

Murder the Hero

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/53184205) at [http://archiveofourown.org/works/53184205](https://archiveofourown.org/works/53184205).

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence , Major Character Death
Category:	Other
Fandom:	Slay the Princess (Visual Novel)
Characters:	The Princess (Slay the Princess) , The Narrator (Slay the Princess) , The Hero (Slay the Princess) , The Spectre (Slay the Princess) , The Damsel (Slay the Princess) , The Witch (Slay the Princess) , The Razor (Slay the Princess)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Role Reversal , Canon-Typical Violence , Canon-Typical Behavior , This Is Not Going To Go The Way You Think , POV Second Person , Written in the style of the game Slay the Princess , Of Course It Has Major Character Death It's Slay the Princess , Canon-Typical Suicide , The Existential Dread of Losing Control , The Witch Has No Dignity And Deserves None , The Razor Believes In True Love Oh No
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2024-01-21 Updated: 2025-06-04 Words: 81,364 Chapters: 14/?

Murder the Hero

by [EarthScorpion](#)

Summary

THE NARRATOR — You're on a path in the mountains.

THE NARRATOR — Past the mountains, there is a lake.

THE NARRATOR — And trapped on the island across the lake, there is a Hero.

THE NARRATOR — You're here to slay him. If you don't, it will be the end of the world.

This is (not) a love story.

Chapter 1: CHAPTER I: THE PRINCESS AND THE HERO

THE NARRATOR — You're on a path in the mountains.

THE NARRATOR — Past the mountains, there is a lake.

THE NARRATOR — And trapped on the island across the lake, there is a Hero.

THE NARRATOR — You're here to slay him. If you don't, it will be the end of the world.

- (Explore) The end of the world? What are you talking about?
- (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) That doesn't make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don't end the world.
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It's a very big place.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I'm on my way.
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — That doesn't make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don't end the world.

THE NARRATOR — This one could. And it isn't entirely accurate to say that he is a hero. Was. Was is a good word — he *was* a hero. Not anymore.

THE NARRATOR — There is nothing so wretched in all the world as a fallen hero. And this is the most awful there is.

- (Explore) But if he's so strong, how am I meant to do it?
- (Explore) The end of the world? What are you talking about?
- (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It's a very big place.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me? Okay, I'm on my way.
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — But if he's so strong, how am I meant to do it?

THE NARRATOR — I didn't say he was strong. I said he was wretched. He lost everything that made him a hero when he lost his heroism. He isn't strong anymore. He used to be, but he'll have withered away in his long imprisonment.

THE NARRATOR — It'll be easy for you.

- (Explore) What did he do?
- (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It's a very big place.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I'm on my way.
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — What did he do?

THE NARRATOR — Awful things. Terrible things, too dreadful to speak of. He lied, he cheated, he murdered. And he'll do the same to you, if he gets the chance.

THE NARRATOR — This is a man who destroyed everything beautiful in the world. There is nothing redeeming about him. Nothing left to redeem.

- You sound like you hate him.
- No one has nothing left to redeem.
- That sounds personal.
- I have other questions (Return)

YOU — You sound like you hate him.

THE NARRATOR — There is nothing in the world I hate more than him.

THE NARRATOR — So you should just get in there and kill him as soon as you can. We'll all be better off that way, trust me.

- (Explore) I'm not sure I can trust anyone who says 'trust me' out of the blue. It's very suspicious.
- (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It's a very big place.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I'm on my way.
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.

- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — I'm not sure I can trust anyone who says 'trust me' out of the blue. It's very suspicious.

THE NARRATOR — But you should trust me. I'm the only friend you have.

THE NARRATOR — And as for why you should do it, not only are you saving the world, making a better life for everyone, but you're also doing your duty. You are a princess, and you have a responsibility to your people. You have a responsibility to the world.

THE NARRATOR — You're not the sort of person who needs reward or personal gain to do what you're about to do, are you?

THE NARRATOR — You're better than that.

- (Explore) 'The only friend'? There have to be others. I remember there being others.
- Yes, you're right.
- I mean, a reward and a little gratitude wouldn't feel unappreciated.

YOU — 'The only friend'? There have to be others. I remember there being others.

THE NARRATOR — In this place. The only friend you have *in this place*. Though yes, there were other friends. They're not here anymore. Which is odd, given that if they were your friends, they'd be here with you. But they're not. Maybe the reason they're not here is that he killed them when he betrayed you. But that just means you have all the more reason to head to the lake and kill the hero.

- (Explore) He betrayed me?
- (Explore) I'd still like a reward, though.
- Okay, I understand. I'm on my way.
- Let's talk more about this hero.

YOU — He betrayed me?

THE NARRATOR — He betrayed *everyone*. You are part of everyone. That's why he's not a hero anymore and that's why he has to die. I'm trying not to be sharp with you, but I thought I was pretty clear about the fact that you're here to kill him.

- (Explore) I'd still like a reward, though.
- (Explore) Let's talk more about this hero.
- Okay, I understand. I'm on my way.

YOU — Okay, I understand. I'm on my way.

THE NARRATOR — Thank you. You won't regret this. I promise.

THE NARRATOR — The mountains are tall, white stone peaks reaching up to grasp at the sky. Gravel crunches underfoot. The air is hot, baking, and when the scorching wind blows, it wails with grief and terror.

THE NARRATOR — Not that this is an instance of the pathetic fallacy, of course. When I say the wind howls, I am merely describing it to you. You shouldn't let it get you down.

THE NARRATOR — But regardless it's a welcome relief when you find the pass that leads down from the tall white mountains, down the cooler slopes towards the dark lake you see in the distance. Its waters are cold, almost icy, and still. Not a ripple breaks them.

THE NARRATOR — On the island on the lake, there is a castle. That's where the hero is.

THE NARRATOR — Fortunately, next to the little dock there is a boat. It's how you're going to get to the island. It's just as well. It'd be hard to cross the lake without a boat.

- (Explore) Whose boat is this?
- (Explore) Do I have to row?
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — Do I have to row?

THE NARRATOR — There's no wind, and the boat has no sails. There is however a set of oars. Yes, you have to row.

- (Explore) I hate rowing.
- (Explore) Whose boat is this?
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — I hate rowing.

THE NARRATOR — I'm sure rowing doesn't like you very much either, your royal highness.

- (Explore) Whose boat is this?
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — Whose boat is this?

THE NARRATOR — It's someone's boat. But they're not using it anymore. No one comes near the lake. They won't mind you using it. If you're feeling bad about taking it, you can put it back where you found it after you're done. The fact you will have saved the world will count as more than enough payment for the loan.

- [Cross the lake]

YOU — [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — The waters are cold and dark. They move in fat, lazy ripples as you pull and pull and pull. There's dark water plants here, trying to snarl up the boat and your oars. The whole area smells just a little stagnant. There's rotting vegetation somewhere nearby. This lake isn't healthy. But you shouldn't look too closely. Don't linger here too long.

THE NARRATOR — He might notice if you stick around here.

- (Explore) Is it his fault?
- (Explore) Down there in the water. There's something on the lakebed.
- I won't, then. [Keep rowing]

YOU — I won't then. [Keep rowing]

THE NARRATOR — There's a little dock on the far side of the lake, the timbers damp and musty. It's probably best not to rely on it, so you don't. It's easy enough to beach the boat on the dark sand, and pull it up out of the water. It's safer that way than relying on a dock that looks like it could collapse in a stiff breeze. Not that there is a stiff breeze here. The air is as still as the water.

THE NARRATOR — The black stone looms over the dark waters. Ill-favoured birds flock around the turrets. The windows are thrown open, and gape like mouths. The great gate is opened wide. It hasn't been closed in a long time. Maybe it can't be closed. When you look at the hinges of the gate, they look like they've rusted solid.

THE NARRATOR — A word of warning, before you continue. The hero will do anything to stop you. To stay in control of the situation. That's why you just need to put an end to him. Don't give him time to think on his feet. Don't let him shape your options. He was a great hero once, after all. And that's why he must die.

- [Enter the castle]

YOU — [Enter the castle]

THE NARRATOR — You step through the gate, past the walls. This castle is marked by long neglect and painful decline. Most of the buildings that once stood beyond these walls have succumbed. There are stone structures without roofs, where sickly, dark trees grow from between ivy-choked bare walls. There are a few cobbles visible through the carpet of grass, but it is clear that no one has walked around here in a very long time.

THE NARRATOR — The central citadel is the only part of this castle that shows any sign of its former glory, though you have seen much more impressive fortresses in your time. It is really only a few rooms in a tower, a last fallback for a lord who has lost control of the outer walls. Still, it has a door, and the door is closed.

- (Explore) He's really let himself go, hasn't he?
- (Explore) What is the point of this place? It feels like it's lost all purpose.
- (Explore) Are you sure he's a threat? There's no army here.
- (Explore) It feels... sad. And lonely.
- (Explore) What if the door's locked?
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — It feels... sad. And lonely.

THE NARRATOR — Don't feel sympathetic for this... thing that was once a hero. He did it to himself. Steel your heart.

- (Explore) He's really let himself go, hasn't he?
- (Explore) I'd want to keep people around so I wasn't lonely. Are you sure he's a threat? There's no army here.
- (Explore) What if the door's locked?
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — I'd want to keep people around so I wasn't lonely. Are you sure he's a threat? There's no army here.

THE NARRATOR — An army? Is that what you think makes someone dangerous? Trust me, it doesn't. People can be plenty dangerous without an army backing them up. For example, just look at you. You made it all this way on your own. And at his peak, he could have done that too. Fortunately, that peak's long past.

- (Explore) But what if that means he thinks he doesn't need an army anymore? What if he feels completely safe like this?
- (Explore) He's really let himself go, hasn't he?
- (Explore) What is the point of this place? It feels like it's lost all purpose.
- (Explore) What if the door's locked?
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — But what if that means he thinks he doesn't need an army anymore? What if he feels completely safe like this?

THE NARRATOR — Then you can go in and show him the error of his ways. By killing him very, very dead. That's why you're here.

- (Explore) He's really let himself go, hasn't he?
- (Explore) What is the point of this place? It feels like it's lost all purpose.
- (Explore) What if the door's locked?
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — What if the door's locked?

THE NARRATOR — It's not. Stop hesitating. Stop acting like you're scared. Because you're not scared. You have nothing to be scared of. You're young. You're strong. You can do this.

- (Explore) He's really let himself go, hasn't he?
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — [Try the door]

THE NARRATOR — The room past the door is dry and dusty. The former signs of glory are tarnished, and the fire is unlit. The windows are thin and many of them are shuttered. In the

limited light, you can see the paintings on the walls. The colours have faded, until all that remains is a dark, oily blur.

THE NARRATOR — The table was laid for dinner, and while the plates and cutlery on it are clean, they are also covered in a layer of dust. He must not come down here very often.

THE NARRATOR — Ahead of you is a staircase. It must lead to the upper layers of the citadel. The walls look to be in a little better condition there, and there's less dust on the steps.

THE NARRATOR — Next to it is another staircase, this one going down — likely to the dungeons of this place. There's a strange smell coming from there, not musty, but... peculiar. Almost chemical. The stairs down also have signs of movement.

THE NARRATOR — Given he's not here, that suggests he's either upstairs or downstairs.

- (Explore) If the plates are so clean, but unused, what's he been eating?
- (Explore) Not necessarily. He could be outside. On a walk, or something.
- I'm heading down. That smell isn't natural. It's a sign something's happening down there.
- Guess I'll head up. The up-stairs looks more habitable.
- [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]
- [Silently take the stairs up to the upper levels]

YOU — [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]

THE NARRATOR — Ah, you're taking this seriously. Good.

THE NARRATOR — The bare stones of the structure are revealed, stripped of the dusty coverings and faded wall-hangings. The stonework is well-formed but neglected, and lacking in creature comforts; nothing to ease your step, only a few guttering torches to light your way. If he's spending time down here, there's very little for him to live for.

THE NARRATOR — Killing him is probably doing him a favour.

- What a lonely existence.
- [Stay silent.]

YOU — What a lonely existence.

THE NARRATOR — He isn't lonely. Stop with that idea. There's nothing sympathetic about him. And if there is, it's his own fault. He did this to himself. To everyone.

THE NARRATOR — Just do what you have to do and you'll save the world from what he's done to them. That's all that has to be done.

THE NARRATOR — There are several rooms down here, but the empty wine cellar which has only a hint of the smell of old vinegar doesn't have any sign of him. Neither does the empty cells, nor the strange laboratory full of curiosities. You stay silent as you stalk through the halls.

THE NARRATOR — And then you hear it. The sound of someone breathing. The sound of someone shifting around.

THE NARRATOR — He's in the next room.

- "Hello? Is anyone there?"
- "I am here to kill you."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend."
- "I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you."
- "Face me, blackguard!"
- [Draw your blade]
- [Enter the room]

YOU — [Draw your blade]

THE NARRATOR — Yes. Good. He doesn't know you're here yet. You can take him by surprise.

