

ERNEST AND THE PALE MOON

By Oliver Lansley

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CHARACTERS

ERNEST HEMEL / CHORUS 1

GWENDOLINE BETRAM / CHORUS 2

EDGEFORD / THOMAS THISTLE / OFFICER / CHORUS 3

NURSE / MOTHER / CHORUS 4

1. ERNEST WATCHING

Ernest sits in his chair at his window as the audience enter. His face is barely lit.

The sound of a clock ticking and the occasional creak of of Ernest's apartment.

A sudden flash of light. Ernest is pressed up against the window with a wild look on his face. Black out.

PRE-RECORDED MUSICAL INTRO INTO ASYLUM AMBIENCE

2. ASYLUM 1

AMBIENT SOUND OF ASYLUM

Langshotts Asylum. NURSE and EDGFORD - They pass by various cells. NURSE carries a lamp.

NURSE

First time in a place like this?

EDGEFORD

Sorry? Oh, yes, no, I mean... In a place like *this* yes, but obviously I've been to countless other institutions before.

EDGEFORD

Can they hear us?

NURSE

They could if they chose, most don't.

NURSE

May I ask how you do it?

EDGEFORD

Do what?

NURSE

Make your judgements... How you decide whether a man is truly mad or not.

EDGEFORD

Well it's a complicated process.

NURSE

Doesn't seem complicated to me. This lot, all of em, mad as the day is long. Dangerous. Not sure why an 'assessment' is necessary, when they're dribbling like babies and howling like wolves.

EDGEFORD

Well the mind is a complicated beast Miss...

NURSE

..Green.

EDGEFORD

Miss Green. They may seem damaged or disturbed but that does not mean to say they cannot be fixed.

NURSE

There's no fixing to be done here I can assure you. It's in their eyes.

NURSE

You clean 'em up and put em back out there, they'll just find a way back in, you mark my words.

NURSE

Here he is. Ernest Hemel.

SINGING BOWL STARTS

EDGEFORD

What's he done with the window?

NURSE

We had to cover it up. At night he would just scream and scream and start tearing at the walls, scratching, scraping. He would damage himself quite badly, we'd have to sedate him and strap him up, took us a while to figure out it was the light of the moon he was afraid of. We covered the window and he's not made a peep since. That's how he was found, like that... pale as a ghost... like he's been scared to death. Timid fella to look at him now but when you hear about what he done... Well like they say... the quiet ones...

LIGHTS CHANGE

PRE-RECORDED MUSICAL INTRO

Once actors are in position, *METRONOME STARTS*

3. INTRODUCTION OF ERNEST

ERNEST

Tick tick tick tick tick tick... Ticked the clock as Ernest Hemel sat, quiet and still in the darkened corner of his apartment block.

LIVE MUSIC BEGINS - ERNEST'S THEME

CHORUS 3

No light but a slight dusting from the distant moon. Still, still he sat,

ERNEST

Calm and patient

CHORUS 3

As he watched, rapt, from his window.

CHORUS 4

Eyes straining as they peered across the empty void to reach their goal.

CHORUS 3

No movement but the occasional twitch from his clammy hand, restless, revealing the inner itch that lay beneath the calm waters in which his body bathed.

CHORUS 4

Tick tock,

CHORUS 3

tick tock,

ERNEST

tick tock, ticked past nine on the clock

CHORUS 4

counting down the precious remaining minutes of this wonderful vision.

ERNEST

Love

CHORUS 4

He called it to himself.

ERNEST

Devotion. A quiet, admirable devotion, which would one day be embraced.

CHORUS 3

For his eyes were felt, he knew that much. He was but one party in this game which was shared with another.

ERNEST

She felt him, he knew it.

CHORUS 3

And every night she would sit for him, as he watched her, in the darkness.

ERNEST

So still, almost like a painting, her clean white skin, the long flow of her hair glowing under the light of the pale moon.

CHORUS 3

They both played their parts, most willingly.

CHORUS 4

Waiting, each alone but not alone as the ticking clock counted down the moments of their nightly encounter.

CHORUS 3

He would sometimes forget to breathe.

METRONOME STOPS

CHORUS 3

His eyes travelling across the emptiness to embrace her fully. He held her tightly and dreamt of her touch.

ERNEST

She belonged to him.

LIGHTS CHANGE

4. ASYLUM 2

ASYLUM AMBIENCE

EDGEFORD

Does he ever speak?

NURSE

Not to me, he just sits there, staring at that picture of his.

EDGEFORD

Who's the woman in the picture?

NURSE

I believe it's his mother... - Some have said that it's the young girl they found but that's probably just stories. You

get a lot of that in this place, people talking, it's as if the truth isn't enough for some people.

LIGHTS CHANGE

5. GWENDOLINE INTRODUCTION

Gwendoline Bertram sits in her den by candle light. We can see her through a lace shroud.

GWENDOLINE THEME SUNG - continued by accordion

CHORUS 1

Miss Gwendoline Bertram.

CHORUS 4

A most divine creature...

CHORUS 1

A most exquisite young maiden...

CHORUS 4

...glanced around at the hundreds of burnt out candles that covered her room, each one a different beautiful wax figurine that had become crooked and disfigured as the candle had melted. She looked down at the figure in her hand -

GWENDOLINE

- sparkling away like her very own special star.

