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# Pit and the Pendulum

By Richard Matheson

- Yes? | - I wish to see don Medina.  
- Yes? | - I wish to see don Medina.  
- My name... | - I'm sorry.  
Don Medina is not receiving | visitors at present.  
You will announce that | Mr. Francis Barnard...  
...has come from England | to see him.  
What do you think you're doing?  
Remove your hand, sir.  
Maximillian.  
What is it ?  
This gentleman demands | to be admitted, Dona.  
- I've told him... | - You are Dona Medina?  
I am.  
I am Francis Barnard, | Elizabeth's brother.  
Oh, I'm sorry.  
Won't you come in, Mr. Barnard?  
Please forgive me. | I'm Catherine Medina.  
Dona.  
Would you not spend the night | Mr. Barnard?  
I am certain | my brother would wish it.  
Perhaps Dona. May I see your | brother now?  
He is resting.  
He has not been well | since the death.  
I see. When may I see him?  
Perhaps at supper...  
...if you will do us the honor.  
I will... supper.  
May I visit my sister's | grave, now?  
Grave?  
I presume there is one.  
Not as such, Mister Barnard.  
She is interred below.  
A family custom, | Mr. Barnard.  
I see.  
If we may go there then?  
Please follow me.  
When did she die?  
Your brother's letter made | no mention of the day.  
About three months ago.  
Three months? Why wasn't I | notified sooner?  
I'm afraid I...  
How did she die?  
I know very little of the | details, Mr. Barnard.  
This is no longer my home, | you see?

I left it several months before...  
...Nicholas married | your sister.  
Meaning you don't even...  
Damn Heaven!  
What's that noise?  
Please follow me, Mr. Barnard.  
Not that way, Mr. Barnard!  
Who are you?  
This is Mr. Barnard, Nicholas.  
Elizabeth's brother.  
Oh, yes.  
You are welcome, mister.  
Resting, dona Medina?  
Sir?  
I told Mr. Barnard | that you were resting, Nicholas.  
I thought that you were.  
That noise, sir.  
This is an apparatus...  
...that must be kept | in constant repair.  
What brings you to us?  
Elizabeth was my sister, | don Medina.  
I received your report | of her untimely death...  
...the report that was | utterly devoid of detail.  
what should I have done, | remained in England?  
Yes, you are quite right. | My apology, sir.  
Shock and grief...  
...restrained me from | more adequate communication.  
You have every right | to be provoked.  
Perhaps you will show me my | sister's place of interment now.  
I told him it would be | alright, Nicholas.  
Yes, of course.  
Now perhaps you'll be good enough | to tell me how my sister died.  
In the illness of | some duration, sir.  
And was this illness diagnosed?  
- Yes. | - By whom?  
Dr. Leon, the physician | of repute.  
And he decided?  
Something in her blood.  
Yes?  
That's all?  
Just something in her blood?  
I'm afraid so.  
And I'm afraid that does not | satisfy me, sir.  
Follow me.

May we go now, Mr. Barnard?  
This is very painful | for my brother.  
And for me...as well.  
This form of burial...  
...is our family custom, | Mr. Barnard.  
Will you stay the night | with us?  
The night...  
...and more, sir.  
Until I know exactly | what has happened to her.  
Thank you.  
Yes?  
I trust that you will be | comfortable here.  
Is this you?  
No.  
No, that is my father, | Sebastian Medina.  
Sebastian Medina, yes.  
The resemblance is remarkable.  
Yes.  
And the other is my | uncle Bartholomew.  
Mr. Barnard, I am aware, | painfully aware...  
...of your distrust regarding | Elizabeth's death.  
Her death was, and is, | anguish to me.  
I beg of you do not | add to it...  
I'm sorry, don Medina, but | your word is not enough.  
Too many things need | fuller explanation...  
...before I can be satisfied | that what you say is true.  
Fuller explanation?  
Yes.  
Come with me.  
Please, come.  
The atmosphere is heavy in here.  
Why have you brought me here?  
It is her room, sir.  
I've had it kept exactly | as she left it.  
Look around you sir.  
This room was furnished and | arranged with dedicated love.  
Every article of furniture | every decorative detail...  
...is the work of a master | craftsman...  
...of Italy, of Spain or France.  
Indeed every country in the | civilized world...  
...is represented here.  
It is unique room.  
I did it all for her.  
I wanted her to have | something that...