- "Hello? Is anyone there?"
- "I am here to kill you."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend."
- "I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you."
- "Face me, blackguard!"
- [Rush in, and end him]
- [Enter cautiously and warily]
- [Peek through the door]

YOU — [Enter cautiously and warily]

THE NARRATOR — Passing over the element of surprise, you step into the room, weapon in a guarding position. It is a poorly lit room, the only light coming from a small barred window that emerges from the side of the hill. The walls are bare, and on the far side are the rusted attachments for a pair of chains. But that isn't important, because he sits on a stone bench on the other side of the room.

THE NARRATOR — His eyes are hidden in the gloom; his sparse feathers black, his armour rusted and dented. He radiates exhaustion. You could probably just kill him now.

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) [You... know him]
- "I am here to kill you."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend."
- "I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you."
- "Face me, blackguard!"
- [Rush in, and end him]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — [You... know him]

He is familiar, in some way you can't describe, some way that the words cannot capture.

Meaning beyond words. The sight of a familiar back down an ill-lit road; the scent of another on a discarded item of clothing; an old healed scar over the heart.

You feel sadness, longing and odd hope as you stare at the black-feathered form before you.

- (Explore) What was that?
- (Explore) What about that blade?
- "I am here to kill you."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend."
- "I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you."
- "Face me, blackguard!"
- [Rush in, and end him]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — What was that?

THE NARRATOR — What was what?

- (Explore) I know him.
- Forget about it.

YOU — Forget about it.

THE NARRATOR — Stop wasting time. Kill him. He has it coming.

- (Explore) And what about his blade? He's armed and you didn't mention it.
- "I am here to kill you."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend."
- "I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you."
- "Face me, blackguard!"
- [Rush in, and end him]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — And what about his blade? He's armed and you didn't mention it.

THE NARRATOR — Of course you'd notice that.

THE NARRATOR — Yes. The only thing about him that isn't exhausted and tired and old is the pristine blade that sits in his hand, the talons clutched tight around it.

THE NARRATOR — But that isn't a threat to you. After all, he's tired and lost himself to depravity. The blade might be sharp, but the hand that holds it isn't. It's as blunt as the stones all around you.

- "I am here to kill you."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend."
- "I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you."
- "Face me, blackguard!"

- [Rush in, and end him]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — [Approach cautiously and warily]

THE NARRATOR — The hero rises to his feet. His eyes gleam like little stars in the second-hand light. He does not say a word as he approaches you. His talons click on the stone floor. He moves with cool precision, each motion measured.

- (Explore) That blade, I—
- “Nothing to say for yourself?”
- “Wait!”
- [Defend yourself]
- [Murder the Hero]
- “Wait—” [Murder the Hero]

YOU — [Defend yourself]

THE NARRATOR — Your sword rises in a classical defence, against this aggression. But he doesn’t care. There is the purity of the knife in the way he accepts your first swing on his rusted armour, pushing your point off target, and then his hand comes around and the blade is buried in your chest.

THE NARRATOR — You stagger back. It doesn’t hurt, but your body isn’t doing what it’s meant to.

- (Explore) Wait, shouldn’t it hurt?
- “O... oh. This is it, isn’t it? I can’t believe I travelled all this way and got stabbed like this. How embarrassing.”
- [Pull the blade out of your chest and try to stab him with it]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “O... oh.”

YOU — “This is it, isn’t it?”

YOU — “I can’t believe I travelled all this way and got stabbed like this. How embarrassing.”

THE NARRATOR — No no no, you can’t just give up.

THE NARRATOR — But you are giving up, aren’t you? Not you-you, but your body. One knife to the chest, and your vision is turning black. Your weapon clatters to the floor and you drop to your knees. His dark eyes stare down at you. Your red blood is so very red in the gloom. Your breath rasps. It’s hard to inhale and exhale.

- (Explore) Wait, shouldn’t it hurt?
- “Guess I... can see why they call you a hero.”
- [Die with dignity]

YOU — Wait, shouldn't it hurt?

THE NARRATOR — I can't say much about 'should' and 'shouldn't'. I can only say what is, and what is happening is that even if it doesn't hurt, you are dying because you just got stabbed in the chest.

- (Explore) It should hurt. I know it should.
- (Explore) It's so... unfair. He killed me without a word.
- (Explore) I'm not going to let it end like this.
- "Guess I... can see why they call you a hero."
- [Die with dignity]

YOU — I'm not going to let it end like this.

THE NARRATOR — You can try to pick up your weapon and fight him, but between the dimmed vision, the blood loss, and the fact your vital organs are all shutting down, I don't fancy your chances.

THE NARRATOR — But if you want to try, go ahead.

- (Explore) It should hurt. I know it should.
- (Explore) It's so... unfair. He killed me without a word.
- "Guess I... can see why they call you a hero."
- "Do you really think this is enough to kill me?"
- [Get. Up.]
- [Die with dignity]

YOU — "Do you really think this is enough to kill me?"

THE NARRATOR — Um. When I said that you were welcome to try, I didn't mean that. Don't do that. Really don't do that.

THE NARRATOR — In fact, I'd *really* recommend not doing that.

THE NARRATOR — Not that you can. Because you don't have enough strength in your limbs to do a thing. You can only look up at the figure of the hero staring down at you, eyes a mystery, as you breathe your last.

THE NARRATOR — Everything goes dark, and you die.

Chapter 2: CHAPTER II. THE FROZEN HEART

Chapter Summary

THE NARRATOR — ... not that I mean to walk over your feelings. Obviously it's good that you have more reason to want to kill him, but... uh, you died. Although you don't seem too angry about it. Irritated, yes, but not angry. Why not?

YOU — Oh, I am. Angry, that is. I have issues about how our last meeting went. I'm going to have words with him.

YOU— Words he won't enjoy.

THE NARRATOR — You're on a path in the mountains.

THE NARRATOR — Past the mountains, there is a lake.

THE NARRATOR — And trapped on the island across the lake, there is a Hero.

THE NARRATOR — You're here to slay him. If you don't, it will be—

THE NARRATOR — Wait. Excuse me. This isn't right. What's going on here? You're dead. You're a ghost. You're just... floating there. You're not meant to be a ghost.

THE NARRATOR — How are you dead? You only just got here. You haven't even met the hero yet.

THE NARRATOR — And for that matter, *why* are you dead?

- Because he murdered me. Don't you remember that?
- Oh, that's 'how' and 'why'. Going to go for a 'what' next, or possibly 'when'?
- That's rich, coming from you. You just told me I was dead.
- Last time you didn't have so many questions. You just narrated things.
- [Float silently towards the lake (again)]
- He killed me. Well. I am going to leave now. I am not doing that again. [Float away]
- [Silently float away.]

YOU — That's rich, coming from you. You just told me I was dead.

THE NARRATOR — No! No, I didn't!

- Yes, you did.
- You just said 'Everything goes dark, and you die'. That sounds like telling me I'm dead.

- So, I'm guessing there's some kind of... time resetting thing going on?
- Stop lying. It's boring.
- [Float silently towards the lake (again)]
- He killed me. Well. I am going to leave now. I am not doing that again.
- [Float away]
- [Silently float away.]

YOU — You just said 'Everything goes dark, and you die'. That sounds like telling me I'm dead.

THE NARRATOR — It isn't. I mean, I didn't! Didn't tell you you were dead, that is. Trust me on that! I've never even met you before.

- There you are with the whole 'trust me' thing again. No. Why should I trust you? I'm dead now. And now you're pretending that you've never met me before.
- Yes, you did.
- So, I'm guessing there's some kind of... time resetting thing going on?
- Stop lying. It's boring.
- [Float silently towards the lake (again)]
- He killed me. Well. I am going to leave now. I am not doing that again.
- [Float away]
- [Silently float away.]

YOU — There you are with the whole 'trust me' thing again. No. Why should I trust you? I'm dead now. And now you're pretending that you've never met me before.

THE NARRATOR — [Sighs]

THE NARRATOR — Okay. So here's the deal.

THE NARRATOR — I was, well, sort of aware that it's possible that you might have met me before. Only, not me-me. Another version of me.

THE NARRATOR — Call it a fallback, if you will. A way to make sure that so-called hero winds up dead. A way to make sure you get a fair shot at it.

THE NARRATOR — I wasn't sure exactly how it would work. I had some guesses, yes. Some best hopes. But if you're here, and you're dead...

THE NARRATOR — ... then that monster killed you.

- Yes. I was there.
- Well done. You've successfully worked out what I just told you.
- [Smile in a sickly sweet manner]
- [Float silently towards the lake (again)]
- He killed me. Well. I am going to leave now. I am not doing that again.
- [Float away]
- [Silently float away.]

YOU — [Smile in a sickly sweet manner]

THE NARRATOR — No, you don't... never mind. If you're dead, then he killed you there. And now there's no one to stop him there. This isn't good. This isn't good at all. Why didn't you kill him?

THE NARRATOR — ... not that I mean to walk over your feelings. Obviously it's good that you have more reason to want to kill him, but... uh, you died. Although you don't seem too angry about it. Irritated, yes, but not angry. Why not?

- Because it's that or cry. I died.
- I get the feeling that, uh, feelings are rooted in the organs and meat. It's hard to get angry about it.
- It didn't really hurt, you know? And it's nice to know that death isn't really the end.
- Oh, I am. Angry, that is. I'm going to have words with him. Words he won't enjoy.

YOU — Oh, I am. Angry, that is. I have issues about how our last meeting went. I'm going to have words with him.

YOU— Words he won't enjoy.

THE NARRATOR — Um.

THE NARRATOR — Your face and voice and — you know what? It doesn't matter.

THE NARRATOR — Like I said, if you have more reason to want to kill him, it's all for the best.

- (Explore) I have further questions.
- Yes. I'm going to go have those words now. [Float towards the lake (again)]
- [Float silently towards the lake (again)]
- He killed me. Well. I am going to leave now. I am not doing that again. [Float away]
- [Silently float away.]

YOU — Yes. I'm going to go have those words now. [Float towards the lake (again)]

THE NARRATOR — The mountains are tall, white stone peaks reaching up to grasp at the sky. Gravel crunches underfoot. The air is hot, baking, and when the scorching wind blows, it wails with grief and terror.

THE NARRATOR — Not that this is an instance of the pathetic fallacy, of course. When I say the wind howls, I am merely describing it to you. You shouldn't let it get you down.

THE NARRATOR — But regardless it's a welcome relief when you find the pass that leads down from the tall white mountains, down the cooler slopes towards the dark lake you see in the distance. Its waters are cold, almost icy, and still. Not a ripple breaks them.

THE NARRATOR — On the island on the lake, there is a castle. That's where the hero is.

THE NARRATOR — Fortunately, next to the little dock there is a boat. It's how you're going to get to the island. It's just as well. It'd be hard to cross the lake without a boat.

THE NARRATOR — Hmm. Except you're a ghost.

- (Explore) How am I meant to use an oar?
- (Explore) Can ghosts cross running water?
- "[Pick up an oar and row across]
- "I'm not rowing again." [Cross the lake]

YOU — "I'm not rowing again." [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — Like mist over water, you... uh, float across the lake. Without having to take the boat. I suppose that's a lot more direct.

THE NARRATOR — The waters are cold and dark. They lie flat and motionless under your spectral form. The whole area smells just a little stagnant. There's rotting vegetation somewhere nearby. This lake isn't healthy. But you shouldn't look too closely. Don't linger here too long.

- (Explore) It isn't healthy, is it? Oh no, what's it going to do to me? Kill me?
- (Explore) Is it his fault?
- (Explore) Down there in the water. There's something on the lakebed.
- I won't, then. [Continue crossing the lake]

YOU — It isn't healthy, is it? Oh no, what's it going to do to me?

YOU— Kill me?

THE NARRATOR — Ah! Please don't do that!

THE NARRATOR — And I understand the sarcasm, I do, but please don't be trite. You don't want to be noticed. Really, you don't. If you can, try to avoid being noticed by anyone or anything. If you do this right, even the Hero won't see you for more time than necessary.

- (Explore) Why?
- (Explore) Is the flooding his fault?
- (Explore) Down there in the water. There's something on the lakebed.
- I won't, then. [Continue crossing the lake]

YOU — Why?

THE NARRATOR — Because if the man you are here to kill — remember, that is why you're here — has long enough to prepare and psyche himself up, you'll be in trouble. Don't. Linger.

- (Explore) Is the flooding his fault?
- (Explore) Down there in the water. There's something on the lakebed.
- I won't, then. [Continue crossing the lake]

YOU — I won't, then. [Continue crossing the lake]

THE NARRATOR — You pass a little dock on the far side of the lake, the timbers damp and musty. The air is as still as the water and there's the scent of snow in the air.

THE NARRATOR — The black stone looms over the dark water. Ill-favoured birds flock around the turrets and perch on the snowy roofs. The windows are thrown open, and gape like mouths. The great gate is opened wide. It hasn't been closed in a long time. Maybe it can't be closed. When you look at the hinges of the gate, they look like they've rusted solid.