CHORUS 1

The stars were shy in the city in which she lived. Veiled by gas and steam and smoke and cloud. Reticent to be seen clearly for fear they may be snared and snatched from their hiding places

GWENDOLINE

But not the bright moon

CHORUS 1

Gwendoline sat quietly, as she did every night, waiting for the moon to pierce the horizon of the foreboding apartment block that sat across from her window, still and menacing like a heavy hound abandoned by its master.

CHORUS 4

She felt a finger of moonlight reach down and caress her face.
She smiled, blew out the candle and pulled open the curtains
of her apartment window to let the light embrace her.

Gwendoline appears from behind the lace.

GWENDOLINE

She loved the moon.

CHORUS 4

Its glow was like a balm to her broken eyes, not like the
harsh, cruel sun. Her captor that kept her locked up
inside. Too cruel for her porcelain skin, too strong for her
gentle, misted eyes. Clouded pearls that felt shape and form
and light but could barely see past the confines of her room.

6. ERNEST WATCHES GWENDOLINE

ERNEST THEME

ERNEST

Unlike the sharp, hawk-like eyes that were trained upon her as
she sat, smiling gently.

CHORUS 3

She was unaware of his invasive gaze that clutched her tightly
in her seat.

CHORUS 4

She couldn't see into the dark window of the dark building
that loomed beyond her sight.

CHORUS 3

She couldn't see that in that darkness sat a man.

ERNEST

Still, calm, patient. Watching.

CHORUS 4

Looking at her with as much love as she looked upon her moon.

ERNEST

He watched her,

GWENDOLINE

as she watched her moon

CHORUS 4

and the clock ticked and tocked.

ERNEST

Tick tock, tick tock,

CHORUS 4

until the time was up.

LIGHTS CHANGE

7. ASYLUM 3 - CUT

8. THOMAS INTRODUCTION

THOMAS THISTLE THEME - on cello and then on harmonica

CHORUS 1

Next door sat a young man,

CHORUS 2

Thomas Thistle,

CHORUS 1

Cursing the shrapnel that peppered the flesh of his thigh and the pain that followed him around these days like a starving dog, clutching at his leg with the stubby fingers of a scared child.

CHORUS 2

He had spent much of his time alone in the month since his discharge from the army.

CHORUS 1

Struggling at first to cope with the sprawling randomness of life outside the military. Faced with a terrifying, oppressive freedom and the heaving lack of purpose that hung like an albatross around the neck of one's everyday existence.

CHORUS 2

He longed for some form of companionship, a distraction, and seeing the face of the young lady who lived next door had lifted his heart higher than it had been since moving into the building.

THOMAS

He had never seen anything like her.

CHORUS 2

Her shock of soft white hair cascading like snow drops from her shoulders. Her skin, so white, almost translucent, but sublime in its purity, like a china doll.

THOMAS

And those eyes...

CHORUS 1

He held the small wax figure he had spent so much time carving tightly in his hand and stared at it.

THOMAS

She is so close.

CHORUS 2

His eyes bored into the walls as if through sheer will they would be able to pierce them and rest upon her face.

THOMAS

He dreamt of her...

GWENDOLINE

As she watched her moon...

ERNEST

And as she was watched from the dark window of the dark building...

CHORUS 4

After a moment, he grabbed his stick and rose to his feet.

Thomas crosses to Gwendoline's area.

THOMAS

Knock knock knock

9. GWENDOLINE HEARS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR

GWENDOLINE

Tick tock,

CHORUS 4

tick tock,

CHORUS 1

tick tock,

GWENDOLINE

ticked the clock as Gwendoline Bertram sat, quiet and still watching her moon.

THOMAS

Knock knock knock

GWENDOLINE

Gwendoline's heart leapt when she heard the knocking at her door. She wasn't used to visitors.

CHORUS 4

She called out

GWENDOLINE

Hello and was greeted by a warm, rich voice.

THOMAS

Hello

GWENDOLINE

Wings of butterflies beat in her stomach.

CHORUS 1

Her hand trembled slightly with excitement.

She rose to her feet and opened the door.

CHORUS 4

And there she found him. The man whom for some reason she had not been able to shake from her thoughts.

GWENDOLINE

She smiled.

Hello.

THOMAS

Oh, hello, er my name is Thomas Thistle, I'm from next door.

GWENDOLINE

Oh, yes. I remember... My name is Gwendoline.

THOMAS

I was, well it's silly really I just... Well I wondered if you might want some company?

LIGHTS CHANGE

10. ERNEST WATCHES GWENDOLINE LEAVE HER WINDOW SEAT

METRONOME STARTS

ERNEST

Tick tock,

tick tock,

tick tock,

tick tock,

ticked the clock as Ernest Hemel sat, quiet and still watching Miss Gwendoline Bertram watch the moon.

ALL CHORUS

Knock knock knock

CHORUS 4

The index finger of his right hand twitched by his side as her eyes dropped their gaze for a moment.

CHORUS 2

She turned her head a fraction, to listen.

ERNEST

She spoke.

CHORUS 3

Ernest could not hear the words nor guess what they were. He couldn't even imagine the sounds of them in her mouth as she spoke, having never heard her voice. This fact ached inside him.

CHORUS 4

His hand clenched as she rose to her feet. He shifted very slightly, as she moved towards the door.

ERNEST

He looked at his clock

ALL CHORUS

tick tock, tick tock

CHORUS 3

He rose from his chair and placed his hand against the window, his heart racing like a mother who had lost her child on a crowded street.