Maria

I beg your pardon, sir.

I was just cleaning up.

Oh, yes, yes of course.

You may go now.

Is this all you | meant to tell me?

You are an unyielding man, | Mr. Barnard.

I am forced to be, sir.

God is my witness | I worshipped your sister

I worship her still.

Without her, life | is meaningless.

She was that substance of | loveliness.

I tried to capture it...

...but it was the way she walked | and moved...

...her smile, her voice.

She sang like an angel.

And she could play | the harpsichord...

...as no other woman I've | ever known could play.

Every night after we | have dined...

...she would play for me.

Please, forgive me.

I have not intended to so | display myself.

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I pray...

...I pray you leave me for awhile.

Please, go.

Do you live in London, Mr. Barnard?

Yes, and you?

In Barcelona, with an aunt.

And have you been here long?

A little over a week.

I came to be with | Nicholas because I...

Who would that be?

Nicholas.

How are you, my friend?

You look pale.

Slept badly, have you?

Charles, we have a visitor.

Well, splendid, splendid.

- Exactly what you need. | - Charles.

It's Elizabeth's brother.

- You mean... | - Yes.

Dr. Charles Leon | at your service, sir.

Doctor.

You are I understand it | Elizabeth's brother.

The resemblance is clear.

The coloring, the same | configuration.

Beautiful woman your sister.

- Doctor. | - Ah, dear.

I interrupted your meal, I see.

Proper timing was never my | fault.

We have just finished. Won't | you join us in a glass of wine, Charles?

Delighted.

So, young gentleman, you've come | all the way from England, then?

That's right.

Terrible tragedy your | sister's death.

Appalling business.

How are things in Baztan, Charles?

What?

Always, always, Nicholas...

...buying and selling | living and dying.

The weave of life.

Why did my sister die, | Dr. Leon?

Have you not been told?

- Of course he has. | - Well then?.

I want to hear it from you doctor.

Her death was inevitable, | I fear...

...under the circumstances.

This castle, this odious atmosphere.

What has the castle to do with it?

What has the castle...?

It's too late now, Charles.

I did not want him to know.

Know what?

Your sister's death was caused | by failure of the heart, sir...

...due to total shock.

Literally, she died of fright.

- Why did you not tell me? | - I thought to spare you, sir.

You thought to deceive me!

- That is not true. | - What is all this?

Show me where it happened.

- Very well. | - No, Nicholas.

There is no other way, my dear.

We were wrong, very wrong to have | kept the truth from Mr. Barnard.

Now we are doubly suspect | in his eyes.

Suspect?

Come.

Nicholas, you should not be | doing this, you know.  
- You are not well. | - It cannot be avoided, Charles.  
Come.  
Well?  
Torture chamber?  
Yes, Mr. Barnard.  
It was my father's.  
Sebastian Medina.  
One of the inquisition's most | infamous, degrading...  
- Sir, that is enough. | - Mr. Barnard, can you not see?  
What was my sister doing here?  
She could not keep herself away.  
That noise I heard, is | that what was...  
No, sir. That particular device...  
...was not in operation | at the time.  
Which device?  
It's in the adjoining chamber | down there.  
Please, Mr. Barnard, do not | go there...  
I do not wish to discuss it.  
The story, sir.  
In detail.  
This was my father's world, | Mr. Barnard.  
Spare yourself at least | this, Nicholas.  
How can I spare myself?  
Was he not my father?  
Am I not the spawn of his...  
...his depraved blood?  
His depravity is not | yours, Nicholas.  
Why scourge yourself | because of it?  
You have not answered me, don Medina.  
I shall not dwell upon the | history of this...  
...this blasphemous chamber.  
Suffice it that the blood of a | thousand men and women...  
...was spilt within these walls.  
Limbs twisted and broken!  
Eyes gouged from | bloody sockets...  
...flesh burned black.  
Why are you telling me these things?  
What do they have to do with | my sister?  
She had never been brought here.  
She was too sensitive, | too aware.  
Aware of what?  
The malignant atmosphere | of this castle.  
It destroyed her.

