

Skin Deep

(c) 2016

PITCH BLACK DARKNESS

The sound of heavy wood SCRAPING against stone reveals a long, round shaft lined with bricks.

A wooden pail with rope attached falls into the shaft and SPLASHES into a dark pool of water.

EXT. WATER WELL - DAY

RENEE (15), an awkward-looking peasant girl dressed in tattered clothes, hair hidden under a dirty bonnet, stands at the well, struggling to pull the pail up by its rope.

She hoists the pail over the well's edge and empties the water into one of two larger buckets that rest beside her.

She tosses the empty pail back down the well. The rope unspools after it until- SPLASH.

Renee grabs the rope and starts hauling again.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

A weathered farmhouse sits, shrouded by trees, at the end of a long dirt road. Along the house's side clean linens are hung on a line to dry. A large tub and washboard sit nearby.

Moving toward the house, Renee trudges up a steep hill. The two water buckets are attached to a shoulder pole and balanced across the back of her neck.

As she nears the laundry area, she stops at...

...her mother, HELEN (40s), also in dirty peasant clothing, sitting in a chair. Helen stares down the long road leading to the house, seeming to be lost in some troubling thought.

RENEE

Mom?

HELEN

(dazed)

Yeah?

RENEE

I've got water from the well.

Helen snaps out of it. She stands.

HELEN

Right. Of course. Let's get started.

MOMENTS LATER

Helen scrubs laundry against the washboard as Renee folds the dry linens into a wicker basket.

Renee looks up through a nearby window to see her sister...

CLAIR (17), a stunning beauty in a fashionable gown. A tasteful amount of make up accentuates her delicate features. She sits at a solid oak vanity table, brushing her long flowing hair in the mirror.

RENEE

(to Helen)

Would it kill her to help out with the daily chores just once?

HELEN

Renee... today is not the day.

RENEE

I don't know how you can afford to spoil her while always complaining about how dire things are.

HELEN

Every one has their lot in life. You're our hard worker and she... well, she's the pretty one.

That stings.

RENEE

It's not fair.

HELEN

It may not seem so, but you should be happy with what you have.

RENEE

What I have are blisters and boils.

Helen slams the laundry angrily into the water.

HELEN

If all you're going to do is complain about your sister, I don't need your help.

Renee stands there, shocked by the outburst.

HELEN

Go!

Renee gathers up the wicker basket and rushes off.

INT. FARMHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Renee enters the main room, and pauses at the sight of...

SIMON (40s), wearing a tarnished leather vest and smoking a pipe. He stands in front of an open wood burning stove and gazes into the dying fire.

RENEE

Are you okay, father?

SIMON

Aye.

Renee lingers for a moment.

SIMON

It's awfully early in the day for your tasks to be complete. You must have something better to do than stare at me.

Renee continues on, leaving her father unmoved.

INT. FARMHOUSE - CLAIRE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Renee enters the room, closing the door behind her.

Clair, still primping at the vanity, doesn't even look up.

Renee sets the basket on the bed.

RENEE

Here are your fine garments and silks, *Your Majesty*.

CLAIR

Thank you.

Renee begins hanging up clothes on a small wooden rack.

RENEE

Is there anything else I can do? Polish your mirror perhaps? It's looking a bit worn from use.

CLAIR

Sister, must you be so confrontational?

RENEE

Is it confrontational to state plainly the fact that you get everything handed to you? It's bad enough you continue to get full meals while the rest of us subsist on half-portions. But now powders and perfumes? It's gone from unfair to indecent.

Clair finally turns around to talk directly.

CLAIR

Those powders and perfumes are father's investment.

RENEE

What could father possibly gain from investing in your conceitedness?

Clair beckons Renee closer, like the next words are secret.

CLAIR

Father says my beauty will help save the farm.

RENEE

I know every moment your head isn't on a pillow it's spent in the clouds, but even you can't think people are going to pay to watch you be beautiful.

Clair rolls her eyes.

CLAIR

I don't know the details. Perhaps I'm to model for something. You know that strapping Thompson boy who's always painting landscapes? Perhaps he's taken an interest in capturing the female form.

Clair bats her eyes seductively.

RENEE

Tell me, does your head ever catch a chill from all the air rushing through it?

CLAIR

Just because you're clever doesn't mean you're not pathetic. Today is very important to me.

