severe limps.

They move closer to him, backing him toward the wall.

ROSMA (CONT'D)
Stay away!

Rosma grabs an ax leaning against the wall and wields it. When he does, a chair flies across the room at him. He chops it apart.

A small table lifts and flies at him. He swings and misses and it breaks across his shoulder.

He screams as the children crowd closer to him.

The front door flies open. The doorway dark, heavy rain pelts the porch. A flash of lightning reveals... more children standing in the shadows?

Rosma straightens up and turns, breathing heavily.

ROSMA (CONT'D)

This ends now!

Rosma raises the ax and attempts to run forward, but only makes it a few steps before he is lifted off his feet by an unseen force and slammed back against the wall with his arms spread wide.

He tries to pull his arm off the wall, but cannot. The ax flies from his hand.

He peers into the doorway, terrified.

ROSMA (CONT'D)

No!

Thunder *BOOMS*.

Lightning strikes. The light reveals Rosma's most recent scribbling, "Mr. Splitfoot Is Here."

EXT. ROSMA'S CABIN - NIGHT

As we're transported away, the small dwelling lit by lightning, echoes with Rosma's screams.

EXT. ELIZABETH'S CABIN - DAY

Super: Windham, Ohio 1848, 30 years later.

Amid a vast expanse of farm fields, a rough timbered cabin, cracked daubing, overgrown weeds, a bit the worse for wear.

INT. ELIZABETH'S CABIN - BEDROOM - DAY

NICHOLAS SUTTON'S (30s), thin, pale, his lifeless eyes stare.

ELIZABETH Sutton (late 20s) beautiful, determined, intense blue eyes of a fighter, lays her head across Nicholas' chest, sobs.

DR. HUGHES (50s), kind, solemn, packs up his medical bag nearby. He looks out the door, hears a child's sniffles.

DR. HUGHES
I'm terribly sorry, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth weeps. Dr. Hughes walks out.

DINING AREA

THOMAS (10), bright, inquisitive, sits on a bench. He holds an intricately carved wooden soldier in his hands.

Dr. Hughes sits down beside Thomas. He looks at the toy.

DR. HUGHES (CONT'D)
May I see that?

Thomas hands the doctor it. Dr. Hughes moves the toy soldier's articulated arms up and down, impressed.

THOMAS
My Papa whittled it for me.

DR. HUGHES
I've never seen one like it. You should be proud to own it.

THOMAS
He was going to teach me how to whittle them. Papa...

Dr. Hughes frowns, hands the toy back to Thomas.

DR. HUGHES
I'm sorry, lad.

He pats Thomas on the shoulder, steps off.

EXT. GRAVE - DAY

Small, lonely plot on the Sutton property surrounded by wheat.

A crudely marked gravestone reads: Nicholas J. Sutton 1815 - 1848. The top corner of the gravestone is chipped and fractured.

Elizabeth and Thomas solemnly watch two GRAVE DIGGERS toss dirt onto Nicholas' interred casket.

Thomas holds a "bouquet" of wild flowers and weeds in his hand. Their cabin looms behind them beyond the wheat.

FATHER CRESPI (50s), weathered, but warm, stocky, a commanding presence about him, reads from his bible.

FATHER CRESPI

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. I will come back and welcome you into My presence, so that you also may be where I am.

Father Crespi shuts his bible.

FATHER CRESPI (CONT'D)

We must realize in the midst of this time of mourning, there is good news. Death is not the end. Nicholas is with the Lord.

Father Crespi hugs Elizabeth, then Thomas.

FATHER CRESPI (CONT'D)

If you need anything at all, you always know where I am.

Elizabeth wipes tears from her face.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, Father.

FATHER CRESPI

I'm glad Thomas is a student at the rectory, but maybe now is a good time for you to return to the church as well.

Elizabeth nods. Father Crespi warmly pats Thomas' head. He walks off with a limp.

Thomas stares chipped corner of the gravestone.

THOMAS
Papa's gravestone chipped.

ELIZABETH
It's all we could afford.

THOMAS
His gravestone shouldn't be
chipped.

Elizabeth sighs. Thomas lays the bouquet on the grave.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Elizabeth, basket in hand, glances through the isle, picks up a few essential items. Two WOMEN in a nearby isle, stare at Elizabeth, whisper.

WOMAN
Jezebel.

Elizabeth turns around, glares at them.

ELIZABETH
Excuse me?

The two women quickly lower their heads, look away.

INT. GENERAL STORE - COUNTER - DAY

The store's owners MR. PERRY (50s) and his wife VICTORIA (50s) organize shelves behind the counter. Elizabeth approaches the register, sets the items down on the counter.

Mr. Perry grabs a logbook, combs through it.

ELIZABETH
Hello, Mr. Perry. I need--

MR. PERRY
I'm sorry Elizabeth, your account is already in default. I cannot extend your credit anymore until you pay your balance.

ELIZABETH
I'm almost done with the harvest.
I'll--

MR. PERRY
I ride by your fields everyday.
They're a long way from harvested.

Mr. Perry looks down for a beat. Grumbles, picks up his pen, scribbles in the logbook.

MR. PERRY (CONT'D)
Still, Nicholas was a good man.

Mr. Perry pushes the items towards Elizabeth.

