

"ANATHEMA"

The Sheridan Tapes - B-Side 12
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by

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Inspired by story and characters from
"Homestead on the Corner"

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Homestead on the Corner

1. UNKNOWN

NARRATOR

Deep in the heart of the country,
far from any sea, there stood a
little town called Verona. Quaint,
quiet, wholly devoted to its
bucolic status quo - like any
number of rural towns. Yet, for all
Verona prided itself on its
traditions and apparent normalcy...
it was perhaps better defined by
its fear.

(beat)

Something lurked in the redwood
forest outside of Verona, or so
many of its people would tell you.
Nameless, shapeless, wholly
unknown, yet present in every
waking moment of the townsfolk. Its
great and eerie shadow lent gravity
to the words of guidance passed
down by the town elders,
establishing their place as a
beacon to gather round in the
storied darkness. The mothers of
Verona reared their young on
caution, diligent to maintain one
great, unspoken rule: never enter
the woods alone.

(beat)

There was a lullaby passed down
through generations, one which
every child of Verona knew by
heart:

"Stray not from me, my little lamb,
Resist the forest's call
The evils of the woods are great
And we, but meek and small.

Contentment is our virtue, dear,
On this, we all agree
So fear the wolf and be at peace
As all good sheep must be."

(beat)

Few in Verona denied the wisdom of
this rhyme so boldly as the girl
named Lily. Lily - a name she
picked for herself, seeing the
tall, pale flowers that basked
unabashed among the towering
redwoods.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

It was a name only she and the forest knew, one that the trees sang in sighing welcome whenever she ventured down the wooded trails alone. And venture she often did. For no cautionary tale, sidelong glance or childhood song could keep Lily from her woods. Her heart's ties to that forest ran as deep as its roots and twice as strong.

(beat)

But on one such foray, Lily encountered something... new. The rain fell feather-light upon the earth, freeing from it the myriad smells of all that grew and died beneath the trees -- the heady perfume of wood rot and the sweet, green scent of life unfurling anew. Death and rebirth. Change. And for a girl who'd only ever known the rigid purity of Verona, wasn't that beautiful? The smell of the woods soothed the ache in her chest, her yearning for something unknown. Enthralled, Lily wandered further than she'd meant to go, drawn by the scent like a moth to flame. Before she knew it, the trees had thinned out into a clearing. This was odd -- Lily knew the forest well, and she swore there was no clearing here before. But even so, she saw before her a meadow: unremarkable in size, but thick with wildflowers more lush and vibrant than she'd ever seen.

(beat)

Aster and primrose and lupine and yarrow - rounded heads of soft, purple allium and swaths of poppy so orange and dense the clearing almost seemed to glow with a gentle fire. Flowers of all kinds, unbroken to the treeline and hypnotic in their scent. The meadow before her, teeming with all that was life, was enough to bring the lonely girl close to tears.

(beat)

And there, in the center of it all, stood her namesake.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Tall, fragrant and somehow luminescent even in the drifting mist, stood a gorgeous redwood lily. The girl found herself wading forward, knee deep in the surrounding flora before she could think better of it. Inside, Lily knew -- this clearing, supernatural in its beauty, was the dark heart of the forest the people of Verona so desperately feared. Yet somehow, this brought her no unease. It was inexplicable, yes -- anathema to the mundane citizenry of her home... but this place felt anything but evil.

(beat)

Lily closed the remaining distance between herself and the flower, softly cupped its curled petals in her hand, and leaned in to breathe its fragrance deep. Subtle, sweet, its scent joined the forest's enchanting bouquet, and there -- stood in the center of that impossible meadow -- something within her changed. A soft, sighing baritone joined her inner voice in perfect, natural harmony. The forest was around her, and within her -- a part of her just as much as she was a part of it. She had never felt so at peace.

(beat)

The sky was already dark when Lily finally left the woods -- so dark that she did not notice the way each of her footsteps left the grass beneath her greener than it was before. Had she looked back, she would have seen a trail of tiny, delicate blue flowers tracing her path from the forest. As it was, Lily was still awash in the calm of her experience, oblivious to the world around her until she reached the porch of her house. Her mother was waiting, and she was late.

(beat)

Lily offered a sheepish smile that quickly fell before the look of horror on the woman's face.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Her mother's eyes were keen, and the little flowers growing in her child's wake did not escape her notice. The small traces of indigo were more damning than a track of blood, and as with all strange things that transpired within Verona, her mother was quick to look to the forest.

(beat)

"Tell me you did not disobey me," her mother cried, "Tell me you did not give yourself over to the evil of those woods." When her child did not respond, her voice cracked with desperation: "my little lamb, I beg of you, do not stray from me." But Lily had never felt whole within the confines of Verona, never felt right... and with the impossible beauty of the forest inside her, she could not lie to her mother now.

(beat)

"I have strayed," Lily breathed -- and for all her dread, the confession was a triumph. She told her mother what she had done... what she had seen. Lily was the lamb and the wolf and the woods beyond the pasture fence, wild and great and different in a way she knew this town could never bear to reconcile. She was changed... and because of that, her mother fled to the elders of the town for aid. She laid it all breathlessly at their feet: what her child had done under her negligent supervision, the footprints bright with new and unnatural life, all the fears and questions she could not bear to answer. Devout as she was, it did not surprise her when the wise ones gathered the most devoted men of the town with sickles in hand, then sent for the one touched by the forest.

(beat)

Before long, Lily was held at the point of a blade under the fearful glare of Verona's finest. "Bring us to the meadow," came the command -- and left without a choice, she did.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Within the hour, the impossible, beautiful clearing she'd found was laid to waste -- clear-cut down to the great lily at its heart. Tears fell at the girl's feet as the men finished their desecration. The last of the flowers were trodden into the earth, their fragrance overpowered by the smell of leather and iron and sweat. And yet there was one final task at hand. One straggling, weeping remnant of the forest's heart to eliminate. One last flower.

(beat)

When the men left the forest, their footsteps stained with vibrant crimson, they left triumphant. They had won -- vanquished that which they did not and would not understand. All was well in Verona once more. Secure in their victory, the dutiful men of the village went back to their homes to wash away the stench of earth and blood and flowers. The town elders, satisfied in their guidance and in their holy judgement, slept soundly that night.

(beat)

Not a single one of them woke up.

(beat)

When dawn broke over Verona the following morning, it shone on an inexplicable sight. Overnight, the houses of all those who had carried sickles into the forest and all who'd decreed that Lily was to die had become impossible meadows of their own. There was aster and primrose and lupine and yarrow, a cacophony of flora where once laid manicured lawns and orderly planter boxes. Allium blooms floated and bobbed in the wind, ethereal spectators of something yet unseen. Doves of poppy streaked the earth and crowded the windowsills like frozen tongues of avenging fire.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

And within the houses of Verona's self-proclaimed saviors, where the elders and the warriors had laid to rest, nothing was left to greet the sun but heaps of pale, luminescent lily blossoms woven between the blood-streaked white of their cold and barren bones.

(beat)

In the wake of the tragedy and beheaded of its leadership, the town of Verona did something no less than anathema to its past self -- it grew. Gradually, new wills and ways and myths filled the spaces left by the old. There is something that lives in the redwood forest beyond the outskirts of Verona, or so any of its people will tell you today. It is said, by those who live there, that if one strays from the path and listens closely, they can hear a voice out there in the forest -- a girl's voice, soft and sweet and calm as the gentle wind. And every spring, without fail, the land is graced by wildflowers, birdsong, and the sweet smell of lilies.

ROLL END THEME
AND CREDITS