RENEE

Today?

SIMON (O.S.)

Clair!

CLAIR

Coming!

Clair pops out of her seat.

CLAIR

Father's meeting someone here soon.

RENEE

How come no one told me?

CLAIR

Cause your only job is to stay out of sight.

Clair heads to the door, but looks back before she leaves.

CLAIR

How do I look?

RENEE

(grumbles)

Gorgeous.

Clair smiles, self-satisfied, and exits.

Renee sighs and heads back to the laundry basket. Hanging a night gown on the clothing rack, she stops to admire a beautiful, Tyrian Purple dress.

Her fingers run down its front, inspecting the meticulously stitched floral pattern.

She picks the dress up and brings it to the mirror, holding it in front of her. The color is very flattering.

Renee's eyes flit across the vanity table's surface. She snatches up a bejeweled necklace and holds it up as well.

Renee notices the still open door. She hastens over and closes it.

LATER

Renee sits at the vanity, now wearing the purple dress and bejeweled necklace. Her bonnet has been tossed aside and her hair let down and brushed.

She finishes applying a powdered rouge to her cheeks, sets the brush aside and considers herself in the mirror.

She looks beautiful, but something's missing.

She rummages through the vanity and finds a small ceramic container labeled "Lip Salve". She opens it and starts applying the waxy substance to her lips.

BOOM!

The room shakes, startling Renee.

CLAIR (O.S.)

NO!

Renee jumps up and rushes to the door.

INT. FARMHOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Peeking out the door, Renee can see down the hall and straight to the front door.

A scuffle can be heard, then...

CLAIR (O.S.)

WAIT! Mom! Dad!

Clair is dragged into view by TWO RUFFIANS, followed by Simon, who opens the front door for them.

CLAIR

PLEASE! DAD! Please don't let them take me!

They drag her kicking and screaming out the front door.

A sharply-dressed businessman, a PROCURER, enters the hall, hands Simon a thick envelope, and walks out the door.

CLAIR

MOM! STOP THIS!

Helen enters the hall, trying to get a last glimpse of her daughter, but Simon pushes the door shut, muffling Clair's continuing pleas.

Helen grabs the knob... but doesn't open the door. Instead she collapses into a heap at Simon's feet and weeps.

Simon, emotionless, opens the envelope and flips through the thick stack of bills inside.

SIMON

Pick yourself off the ground. You want Renee to see you like this?

HELEN

Is it at least enough to save the farm?

SIMON

It'll have to be. And even if it isn't, we've still got our investment.

Renee backs up, terrified, and accidentally pushes the door against the wall with a dull THUD.

Simon and Helen's gaze both whip up to see the made-up and bejeweled Renee standing in the hall.

SIMON

Renee? How long you been standing there?

Renee retreats...

INT. FARMHOUSE - CLAIRE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...back into Clair's room. She throws the door shut, latches the lock and turns her back to the door.

Her eyes immediately go to the vanity. *The investment.*

She runs to it and trashes it. Drawers are ripped open. Contents CRASH to the ground.

POUNDING at the door.

SIMON (O.S.)

RENEE! What are you doing!?

Renee pulls perfume bottles out of a cupboard and smashes them one by one against the ground.

BOOM! Simon's full weight hits the door.

SIMON (O.S.)
RENEE! OPEN THIS DOOR!

Renee grabs the ceramic salve container and hurls it at the vanity, SHATTERING the mirror.

She collapses, exhausted, then notices something...

HER REFLECTION in a long shard of mirror. Her blemishes covered. Complexion smoothed out. A healthy, rosy glow about her cheeks.

She's beautiful.

She grabs the shard.

INT. FARMHOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Simon slams against the door. It CRACKS.

Helen stands beside him.

HELEN
Renee, please!

Simon slams against the door again...

INT. FARMHOUSE - CLAIRE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door bursts open.

Simon immediately draws back, a look of horror on his face.

Helen rushes in behind him to see...

Renee, her FACE CUT TO RIBBONS. Chunks of flesh hang from her cheekbones. Blood soaks through her Tyrian Purple dress.

She holds the bloodied shard out in a defensive posture.

RENEE
Tell me I'm safe. Tell me!

But all Helen can do is SCREAM, over and over, a high-pitched, shrieking howl of insanity.

FADE OUT