My sister was a strong and | willful woman...  
...not subject to the influence | of atmospheres.  
You have been here only | a matter of hours, Mr. Barnard.  
You cannot know what it is | to live here...  
...month upon month, | year after year...  
...breathing this infernal air...  
...absorbing the miasma | of barbarity...  
...which permeates | these walls...  
...particularly this chamber.  
But it did not bother her | at first either.  
Our life was good...  
...rich with the shared | pleasures of our love.  
Each morning I would bring | her breakfast.  
In the afternoons, she usually sat | for me while I attempted all in  
vain...  
...to capture her beauty on canvas.  
I did that portrait which you saw | on her room before...  
...but it is all inadequate to what I | called the loveliness of her.  
We dined, sometimes alone, | enjoying intimate conversation...  
...sometimes with the doctor.  
And every night | Elisabeth would play for me.  
Life was simple, quiet, | richly pleasurable...  
...and then the darkness | began to fall.  
More and more entering her room | in the mornings...  
...I would find her awake and discover | that she had not slept all the  
night.  
I tried to find out why, | but she had no explanation.  
Her appetite began to fade.  
She began to lose weight | and color.  
I tried to make her eat...  
...but something kept her from it.  
I would come upon her wandering | in the corridors at night.  
I tried to find out | what was wrong...  
...but she never had an answer...  
...except to say that... | that something was oppressing her.  
Oh God, help me for my blindness.  
I should have known...  
Then one day she disappeared.  
Frantic, I searched the castle | for her.  
And then I knew.  
The castle and its awful history | had obsessed her.  
These very instruments of torture...  
...which were my birthright | and my curse...  
...now tormented her as well...

...infecting her with a kind of | haunted fascination.  
And watched her drawn to one | and then another...  
...as if the aura of pain | and suffering which surrounded them...  
...was luring her to sickness...  
...and to death.  
Immediately I made my plans | to leave the castle with her.  
We would travel for a while, | restore her spirits...  
...and then make our home elsewhere.  
Then on the very eve of | our departure...  
...we heard her scream from below...  
...the most hideous blood-chilling | scream...  
...I have ever heard | in my life.  
Just before she died, | she whispered a name.  
Sebastian.  
Sebastian.  
Mr. Barnard.  
Dona.  
May I speak with you?  
Yes, of course.  
How is your brother?  
Better, thank you. | Dr. Leon is staying with him.  
I have come to ask you | to please believe him, Mr. Barnard.  
He has told you the truth.  
Has he?  
Yes. And not telling you before...  
...he only meant to spare you pain.  
He is a good man, Mr. Barnard...  
...a kind and gentle man...  
...and I know that he adored | your sister.  
I would like to believe him, | Dona Medina...  
...but I find it very difficult | to do so.  
There is something about him | I cannot help at sense...  
...kind of fearful tension that...  
I am sorry...  
...but an air of | definite guilt.  
Of course he suffers from guilt | Mr. Barnard...  
...because of what our father did...  
...because of what happened to | Elizabeth.  
Perhaps it will help you | to understand...  
...if I tell you something | that happened to Nicholas...  
...when he was just a boy.  
One day, while Nicholas was | playing...  
...in a lower corridor...  
He had been forbidden by | our father...

...to enter this chamber at any time.  
The curiosity of youth, however...  
...overcame his fear of challenging | our father's discipline.  
He had to see the chamber.  
Suddenly, there were footsteps.  
It was our father.  
With him were our mother | and our uncle Bartholomew...  
...who was our father's brother.  
At first it appeared that for | some inexplicable reason...  
...our father was actually...  
...conducting them on a tour of | his ghastly chamber.  
Nicholas could see that both | our mother and our uncle...  
...were uneasy, frightened.  
Our father's smiling affability...  
...as he described the workings | of these hellish instruments...  
...turned Nicholas' blood cold.  
He watched them with a mounting | sense of premonition.  
Something was wrong, most | terribly wrong.  
Even he, no more than | 10 years of age...  
...could sense it like a | darkening vapor in the air.  
There was no reason...  
...for our mother and our uncle | to have been there.  
As he struck, he kept on | screaming at his brother...  
...one word, over and over.  
"Adulterer! Adulterer!"  
And then he turned on her.  
Accusing her of vile debauchery | with his brother...  
...cursing her as faithless...  
...promising her the | agonies of hell...  
...and payment | for her infidelity...  
...and then before my brother's | very eyes...  
...our mother was tortured to death.  
Ever since then...  
...Nicholas has been unable to live | as other men.  
Always he is haunted by the memory...  
...of that terrible day..  
Your sister's death...  
...came very close to driving, | him insane, Mr. Barnard.  
I beg of you...  
...have pity on him.  
Help him by believing him.  
I will try, dona Medina.  
Well, I know you must be very | tired from your journey.  
Good night.