CHORUS 2

His clammy fingers left fingerprints upon the glass as he stared and stared.

ERNEST

Movement. A man.

GWENDOLINE

Hello.

THOMAS

Oh, hello, er my name is Thomas Thistle, I'm from next door.

GWENDOLINE

Oh, yes. I remember... My name is Gwendoline.

THOMAS

I was, well it's silly really I just... Well I wondered if you might want some company?

ERNEST

Ernest forgot to breathe, his heart began to thunder in his chest. Pounding as if trying to escape. Her eyes on him.

CHORUS 4

Her moon was forgotten.

ERNEST

She smiled. Ernest had never seen that smile.

METRONOME STOPS

CHORUS 3

Blood seared through his veins as a familiar rage began to engulf his being.

CHORUS 2

He pressed his face up against the window.

CHORUS 4

His now, boiling breath, heaving and wheezing and clouding the glass.

CHORUS 2

His hands now clenched to fists, shaking slightly.

ERNEST

He watched as they spoke words he could not hear, as they exchanged looks, laughs, he would never understand.

CHORUS 4

Ernest's eyes welled with tears of fury and he hammered his fist on his window, once. As he did so his mind flicked to the body of his mother, sleeping gently nearby.

ERNEST

He didn't want to wake her.

CHORUS 4

He strained his ears, heard no sounds of stirring, and so returned to his watch. His breath unsteady like an animal.

THOMAS

The man left

GWENDOLINE

Gwendoline returned to her darkness.

CHORUS 4

And the moon rose in the sky.

LIGHTS CHANGE

BLOOD THEME INTO THOMAS THEME

13a. THOMAS RETURNS TO HIS APARTMENT

THOMAS

Thomas Thistle bade Gwendoline Bertram goodnight. He had thoroughly enjoyed her company and would dream about her that night. He was almost unaware of the pain in his leg that followed him around like a starving dog. It had been silenced by his happiness, pacified by contentment. He moved to his window and switched on his light.

14. ERNEST WITH KNIFE IN WINDOW

ERNEST

A light appeared in another window.

CHORUS 4

Ernest saw the man's face.

ERNEST

The man he had been cursing, the man he didn't know.

CHORUS 2

A tiny droplet of blood slid down the crease between Ernest's left thumb and forefinger as he slowly unclenched his fist, allowing his nails to slide out from the grooves they had created in his palm.

CHORUS 4

In his right hand he could feel the weight of the knife he had snatched from his kitchen drawer moments before.

CHORUS 2

Ernest's breath deepened.

THOMAS

The man smiled and sighed.

ERNEST

For a moment Ernest flinched as the man seemed to stare directly at him, but Ernest knew he could not be seen. Could he?

LIGHTS CHANGE

15. LIGHT SHINES IN THOMAS' FACE

THOMAS

Thomas stared out of the window, a contented smile upon his face, until something caught his eye.

TORCH LIGHT ON THOMAS' FACE - Chorus 2

CHORUS 2

He blinked, momentarily blinded.
From a dark window of the dark building that overshadowed his apartment a light was flickering upon his face.

CHORUS 4

He strained his eyes trying to detect the source of this light but whenever he thought he might be able to make out the shape of a figure, it struck him again, flushing his eyes out of focus.

CHORUS 4 [cont.]

Fluttering intently around them like a moth around a flame.

THOMAS

A signal? A warning? A cry for help?

CHORUS 4

Thomas rested on his stick and counted the blocks of the building.

THOMAS

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen floors up.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven across. On the corner.

16. ERNEST SEES A DARK FIGURE CROSS BELOW

CHORUS 2

Ernest's heart was racing as the man in the building opposite stared directly at him.

ERNEST

How could he see him? How could he know?

CHORUS 4

The knife in his right hand trembled as the moon high above shone down upon him and its light caught the blade.

TORCHES ON

THOMAS

Thomas stood for another second, staring at the source of the light, he then turned and walked out of his room.

CHORUS 2 TORCH OFF

ERNEST

He is coming.

CHORUS 4

Ernest stood in the dark and waited.

CHORUS 4 [cont.]

His breath heavy as his nostrils filled with the pungent scent of the fresh hot-house flowers that sat, as they always did, in the vase on the table beneath his mother's portrait.

ERNEST

He waited. Tick tock tick tock. He is coming.

CHORUS 3

Ernest's heart began to pound. He pushed himself up against his window to get a view of the ground between the two apartment blocks and he waited.

CHORUS 2

Thirteen floors below he saw a dark figure move towards his building.

He clutched his knife tightly in his hand and moved to his door.

ERNEST

He is coming.

TORCH OFF

Cast MOVE STRUCTURE - the window has now become the door.

CHORUS 3

There was a knock.

CHORUS 2

Knock, knock, knock

ERNEST

Ernest stared at his door as the knocks echoed through his bones.

CHORUS 2

Knock, knock, knock.

ERNEST

He is here.

CHORUS 2

Ernest moved to the door and reached for the handle.

CHORUS 2

Knock, knock, knock

CHORUS 3

Ernest pushed himself up against the wall and opened the door.

LX UNDER FLOORBOARDS ON?

CHORUS 3

He listened and tried to remain still, he could hear the heavy breath of the figure on the other side.

ERNEST

One step, two steps.

CHORUS 3

Footsteps crossed the threshold.

