

HER NAME WAS BEATRICE

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BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "SOME THINGS HAVE TO BE BELIEVED TO BE SEEN."
RALPH HODGSON

FADE IN:

EXT. APARMENT BUILDING FAÇADE - NIGHT

It's a stormy night. An apartment building. Thunders ROAR and flashes of lightning break through the dark clouds.

INT. BERNARD'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's a living room in the dark. Two MEN and two WOMEN are sat around a table, taken by the hand, eyes shut. The flames of a candelabra light up their faces and a photo portrait showing a smiling red-haired ten years girl.

THERESA, 60, the older women, opens her gray eyes. She wears wide and brightly colored clothes; flamboyant necklaces adorn her thin neck.

THERESA

That's enough. Please open your eyes.

They obey and place their hands on the table. Theresa turns to look at CONNIE, 25, a woman at her right; her blue eyes move nervously under her dark tied up hair.

THERESA

You okay, Connie?

Connie nods and smiles. Theresa turns to look at the men.

THERESA

Ready?

OLIVER, 40, a man at her left, nods coldly; his elegant suit and glasses grant him a certain distinction. Then Theresa looks ahead to see BERNARD, 70, a thin and wizened man. He nods moving his bald head up and down, his face showing anxiety, almost fear.

THERESA

Alright, Bernard. First of all, tell me your daughter's name.

BERNARD

(whispering)

Beatrice.

THERESA

Louder, please.

BERNARD

Beatrice. Her name was Beatrice.

Theresa nods. Then she inhales deeply, places her hands on the table and raises her eyes to the dark ceiling.

THERESA

Beatrice, we're here this night because your father needs to talk with you. He just wants to know if you're fine. It's important for him to know. So can you give us a sign of your presence?

They wait in silence. There's no response. Theresa looks again at Bernard.

THERESA

Was there anything special that your daughter left unfinished in life? Could she be resentful of the world of the living?

BERNARD

I don't think so. She was too young to have real problems.

Bernard glances down at his daughter's portrait with sorrow filled eyes.

BERNARD

She was only ten years old when it happened.

Theresa nods, understanding.

THERESA

Alright, let's continue.

(raising again
her eyes)

Can you hear me, Beatrice? Is there anything that prevents you from manifesting yourself?

There's no answer. Everyone looks at her expectantly.

THERESA

I'm afraid that she-

A powerful thunder ROARS as a bolt of lightning lights up the room. Then one of the windows flies open and a gust of whistling wind hits the startled faces of the spiritualists. Some of the flames blow out.

Oliver quickly stands up and closes the window. Then he goes back to the table and sits down again. Connie nervously relights the candelabra.

CONNIE

It's raining cats and-

A CREAKING SOUND coming from the back of the room is heard.

A hula-hoop emerges from the darkness and comes rolling up to the table. It falls down at Bernard's feet. Shocked, he picks up the hoop.

BERNARD

It... It belonged to Beatrice. She was playing with it when she was run over... I... I threw it in the trash several years ago..

They stare at the hula-hoop in silence, astonished. Bernard drops it to the floor.

THERESA

She's already here.

Oliver sets a briefcase on the table and looks at Theresa hesitantly. She nods. He opens it, takes out some sheets of paper and a pencil, and hands them to her.

THERESA

Bernard, we're going to contact with her by automatic writing. She'll enter into me to answer all of your questions.

BERNARD

Sounds dangerous.

THERESA

Don't worry. Beatrice will just have power over a few parts of my body. We have been using this technique for years.

Theresa places again her hands on the table, inhales deeply and raises again her eyes to the ceiling.

THERESA

Beatrice, I ask you to enter my body. This way, you will be able to directly communicate with your father. Do you agree?

There's no answer. Theresa keeps concentrating, now her eyes closed tight...

A strong convulsion shakes her body. Then she opens her eyes again and nervously smiles.

THERESA

She's here...

Another convulsion shakes her body.

THERESA

She's nervous. It's a weird experience for her.

Theresa picks up the pencil to start writing. A third spasm shakes her.

THERESA

Calm down, dear. We don't want to hurt you, just talk.

No more convulsions. Theresa relaxes.

THERESA

C'mon, Bernard. Speak slow and clear.

Bernard runs his fingers through his scanty hair as he sighs nervously.

BERNARD

Beatrice... It's me, Daddy. Are you okay, honey?

The pencil doesn't move in Theresa's hand.