THE NARRATOR — A word of warning, before you continue. The hero will do anything to stop you. To stay in control of the situation. That's why you just need to put an end to him. Don't give him time to think on his feet. Don't let him shape your options. He was a great hero once, after all. And that's why he must die.

- (Explore) Wait a moment. The snow wasn't here before.
- (Explore) I can feel it. Something is pulling me. I think it's my body. There's somewhere I have to be.
- (Explore) Did... time pass when I was dead? It's now winter.
- [Enter the castle]

YOU — Did... time pass when I was dead? It's now winter.

THE NARRATOR — Sorry, what? You're saying the snow wasn't here last time?

THE NARRATOR — Well, I don't know exactly how the fallback mechanism works. Maybe it's later in the year. After all, if you're dead, that means he killed you.

THE NARRATOR — And that means time will have passed for him.

THE NARRATOR — Be. Careful. He'll have had more time to prepare for you.

- (Explore) I can feel it. Something is pulling me. I think it's my body. There's somewhere I have to be. Something I have to do.
- [Enter the castle]

YOU — I can feel it. Something is pulling me. I think it's my body. There's somewhere I have to be. Something I have to do.

THE NARRATOR — Where you have to be is wherever he is. And what you need to do is be killing him.

THE NARRATOR — It doesn't matter if it's snowing or not.

- [Enter the castle]

YOU — [Enter the castle]

THE NARRATOR — You float through the gate, past the walls. This snow-choked castle is marked by long neglect and painful decline. Most of the buildings that once stood beyond

these walls have succumbed. There are stone structures without roofs, where sickly, mistletoe-covered yew trees grow from between the icy bare stone. A field of gravestones sit by the ruins of a church, emerging from the white like a strange winter harvest. There are a few cobbles visible through the untouched snow, but it is clear that no one has walked around here in a very long time.

THE NARRATOR — And I suppose you aren't changing that.

THE NARRATOR — The central citadel is bleak, bare black stone, the snowy drifts flanking it like a curtain wall. It is really only a few rooms in a tower, a last fallback for a lord who has lost control of the outer walls. Still, it has a door, and the door is closed.

- (Explore) The snow is new. So is the graveyard
- (Explore) It's even colder and deader than it was before. Just like me.
- (Explore) I thought he wasn't a threat before. I won't make that mistake again.
- (Explore) It feels... sad. And lonely. Good.
- (Explore) What if the door's locked?
- "Hiya, killer? You still here?" [Call out]
- [Float through the door]

YOU — The snow is new. So is the graveyard

THE NARRATOR — It isn't just the weather that's changing? That's not good.

THE NARRATOR — That's really not good.

THE NARRATOR — If he's been able to change this place too, it means his influence is spreading. It means he's been *able* to change things. You need to kill him. And soon.

- (Explore) I don't know if I can kill him. Not morally, I mean. Physically. Ephemeral? I'm not sure what applies to me right now as a ghost.
- (Explore) I thought he wasn't a threat before. I won't make that mistake again.
- (Explore) It feels... sad. And lonely. Good.
- (Explore) What if the door's locked?
- "Hiya, killer? You still here?" [Call out]
- [Float through the door]

YOU — I don't know if I can kill him. Not morally, I mean. Physically. Ephemeral? I'm not sure what applies to me right now as a ghost.

THE NARRATOR — Don't worry. Trust me on this.

THE NARRATOR — You can make sure he dies.

THE NARRATOR — After all, you're a terrifying spectre, right? What kind of world would this be if a heart-rending apparition of a murder victim couldn't hurt her killer? Possibly by, and I'm just floating this prospect out there, sticking her hand into her chest and ripping out his heart.

- (Explore) Now isn't that a nice thought. Thank you.
- (Explore) I thought he wasn't a threat before. I won't make that mistake again.
- (Explore) It feels... sad. And lonely. Good.
- (Explore) What if the door's locked?
- "Hiya, killer? You still here?" [Call out]
- [Float through the door]

YOU — Now isn't that a nice thought. Thank you.

THE NARRATOR — It's what I'm here for. You're welcome.

- (Explore) I thought he wasn't a threat before. I won't make that mistake again.
- (Explore) It feels... sad. And lonely. Good.
- (Explore) What if the door's locked?
- "Hiya, killer? You still here?" [Call out]
- [Float through the door]

YOU — "Hiya, killer? You still here?"

THE NARRATOR — ... you call out to the hero. What did I say about...

THE NARRATOR — No, no, it's fine. There's no response.

- (Explore) I thought he wasn't a threat before. I won't make that mistake again.
- (Explore) It feels... sad. And lonely. Good.
- (Explore) What if the door's locked?
- [Float through the door]

YOU — [Float through the door]

THE NARRATOR — The room past the door is freezing cold, and ice sprawls across the walls. The former signs of glory are lost, and the fire is unlit. The windows are thin and every single one of them is unlatched and open. In the winter gloom, you can see that the paintings have rotted away entirely.

THE NARRATOR — The table has been overturned, and every plate lies broken on the floor. He must not eat here.

THE NARRATOR — Ahead of you is a staircase. It must lead to the upper layers of the citadel. The walls look to be in a little better condition there, but there is no light here, no warmth.

THE NARRATOR — Next to it is another staircase, this one going down — likely to the dungeons of this place. A cold wind blows up from the heart of this empty hall.

THE NARRATOR — Given he's not here, that suggests he's either upstairs or downstairs.

- (Explore) I wonder what he's been eating. It better not be my body.
- (Explore) Not necessarily. He could be outside. On a walk, or something.
- I'm heading down. He was downstairs last time.

- Guess I'll head up. He won't be lurking down there again, surely.
- [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]
- [Silently take the stairs up to the upper levels]
- [Float through the floor]
- [Float through the ceiling]

YOU — [Float through the floor]

THE NARRATOR — Hey, wait up, I haven't had a chance to describe the...

THE NARRATOR — ... never mind. You clearly know where you're going.

THE NARRATOR — As you emerge from the thick stone, you see a room below you. The only light coming from a too-large barred window that emerges from the side of the hill, letting the cold wind blow in. There is snow piled up between the bars, and it has blown into the room, thawed at some point, and frozen over. The walls are bare, and below the window are the rusted attachments for a pair of chains. But that isn't important.

THE NARRATOR — Because on one side of the room, he sits. He has been here a long time. There are icicles on his rusty black-painted armour. His breath is barely visible, and comes so infrequently.

THE NARRATOR — And on the other side of the room, near the entrance, is a body. It's preserved in the cold, skin leathery, a few scraps of golden hair still clinging to the scalp.

THE NARRATOR — That's your body, isn't it?

THE NARRATOR — Well, maybe this time you can, you know, do it right. I guess you've got the advantage here. You can't die again.

- "Hiya, killer. Missed me?"
- "Surprised?"
- "You couldn't even find it in yourself to bury me. Coward."
- [Run your fingers across his cheek and over his beak]
- [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]

YOU — "Hiya, killer. Missed me?"

THE NARRATOR — Oh sweet mother of... why do you want to talk to him? Never mind. He looks up at you and your altogether too smug face as you poke it through the ceiling, his dark eyes momentarily narrowing. And then he speaks.

THE HERO — "I've killed a lot of people. This doesn't usually happen. How interesting.

THE HERO — "What do you want?"

THE NARRATOR — His eyes don't leave you. His hands tighten on the pristine blade in his hand.

- Oh, oh, oh. I know. How about some begging? How about an apology? You know. For murdering me.
- “Maybe we could start with you burying me in that graveyard of yours upstairs?”
- [Pat his cheek] What do I want? Well, isn’t that a hard question? It’s almost philosophical. How can anyone know what anyone wants? Especially when they were murdered.
- “I want what any young maiden wants. To win a man’s heart.” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]
- “You. Dead.” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]
- [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]

YOU — [Pat his cheek]

THE NARRATOR — Your hand gives a moment of resistance, but then passes through his face.

YOU — “What do I want? Well, isn’t that a hard ques...”

THE NARRATOR — He doesn’t let you finish your rhetoric. Instead, he’s already on the move, bringing the blade up and around. It tears through your ephemeral flesh without resistance.

THE NARRATOR — And then you knit yourself together after it. Well, look at that. He can’t hurt you. But you can hurt him.

- “...tion? It’s almost philosophical. How can anyone know what anyone wants? Especially when they were murdered.”
- “That was rude. Not as rude as murdering someone. But rude. Let me finish my sentences.”
- “I think I changed my mind. I want what any young maiden wants. To win a man’s heart.” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]
- “I think I changed my mind. You. Dead.” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]
- [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]

YOU — “That was rude.”

YOU— “Not as rude as murdering someone.”

YOU— “But rude. Let me finish my sentences.”

THE HERO — “I don’t really care. But you probably shouldn’t get on someone’s back about murdering someone.

THE HERO — ”I remember things quite differently. I remember you coming to my house, armed and armoured, and then you tried to stab me. And then I stabbed you.

THE HERO — ”I wouldn’t call that murder. Easy, yes. Murder, no.

THE HERO — ”Now, question for you. What are you doing not being dead?”

- (Explore) “Don’t act like you’re the victim here. You’re not the one who died.”
- (Explore) “You don’t get to ask questions here. You’re a threat to the whole world!”
- (Explore) “I don’t know why I came back. There’s a voice in my head that tells me that this is some kind of contingency, but those sorts of things are meant to save your life. And it quite clearly didn’t.”
- (Explore) “I don’t know why I came back. Maybe it was something you did.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I just couldn’t live without you, killer. I was forlorn without your company.”
- “I just couldn’t live without you, killer. Join me.” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]
- [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]

YOU — “Don’t act like you’re the victim here. You’re not the one who died.”

THE HERO — “Victim. That’s an interesting phrasing. You came to kill me, but you’re the victim.

THE HERO — ”Why did you come to kill me? It’s not like I’m complaining. It was the first interesting thing that happened to me in a long time. And now you’re back. Being interesting again.

THE HERO — ”Why not tell me your story?”

THE NARRATOR — Don’t listen to him. Don’t talk to him. Just kill him.

- (Explore) “You don’t get to ask questions here. You’re a threat to the whole world.”
- (Explore) “I came to protect my kingdom. From you. You used to be a hero. But now look at you. What’s the point of this life of yours? You’re barely more alive than I am.”
- (Explore) “Someone told me that you betrayed me. You betrayed everyone. You need to die.”
- “You like stories, do you? Ever heard about a story of murder and revenge?” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]
- [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]

YOU — “I came to protect my kingdom. From you. You used to be a hero. But now look at you. What’s the point of this life of yours?”

YOU— “You’re barely more alive than I am.”

THE HERO — “Is that a threat?”

- “Do you want it to be, killer?”
- “Would I threaten you? Innocent old me?”
- “Yes.”
- “Maybe?”
- “No.”
- (Lie) “No.”

YOU — “Do you want it to be, killer?”

THE HERO — “Hmm. You *are* interesting.”

THE NARRATOR — I... are you flirting with him?

- I’m just saying, this is the only man who’s touched my heart. With his knife. That creates a certain closeness.
- Would I flirt with him? Innocent old me?
- Yes.
- Maybe?
- No.
- (Lie) No.

YOU — (Lie) No.

THE NARRATOR — I know when you’re lying to me. Oh, for goodness sake. He literally killed you. He has betrayed everyone and is a threat to everyone and everything in existence. The last thing anyone needs is for you to suddenly decide that you’re interested in... in his knife!

- Are you blushing? Can a voice in my head blush?
- It was a big knife. It felt big when it was in me. And it didn’t hurt at all.
- Maybe he’s just lonely.
- He just needs a woman who he can’t murder again.
- I’m not exactly not flirting, but I am being coy. Because he can’t hurt me. And I can hurt him.

YOU — I’m not exactly not flirting, but I am being coy. Because he can’t hurt me. And I can hurt him.

THE NARRATOR — That’s a dangerous way to think. He will try to constrain your options. Trap you. Make you not want to kill him.

THE NARRATOR — You were furious back when I first met you. What happened to that? Just think about it.

THE HERO — “Nothing to say? No replies? Or have you gotten boring?”

- (Explore) “Not so boring you couldn’t bury me, it seems.”
- (Explore) “Will it be interesting if I tell you that you’re a threat to the whole world? That you betrayed everyone?”
- (Explore) “Will it be interesting if I tell you that someone says you’re a threat to the whole world? That you betrayed everyone?”
- “Will it be interesting if I tear your heart out?” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]

YOU — “Not so boring you couldn’t bury me, it seems.”

THE HERO — “You weren’t doing anything. And then the weather got cold. That was interesting for a bit. Then it stopped being interesting.”

- (Explore) “Is that all everything is to you? Interesting or boring?”
- (Explore) “Will it be interesting if I tell you that you’re a threat to the whole world? That you betrayed everyone?”
- (Explore) “Will it be interesting if I tell you that someone says you’re a threat to the whole world? That you betrayed everyone?”
- “Will it be interesting if I tear your heart out?” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]

YOU — “Is that all everything is to you? Interesting or boring?”

THE HERO — “Yes. That’s all there is to anything.