ERNEST

Three steps, four steps, five steps.

CHORUS 2

Ernest's heart thundered in his chest, his knuckles whitened around the knife in his hand. He held his breath. Beetles of sweat scuttled across his brow.

ERNEST

Six steps, seven...

CHORUS 2

Ernest slammed the door shut and launched himself upon the figure, plunging his knife deep into the back, feeling its blade scrape slightly against fragments of spine.

CHORUS 3

A small searching glow of moonlight crept into Ernest's apartment.

ERNEST

His heart stopped when he caught sight of the shock of white hair that fell into his arms.

MUSIC - action rewinds.

LIGHTS CHANGE

17. GWENDOLINE FOLLOWS HER STAR

CHORUS 1

As Gwendoline went to close her curtains something caught her eye.

CHORUS 1 FLICKERS TORCH LIGHT ON HER FACE

GWENDOLINE

A flash, a sparkle, like a star twinkling just for her.

CHORUS 3

She gazed out, her failing eyes struggling to find their target. The star remained, twinkling brightly, shining into her eyes.

GWENDOLINE

Her very own special star.

CHORUS 3

Its light caressed her face. It was calling to her.

GWENDOLINE

Another gift?

CHORUS 3

She smiled.

CHORUS 1

It came from a dark window of the dark building across from hers. Straining her eyes to make out the shapes of the windows she counted the blocks of the building.

GWENDOLINE

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen floors up. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven across. On the corner.

CHORUS 1

She remained there in the darkness for a moment longer watching the twinkling star, before turning and walking out of her apartment.

CHORUS 1 TORCH OFF. CHORUS 3 TORCH ON

CHORUS 3

Clutching the railings, she made her way down the stairs and out into the night.

CHORUS 1

She looked up as she crossed the space between the two buildings and saw the moon high up in the sky looking down upon her.

CHORUS 3

She followed the star and reached the entrance of the building. She started climbing the stairs.

GWENDOLINE

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen floors up.

CHORUS 3

She counted the doors.

GWENDOLINE

One...two...three...four...five...six...six...six...six... seven across. On the corner.

CHORUS 3

She knocked.

CHORUS 3

Knock, knock, knock

GWENDOLINE

Nothing.

CHORUS 3

Knock, knock, knock

GWENDOLINE

Nothing.

CHORUS 3

Knock, knock, knock

GWENDOLINE

Nothing.

CHORUS 4

She turned to leave but as she did she heard the gentle creak of a door opening.

LX UNDER FLOORBOARDS ON

CHORUS 4

Her heart fluttered. She stared inside the dark apartment. She could see nothing but the thick darkness. She stepped forward.

ERNEST

One step, two steps.

GWENDOLINE

Crossing the threshold.

ERNEST

Three steps, four steps, five steps.

GWENDOLINE

She looked around, trying to find her star.

ERNEST

Six steps, seven...

CHORUS 3

Gwendoline's eyes opened wide as she felt the knife enter her back, her mouth dropped open as she struggled to breathe,

CHORUS 4

she could not scream, her lungs refusing to inflate as they snatched at the stale air of the apartment.

MUSIC - action rewinds

LIGHTS CHANGE

18. THOMAS WITNESSES THE STABBING

CHORUS 1

Thomas Thistle exited his room and moved to the dresser in his hallway. Kneeling down he rifled through the drawers and began pulling out the junk inside.

CHORUS 2

There was an urgency to his actions, a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach fueling his curiosity.

THOMAS

Anxiety pricked at the hairs on his neck and back.

CHORUS 1

From behind walls of bric-a-brac he uncovered a small tin box.

THOMAS

He opened the box, a tobacco tin, some letters, photographs..

CHORUS 1

His military issue handgun.

CHORUS 2

Thomas froze like a child confronted with the ghost of a long forgotten fear.

THOMAS

The gun which had never been fired.

CHORUS 1

He suddenly felt a sharp pain in his right leg, a scream from the shard of shrapnel that was now becoming a piece of him.

CHORUS 2

Biting away his pain he pushed the handgun aside and retrieved the old pair of binoculars that he sought.

THOMAS

He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the years of dust from their lenses before heaving himself to his feet and returning to his room.

CHORUS 2

He walked to his window and counted the blocks of the building.

THOMAS

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen floors up. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven across. On the corner.

CHORUS 4

His hands clutched the handle of his cane tightly as he raised the binoculars to his eyes and looked into the dark window of the dark building. A small shaft of moonlight crept inside the apartment.

THOMAS

He saw her, pale as a ghost, her long white hair resting gently on her shoulders.

ERNEST

One step, two steps.

THOMAS

She crossed the threshold.

ERNEST

Three steps, four steps, five steps.

THOMAS

She looked around.

CHORUS 4

Thomas thought he could make out the shadow of a figure behind her. He forgot to breathe.

ERNEST

Six steps, seven...

CHORUS 4

The flash of the blade caught the moonlight blinding him.

FLASH OF LIGHT AND BLACKOUT

THOMAS

He dropped the binoculars, his heart raced. What had he witnessed? It couldn't be...? With shaking hands he scrambled around on the floor to pick up his father's binoculars. Thirteen floors up. Seven across. On the corner. He returned the binoculars to his fearful eyes.

LIGHTS UP

19. ERNEST SEES THOMAS AND THOMAS CALLS THE POLICE

ERNEST'S THEME

CHORUS 4

Thomas saw the face of a man, lit by the moon, staring back at him. Eyes cold as stone, full of hate.