BERNARD

Can you hear me, Beatrice?

Theresa's hand remains still.

THERESA

Maybe she's angry with you.

Bernard looks at Theresa with a mixture of amazement and outrage written all over his face.

BERNARD

Angry? Why? I loved her with all my heart. I never beat her, not even a-

Another convulsion. Theresa's hand starts to move. She writes something on a paper and hands it to Oliver.

THERESA

-Please Oliver, read it.

OLIVER

(reading)

Spanks. Slaps.

Oliver and Connie look surprised at Bernard while Theresa keeps writing.

BERNARD

That's not true! I never-

Oliver reads the next written paper.

OLIVER
-Molestation.

BERNARD
(offended)
What? She cannot be saying that!
It's false! Absolutely false!

Oliver takes the next paper and reads it.

OLIVER
Rape.

Theresa and Oliver glare at Bernard as Connie straightens up in shock.

THERESA
What kind of monster are you,
Bernard?

Bernard lowers his gaze, covers his face with his hands and starts crying in silence.

BERNARD
My god...

He pulls a handkerchief from his jacket and wipes his tears. Then he looks at Beatrice's portrait.

BERNARD
I always wanted the best for her.
Perhaps I was too affectionate,
mostly when my wife left us, but...
Yes, she probably misinterpreted
my love for her and thought my
intentions were... All those news
about child molesters, the social
alarm... You know, those things can
influence a little girl. Yes, I'm
sure that-

Theresa writes some more words and drops the pencil.

THERESA
-Bernard, I think you should hear
this...

Bernard raises his gaze to Theresa, who looks at Oliver. He nods and reads the last paper.

OLIVER
Daddy must die.

Bernard opens his eyes in shock as he grows pale with fear; his lower lip starts to tremble.

BERNARD

That's... That's nonsense. I don't...
I never...

A ghostly VOICE erupts from the back of the room. It sounds like a little girl.

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)

Daddy... Daddy... Daddy...

Frightened, Connie tries to stand up but Theresa holds her down in her chair. Then Bernard stands up vigorously, leans his fists on the table and sighs deeply.

BERNARD

(nervously)

Well... I think... I think you have gone too far with this... You've done a great job, no doubt, but you must admit that you... A bunch of sound and light effects would have been more than enough to... to stimulate me. But all this matter of molestation is too disgusting.

OLIVER

I'm afraid you're mistaken, we have not-

BERNARD

-Yes, I know, Oliver, I know...

Bernard deeply sighs again, containing his anger.

BERNARD

Ulysses and the song of the sirens. The contract obliges me to remain until the end of the séance, whatever happens, even though I regret and beg you... But please, believe me, this game doesn't excite me anymore.

Theresa, Oliver and Connie look at each other in confusion while Bernard pulls a folded paper from his jacket and unfolds it. It's the typed agreement.

Filled with anger, Bernard tears the contract into pieces and throws them on the table.

BERNARD

Here's your damn contract!

Bernard sits down and lowers his eyes to the table.

BERNARD

Now leave, please.

OLIVER
 Our contract has nothing to do
 with what is happening here
 tonight. You're wrong.

Bernard raises his eyes to look at Oliver.

BERNARD
 (uneasy)
 What do you mean?

OLIVER
 We have totally lost control of
 the situation.

THERESA
 Beatrice is really here with us.
 I'm feeling her. She wants to
 manifest herself, physically..

Bernard bangs his fist on the table and stands up again.

BERNARD
 My daughter died! Don't you know
 what that means to a father?!

OLIVER
 Please calm down.

BERNARD
 Insult me if you want! Call me
 depraved because I'm playing with
 the memory of my dead daughter!
 But stop pretending, please! I
 beg you!

THERESA
 Nobody is pretending anything,
 Bernard.

Bernard sits down again and sinks his face into his
 hands. Then he starts to sob.

CONNIE
 We just want to help you.

Bernard shows his face, burst into tears.

BERNARD
 You don't understand what it
 means to lose a loved one in
 such a sudden and tragic way.
 Have any of you ever suffered
 anything like that?

Everyone keeps quiet, there is no answer. Then Oliver
 slowly removes his glasses.

OLIVER

My mother...

Surprised, Theresa, Connie and Bernard turn to look at him.

OLIVER

She died five years ago. She was also run over by a car.

Oliver closes his eyes and gently presses his eyelids with his fingertips. He looks sorrowful.