MR. PERRY (CONT'D)
Last time.

ELIZABETH
Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Perry. I will pay my debt. You have my word.

Elizabeth swipes the items off the counter, leaves. Victoria shakes her head.

VICTORIA
There's more money we'll never see.

MR. PERRY
Her husband just died, Victoria.

VICTORIA
Well... we reap what we sow.

INT. SUTTON CABIN - NIGHT

Thomas sleeps in his bed. Elizabeth sews up a pair of Thomas' pants by candlelight.

BANG!

Something drops to the floor, rolls, startles her. She sets the pants down, heads to the noise.

Carrying a lantern, Elizabeth approaches his bed, notices Thomas' toy soldier has fallen to the floor.

She picks up the soldier, tucks it away with him. She leans over and kisses Thomas on the forehead.

She's about to walk back out when she notices a piece of paper on Thomas' night stand. She picks it up.

The paper has a child's drawing on it: A crudely drawn woman, a little boy, and a man. The man has X's for eyes. He has a tombstone over his head. The crack in its corner is featured prominently.

Elizabeth lays the drawing back down. Saddened, she watches Thomas sleep for a moment.

EXT. ELIZABETH'S CABIN - DAY

HARLAN (30s), handsome, chiseled-jaw aristocrat, rides up on a horse. He dismounts, ties the horse, looks around. He knocks on the front door.

When there's no answer he looks in a window, looks toward the fields. He sees crops moving in the distance.

EXT. FARM FIELD - DAY

Elizabeth hard at work, swings a scythe. There's a cart nearby with stacks of wheat in it. Harlan approaches, barely dodges one of Elizabeth's swings.

HARLAN

Whoa.

ELIZABETH

Are you trying to get yourself killed?! What are you doing here?

She sets the scythe down.

HARLAN

I've just come to check up on you and Thomas.

ELIZABETH

It's not necessary. We're doing just fine.

HARLAN

I also wanted to offer my condolences. Nicholas was a hard-working man.

Elizabeth takes her gloves off, wipes sweat from her brow.

ELIZABETH

Thank you.

She bends down, picks up a handful of wheat, loads them into the cart. She winces in pain. Harlan gently grabs her hand.

HARLAN

Your hands are blistered.

Elizabeth quickly retracts her hand.

ELIZABETH

That's what happens when you work, Harlan.

HARLAN

But why are you doing it alone?

ELIZABETH

Who else is going to do it? I have Thomas to think about and a mortgage to pay. I have animals to feed. Mr. Perry has cut me off from his store. I owe--

HARLAN

You don't owe him anything.

ELIZABETH

Yes, I do. I--

HARLAN

Your account has been paid in full.

ELIZABETH

What? Why did you do that?

HARLAN

I know you've been in a bind since Nicholas passed. I wanted to help.

ELIZABETH

You shouldn't have. Now you've given everyone something else to talk about.

HARLAN

You shouldn't worry yourself about the gossips in this town.

ELIZABETH

And a man of your status? You should worry more. I'll pay you back when the harvest come in.

HARLAN

That won't be necessary.

ELIZABETH

Yes, it will.

Elizabeth puts her gloves back on. Picks up the scythe, gets back to work.

HARLAN

Let me lend you some of my field hands. This is a lot of work for--

ELIZABETH

For a woman?

Harlan grins.

HARLAN

Always on the defensive. I was going to say, for one person. I'll send some help, just until you get caught up.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, but I can handle it myself.

HARLAN

Don't be so stubborn. You'll never clear these fields in time.

ELIZABETH

I said I can handle it. Now if you'll excuse me.

Harlan sighs, looks around at all the fields that still need to be worked.

HARLAN

Mother has arranged a soirée this weekend.

As she works:

ELIZABETH

Oh? What's the occasion?

Harlan smiles.

HARLAN

No occasion, really. Just mother trying to stay socially relevant since my father's passing. You remember the gatherings she used to host.

Elizabeth smiles, keeps working.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Well, the entertainment should be interesting anyway. A trio of traveling mediums. Sisters, in fact. They'll be presenting a seance.

Elizabeth gives him a dubious glance.

ELIZABETH

Really? I wouldn't have pegged you
as a spiritualist.

Harlan laughs.

HARLAN

You know my mother. She's easily
taken in by such foolishness.
Regardless, it shall be an
delightful evening. The seance is
to begin at the stroke of midnight.

Harlan moves his eyebrows up and down. Elizabeth can't help
but giggle.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

I should like you to come.

She leans on her scythe.

ELIZABETH

Oh, I'm certain your mother would
love to see me.

HARLAN

She's not one to hold a grudge.

ELIZABETH

No? Half the people in this town
whisper ill of me behind my back
and the other half are bold enough
to speak ill of me to my face. You
don't think I know it's your
mother's doing? Her prominence
means that her opinions of me carry
far and wide.

HARLAN

I'm sorry. I've talked to her
before about the rumors she
spreads. I'll talk to her again.

ELIZABETH

Don't bother. Thank you for the
invitation Harlan, but as you have
already ascertained, there is much
work to be done.

Elizabeth gets back to work.

HARLAN

Very well. It was good to see you.
I do hope you change your mind.

Harlan leaves. She watches him, swings her scythe.