ERNEST

With hot blood on his hands, Ernest saw the man, the man whom should now be dying in his arms, standing there, in the opposing apartment watching him.

He drew his curtains shut.

LIGHTS CHANGE

20. ASYLUM 4 - CUT

21. OFFICER / ERNEST DIALOGUE

PRE-RECORDED MUSIC - ERNEST'S RECORD

Portrait hung, flowers and table, cello on floor, knife up sleeve, Officer uniform on.

Knocking effect on cello

ERNEST

Hello?

OFFICER

Mr Hemel?

ERNEST

Yes?

OFFICER

I'm sorry to bother you at this time but we've had a report of a disturbance coming from your apartment.

ERNEST

A disturbance?

OFFICER

That's right. I wonder if I could ask you a few questions.

ERNEST

Questions? What sort of questions?

OFFICER

May I come in?

ERNEST

Yes, of course.

OFFICER

Nice place.

ERNEST

Thank you.

OFFICER

Yours?

ERNEST

Yes. Can I get you anything? A drink?

OFFICER

A drink, maybe a hot drink thank you, if it's not too much trouble.

ERNEST

Tea perhaps?

OFFICER

Yes, tea would be most sufficient.

ERNEST

It may take a few moments for the kettle to boil. The water here is always very cold.

OFFICER

Quite.

Ernest crosses to kitchen area.

ERNEST

May I ask what questions...

OFFICER

We have had reports of a disturbance.

ERNEST

What sort of disturbance?

OFFICER

Are these curtains always closed?

ERNEST

Often. When it's dark out.

OFFICER

Are you alone?

ERNEST

How do you mean?

OFFICER

Have you had company this evening?

ERNEST

No I...

OFFICER

Reports of a pale young lady.

ERNEST

A pale lady? What's happened to her?

OFFICER

What's that smell?

ERNEST

The flowers.

OFFICER

A fine looking woman.

ERNEST

Excuse me?

OFFICER

The painting... A pale lady... Your wife?

ERNEST

My mother... She's asleep in the next room.

OFFICER

I thought you said you were alone.

ERNEST

I am alone, she sleeps through. She's not well. I could show you if you like.

Cello/accordion as mother breathing.

ERNEST

I'd rather not wake her if that's ok with you, she's not well.

OFFICER

Of course.

Whistle.

ERNEST

That's the kettle. I should get you your tea.

LIGHTS CHANGE

22. ASYLUM 5

ASYLUM AMBIENCE

THOMAS

So it was Thomas who called the police?

NURSE

I believe so. Yes. Said he'd witnessed a murder. That he'd seen a young girl killed. But this was several days before Ernest was brought in.

THOMAS

So what happened?

NURSE

The officer reported that he thought him to be a quiet, polite man, sane as a judge - normal, calm, helpful. He said the man he brought in several days later could have been a different person all together. He described him as a shell, a cadaver of the man he met that night.

EDGEFORD

Really? And there was no sign of the girl?

NURSE

None, not at that time, he said he found Mr Hemel to be most helpful.

EDGEFORD

So what happened in those few days that passed?

NURSE

Who knows?

EDGEFORD

It just doesn't make any sense. How could a normal, seemingly sane human being have been turned into... this... in a matter of mere days?

NURSE

Guilt? It'll always catch up with you in the end. A relentless pursuer, you can ignore, it bury it, run from it, but it'll just keep hunting you down, it'll never stop till it's dragged you into its blackness.

LIGHTS CHANGE

23. ERNEST PUTS MOTHER IN THE WALL

CHORUS 2

tap tap, tap tap.

With the warm blood of his victim still on his hands Ernest reached up to the wall and slowly and delicately

Tap tap...

He searched for the right spot.

Tap...

CHORUS 3

When he heard the sound of a hollow his hand stopped.

CHORUS 2

Calmly and with utmost precision, Ernest began to peel back the wallpaper.

CHORUS 3

He carefully removed the nails from the boards beneath, one by one,

then began prising away the planks to reveal the musty dark void that lay between the walls. He looked inside,

ERNEST

black, empty, dead.

CHORUS 2

Ernest looked upon his victim. The shocking red blood screaming against the soft whiteness of her skin.

CHORUS 3

Ernest's heart was thundering, his mind was racing. A momentary flood of emotion tried to engulf him but he held it back.

CHORUS 2

He took hold of her.

CHORUS 3

She was light and limp in his hands as he placed her into the cavity.

CHORUS 2

He forced her body into the darkness, crushing her elegant limbs into their claustrophobic resting place. She didn't put up a fight as her body was bent and broken and forced into place.

CHORUS 3

He looked at her pale face one last time, sweat christening his brow, hands shaking with fear and rage and shame. He kissed her cool lips.

CHORUS 2

At his touch she stirred, as if waking from a deep sleep, her eyes opened and she looked at him. She tried to scream but she couldn't, her body wouldn't allow it, a desperate plea, a last call for clemency.

CHORUS 3

Ernest's heart ripped through his chest, his eyes wide, he tore her tight fingers from his shirt.

CHORUS 2

He looked into her eyes and she looked into his, both now fully grasping the horror of the situation.

CHORUS 3

He heard a terrible sound coming from her throat, a sound unlike any he had ever heard before. Animalistic, primal, a dying spirit inside a broken body.