Dona.

Who is that?

I'll see.

Where's Nicholas?

He is gone?

I must have dozed off in | that chair...

...and I heard...

I don't understand. | It is surely your brother.

No, Nicholas has never played the | harpsichord in his life.

Maria.

I heard the playing, sir.

Go back to bed, child.

Nicholas!

It was Elizabeth.

You saw her?

I did not have to see her.

I know her playing

Locked?

Yes.

Is there another door?

There is not, sir.

My sister's?

Easy, easy.

It was she.

Up, take this.

Thank you.

Hers?

Yes.

You will sleep in a minute or so.

Doctor, will you stay please?

Yes, of course, my dear.

Until the morning, at any rate.

My dear Lord.

It is hers, isn't it?

- It is. | - But how?

Let us not talk yet.

May we use your room, sir?

Yes, of course.

Sit.

What I am about to tell you...

...no one in this world except | Nicholas and myself knows.

That is, I thought that no one else knew.

Take this.

No, thank...

Drink it.

To be absolutely blunt about it...

...Nicholas believes that Elizabeth | may have been interred prematurely.  
What?

I hasten to assure you both...

...that such is not the case.

Elizabeth was quite dead.

I would stick my reputation | on that fact.

Then why...

...does he believe it?

Because of what happened to | his mother many years ago.

I'm afraid I don't understand.

I told mister Barnard | what Nicholas saw that day.

No, my dear. Your mother was not | tortured to death...

...as you were told.

But...

She was tortured, yes...

...but not to death.

Do I make myself clear?

Do you mean to say that...?

Your mother was walled up in | her tomb while yet alive.

Oh, no.

From that day forth...

...the very thought of premature | interment...

...was enough to drive your brother | into convulsions of horror.

Nicholas broods about it | constantly.

Already he has told me he has | heard Elizabeth's walking the |  
corridors...

...even that he has heard her | speaking his name.

- Dr. Leon. | - Sir?

You seem to forget that we all | heard the harpsichord playing.

No, I have not forgotten that, sir.

It is why I said before that I thought...

...that no one but Nicholas and | myself knew about this.

What do you mean?

Someone, I fear, has discovered | Nicholas' secret...

...and is using it as a terrible advantage

The servant, perhaps.

I could almost more easily believe | that...

That what, Dona Medina?

Nothing.

I spoke without thought.

I want to know one thing, sir.

Are you absolutely positive...

...that don Medina's dread is | unwarranted?  
If Elizabeth Medina walks the | corridors of this castle...  
...it is her spirit, not her living self.  
- Where did it come from? | - Elizabeth's room.  
What is it, child?  
Easy, child. Easy..  
But tell us what happened to you.  
I... I... I heard her.  
Heard?  
The mistress.  
I was cleaning up the room...  
...and she spoke to me.  
She called me by my name, Maria.  
She said, "Maria, leave | this room".  
My wife spoke to you?  
-My wife spoke... | -Nicholas!  
No one will ever enter that | room again.  
- Mister Barnard, I... | - No need explaining, Nicholas.  
Mister Barnard knows everything.  
Take care of the girl, | will you Catherine.  
I'll see to it, dona Medina, if you | want to go with your brother.  
Thank you.  
Come, Maria, let me help you | downstairs.  
Perhaps I should bring some food | to Nicholas.  
He will not eat it, my dear...  
...any more than you are | eating yours.  
I am not hungry.  
You need your strength, nonetheless.  
If I may interrupt this | fascinating conversation for a moment...  
...how long, may I ask, you intend | to accept these occurrences...  
...face value?  
I should have thought, mister Barnard | that a man of your investigative  
zeal...  
...would have already solved | the mystery.  
And have you, doctor?  
I am not certain.  
But you remember that no one | actually heard Elizabeth's voice?  
We have only Maria's word for it.  
We proceed on similar lines, doctor.  
On questioning Maria, I asked her to | describe the voice she heard.  
- And? | - She could not describe it, doctor...  
...because it only whispered to her.  
This point seems of vital import | to you, doesn't it?  
Don Medina!