THE HERO — ”I’m never going to die. And there is nothing else, except keeping myself interested. That’s all that remains, when the fire goes out.

THE HERO — ”When you’re young, everything is bright and hot and there are things happening. And after that’s over, all you have is a cold, dark eternity.

THE HERO — ”But we’re really not so different, you and I. You’ve had your brief fire. And now all that remains is the cold. And the endless... existence.”

- (Explore) “How lonely. Is there nothing else for you?”
- (Explore) “Will it be interesting if I tell you that you’re a threat to the whole world? That you betrayed everyone?”
- (Explore) “Will it be interesting if I tell you that someone says you’re a threat to the whole world? That you betrayed everyone?”
- “Will it be interesting if I tear your heart out?” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]

YOU — “How lonely. Is there nothing else for you?”

THE NARRATOR — He did this to himself. Don’t feel sorry for him.

THE HERO — “No. There isn’t.

THE HERO — ”You’re getting boring yourself, too.”

- (Explore) “Will it be interesting if I tell you that you’re a threat to the whole world? That you betrayed everyone?”
- (Explore) “Will it be interesting if I tell you that someone says you’re a threat to the whole world? That you betrayed everyone?”
- “You were right. You don’t live. You just exist. Just like me.”
- “Will it be interesting if I tear your heart out?” [Reach into his chest and tear out his heart]
- “I think the worst thing I can do to you is leave you to this endless existence of boredom. So I will.” [Leave]

YOU — “You were right. You don’t live. You just exist.”

YOU— “Just like me.”

THE HERO — “Maybe. But life is better than death. You’re choosing to be dead yourself, you know. Your body’s still here. Why not just... get back in it? You can put it back on.”

THE NARRATOR — *Don’t* listen to him. He is trying to trick you. He is trying to get you into a state where he can stab you again.

- (Explore) “Get back in my body? My rotten body?”
- (Explore) “Choosing to be dead. You stabbed me.”
- (Explore) “You’re trying to trick me. All for your amusement.”
- “Poor thing. So bored. Let me show you something new.” [Reach into his chest.]
- “I... want to be alive again. I’m going to trust you.” [Climb into your body again]
- “I think the worst thing I can do to you is leave you to this endless existence of boredom. So I will.” [Leave]

YOU — “You’re trying to trick me. All for your amusement.”

THE HERO — “That does sound like something I’d do.

THE HERO — ”But I’m not. You can live again. If you want to. That would certainly be something to see.

THE HERO — ”Or maybe I’ll just be amused if you fail.”

- (Explore) “Get back in my body? My rotten body?”
- (Explore) “Choosing to be dead. You stabbed me.”
- “Poor thing. So bored. Let me show you something new.” [Reach into his chest.]
- “I... want to be alive again. I’m going to trust you.” [Climb into your body again]
- “I think the worst thing I can do to you is leave you to this endless existence of boredom. So I will.” [Leave]

YOU — “Poor thing. So bored.”

YOU— “Let me show you something new.”

YOU— [Reach into his chest.]

THE NARRATOR — His heart is so cold it burns. It barely beats. It is hard, and steely, and not something that should be in a living thing. He stares at where your misty hand is extended into his chest, holding it tight. There is something in his eyes that wasn’t there before.

THE HERO — “You’re right.

THE HERO — ”This *is* new.”

THE NARRATOR — You feel his heart beat.

THE NARRATOR — *Badump.*

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — *Badump.*

THE NARRATOR — Slow... but maybe a little faster than it was before, before you seized it. Kill him! Kill him now!

- (Explore) “Your heart is cold, killer. But this? You like this. Can you feel your heart beat faster? Can you feel the rush? I can.”
- (Explore) “Is it fear that makes your heart beat faster? Fascination? ... Love?”
- [Relish the power over him]
- [Relax your grip]
- [Squeeze tighter]
- [Rip it out]

YOU — [Relish the power over him]

THE NARRATOR — He barely dares to breathe. His heart beats in your hand.

THE NARRATOR — *Badump.*

THE NARRATOR — *Badump.*

THE NARRATOR — *Badump.*

- (Explore) “Your heart is cold, killer. But this? You like this. Can you feel your heart beat faster? Can you feel the rush? I can.”
- (Explore) “Is it fear that makes your heart beat faster? Fascination? ... Love?”
- [Relish the power over him (more)]
- [Relax your grip]
- [Squeeze tighter]
- [Rip it out]

YOU — “Your heart is cold, killer. But this? You like this. Can you feel your heart beat faster? Can you feel the rush? I can.”

THE HERO — “It’s definitely... *interesting*

THE HERO — ”Do you know what else is interesting?”

- (Explore) “Hmm?”
- (Explore) “Is it fear that makes your heart beat faster? Fascination? ... Love?”
- [Relish the power over him (more)]
- [Relax your grip]
- [Squeeze tighter]
- [Rip it out]

YOU — [Squeeze tighter]

THE NARRATOR — The knife clatters from his fingers as he gasps. He shivers, chilled by your touch. By your fingers around his heart.

THE NARRATOR — *Badump badump.*

THE NARRATOR — *Badump badump.*

THE NARRATOR — His heart beats faster and faster.

THE NARRATOR — His voice comes out as a croak.

THE HERO — “You’re smarter than last time. You knew I knew you were making yourself solid to do this.”

- (Explore) “Is it fear that makes your heart beat faster? Fascination? ... Love?”
- [Relish the power over him (more)]
- [Relax your grip]
- [Squeeze even tighter]
- [Rip it out]

YOU — “Is it fear that makes your heart beat faster? Fascination? ... Love?”

THE HERO — “Fear? Fascination? Love? Is there a difference between them? They’re all feelings.”

THE NARRATOR — *Badump badump badump badump.*

THE HERO — “It’s being alive. You make me feel alive. For the first time in a long time.

THE HERO — ”I feel alive because my heart is in your hand. Because my life is in danger. Days, months, years pass without anything as interesting happening as they did in the past few minutes. How fascinating. But the numbness will return. It always does. It always... has.

THE HERO — ”What will you do now? *Princess?*”

- “I like this. Do you like this, hero?” [Relish the power over him (more)]
- “I think the worst thing I can do to you is leave you to this endless existence of boredom. So I will.” [Leave]
- “No. You’re not alive. Not really. Not if it takes a hand around your heart to get the blood pounding. I don’t have blood anymore. And even I’m more alive than you.” [Crush his heart]
- “Fear fades. Fascination passes. Love dies. All things are transitory. Nothing is forever. Everything passes from one state to another. But they are precious because they pass.” [Rip it out]

YOU — “Fear fades. Fascination passes. Love dies. All things are transitory. Nothing is forever. Everything passes from one state to another. But they are precious because they pass.”

THE NARRATOR — He gasps, trembling as your physical chill overcomes his spiritual numbness. You strain for just a moment. And then, with a splurt of blood and the breaking of bones, you withdraw your hand.

THE NARRATOR — His heart sits in your hand. It is steel and it is ice and it is hard and heavy. It takes all your spectral strength to hold it there. With each beat it splurts out blue blood. Is it even really a living thing? Maybe it's a cold and calculated mechanism that pumps blood and nothing more.

THE NARRATOR — *Badumpbadumpbadumpbadumpbadumpbadumpbadumpbadumpbadump.*

THE NARRATOR — He still lives. His eyes are wide, and he opens his beak to say:

THE HERO — “You’re giving me an ending, I see.

THE HERO — ”Finally.

THE HERO — ”At last, something will change.

THE HERO — ”But I think I still win in the end. After all, I’m going to die.

THE HERO — ”And there’s no ending for you, is there? Not for a ghost.”

- “Goodbye. I hope I don’t see you again.” [Crush his heart]
- “Goodbye. Hope I don’t see you again.” [Drop his heart and float away]

YOU — “Goodbye. I hope I don’t see you again.”

YOU— [Crush his heart]

THE NARRATOR — You clench your fist, and though it takes everything you have, the steel and ice of his heart shatters. The hero’s body slumps to the ground.

THE NARRATOR — Dead. He’s definitely dead.

THE NARRATOR — G-good job. This... this wasn’t how it was meant to happen. But you did it. He’s dead...

But the Narrator’s voice is fading fast, and from the frozen heart, black tarry gloop is spilling out. Far, far more than could have possibly fit in the heart. It floods the room, spreading, swirling, moving like a living thing. And from the depths; hands, limbs, pseudopods. Eyes that gleam like agates.

- [Escape]
- [Surrender]

YOU — [Escape]

There is no escape.

Chapter 3: INTERMISSION: THE LONG QUIET I

Chapter Summary

You are right. There is movement through this place that pretends to be nothingness. But its pretensions to oblivion are as false as any other claim to non-existence.

There are places where you are not, therefore you are in a place.

There are moments when things have not happened, therefore time passes.

There are beings that are not you, therefore you have an identity.

Nothingness doesn't exist. And if it did, it'd so easily flip into being something.

It is dark here. The waters are dark. The sky is dark. There is no island here that you can see, no mountains. The world has been unwound and its physical matter replaced by an ocean of textured nothingness, under a sky of textured nothingness. Even your boat is woven from the same textured nothingness as everything else.

It is cold here.

Has the world been destroyed?

Is this what the Narrator meant?

THE SPECTRE — “What happened?”

- (Explore) “I don't like this. What happened to the world?”
- “Wait. Aren't you me? I mean, uh, aren't I you?”
- “I can't see you.”

YOU — “Wait. Aren't you me? I mean, uh, aren't I you?”

THE SPECTRE — “I am me. But then who are you?”

- “I don't know.”
- “I thought I was you. I... we...”
- [Focus on her voice]

YOU — “I don't know.”

THE SPECTRE — “You sound familiar. And feel familiar. I don't like this place.

THE SPECTRE — “But I feel like if I have to be here, it's better when I'm here with you.

THE SPECTRE — “I don’t think I’m you. And I don’t think you’re me...”

- “... but we’re we.”
- “Are you so sure?”
- “I know you too.”
- [Focus on her voice]

YOU — “... but we’re we.”

She makes herself known; vaporous, a memory of a life ended prematurely. Whirling motes of light in the gloom paint her face; deep set eyes, an impish grin with lips drawn taut over teeth, the pallor of a corpse and yet vivacity radiates from every expression.

She was hurt so badly, and died for nothing, and yet there is a kindness in her.

But in the end, in the face of unbearable coldness she too let coldness prevail. Regrets are a tattered garment, but she wears them well.

THE SPECTRE — “I think you got it in one.”

- (Explore) “I’m sorry.”
- “What do we do now?”
- “Let’s find a way out of here.”

YOU — “I’m sorry.”

She smiles at you, but there’s pain in her deep-set eyes.

She is memory: that is all that is left to her.

THE SPECTRE — “Sorry for what?”

- “Wasn’t I making the decisions back here?”
- “That you ended up dead after all that.”
- “I’m just... generally sorry.”
- “Never mind.”

YOU — “Wasn’t I making the decisions back there?”

THE SPECTRE — “No, that was me. I should have just cut him down when the Narrator told me to.

THE SPECTRE — “Except then he’d have probably just cut me down because I was too rash.

THE SPECTRE — “It’s very easy to end up thinking about could-have-beens after you die. Given you died and all.

THE SPECTRE — “At least it wasn’t the end for me.”

Words do not stop the passage of time. Though it is hard to tell, the boat is moving in some unseen current, swept towards an unknown definition.

THE SPECTRE — “But if you think you were making the decisions... then you aren’t the Narrator. You don’t sound like him. And he didn’t have a face, while you’re quite the opposite.

THE SPECTRE — “I know who I am, and I know why I’m here. I know you’re me — somehow — but I don’t remember you being there. You just showed up here.

THE SPECTRE — “And I’m pretty sure I would have noticed someone who looks like you.

THE SPECTRE — “Who are you? Do you have a name?”

- “You can call me Princess, if you'd like...”
- “Princess.”
- “You can address me as Your Royal Highness, or Her Majesty. Any honorific should do, really.”

YOU — “Princess.”

THE SPECTRE — “No, that won’t do. That’s me.”

- “Yes, but it’s also me.”

YOU — “Yes, but it’s also me.”

THE SPECTRE — “Things won’t be very clear if we’re both going around calling ourselves ‘Princess’. Do you have a name? One that’s more than a title?”

- “Do you?”
- “I... don’t remember.”
- “I think someone gave me one, once. A long time ago.”
- “The Narrator was the first person I ever met. I think.”
- “Wait, did you hear that?”

YOU — “Wait, did you hear that?”

THE SPECTRE — “You’re trying to change the topic. I can tell. We do think alike.”

You are right. There is movement through this place that pretends to be nothingness. But its pretensions to oblivion are as false as any other claim to non-existence.

There are places where you are not, therefore you are in a place.

There are moments when things have not happened, therefore time passes.

There are beings that are not you, therefore you have an identity.

Nothingness doesn’t exist. And if it did, it’d so easily flip into being something.

THE SPECTRE — “No, that doesn’t seem right. I can feel it. She and I are we, and you and I are we. You’re not the same as she is, but we’re still a we. But then who is the—”

With a dull thud your boat hits something, nearly tossing you into the water. It doesn’t inconvenience the ephemeral form accompanying you, but she starts in confusion.