Beat.

He then began replacing the planks.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

TILT STRUCTURE (floorboards up)

Sound effects through the blackness.

CHORUS 2

He hammered in the nails. CHORUS 3 He heard her nails scratching against the wood.

CHORUS 3

Like trapped rats. The harsh, blunt cracks as her soft nails snapped and splintered against the wood. The dull sound of the numb stumps of her fingers, prising at the boards.

ERNEST

It stopped.

LIGHTS UNDER FLOORBOARDS ON

CHORUS 4

Slowly, as if approaching a dangerous creature, he edged closer to the wall, pressing his face up against it to listen. Through the wood he could just make out the sound of death. The last drops of steam rising from a kettle's mouth.

CHORUS 2

A gentle gasp, a dying breath, death's rattle.

ERNEST

It had ended.

LIGHTS CHANGE

MUSIC

CHORUS 4

He wiped the knife and returned it to his drawer.

CHORUS 2

He mopped up the blood from his wooden floors.

CHORUS 4

He changed his bloody clothes.

CHORUS 2

And washed his hands.

CHORUS 4

Ernest stared at the blank wall. A long shaft of moonlight, the shape of a casket, crept through his curtains, outlining the place where her body lay.

CHORUS 2

Slowly he began to notice a tiny speck appearing in the middle of it.

ERNEST

Miniscule, the size of a pin prick, a small insect.

CHORUS 4

Ernest stared at the spot, fear swelling in his stomach. Fearfully he reached out a finger and touched it, it was wet and hot. *(blood on hands)*

FAST MUSIC

CHORUS 2

Over come with fear Ernest ran to his mother's bedroom. He grabbed the portrait that hung above her bed and, with urgency and panic he covered the damned spot that had appeared to torment him.

Hangs portrait on structure.

CHORUS 4

He stepped back.

ERNEST

He clenched his fist to prevent his hands from shaking.

CHORUS 2

They retained a slight redness, a flush that would never leave them.

CHORUS 4

Ernest stared into the eyes of his mother..
The clock ticked..

Mini cymbal sound effect from behind structure.

LIGHTS CHANGE

24. THOMAS / GWENDOLINE BACKSTORY

MINI GLOCKENSPIELS.

CHORUS 1

It was a crisp Autumn evening when Thomas Thistle first laid eyes upon Gwendoline Bertram.

BRRRING!

Before then he had no idea who inhabited the apartment next door.

The only sign of life was the occasional sound through the thin walls and the large white candle that would sit on her doormat at the beginning of each week, like clockwork, before disappearing, never to be seen again.

CHORUS 4

Gwendoline lived by candle-light.

BRRRING!

Her eyes were too sensitive for the harsh glare of day and so she would spend her existence locked up inside her small apartment, with only a single lit candle for her to see her way.

This candle would be delivered to her door each week, like clockwork.

CHORUS 1

The candles fascinated Thomas and on this particular Autumn evening he had been overcome with curiosity and had stationed himself at his door waiting, staring through the tiny peephole at the large white candle sitting expectantly on the opposing doormat.

He waited there patiently..

CHORUS 4

Gwendoline shuffled through the darkness of her apartment as she did, every week, to fetch her candle. She opened her door and the aggressive light of the hallway attacked her senses.. She groped around on the doormat for her candle.

CHORUS 1

Thomas saw her, for the first time.
He had never seen anything like her.
Those eyes.

CLOCK CHIMES

CHORUS 1

The very next day Thomas ventured out and purchased a large white candle.
He spent days carefully carving it, ever so delicately with the razor sharp edge of his military issue pocket knife into the image of the pale young lady.

When the day came he went to his door, opened it, and peering around cautiously, he reached down and replaced the large white candle with his own before returning to his peephole to wait.

CHORUS 4

As always Gwendoline went to her door to fetch her candle, she opened the door and clutched around in the brightness. As her fingers touched it she stopped for a moment. She gently glided her hands over the moulded wax, feeling the contours Thomas had painstakingly carved.

CHORUS 1

Thomas watched on eagerly, almost forgetting to breathe. He saw what seemed to be the soft shadow of a smile appear across her lips.
Hurriedly he pulled open the door.

BRRRING!

CHORUS 4

Through the piercing light, she saw him.

CHORUS 1

They stared into each other eyes for a moment.

CHORUS 4

Their hearts stopped.

CHORUS 1

Clocks didn't tick.

CHORUS 4

Suddenly Gwendoline regained herself

3 X CHIMES

CHORUS 4 [cont.]

and shuffled back into her apartment.

CHORUS 1

This same ritual continued for months, every week another perfectly carved visage of her beauty

CHORUS 4

...and every week she would remain at the door a tiny moment longer as if she were aware of his gaze and was rewarding him for his kindness.

CHORUS 1

They would long to to speak,

CHORUS 4

to say hello

CHORUS 1

but each time they would remain there still, silent,

CHORUS 4

watching through their peepholes

CHORUS 1

Until one day Thomas decided to knock on her door.

THOMAS

Knock knock knock

LIGHTS CHANGE
MOVE STRUCTURE

27. SLEEP DEPRIVATION

THOMAS

Thomas Thistle sat, minutes, hours, days, nights, in the darkness watching the apartment thirteen up, seven across. Hoping to catch a glimpse of his love.

THOMAS [cont.]