BERNARD

I'm so sorry, Oliver. You'll understand me then. What would you do if it were your mother instead of my daughter? Wouldn't you try to stop this farce?

OLIVER

No.

Bernard's expression changes completely, his eyes grow wider and wider.

OLIVER

I'd be terrified. A very small part of what's happening is a farce.

Bernard sinks in his chair and remains still for a few seconds, thoughtful.

BERNARD

There's only one way to know the truth. A simple way...

Bernard sighs deeply and turns to stare at Oliver.

BERNARD

Swear on your mother's grave that what's happening here is true. If you do, I'll believe you.

Oliver furrows his brow, as if confused.

OLIVER

Well...

Oliver hesitates while Theresa and Connie look at him expectantly. Then he puts his glasses back on and stares firmly at Bernard.

OLIVER

I swear. I swear on my mother's grave.

Bernard doesn't answer; shocked, he just stares back at him. Then he slowly glances down at the written papers.

BERNARD
Then all these words...

Bernard peers into the darkness of the living room.

BERNARD
And that voice...

Bernard looks fearfully at the spiritualists.

BERNARD
Are they real?

Theresa and Oliver nod sharply. Connie nods too, but scared.

BERNARD
It cannot be true... It cannot-

Theresa's body shakes violently in convulsions. A few instants later, they stop.

THERESA
(nervously)
Beatrice has come out of my body...
She's going to appear...

Bernard looks at her in fear.

THERESA
She's here, next to us... I can
feel her...

They peer into the darkness around the table...

A loud CREAKING SOUND is heard.

They straighten up in their chairs. Then Oliver takes the candelabra to light up the spot where the sound came from...

One of the wooden legs of a small table has broken because the weight of a big pile of books.

OLIVER
Don't worry. It's just a leg of
this table, it broke.

Oliver places again the candlestick on the table while Connie wraps her arms around herself and shivers.

CONNIE
It's very cold here.

OLIVER

Sudden drops in temperature are often associated with this kind of experiences.

Oliver turns to look at Bernard.

OLIVER

Are you cold, Bern-

Bernard is pale and paralyzed in fear. A trickle of sweat runs from his forehead down his nose. His face muscles tremble nervously.

CONNIE

(worried)

You okay, Bernard?

Bernard slowly turns his neck to look down at his left shoulder..

A small, bloody HAND is placed on it.

Astonished, Oliver slowly moves the candelabra towards Bernard. The light reveals..

A red-haired LITTLE GIRL, 10. She's ghostly pale, with cold eyes, and wearing a bloody nightdress.

The little girl giggles while staring down at Bernard.

Without turning toward her, Bernard starts to tremble while putting a hand on his chest. Then his expression turns blank and collapses to the floor.

Connie screams. Theresa and Oliver quickly stand up to help him, knocking the candelabra down. The flames go out. Total darkness.

OLIVER (O.S.)

Turn on the light! Hurry!

Quick STEPS and loud NOISES of objects falling to the floor are heard.

OLIVER (O.S.)

The light! For God's sake!

A CLICK is heard and the living room gets illuminated. It is a wide and elegant room decorated with some sculptures and nice landscape paintings.

Lying on the floor, Bernard gasps for breath as his body shakes. Crouched down next to him, Oliver nervously searches through Bernard's jacket pockets.

OLIVER

Water! Hurry!

Connie runs out of the living room while Theresa approaches the men. Oliver pulls out a pill bottle from Bernard's pocket and opens it. Then he pops a couple of pills into Bernard's tremulous mouth.

OLIVER
Don't worry, Bernard. You'll feel better right away.

Connie comes back to the room with a glass of water and brings it Bernard's lips. He drinks and swallows the pills. A few moments later, he starts breathing better.

OLIVER
All right, take deep breaths.

Theresa approaches a corner of the room where the little girl, ALICE, 10, is crying and caresses her. Alice's nightdress is covered in a red liquid resembling blood.

THERESA
Don't cry, dear. It wasn't your fault. You just did your job.

Alice lifts her tearful eyes to look at Theresa.

ALICE
But I didn't want-

Theresa puts a finger across Alice's lips.

THERESA
Enough said. Go wash your face and change your clothes.

Alice leaves. Theresa starts to unplug some microphones, loudspeakers and other small devices hidden in the room.

Oliver and Connie help Bernard to stand up and sit down on an armchair. He sighs, exhausted, and smiles.

BERNARD
Marvelous, just marvelous... I have to congratulate you.