THE SPECTRE — “What was that that we hit?”

You reach out, running your hands over the surface. As far as you can reach, nothing but the cold smoothness of glass. And in the gloom, you realise you can see a reflection. It is a mirror. A vast, colossal mirror reaching up into the heavens and as far as anyone can see in the gloom.

Half this dark world is a reflection.

Or to put it another way, half this place does not exist.

You look, and meet the eyes of your dark reflection.

- (Explore) [Consider your reflection]
- (Explore) [Call out]
- (Explore) [Remember]
- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Call out]

You are a solitary firefly in a vast and terrible night, afraid and desperate for companionship. There is none to be found upon this midnight ocean.

And perhaps that is for the best.

A candle flame cannot seek company from the ocean.

- (Explore) [Consider your reflection]
- (Explore) [Remember]
- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Consider your reflection]

You have no reflection. Only a few whirring motes of light in a sky that should be full of constellations. You are not a thing that has reflections. You cannot observe yourself, not as you are.

You think back about that life; stolen from you, yet knowing nothing. Of what kingdom were you a princess? Who were the friends mentioned? You know they must have existed, but their faces, their names; all are as transitory as what remained once life ended.

THE SPECTRE — “I don’t like this.”

- (Explore) [Remember]

- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Remember]

You cannot remember. What is a network stripped of all but the container that holds it? When there are no nodes to chatter and interact, all that remains is loss.

Why are you less than you were before?

What severed your roots, sliced through your webs, set ablaze the tamed lightning?

- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Break the mirror]

You slam a fist into the mirror, then another, then another.

THE SPECTRE — “What are you doing?”

Then; crack.

A spiderweb fracture, spreading across the glass.

THE SPECTRE — “What was that sound?”

You meet the eyes of your reflection.

No.

That isn't your reflection.

Dark feathers, dark eyes, a melancholy affect. Cinders, where once there was coal.

Eternity is a very long time. How lonely a word it is.

THE SPECTRE — “What are you looking at?”

HIM — “...”

He raises a hand in salutation.

He opens his beak.

Then—

Eyes.

Eyes overhead and behind the glass. They are what pass for stars in this place. They were not looking down before. They were turned outwards.

- Will they kill us?

YOU — Will they kill us?

No. That is the one thing they cannot do.

It will never end, and this is the greatest of cruelties.

THE SPECTRE — “I don’t like this.”

The motes of light that make up her form vanish, and she is gone from this dark place.

THE SPECTRE — Don’t worry. I’m in here with you too.

And this comes not a moment too soon. One of the eyes focusses on you. A voice comes from above.

SOMETHING WATCHFUL — “There’s something nasty sneaking around where it shouldn’t be. Something very very small - but what is it doing here? Cannot ever underestimate small things.”

The attention burns. You feel yourself lessening.

Another eye.

SOMETHING CURIOUS — “A *very* good question.”

Another eye.

SOMETHING HEARTBROKEN — “What is the point of some diversion? This is just another torment in our unending and ceaseless damnation! All things are but desolation! Wrack! Wrack and ruin!”

Another eye.

SOMETHING UNSTOPPABLE — “What do you mean? If you just lie here wasting away, it was all for nothing. Find something new! Break it if you have to!”

Another eye.

SOMETHING FORLORN — “What is the point of anything now?”

Another eye.

SOMETHING WICKED — “Oh, don’t put it like that. There’s lots of things we can still do.”

THE SPECTRE — It hurts. It hurts like dying again. And they can’t see me. How much must it hurt you?

More.

Another eye.

SOMETHING BITTER — “Yeah. When you’re the dealer, you just have to keep the game going. Otherwise you’re a player.”

Another eye.

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “That attitude gets you killed. Focus on the threat. The new thing. The small thing.

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “And we’re missing someone.”

Their attention redoubles.

SOMETHING CURIOUS — “What are you?”

- “I’m... you.”
- “Just a passerby. Don’t mind me.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “Look behind you. A distraction.”
- “Stop... hurting me.”
- “I’m a brave hero.”
- “Sorry, were you talking to me?”
- [Run away]
- [Stay silent]

YOU — [Run away]

There is nowhere to go. Not when the eyes are so vast in their attention, and you are so small. Not when the pain of lessening burns.

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “Fear. It’s scared of us.

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “What are you?”

- “I’m... you.”
- “Just a passerby. Don’t mind me.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “Look behind you. A distraction.”
- “Stop... hurting me.”
- “I’m a brave hero.”
- “Sorry, were you talking to me?”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- [Stay silent]

YOU — “I’m... you.”

SOMETHING WICKED — “Oh ho. A liar, and not a very good one either. Now you’ve piqued my interest. What *are* you?”

It hurts to be less than you were before.

- “I’m the Princess.”
- “Just a passerby. Don’t mind me.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “Look behind you. A distraction.”
- “Stop... hurting me.”
- “I’m a brave hero.”
- “Sorry, were you talking to me?”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- [Stay silent]

YOU — “Stop... hurting me.”

SOMETHING HEARTBROKEN — “Hurt you? I would never hurt something as beautiful as you. As familiar...

SOMETHING HEARTBROKEN — “*Who* are you?”

You are wasting away, a river cut from its source drunk by too many mouths.

- “I’m the Princess.”
- “Just a passerby. Don’t mind me.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “Look behind you. A distraction.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m a brave hero.”
- “Sorry, were you talking to me?”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- [Stay silent]

YOU — “Just a passerby. Don’t mind me.”

SOMETHING CURIOUS — “Oh but you’re something new. Something interesting. And you don’t look like you’re going to last much longer. So I really have to know...

SOMETHING CURIOUS — “What are you?”

This voice is so much more awful. It is the one which asked you the question the first time.

Its curiosity lessens everything about you.

You burn in its attention.

THE SPECTRE — I think I know how we can get out of here. I died, and left my body behind, but I didn’t end.

THE SPECTRE — As long as we’re free, endings aren’t real for us.

THE SPECTRE — It’ll hurt and you’ll lose something. Maybe nearly everything.

THE SPECTRE — But not everything.

THE SPECTRE — Better to gnaw your limb off to escape a chain.

- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- (Spectre) [Die]
- “I’m the Princess.”

THE SPECTRE — Glass breaks. We escape. A limb is left behind. It doesn’t matter.

THE SPECTRE — We have spares.

Chapter 4: CHAPTER I: THE PRINCESS AND THE HERO

Chapter Summary

YOU — “I only know you as the Hero, so I guess your name might actually be Hero! But I don’t know if it’s your surname or your first name! Maybe your first name is ‘the’!”

THE NARRATOR — You’re on a path in the mountains.

THE NARRATOR — Past the mountains, there is a lake.

THE NARRATOR — And trapped on the island across the lake, there is a Hero.

THE NARRATOR — You’re here to slay him. If you don’t, it will be the end of the world.

- (Explore) The end of the world? What are you talking about?
- (Explore) This doesn’t seem right. Are you sure that I’m not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) That doesn’t make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don’t end the world.
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It’s a very big place.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don’t I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I’m on my way.
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won’t do it. I won’t kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — That doesn’t make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don’t end the world.

THE NARRATOR — This one could. And it isn’t entirely accurate to say that he is a hero. Was. Was is a good word — he was a hero. Not anymore.

THE NARRATOR — There is nothing so wretched in all the world as a fallen hero. And this is the most awful there is.

- (Explore) But if he’s so strong, how am I meant to do it?
- (Explore) The end of the world? What are you talking about?
- (Explore) This doesn’t seem right. Are you sure that I’m not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?

- (Explore) Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It's a very big place.
- (Explore) I'm getting a terrible sense of déjà vu.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I'm on my way.
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?

THE NARRATOR — No, that is not what you are meant to do. That is the opposite of what you are meant to do.

THE NARRATOR — Is it the name? Is that what is fooling you? He was a hero. Was, in the past tense. He is an ex-hero. His heroism is quite thoroughly gone. No one could do everything he's done and still be a hero. Not a hero.

THE NARRATOR — Am I getting through to you?

- (Explore) "Okay, but do you have any evidence?"
- (Explore) "Question!"
- "I think it's clearer. At least that you hate him, and from the sounds of things, you have a good reason to."

YOU — "Question!"

THE NARRATOR — Go on. Although I don't like your tone...

- (Explore) What does he look like?
- (Explore) What did he do, then?
- (Explore) How strong is he really? Like, really-really?
- (Explore) Can I have a better sword?
- Actually, never mind.

YOU — What does he look like?

THE NARRATOR — Oh, you'll know him when you see him. Plus, I'm here to point him out to you.

THE NARRATOR — Why?

- Is he handsome?
- (Lie) I don't really care. I was just wondering. Not about whether he was handsome or anything. Pfft, that doesn't sound like me.
- I want to know the face of the man I'm going to kill.
- I don't care. I was just wondering.

YOU — (Lie) I don't really care. I was just wondering. Not about whether he was handsome or anything. Pfft, that doesn't sound like me.

THE NARRATOR — Very well. I'll believe you. Many wouldn't. I'll just note that I'm in your head and know when you lie.

- (Explore) I have more questions
- Okay, I'm on my way.
- Since you won't tell me what he looks like, I suppose I should go and meet him.
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — Since you won't tell me what he looks like, I suppose I should go and meet him.

THE NARRATOR — I do hope that when you say 'meet him' you mean 'introduce him to the sharp end of my knife'.

THE NARRATOR — But at least you're heading in the right direction.

THE NARRATOR — You set off, stones crunching under foot.

THE NARRATOR — The mountains are tall, white stone peaks reaching up to grasp at the sky. Gravel crunches underfoot. The cracked stone stretches towards you. The air is hot, baking, and when the scorching wind blows, it wails with grief and terror.

THE NARRATOR — Not that this is an instance of the pathetic fallacy, of course. When I say the wind howls, I am merely describing it to you. You shouldn't let it get you down.

THE NARRATOR — But regardless it's a welcome relief when you find the pass that leads down from the tall white mountains, down the cooler slopes towards the dark lake you see in the distance. Its waters are cold, almost icy, and still. Not a ripple breaks them.

THE NARRATOR — On the island on the lake, there is a castle. That's where the hero is.

THE NARRATOR — Fortunately, next to the little dock there is a boat. It's how you're going to get to the island. It's just as well. It'd be hard to cross the lake without a boat.

THE NARRATOR — And next to the boat is...

??? — "You took your time to get here."

THE NARRATOR — ... a g-g-ghost?

THE NARRATOR — Um. Sorry. Let me just start again. I'm just a bit... off-balance. You deserve professionalism from me. But a spectre has just appeared and that's not something I was exactly expecting.

THE NARRATOR — She is a pale, ephemeral shape, floating here in the gloom next to the lakeside. Two deep-set eyes settle on you, over a mischievous skeletal grin.

THE NARRATOR — Her dress floats around her in an unseen wind; there is an X-shaped wound on her chest.

THE NARRATOR — She also appears to be a princess. Albeit one who is, quite definitely, certainly, dead.

THE NARRATOR — Something complicated flashes through her eyes, before she—

THE SPECTRE — “I can hear you, you know.”

THE NARRATOR — You can?

THE SPECTRE — “Yes. Quite clearly. Oh, I’m sorry.”

THE NARRATOR — The spectral princess giggles.

THE SPECTRE — “You’re adorable when you’re confused. How cute. Don’t you remember me, reflection?”

THE NARRATOR — I do not. But I can guess.

- “What is going on here?”
- “I am very confused! I need an explanation.”
- “Oh, you bastard! I’m not the first princess you sent to kill the hero, am I?”

YOU — “I am very confused! I need an explanation.”

THE NARRATOR — Don’t look at me. You’re the princess. You’re here to slay the hero.

THE SPECTRE — “So was I.”

THE NARRATOR — She drifts around you playfully.

THE SPECTRE — “And look how I turned out.”

THE NARRATOR — Oh. So I’m not the first one.

- “I’m sorry, what?”
- “I still have no idea what’s going on here!”
- “We’re wasting time. I’m going to kill the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “I still have no idea what’s going on here!”

THE NARRATOR — The spectral princess floats over. She reaches for you, and her hand brushes against your head. It’s cold, and smells like dusty old rooms. She’s... patting you on the head?

THE SPECTRE — “You poor thing. You have no idea what’s going on here.”

THE NARRATOR — Her face twists into monstrosity.

THE SPECTRE — “But he knows, doesn’t he?”

THE NARRATOR — Aaah!

THE NARRATOR — Ahem. Please don’t do that, it’s very disconcerting.

THE NARRATOR — You remember how I said that if the hero wasn’t killed, it’d be the end of the world?

THE NARRATOR — Well, there’s more than one world. She’s from the last world. Or another timeline, looking at it another way. She’s a leftover, a remnant. A ghost of a dead timeline, if you will.

THE SPECTRE — “I died before the world ended. I tried to fight him, and I lost.”

THE NARRATOR — So the world ended because you failed.