He begged to go back, to change things. Another loss, another death, caused by his inaction.

ERNEST

Ernest sat, minutes, hours, days, nights, staring at the picture of his mother that hung upon his wall, a cenotaph heralding an unmarked tomb. A shadow of crimson seemed to creep out from behind every side of its thick frame. The sounds of scratching pricked in his ears. His eyelids, like thick syrup, dripped onto his cheeks, smothering into darkness..

FLASH OF LIGHT ON SHINING TWINS IN PICTURE FRAME

THOMAS

The days passed and Thomas stared at ErnestERNESTAnd Ernest stared at the picture

CHORUS 4

And the picture stared back.

LIGHTS CHANGE

26. THOMAS' WAR MEMORY

THOMAS THEME - HARMONICA

CHORUS 2

Thomas had seen death before. Many times, it is the price of going to war.

CHORUS 1

But death is a strange creature, sometimes it will let you pass by freely and others it leaps upon your back, forcing you to carry it until you can walk no further before dragging you down into the mud with it.

BULLET HOLE LIGHTS IN BOXES ON

THOMAS

He remembered shivering in the dark ruins of a derelict building as an enemy patrol searched for him and the remains of his unit.

He remembered the moon shining on the face of the young private whom they found in the room next to him.

The harsh sounds of the words they shouted at him

CHORUS 1

Eh bamboo! Mavuto, mavuto!

THOMAS

words he didn't recognise but the meaning of which he understood.

He remembered the faltering sound of the boy's voice

CHORUS 1

Help! Mercy!

THOMAS

He remembered clutching his military issue handgun, it feeling heavy and alien in his shaking hand. He remembered trying to move, to stand, to act.

He remembered the moment it started to snow, a flicker of beauty amidst the horror.

He felt the snowflakes falling upon his face.

He remembered the sound of a gunshot.

Then silence.

Lights change

MUSIC - SLOW ERNEST THEME

25. MEMORIES OF MOTHER

CHORUS 4

With a jolt, Ernest sat bolt upright in his chair.
His heart crashing against his chest like a drowning man
hammering at the surface of a frozen lake.

ERNEST

His mother's eyes stared back at him from the wall.

CHORUS 2

Memories dug at Ernest's skull like a hatchet, guilt and fear
pierced his spine like poison filled incisors. He forced some
air into his shallow lungs.

CHORUS 3

He couldn't raise his eyes to meet hers. Though he could feel
them upon him.

FAKE MOTHER STARTS MOVING

MOTHER

He saw the shine of her perfect patent leather shoes. The
familiar sight of the hem of her dress, her stockings beneath.

CHORUS 2

Click... click... Click...

CHORUS 4

Heel on hard wood.

CHORUS 2

Click...click... Click.

CHORUS 3

Ernest tried to tear the unwanted thoughts from his head,
pulling at them, one by one like strands of hair. But as he
pulled they just got longer and longer.

CHORUS 2

Click, click

CHORUS 3

He closed his eyes and braced himself for an impact.

MOTHER

But it didn't come, the heels of her shoes clicked on the hard wood floor as she turned and walked away.

ALL CHORUS

Click click

Scratch scratch

Knock knock knock

Tick tock

Click click

Scratch scratch

Knock knock knock

Tick tock

Chorus 3 pushes Ernest out of his chair. Chorus 2 walks behind portrait.

LIGHTS CHANGE

28. BLOOD SPREAD

CHORUS 3

Ernest couldn't help but notice that over the past few days the pigment seemed to be draining from his apartment. The carpet, the wallpaper, had all slowly started losing their colour, and now they appeared white. Pure white, like virgin snow.

CHORUS 4

Even the portrait of his mother had started to change. Her face had become paler, as if a terrible fright had caused it to turn pure white and now you could barely make her out against the stark canvas.

ERNEST

He stared at the painting.

CHORUS 4

The eyes bore into him.

CHORUS 3

He couldn't be sure but it seemed to be moving, almost imperceptibly.

ERNEST

It seemed to breathe.

CHORUS 4

Ernest's heart faltered as he realised the face he was now staring at was not that of his mother, but of a young woman. A young woman with a shock of white hair.

CHORUS 3

The eyes of the poor white woman in the picture started to widen and her breath began to quicken, as she tried desperately to fill her lungs but could not.

CHORUS 4

Ernest ran to the wall, tearing down the painting. But as he did, he revealed the scarlet stain behind it.

CHORUS

Scratch, scratch, scratch,

CHORUS 3

He watched the mark bleed across his wall, spreading like a cancer.

CHORUS

Scratch, scratch, scratch,

ERNEST

Ernest closed his eyes

CHORUS 2

A shock of red on white.

ERNEST

her face, her skin.

CHORUS

Scratch, scratch, scratch,

CHORUS 3

He felt the hot liquid under foot.

RED LIGHTS UNDER FLOORBOARDS ON

CHORUS

Scratch, scratch, scratch,

CHORUS 4

Red, blood, everywhere,

CHORUS

Scratch, scratch, scratch,

CHORUS 2

Consuming the walls and the ceiling and the floor, crawling up them like a swarm of fire-ants.

RED LIGHT FILLS THE STAGE

CHORUS 3

the whole room, the whole apartment, drowning in blood.

CHORUS

Scratch, scratch, scratch,

CHORUS 2

Scratches echoed through him from every wall of the house.

ERNEST

Where is she?