Don Medina!  
The key to Elizabeth's room..  
The key, I said!  
Again?  
Do not go there, Nicholas.  
I must, Catherine.  
Nicholas!  
Come.  
What I have dreaded all these months...  
...has come to pass.  
You are wrong, Nicholas.  
No. She haunts me...  
...because of the terrible thing | I did to her...  
Mister Barnard!  
What in the name of heaven?  
And have you nothing to say, don Medina?  
I don't understand, sir.  
Do you not, sir?  
Then, with your permission, I will enlighten you.  
What is the meaning of this?  
The meaning, doctor, is this: | only one person in this castle...  
...could have caused all these inexplicable | occurrences.  
That person is don Medina.  
- What? | - You are mad, sir.  
Am I?  
Mister Barnard, I swear that I...  
The secret passage, sir...  
...how convenient for you.  
Enabling you to whisper to | Maria without being seen.  
Then after the door to Elizabeth's | room had been...  
...locked by YOU, enabling you to | return there and...  
...at your leisure | demolish everything.  
- You are wrong, sir. I swear I... | - You are lying, sir!  
When Maria screamed, where | were you?  
When Elizabeth's room was being torn apart, | where were you?  
How you are not | investigating that?  
I was afraid.  
You lie!  
Both times you were in | Elizabeth's room yourself!  
Both times your own door | was locked...  
...protecting you from | discovery.  
No, that's not true! It's not true!  
Why should Nicholas do these things?  
Why!?

Is it possible?  
Is it possible I am doing these things | unaware?  
To punish myself?  
No, Nicholas!  
One of the servants was responsible  
Most likely Maria.  
Could I have kept that ring without knowing it?  
Play the harpsichord without | knowing it?  
Destroy Elizabeth's room | all without knowing it?  
My inner mind...  
...creating evidence of Elizabeth's | vengeful return....  
...because that mind knows...  
But I don't know!  
I will find out.  
No.  
It's the only way, Catherine.  
And it's the only way I...  
I must be sure!  
I must be sure.  
Can you not stop this?  
I do not believe I wish to stop it, my dear.  
If this is the only way of | convincing Nicholas...  
...that he did not bury his wife alive then | I say by all means- do it.  
This groundless dread...  
...must finally be put to rest.  
We will exhume Elizabeth.  
True.  
True!  
I swear to you I thought she | was dead.  
On my honors of physician I | thought she was dead.  
I swear to you!  
True.  
True.  
True  
It's true.!  
No, Nicholas!  
It's true.  
Nicholas!  
I killed her.  
I killed her.  
No, Nicholas.  
I killed her. I killed her.  
Nicholas.  
I would suggest, Nicholas, | that you leave this place.

Your remaining here cannot | help Elizabeth now.  
Try to understand, Nicholas.  
I am a doctor of medicine.  
Never in my career have I seen a | condition which so completely...  
... paralleled the physical appearance...  
...of dead.  
You cannot feel responsible, Nicholas.  
While we were up here mourning...  
...and she was alive, struggling | to be free.  
I am responsible. | If it were not so...  
...she would not want to haunt me  
She does not haunt you, Nicholas.  
Can you not see that? It is you | punishing yourself.  
I must leave in the morning.  
Already I have been grossly | negligent...  
...of my other patients.  
I beg of you- leave with me.  
I can never leave.  
I must accept whatever vengeance...  
...Elizabeth chooses to inflict upon me.  
Dona Medina? Dona Medina?  
What is it, Mister Barnard?  
May I speak with you?  
- Certainly. | - I came to apologize.  
Apologize?  
But everything you said...  
I know that my suspicions were | justified...  
...but not as I had expected.  
I realize now that my sister's death...  
...was an accident.  
I do not blame your brother.  
I feel only sympathy for him.  
What I did was, I assure you, | only because of Elizabeth.  
I think I understand.  
I am sorry that our meeting...  
...should have taken place under | such unhappy circumstances.  
Had things been otherwise...  
Perhaps we should meet again...  
...in Barcelona.  
I hope so.  
Good night, Dona.  
Good night.  
- Doctor. | - Where are you going, sir?  
- To apologize to don Medina. | - I wouldn't speak to him just now.