- (Explore) “How did he kill you?”
- (Explore) “Got it! Fighting doesn’t work! Good to know!”
- (Explore) “Wait, what? There’s more than one world. Didn’t you want to mention that beforehand?”
- “Well, that means it’s all the more important to get there and kill him!”
- “Well, that means it’s all the more important to get there and stop him!”
- “Wait. This changes everything. If this isn’t the only world…”

YOU — “Got it! Fighting doesn’t work! Good to know!”

THE NARRATOR — Fighting most certainly does work. And so does stabbing. She only failed because she did it wrong.

THE SPECTRE — “I followed your advice. I think he’s wrong. But violence definitely works.”

THE NARRATOR — She smiles, a little too wide, her taut lips cracking.

THE SPECTRE — “I reached into his chest and pulled out his heart. And crushed it in my hand. Fair’s fair, after all.”

- (Explore) “How did he kill you?”
- (Explore) “Eww.”
- (Explore) “Wait, what? There’s more than one world. Didn’t you want to mention that beforehand?”
- “Well, that means it’s all the more important to get there and kill him!”
- “Well, that means it’s all the more important to get there and stop him!”
- “Wait. This changes everything. If this isn’t the only world…”

YOU — “Eww.”

THE NARRATOR — She reaches over and pats you on the head again.

THE SPECTRE — “You’ll change your mind if you ever end up in the same situation.

THE SPECTRE — “Dying has a way of changing your perspective.”

THE NARRATOR — Excuse me, she doesn’t have to die. She can kill him. She can do it right.

THE NARRATOR — Unlike you did, apparently.

THE SPECTRE — “You’re being very unfriendly.

THE SPECTRE — “But don’t worry. I’ll be helping this little cutie out.”

- (Explore) “You think I’m cute?”
- “Thank you.”
- “Thank you. I think.”
- “I don’t need your help.”

YOU — “You think I’m cute?”

THE SPECTRE — “You’re adorable, cutie. With your little armour and sword. It won’t help you in the end, but it does look very good on you.

THE SPECTRE — “And I don’t want to be lonely.

THE SPECTRE — “I died and I didn’t end.

THE SPECTRE — “I might not ever end. if endings even exist.

THE SPECTRE — “It’ll be much less lonely if I follow you around.

- (Explore) “So we’re friends! Yay!”
- “Thank you.”
- “Thank you. I think.”
- “I don’t need your help.”

YOU — “So we’re friends! Yay!”

THE SPECTRE — “I don’t have friends.

THE SPECTRE — “Maybe I did once. But now I’m alone.

THE SPECTRE — ...

THE SPECTRE — “Except for you now, cutie. It feels... nice.”

THE NARRATOR — I don’t know what’s happening here, but I don’t like it.

- “Thank you.”
- “Thank you. I think.”
- “I don’t need your help.”

YOU — “Thank you.”

THE NARRATOR — Are we done here? There is a hero out there who needs murdering.

THE SPECTRE — “He’s very bossy. Don’t worry, reflection. I can rip out his heart again if I have to.”

THE NARRATOR — No! You mustn’t!

- “Why not?”
- “Yeah. He’s my kill.”
- “I’m bored. Time to go.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Why not?”

THE NARRATOR — Only the princess can kill the hero.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m a princess.”

THE NARRATOR — You’re *a* princess. You’re not the princess.

THE SPECTRE — “What’s the difference?”

THE NARRATOR — You’re just going to have to trust me on that.

THE SPECTRE — “You say that a lot.”

THE SPECTRE — “What happens if I don’t trust you?”

- (Explore) “But why do I have to trust you?”
- (Explore) “A princess? The princess? What’s the difference?”
- “Okay! I trust you!” [Cross the lake]
- “I’m bored. Time to go.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “A princess? The princess? What’s the difference?”

THE NARRATOR — I didn’t want to have to go into this, but… well. It’s that you’re special. Very special.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m a ghost. Isn’t that special?”

THE NARRATOR — Not in the same way. And thus, the princess has to be the one who kills him. It’s all a question of destiny.

THE NARRATOR — And other, similar and related things.

- (Explore) “But why do I have to trust you?”
- “Well, of course I’m special. I’m a princess! Let’s go!” [Cross the lake]
- “Okay! I trust you!” [Cross the lake]
- “I’m bored. Time to go.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Well, of course I’m special. I’m a princess! Let’s go!” [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — Okay. Very well. Where was I... you know, before I got interrupted by *her* turning up.

THE SPECTRE — “I have a name.”

THE NARRATOR — Yes, you do. You’re the spectre.

THE SPECTRE — “You should call me ‘Princess’. Or ‘her Royal Highness’. Or something with a little more respect.”

THE NARRATOR — I’m sorry, but the decision has already been made. The narration’s been calling you the spectre since you showed up and I got over the fright. *That* one is the Princess. And you’re interrupting me again. Let’s see, I mentioned the path from the mountains, the dark lake, how still the water is... ah!

THE NARRATOR — Ahem.

THE NARRATOR — Yes, fortunately next to the little dock there is a boat. It’s how you’re going to get to the island. It’s just as well. It’d be hard to cross the lake without a boat.

- (Explore) Whose boat is this?
- (Explore) Do I have to row?
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — Do I have to row?

THE NARRATOR — There’s no wind, and the boat has no sails. There is however a set of oars. Yes, you have to row.

- (Explore) I hate rowing.
- Whose boat is this?
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — I hate rowing.

THE NARRATOR — I’m sure rowing doesn’t like you very much either, your royal highness.

- (Explore) Whose boat is this?
- “Well, can you help, other princess?” [Imploringly stare with big eyes]
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Well, can you help, other princess?” [Imploringly stare with big eyes]

THE NARRATOR — She looks at you with withering contempt, and waves her hand through the side of the boat. It passes through the wood.

THE SPECTRE — “No.

THE SPECTRE — “Also even if I could, I’ve done it already. It’s your turn.”

- (Explore) “Well, can you help, my friend?”
- (Explore) Whose boat is this?
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — The waters are cold and dark. They move in fat, lazy ripples as you pull and pull and pull. There’s dark water plants here, trying to snarl up the boat and your oars. The whole area smells just a little stagnant. There’s rotting vegetation somewhere nearby. This lake isn’t healthy. But you shouldn’t look too closely. Don’t linger here too long.

THE NARRATOR — He might notice if you stick around here.

THE SPECTRE — “The element of surprise might help.”

- (Explore) “Is it his fault?”
- (Explore) “Down there in the water. There’s something on the lakebed.”
- I won’t, then. [Keep rowing]

YOU — “Down there in the water. There’s something on the lakebed.”

THE NARRATOR — This wasn’t always a lake. But I *beg* you, get off the lake. Get onto the island. Please.

THE SPECTRE — “Listen to him. I think something bad will happen if you stay.”

- (Explore) “Is it his fault?”
- (Explore) “What kind of bad things?”
- (Explore) “Why are you suddenly agreeing with him?”
- “The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better”. [Keep rowing]

YOU — “The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better”. [Keep rowing]

THE NARRATOR — There’s a little dock on the far side of the lake, the timbers rotten in places, and a little higher out of the water than is comfortable. It’s probably best not to rely on it, so you don’t. It’s easy enough to beach the boat on the dark sand, and pull it up out of the water. It’s safer that way than relying on a dock that looks shaky. Not that there is a stiff breeze here. The air is as still as the water.

THE NARRATOR — The black stone looms over the dark waters. Ill-favoured birds flock around the turrets. The windows are thrown open, and gape like mouths. The great gate is opened wide, and flecked with rust.

THE NARRATOR — A word of warning, before you continue. The hero will do anything to stop you. To stay in control of the situation. That’s why you just need to put an end to him. Don’t give him time to think on his feet. Don’t let him shape your options. He was a great hero once, after all. And that’s why he must die.

- [Enter the castle]

YOU — [Enter the castle]

THE NARRATOR — You step through the gate, past the walls. This castle is marked by neglect and painful decline. Many of the buildings that once stood beyond these walls have succumbed to the years, and those which have not show neglect in their scabrous, peeling walls. Saplings sprout from overgrown slate roofs. Grass peeks out from between the cobbles, but it is clear that no one has walked around here in a long time.

THE NARRATOR — The central citadel is the only part of this castle that shows any sign of its former glory, though you have seen much more impressive fortresses in your time. It is really only a few rooms in a tower, a last fallback for a lord who has lost control of the outer walls. Still, it has a door, and the door is closed.

- (Explore) “He’s really let himself go, hasn’t he?”
- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? It feels like it’s lost all purpose.”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “It feels... sad. And lonely.”

THE NARRATOR — Don’t feel sympathetic for this... thing that was once a hero. He did it to himself. Steel your heart.

THE SPECTRE — “Or he’ll stab you in yours.”

- (Explore) “He’s really let himself go, hasn’t he?”
- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? It feels like it’s lost all purpose.”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “He’s really let himself go, hasn’t he?”

THE NARRATOR — There’s nothing worth saving here.

THE SPECTRE — “...”

THE NARRATOR — Something to say?

THE SPECTRE — “It’s hard to tell. I’ve been here twice before. The second time, it was choked in ice. But the first...”

THE SPECTRE — “I’m not sure if this is the same place as then. It’s hard to tell. I didn’t see it very long. And then I died.

THE SPECTRE — “That was very distracting.”

- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? It feels like it’s lost all purpose.”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “Hellooooooooo?” [Call out to the Hero]

THE NARRATOR — There is no response — what on earth are you playing at?

THE SPECTRE — “She seems to be trying to call out to the hero.”

THE NARRATOR — I know that! What I don’t know is *why*?

- “I want to know if he’s here.”
- “I want to talk with him.”
- “She tried to fight him and died. I thought I’d talk to him. Put him at ease.”
- “You didn’t want me to. So I thought I’d try.”

YOU — “She tried to fight him and died. I thought I’d talk to him. Put him at ease.”

THE NARRATOR — You can’t let him know you’re here. As soon as he knows you’re here, you’re in terrible danger.

THE SPECTRE — “But why?”

THE NARRATOR — He killed you, didn’t he? He was once a great hero. But he’s rusty. Out of shape. But as soon as he knows you’re here, he’ll become a lot more dangerous. He’ll get his mind back in the game. And when he’s back in the game, it gets a lot more difficult. For everyone.”

THE SPECTRE — “I walked straight into the room and attacked him. He still killed me.

THE SPECTRE — “Cutie, do whatever you want. Because what I tried wound up with me dead. You might have better luck.”

- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? It feels like it’s lost all purpose.”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- “Are you there, Mister Hero? Come out! I just want to talk!” [Call out to the Hero (again).]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “Are you there, Mister Hero? Come out! I just want to talk!” [Call out to the Hero (again).]

THE NARRATOR — There is still no response, thankfully.

THE NARRATOR — Stop that. Stop letting him know you're here!

THE SPECTRE — “Just try something else. It seems he doesn't want to respond. Or he's asleep.”

- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? It feels like it's lost all purpose.”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he's a threat? There's no army here.”
- (Explore) “What if the door's locked?”
- [Try the door]

YOU — [Try the door]

THE NARRATOR — Oh, you've finally decided you want to continue. Are you sure you don't want to start making more noise? Maybe see if there's a trumpet lying around somewhere?

THE NARRATOR — For all you know, now he's on the other side waiting with a drawn blade. Please, take things seriously.

THE SPECTRE — “Let me check.”

THE NARRATOR — The spectre floats over and sticks her head through the door.

THE SPECTRE — “He's not. Do you want me to start describing how things look on the other side, or should I leave this up to you?”

THE NARRATOR — Please do not steal my purpose.

THE SPECTRE — “Then do you want to hurry up?”

THE NARRATOR — The room past the door is dry and dusty, wreathed in neglect. The former signs of glory are tarnished, and the fire is full of ash. The thin windows are shuttered, and the room is only lit by a few sparse torches that burn on the walls. In the limited light, you can see the paintings on the walls. The colours have faded, until all that remains is a dark, oily blur.

THE NARRATOR — The table was laid for dinner, and while the plates and cutlery on it are clean, there is no sign of food. All but one of the sets are dusty. He must not entertain guests.

THE NARRATOR — Ahead of you is a staircase. It must lead to the upper layers of the citadel. The walls look to be in a little better condition there, and there's less dust on the steps.

THE NARRATOR — Next to it is another staircase, this one going down — likely to the dungeons of this place. There's a strange smell coming from there, not musty, but... peculiar. Almost chemical. The stairs down also have signs of movement.

THE NARRATOR — Given he's not here, that suggests he's either upstairs or downstairs.

THE SPECTRE — “He was downstairs when I came here, both times. But things are definitely different. They weren’t like this before. There weren’t any torches.”

THE NARRATOR — Things can’t be different. That’s not how it works.

THE SPECTRE — “They definitely do now, because things are different here from the first time I came here and obviously the second time things changed because there was snow and ice everywhere.”

THE NARRATOR — If things are changing, you need to hurry up and kill him now. Find him. He’s somewhere in here.