CHORUS 3

He raced to his kitchen, dragged open the drawer and pulled out the knife.

CHORUS 4

He heard her breath, felt it upon his face.

CHORUS

Scratch, scratch, scratch,

CHORUS 3

The hot-house flowers attacked his senses.

ERNEST

He couldn't breathe.

CHORUS 3

He rushed to the window, tore open the curtains and flung it open.

SUDDEN LIGHT CHANGE FROM RED TO WHITE

Sound effects of outside.

CHORUS 2

Ernest felt the icy breeze on his cheek and filled his lungs, gulping at the fresh night air, his shaking hands clutching the knife as the moon's rays shined down upon it.

LIGHTS CHANGE

MUSIC - THOMAS THEME

29. THOMAS GOES TO ERNEST'S APARTMENT

THOMAS

Thomas Thistle was stirred from his uneasy slumber.

TORCHES ON - CHORUS 1 AND CHORUS 2

Something was waking him, calling to him. Something, he felt it, a light shining upon his face. - A signal? A warning? A cry for help? The light that he had seen before, the light... ..from the night that she died. He looked up at the dark window of the dark building.

Thirteen up, seven across.

Something sparked inside his chest, a determination. He dragged himself to his feet, grabbing at the handle of his

gun, the gun that had never been fired. He lurched out of his room and started limping across the space between the two buildings, ignoring the shrieking pain in his leg as metal chewed at the flesh and muscle. He opened the doors and started climbing the stairs, hammering his stick down hard upon each step. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen floors up. He counted the doors...one, two, three (*continued under following*), four, five six...

Six...six...six...

ERNEST

Ernest heard the footsteps; he clutched his knife tightly in his palm. She is coming!

THOMAS

Thomas gripped the handle of his gun with a vicious intent, as if trying to choke the life out of it.
Seven across, on the corner!

ERNEST

She is here!

THOMAS

BANG BANG BANG

LIGHTS CHANGE - red strobe?

ERNEST

Ernest couldn't bear it any more. In desperation he started clawing at the wall, scratching away at the paper with his fingernails, scraping at the wood, pulling out the nails, prising up the boards trying to find her, to reveal her, to set her free!

THOMAS

BANG BANG BANG

ERNEST

Ernest stared into the blackness.

THOMAS

BANG BANG BANG

ERNEST

Ernest forgot to breathe.

THOMAS

BANG BANG BANG

Silent scream.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

30. THOMAS ENTERS ERNEST'S APARTMENT

LX: TORCH LIGHT ONLY

THOMAS

The scream that Thomas heard from behind the door would stay with him for the rest of his life. Even amidst the horror of war he had not heard such a sound emerge from another human being. It filled him with fear and horror and pity.

CHORUS 4

Unable to battle with his morbid curiosity, he slowly forced open the door and raised his gun. The first thing that hit Thomas was the smell.

CHORUS 2

Slowly the moon's rays seeped into the room and Thomas began to make out the shape of Ernest Hemel, lying motionless on the floor. Next to a large portrait of a pale lady.

THOMAS

Thomas saw a shock of white hair upon Ernest's head and an expression on his face that chilled him to the core.

CHORUS 4

Ernest's hand twitched involuntarily. Thomas saw the flash of the knife. He lowered his gun, it would remain unfired.

LIGHTS CHANGE

31. ASYLUM 6

ASYLUM AMBIENCE

NURSE

It's like he'd seen a ghost. Maybe he had.

EDGEFORD

...and what about the young girl? The one Thomas Thistle had thought he'd seen killed.

NURSE

The girl was fine, they found her in his mother's room. Tucked up in bed, sleeping. A single puncture wound, near her spine that had been dressed and treated, apart from that...

EDGEFORD

And his mother?

LIGHTS CHANGE

32. THOMAS SEES ERNEST'S MOTHER IN WALL

THOMAS

Thomas's eyes followed the shaft of moonlight as it crept up the wall, illuminating a spot where the wallpaper had been torn away and the planks of wood forced aside, to reveal a cavity.

ALL CHORUS

Tick tock tick tock tick...

THOMAS

Thomas forgot to breathe as through the darkness he saw the decaying body of Ernest's mother, her hands and face contorted into their final expressions of fear and desperation.

CHORUS 2

The moon's rays rested gently upon her face, at peace.

THOMAS

Thomas closed his eyes.

LIGHTS CHANGE

33. ASYLUM 7

ASYLUM AMBIENCE

NURSE

She'd been there for years, hidden in the walls.

NURSE [cont.]

Stabbed her in the back. His own mother. They reckon she was still alive for days after he'd buried her. Neighbours reported scratching in the walls around the time that she died, but they just thought it was rats and then when it stopped a few days later they thought no more about it. Poor woman.

LIGHTS CHANGE

34. ERNEST IN ASYLUM CELL

ASYLUM AMBIENCE

ERNEST'S FACE IS LIT BY THE ASYLUM LIGHT BOX (Chorus 3)

ERNEST

Tick tock tick tock tick tock...Ernest sat in his cell staring at the picture of his mother as the picture stared back. He tried to ignore the scarlet stain that glistened around the outside of her frame and the scratches that echoed in his ears. She belonged to him.

SOUND EFFECT OF CELL WINDOW SLAMMING SHUT. SILENCE.

CURTAIN CALL - PRERECORD OF THOMAS/GWENDOLINE BACKSTORY

END