He is much overwrought. | In the morning, perhaps.

- You will be leaving then? | - Yes.

Will you accept the hospitality of | my carriage?

Thank you, doctor. Good night.

Good night, mister Barnard.

Nicholas.

Elizabeth?

Elizabeth?

Nicholas.

Nicholas.

Elizabeth?

Where are you?

Elizabeth?

Where are you?

Nicholas?

Is my brother with you?

- No. Is he not in his room? | - No.

He must be with Dr. Leon then.

Nicholas.

I will check below.

You two search this floor and | the one above.

All right

Nicholas.

Is that you?

Elizabeth?

Elizabeth?

Nicholas!

Elizabeth?

Elizabeth?

Elizabeth?

Nicholas.

Nicholas.

Nicholas!

I told you to wait.

I couldn't.

He is gone.

What about my brother?

He is supposed to leave in the | morning..

...but now...

Why couldn't you wait one more day?

I've waited too long already.

Oh, my darling Nicholas...

...we've broken you at last.

Elizabeth, there is no time for this.

I've waited an eternity for this moment.

There has to be time.

And now, my dear Nicholas...

...I have you exactly as I want you...

...helpless.

Elizabeth.

Is it not ironical, my husband?

Your wife, an adulteress.

Your mother, an adulteress.

Your uncle, an adulterer.

Your closest friend, an adulterer.

Do you not find that amusing, | dear Nicholas?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes!

Yes!

What's happening to him?

Happening?

What should be happening, Isabella?

Isabella?

You, Bartholomew, my brother...

...how do you like my little workshop?

Dear God!

What ails you, brother, huh?

And you, my dear, why are you so pale?

Does this place disturb you?

I thought the two of you | would enjoy...

...the novelty of it.

Come, let me show you about a bit.

Where are you going, Isabella? | Bartholomew!

Are you leaving me?

Don't you want to see my...?

I am going to torture you, Isabella.

I am going to make you suffer | for your faithlessness to me.

Before this day is out...

...you will be begging me to kill you...

...to relieve you of the agony of hell..

...into which your husband is about to | plunge you.

Harlot!

You will die in agony!

Die!

Now, Bartholomew, my brother...

Bartholomew!

Bartholomew!

Where are you?  
You cannot hide from me, you know.  
Don Medina?  
Don Medina!  
There you are, Bartholomew!  
Ah, there you are, sir.  
We've been searching all over for you.  
And now for you Bartholomew, | my beloved brother...  
...while you are still alive...  
...my ultimate device of torture.  
Are you ready now, Bartholomew?  
Bartholomew?  
Now we are ready to begin, Bartholomew.  
Do you know where you are, Bartholomew?  
Don Medina, I am Francis Barnard.  
I will tell you where you are.  
You are about to enter hell, Bartholomew.  
Hell!  
The Netherworld.  
The infernal region.  
The abode of the damned.  
The place of torment. | Pandemonium.  
"Abbadon, "Tophet", "Gehenna".  
"Naraka", the pit!  
And the pendulum.  
The razor edge of destiny.  
That's the condition of man.  
Bound on an island from which | he can never hope to escape...  
...surrounded by the waiting | pit of hell.  
Subject to the inexorable | pendulum of fate...  
...which must destroy him finally.  
Nicholas?  
Nicholas, are you in there?  
Catherine, help me!  
Nicholas?  
Nicholas!  
Maximillian! Maximillian!  
We must break into the torture | chamber. Quickly!.  
Maximillian!  
Don Medina- he thought that | I was...  
It's over now.  
Nicholas.  
No one will ever enter this room again.  
"...THE AGONY OF MY SOUL | FOUND VENT IN ONE LOUD, LONG, | AND FINAL SCREAM

OF DESPAIR" . . . POE