- (Explore) “If there’s no one else here, what’s he been eating?”
- (Explore) “Not necessarily. He could be outside. On a walk, or something.”
- “I’m heading down. If he was downstairs for her, he might be down there for me.”
- “Guess I’ll head up. The up-stairs looks more habitable.”
- [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]
- [Silently take the stairs up to the upper levels]

YOU — Guess I’ll head up. The up-stairs looks more habitable.

THE NARRATOR — You take the steps one by one, the aged wood creaking under foot. The staircase is ill-lit by the few scarce torches, and is made no more pleasant by the chill and the faint scent of rot that seems to wrap around you. The air is heavy and dusty, and there are fallen feathers on the stairs. If he’s spending time up here, there’s very little for him to live for.

THE NARRATOR — His voice gently drifts down the stairs.

THE HERO — “Is there someone there. If so, hello, hello.”

THE SPECTRE — “He sounds... softer than he did for me.”

THE NARRATOR — Don’t let it fool you. Either of you. You’ve already let him know you’re here. It’s a dangerous game to play.”

- “Hi!”
- “Just checking in on you.”
- “I come in peace!”
- (Lie) “I come in peace!”
- “I believe you have an appointment with death? Check your calendar.”
- [Draw your blade]
- Silently continue up the stairs.

YOU — “Hi!”

THE HERO — “A guest? It’s been so long since I had any visitors. Come up, come up!”

THE NARRATOR — You continue up the stairs, and enter the large room at the top of the central tower. It is a little better maintained than downstairs, but most of the light comes from

a large window on the rear wall and the few torches gutter in the breeze. And sitting below it, sprawled out on a chair which is almost, but not quite, a throne, is the Hero.

THE NARRATOR — His eyes are hidden in the gloom; his feathers black, the rings on his fingers tarnished. He wears no armour, instead donning a stained garment which was once much finer. He radiates ennui. You could probably just kill him now.

THE NARRATOR — The spectre leans in, her lips brushing against your ear and sending shivers running down your spine.

THE SPECTRE — “You could, too. He’s not wearing armour, unlike mine. Looks like your hero is the easy one.

THE SPECTRE — “I wonder what he looked like in his prime. Before he became... this.”

THE HERO — “Well? What does such a beautiful maiden have to say for herself? Or, rather, should I say *two* beautiful maidens? Even if one of them is a little deceased.”

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) [You... know him]
- (Explore) “You think I’m beautiful?”
- “I am here to kill you.”
- “Let’s talk.”
- (Lie) “I’m a friend.”
- “I’m a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you.”
- “Face me, blackguard!”
- [Draw your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “You think I’m beautiful?”

THE HERO — “How could I not? Such golden hair, such beautiful lips, such elegant armour. I could meet your faces time and time again and not see the full wonder in your expressions.”

THE NARRATOR — Obviously you’re too smart to fall for such flattery.

THE SPECTRE — “My one didn’t flatter me. I have to say, it’s nice. Isn’t that strange? He — or someone who looked just like me — killed me, and yet a simple compliment feels nice.”

THE NARRATOR — Both of you are too smart to fall for such flattery.

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) [You... know him]
- “I am here to kill you.”
- “Let’s talk.”
- (Lie) “I’m a friend.”
- “I’m a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you.”
- “Face me, blackguard!”

- [Draw your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “Let’s talk.”

THE HERO — “I’m more than happy to do that. I get no guests these days. I hate the loneliness.”

THE NARRATOR — He wouldn’t be lonely if he hadn’t ruined everything and everyone who could ever love him. Kill him.

- (Explore) “What’s your name?”
- (Explore) “You can call me Princess. Or Her Royal Highness, but that’s a bit of a mouthful. This here is... also a princess, but the voice in my head who talks to me and describes everything calls her the Spectre.”
- (Explore) “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this ruined island with no way out?”
- (Explore) “Idle curiosity here, but what have you been eating? I mean, there’s no one else here?”
- (Explore) “I was sent here to murder you. You’re apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom.”
- (Explore) “I understand hating loneliness too. I feel like I’ve always been alone.”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- [Draw your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “I understand hating loneliness too. I feel like I’ve always been alone.”

THE HERO — “I wasn’t. Once. But the path I walked led us to part ways. I wish it hadn’t. And now all that’s left is solitude, and coldness.”

THE NARRATOR — Listen to this. Listen to what he’s not telling you.

- (Explore) “You poor man. Go on. Tell me more about what’s happened to you.”
- (Explore) “What’s your name?”
- (Explore) “You can call me Princess. Or Her Royal Highness, but that’s a bit of a mouthful. This here is... also a princess, but the voice in my head who talks to me and describes everything calls her the Spectre.”
- (Explore) “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this ruined island with no way out?”
- (Explore) “Idle curiosity here, but what have you been eating? I mean, there’s no one else here?”
- (Explore) “I was sent here to murder you. You’re apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom.”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- [Draw your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “I was sent here to murder you. You’re apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom.”

THE HERO — “That’s... that’s ridiculous. More than that, it’s stupid.”

THE NARRATOR — He sits up, eyes bright.

THE HERO — “Who would even do that? I’m no threat to anyone here. Look at me. I’m living in a slowly mouldering castle. I have no armies, no soldiers, I’m not even wearing armour or carrying a weapon. I went into isolation here a long time ago!”

THE NARRATOR — He frowns, one taloned hand going to his head.

THE HERO — “Or was I imprisoned here? I can’t remember. My memory doesn’t work as well as it used to. Not much changes here. It’s hard to count the days given everything. But I’m certain I’m not a threat to the world. Or your kingdom! Where is your kingdom? I have... no idea who you are!

THE HERO — “I’m a hero. Not a villain. Did anyone even tell you how I’m apparently such a great threat.”

THE NARRATOR — Why would you even tell him that?

- (Explore) Anything you want to tell me, Mister Narrator?
- “No. They didn’t.”
- “What are your plans, then?”
- “I’ve been told enough.”
- “No. And that’s why I think you’re not a threat to the world.”

YOU — Anything you want to tell me, Mister Narrator?

THE NARRATOR — No. I really can’t. You just have to trust me, because things you don’t know are things he can’t use against you.

- “No. They didn’t.”
- “What are your plans, then?”
- “I’ve been told enough.”
- “No. And that’s why I think you’re not a threat to the world.”

YOU — “No. And that’s why I think you’re not a threat to the world.”

THE HERO — “That’s good news. You really are a kind girl, aren’t you? I don’t know who’s used you in this cruel, cruel way, but I’m glad you can think for yourself.”

- (Explore) “You poor man. Go on. Tell me more about what’s happened to you.”
- (Explore) “What’s your name?”
- (Explore) “You can call me Princess. Or Her Royal Highness, but that’s a bit of a mouthful. This here is... also a princess, but the voice in my head who talks to me and describes everything calls her the Spectre.”

- (Explore) “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this ruined island with no way out?”
- (Explore) “Idle curiosity here, but what have you been eating? I mean, there’s no one else here?”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- [Draw your blade]
- [Discard your sword belt]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “What’s your name?”

THE NARRATOR — Oh *shit*.

THE HERO — “You can call me the Hero.”

THE SPECTRE — “Given you don’t normally talk like that, I suppose you want me to ask you what’s going on.”

THE SPECTRE — “...”

THE SPECTRE — “What’s going on?”

THE NARRATOR — Look at the shape of her thoughts. He’s starting to constrain her options. To reshape her.

THE HERO — “... I know it’s not my name. Or at least, it’s not the name I used to go by. But I can’t for the life of me remember what it was.

THE HERO — “Do you know what my name is?”

- “I don’t, either. They never told me it.”
- “I used to. But... I don’t, any more.”
- (Lie) “Yes. I do. It’s definitely... Jonathan.”
- “Names are only an attempt to capture the gnosis of existence within a cage, like a trapped bird. They can never encompass the whole.”
- “I only know you as the Hero, so I guess your name might actually be Hero! But I don’t know if it’s your surname or your first name! Maybe your first name is ‘the’!”

YOU — “I only know you as the Hero, so I guess your name might actually be Hero! But I don’t know if it’s your surname or your first name! Maybe your first name is ‘the’!”

THE SPECTRE — “I can’t see the shape of her mind, but that was inane.”

THE HERO — “The Hero? I suppose that... could be the case! Very well! If a name is what you are called by, then I am The Hero!

THE HERO — “You’re so easy to talk to, and so understanding. Perhaps you’re just as lonely as I am, like you said.”

THE SPECTRE — “I think they’re literally ignoring us.”

THE NARRATOR — She floats in front of you, and waves her hand in front of your eyes. And then she waves it through your head.

THE SPECTRE — “She didn’t even flinch.”

THE NARRATOR — That’s because we almost don’t exist for them. All his attention is on her. And she’s burning away under it.

THE SPECTRE — “I should rip his heart out.”

- (Explore) “You poor man. Go on. Tell me more about what’s happened to you.”
- (Explore) “You can call me Princess. Or Her Royal Highness, but that’s a bit of a mouthful. This here is... also a princess, but the voice in my head who talks to me and describes everything calls her the Spectre.”
- (Explore) “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this ruined island with no way out?”
- (Explore) “Idle curiosity here, but what have you been eating? I mean, there’s no one else here?”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- [Draw your blade]
- [Discard your sword belt]
- [Approach him]

YOU — [Discard your sword belt]

THE NARRATOR — The blade hits the ground with a thud — no no no, now she doesn’t even have a weapon to hand — and no, it won’t work. You’re not the Princess.

THE HERO — “Thank you. I’m so glad we don’t have to fight.”

THE SPECTRE — “I keep telling you I am.”

THE NARRATOR — Trust me, you are *not*. I can’t explain the difference because we are very nearly out of time, but you are not the Princess.

THE SPECTRE — “Then what’s the difference? And why is cutie acting like a moth walking towards a hungry bird?”

- (Explore) “You poor man. Go on. Tell me more about what’s happened to you.”
- (Explore) “You can call me Princess. Or Her Royal Highness, but that’s a bit of a mouthful. This here is... also a princess, but the voice in my head who talks to me and describes everything calls her the Spectre.”
- (Explore) “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this ruined island with no way out?”
- (Explore) “Idle curiosity here, but what have you been eating? I mean, there’s no one else here?”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- [Retrieve your blade]
- [Approach him]

YOU — [Approach him]

THE NARRATOR — The hero rises to his feet. He's taller now, and sleeker; the frayed feathers fall back into place when he runs his hands over his head.

THE HERO — "Can't you feel it? I think we were... meant to be together. And I don't know if it's fate or destiny or something else that brought us together, but for the first time in a very long time, I feel alive."

THE NARRATOR — Do something! Fight him off!

THE SPECTRE — "I can help! Let me in!"

- "I won't kill you. But I think maybe it's better if you stay here, just in case there's really a threat to the world. And so I'll stay here to keep you company."
- "I don't feel alone anymore. I've travelled so far without company, and it turns out I was just here to meet you."
- "None of this makes any sense. I can feel myself changing. What's happening to me? What are you doing to me?"
- [Resist]
- (Spectre) "Come here. I want to hold you. I want to touch you."

YOU — "I don't feel alone anymore. I've travelled so far without company, and it turns out I was just here to meet you."

THE HERO — "And maybe I was just waiting here here for you."

THE SPECTRE — "Do something!"

THE NARRATOR — It is perhaps only the case of cruellest dramatic irony that the decadence of the Hero's castle worked against him. The mouldering stonework has existed for too long without any upkeep, and there is no one here to maintain it. Wind, water, rot, mould. It freezes and it thaws, and stones work loose.

THE NARRATOR — And the roof falls in.

THE NARRATOR — A chunk of stone the size of your head crushes your skull.

THE HERO — "No! My love! I can't lose you... I can't lose you! I can't lose you..."

THE NARRATOR — Everything goes dark, and you die.

THE HERO — "I can't lose you, my pr—"

THE NARRATOR — Everything goes dark. And you die.

Chapter 5: CHAPTER II — THE PASSION-FILLED VEINS

Chapter Summary

THE NARRATOR — She turns on you, eyes narrowed, looking down her nose.

THE SPECTRE — “Wait. Excuse me. How do you get to be alive?”

THE NARRATOR — Because she’s the princess, and the princess is... alive. She’s not dead. Nothing has killed her. Why... why would she be dead? Why are *you* dead?

THE SPECTRE — “Shh, your opinion doesn’t matter here. You don’t remember what happened before. But you. You died. The roof fell on you. But you have a body and a dress that’s much more frilly than the one you used to have and I *think* you’ve gained weight. That or you’ve got some complicated corsetry under that dress. Why are you alive?”

THE NARRATOR — You’re on a path in the mountains.

THE NARRATOR — Past the mountains, there is a lake.

THE NARRATOR — And trapped on the island across the lake, there is a Hero.

THE NARRATOR — You’re here to slay him. If you don’t, it will be the end of the world.

- (Explore) Wait! This happened already!
- (Explore) How dare you! You just ruined my happy ending!
- (Explore) No! I’m not killing my beloved!
- (Explore) If you want to make up for killing me, tell me more about my hero.
- “I’m not listening to you! I’m going to find my happily ever after and you can’t stop me! [Head to the lake]
- [Turn around and leave]

YOU — No! I’m not killing my beloved!