Connie looks confusedly at him while Oliver smiles.

OLIVER
Thanks, it's been a hard work.

BERNARD
I made it really difficult for you, didn't I?

OLIVER
Yes, you almost fooled me with the contract trick.

Bernard laughs. Connie looks perplexed.

CONNIE
But he really tore up-

OLIVER
-An unsigned copy.

Olive pulls a typed and signed document from his jacket and shows it to her.

OLIVER
The original contract. It needs
both signatures to be valid.

Oliver puts away the contract as Bernard smiles.

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)
Daddy... Daddy...

They turn around, surprised. The little girl voice comes from a loudspeaker. Theresa unplugs it.

THERESA
Sorry.

BERNARD
How have you gotten it? It sounds
like Beatrice's voice.

THERESA
It's a standard girl's voice. You
know, the power of suggestion...

Theresa lights the candles again while Oliver helps Bernard to stand up and walk.

BERNARD
Your mother's death was also a
trick, I guess...

Oliver hesitates.

BERNARD
Your performance was very
convincing and dramatic.

OLIVER
Well, she really died run over
some years ago. I wasn't acting.

CONNIE
But you swore on-

OLIVER
-We're professionals, Connie. We
have to put our feelings aside.

Connie, shocked, keeps silence while Bernard gently grabs Oliver by the arm.

BERNARD
You're an exemplary man, Oliver.
I admire you.

Oliver smiles while nodding gratefully.

Theresa leads Alice, now clean and with new clothes, to the center of the room. Bernard widely smiles and embraces the girl while kissing her on the cheek.

BERNARD
You were superb! Thank you!

Alice smiles shyly.

THERESA
She's a great actress.

BERNARD
And she looks a lot like my
daughter, her spitting image.

Bernard gently caresses Alice's head.

BERNARD
Now forgive me, but I must leave
you. Take the time you need to
pick up your stuff.

They shake their hands.

BERNARD
Thank you very much. It's been
the most stimulating experience
of my whole life.

THERESA
I hope we'll meet again.

BERNARD
Sure. The fifth anniversary of
Beatrice's death will be soon.
Maybe we should make something
special.

(smiling)
See you soon.

Bernard walks away towards the hall. When he reaches the living room's door, he feels a slight dizziness and leans on the doorframe. Worried, Connie quickly runs up to him and grabs him by his arm.

CONNIE
Are you okay? Can I help you?

BERNARD

Oh, no, thanks, it's just tiredness. I need a good shower and a good bed.

Connie smiles understandingly.

BERNARD

And some clean underpants, of course.

Connie's smile freezes. Then she moves away from Bernard, who leaves happily.

EXT. APARMENT BUILDING FAÇADE - NIGHT

The hard rain and the noisy thunders are still punishing the street. Theresa, Oliver, Connie and Alice leave the building and get in a small car parked at the door.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Oliver sits in the driving seat, Connie in the passenger seat and Theresa and Alice in the back seats.

CONNIE

Oh, my God... How anyone can get sexually aroused by thinking...? It's disgusting! It's sickening!

OLIVER

Need I remind you that the agency doesn't force us to do this type of services?

CONNIE

Yeah, I know, but-

THERESA

-He's just a poor man, Connie. For some reason, he feels guilty for his daughter's death and gets excited thinking she comes back to punish him.

CONNIE

We're feeding his disorder then.

OLIVER

That's not our problem. We're professionals.

THERESA

He's very ill and will die soon. No time to heal his mind. This is like injecting a last dose to a terminal drug addict. We should not charge him for the next time.

OLIVER

We'll see about that. By the way, whose idea was it to bring that hoop? It was great, but I knew nothing. Next time, please let me know. I almost shitted myself!

Oliver smiles at the women, who look at him in confusion.

THERESA

I thought it was your idea.

CONNIE

So did I.

ALICE

I was hidden behind the curtains.

Oliver's smile freezes.

OLIVER

Who brought it then?

A ROARING THUNDER explodes next to the car as a lightning flash illuminates them. They jump in their seats.

EXT. APARMENT BUILDING FAÇADE - NIGHT

The car moves away from the building.

INT. BERNARD'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The living room is in the dark again. On the table, the candelabra illuminates Beatrice's photo portrait.

The SQUEAKING SOUND of a window opening is heard and a gust of whistling wind blows out the candles...

Darkness.

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)

Daddy... Daddy... Daddy...

THE END