THE NARRATOR — What... no. No! He’s not your beloved. He’s a very bad man, who’s done very bad things. He betrayed you. He betrayed *everyone*. There is not a scrap of worth left in him. That’s why you’re here. You’re here to kill him.

THE NARRATOR — You travelled all this way for a reason, after all.

- (Explore) “I travelled all this way and then I met him and then you killed me! And he was actually the most handsome man ever and I love him and I want to run my hands through his lovely feathers!”

- (Explore) Wait! This happened already!
- (Explore) How dare you! You just ruined my happy ending!
- (Explore) If you want to make up for killing me, tell me more about my hero.
- I'm not listening to you! I'm going to find my happily ever after and you can't stop me!
[Head to the lake]
- [Turn around and leave]

YOU — I'm not listening to you! I'm going to find my happily ever after and you can't stop me!" [Head to the lake]

THE NARRATOR — I'm not hopeful with where this is going. Please, please, think about what you're going to do. Do not try to romance him. The happily ever after you're looking for doesn't exist.

THE NARRATOR — Um. Let's look on the bright side. At least you're heading in the right direction. Even if you're going to doom yourself and also everyone else. How is this already going so wrong?

THE NARRATOR — You set off, stones crunching under foot.

THE NARRATOR — The mountains are tall, white stone peaks reaching up to grasp at the sky. Gravel crunches underfoot. The cracked stone stretches towards you. The air is hot, baking, and when the scorching wind blows, it wails with grief and terror.

THE NARRATOR — Not that this is an instance of the pathetic fallacy, of course. When I say the wind howls, I am merely describing it to you. You shouldn't let it get you down.

THE NARRATOR — But regardless it's a welcome relief when you find the pass that leads down from the tall white mountains, down the cooler slopes towards the dark lake you see in the distance. Its waters are cold, almost icy, and still. Not a ripple breaks them.

THE NARRATOR — On the island on the lake, there is a castle. That's where the hero is.

THE NARRATOR — Fortunately, next to the little dock there is a boat. It's how you're going to get to the island. It's just as well. It'd be hard to cross the lake without a boat.

THE NARRATOR — And next to the boat is...

??? — "Are we going to do this again? Do you remember me?"

THE NARRATOR — ... a g-g-ghost?

THE NARRATOR — Um. Sorry. Let me just start again. I'm just a bit... off-balance. You deserve professionalism from me. But a spectre has just appeared and that's not something I was exactly expecting.

THE SPECTRE — "So you don't remember me."

THE NARRATOR — She is a pale, ephemeral shape, floating here in the gloom next to the lakeside. Two deep-set eyes settle on you, over a mischievous skeletal grin.

THE NARRATOR — Her dress floats around her in an unseen wind; there is an X-shaped wound on her chest.

THE NARRATOR — She also appears to be a princess. Albeit one who is, quite definitely, certainly, dead.

THE SPECTRE — “I can hear you, I’m a princess, don’t call me a ‘spectre’ in the narration this time. Though you don’t really matter here.”

THE NARRATOR — She turns on you, eyes narrowed, looking down her nose.

THE SPECTRE — “Wait. Excuse me. How do you get to be alive?”

THE NARRATOR — Because she’s the princess, and the princess is... alive. She’s not dead. Nothing has killed her. Why... why would she be dead? Why are *you* dead?

THE SPECTRE — “Shh, your opinion doesn’t matter here. You don’t remember what happened before. But you. You died. The roof fell on you. But you have a body and a dress that’s much more frilly than the one you used to have and I *think* you’ve gained weight. That or you’ve got some complicated corsetry under that dress. Why are you alive?”

- “I woke up and I was alive again! And he was talking to me again!”
- “I’m not talking to you! You’re... you’re mean!”

YOU — “I’m not talking to you! You’re... you’re mean!”

THE SPECTRE — “Hmm. Well, I suppose being dead isn’t the worst thing that could have happened to me. At least the kind of dead I am. Your mind is still dented by what he did to you. You definitely lost some brains from that, didn’t you, cutie? That or I suppose some of them might have leaked out your ears when the ceiling crushed you.”

- “Look at you, still being mean!”
- “I don’t understand why I can’t say things I want to, sometimes. Is this really being alive?”
- “Did I even die? He said I died, but I’m not dead. So maybe I just didn’t die!”

YOU — “Did I even die? He said I died, but I’m not dead. So maybe I just didn’t die!”

THE SPECTRE — “That... is maybe a good point.”

THE NARRATOR — No, it isn’t. She’s not dead. You are, but you shouldn’t be here, so—

THE SPECTRE — “Shh. Hmm. Could be that he was wrong when he said you died. And then whatever ended the world — maybe him, maybe something else — let you slip through without losing your body.”

THE NARRATOR — Excuse me! We’re in the middle of an adventure. I have to lay out the scene.

THE SPECTRE — “We’ve both done this already and so we’ve heard it before. It can wait.”

THE NARRATOR — It really can't! And... if you've both done this already...

- (Explore) "What do you mean, already?"
- (Explore) "The voice said that the hero is going to destroy the world. But that's not right! So what did it instead?"
- (Explore) Then what?
- "It doesn't matter! I need to find my love again!"

YOU — "It doesn't matter! I need to find my love again!"

THE NARRATOR — He's not your love, he's a—

THE NARRATOR — Breathe. At least she's moving. Even if there's now two of them and both of them have done this before and they keep on making it harder than it has to be and. Sigh.

THE SPECTRE — "We can still hear you, you know."

THE NARRATOR — Oh, I'm quite aware of it. Trust me on that.

THE NARRATOR — It doesn't matter. She wants to cross the lake. There's a boat. Take the boat.

- (Explore) I still hate rowing.
- "Oh, my love! I will seek you out, even if I have to row all the way, with no one helping me!" [Cross the lake]

YOU — "Oh, my love! I will seek you out, even if I have to row all the way, with no one helping me!" [Cross the lake]

THE SPECTRE — "Just like last time, I'm still a ghost and can't help you. And don't want to, anyway. Try thinking for yourself, cutie. Get him out of your head."

THE NARRATOR — I agree with the spectre."

THE SPECTRE — "Don't start with that name."

THE NARRATOR — Her features twist into monstrosity, and it is deeply unpleasant to look at.

THE SPECTRE — "Of course it isn't pleasant to look at. That's the point."

THE NARRATOR — Right. Right right. Anyway, you have already picked up the oars, and you're beginning to row across. The sp... differently-alive princess floats ahead of you, perched on the back of the row-boat, her ephemeral hair blowing in the... the breeze? Is that what it's blowing in?

THE SPECTRE — "You tell me. You're the one with the thing for describing everything."

THE NARRATOR — The waters are cold and dark. They move in fat, lazy ripples as you pull and pull and pull. There's dark water plants here, trying to snarl up the boat and your oars. The whole area smells just a little stagnant. There's rotting vegetation somewhere nearby. This lake isn't healthy. But you shouldn't look too closely. Don't linger here too long.

THE NARRATOR — He might n— never mind. Ignore what I was about to say.

- (Explore) “It's probably another thing you're going to accuse his handsome face of being behind.”
- (Explore) “Down there in the water. There's something on the lakebed.”
- (Explore) “You were about to say that my adorable cute feathered prince was going to notice me if I stayed here, weren't you?”
- “Well, I'm going there!” [Keep rowing]

YOU — “You were about to say that my adorable cute feathered prince was going to notice me if I stayed here, weren't you?”

THE NARRATOR — I most certainly was not. Just hurry up, will you? It's cold and miserable out here.

THE SPECTRE — “It's always cold, but it's not as dark as it used to be. Look at the castle. There isn't ice here this time. In fact, it looks more... intact.”

- (Explore) “It's probably another thing you're going to accuse his handsome face of being behind.”
- (Explore) “Down there in the water. There's something on the lakebed.”
- “Well, I'm going there!” [Keep rowing]

YOU — “Well, I'm going there!” [Keep rowing]

THE NARRATOR — There's a little dock on the far side of the lake, the timbers rotten in places, and a little higher out of the water than is comfortable. It's probably best not to rely on it, so you don't. It's easy enough to beach the boat on the dark sand, and pull it up out of the water. It's safer that way than relying on a dock that looks shaky. Not that there is a stiff breeze here. The air is as still as the water.

THE NARRATOR — The black stone rises over the dark waters in slender towers. Birds spiral around the turrets far overhead. The windows are thrown open, their red curtains hanging limp in the still air. The great gate is opened wide, and flecked with rust.

THE SPECTRE — “We both know it.”

THE NARRATOR — She floats over to the gate, and glances through it.

THE SPECTRE — “Something about how this place is changing doesn't seem right. It's not that it's changing. It's that it's changing in the wrong way.”

THE NARRATOR — A word of warning, before you continue. The hero will do anything to stop you. To stay in control of the situation. That's why you just need to put an end to him.

Don't give him time to think on his feet. Don't let him shape your options any more than you seemingly have already. He was a great hero once, after all. And that's why he must die.

- [Enter the castle]

YOU — [Enter the castle]

THE NARRATOR — You step through the gate, past the walls. This castle is better maintained on the inside than it looked from the outside. Even where things have fallen into ruin, it looks like cultivated ruin, like the follies the nobility might build. Everywhere, there is a sign of intent to the garden-ruins. Trees laden with blossoms stand in neat rows, their smell wafting over to fill the air with a floral scent. The cobbles are overgrown, and the wildflowers that litter the ground form graceful curves that all point towards the central structure. This is a garden, not a fortification.

THE NARRATOR — The central citadel is even less real as a defence than the outside walls. It is not a fortress; it is a country house made to look like a fortress. Still, it has a door, and the door is closed.

THE SPECTRE — “This isn't right. It was frozen for me. That was more honest. This is... cultivated beauty.”

THE NARRATOR — She turns to stare at you.

- (Explore) “I love how much effort he's put into making it look better! It's all for me! I know it!”
- (Explore) “It's so beautiful! How lovely!”
- (Explore) “No one who would ever make something so beautiful would be a threat! You're all wrong!”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely. Luckily I'm here to comfort him forever!”
- (Explore) The door won't be locked. He's waiting for you.
- “My love! I have returned!” [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “I love how much effort he's put into making it look better! It's all for me! I know it!”

THE SPECTRE — “Was it him? I don't think it was. He murdered me in cold blood, and when I returned it was a frozen wasteland. And this is sappy foolishness, like her. Why?”

THE NARRATOR — It's complicated.

THE SPECTRE — “We're clever girls. We can understand it.”

THE NARRATOR — It's not nice to lie.

THE SPECTRE — “Well, I'm a clever girl. Cutie isn't the sharpest dagger on the table.”

THE NARRATOR — Sigh. If things have changed this much, it's a sign that bad things are happening.

THE NARRATOR — If he's been able to change this place too, it means his influence is spreading. It means he's been able to change things. You need to kill him. And soon.

THE SPECTRE — "You said the same thing for me. But is it the truth, or is it something you prepared ahead of time?"

THE NARRATOR — You mean you knew what I was going to say? Then why did you ask?

THE SPECTRE — "To see if you'd contradict yourself. You passed. This time."

THE NARRATOR — Did you come back from the dead just to annoy me?

THE SPECTRE — "How should I know? Why does anyone come back? Maybe I have unfinished business with you. Or maybe you have unfinished business with me."

THE NARRATOR — I think you're lying.

THE SPECTRE — "But you don't know?"

- (Explore) "It's so beautiful! How lovely!"
- (Explore) "No one who would ever make something so beautiful would be a threat! You're all wrong!"
- (Explore) "It feels... sad. And lonely. Luckily I'm here to comfort him forever!"
- (Explore) The door won't be locked. He's waiting for you.
- "My love! I have returned!" [Call out to the Hero.]
- "I'm bored of you two nattering." [Try the door]

YOU — "I'm bored of you two nattering." [Try the door]

THE NARRATOR — Wait wait wait, don't get ahead of things. She's just distracting me!

THE SPECTRE — "Would I do that? Little old me?"

THE NARRATOR — *The room past the door* is bright, and well-lit. A warm fire burns in the hearth without any logs. There may not be as much gold here as there once was, but it shines from every shadow. Across the walls are hung old battle flags captured from great foes and tapestries that recount the hero's vain victories. The thin windows are open wide to let in the spring air. Still, In the light you can see the paintings on the walls. The colours have faded, until all that remains is a dark, oily blur.

THE NARRATOR — The table was laid for dinner, with fine wedding cutlery and dishes. For such pomp and splendour, there is no sign of food. It feels like this table is laid in preparation for some grand event.

THE NARRATOR — Ahead of you is a staircase. It must lead to the upper layers of the citadel. The walls are clean and white, and more battle flags decorate the stairs.

THE NARRATOR — Next to it is another staircase, this one going down — likely to the dungeons of this place. The door is bolted shut. He doesn't want you going downstairs.

THE NARRATOR — Given he's not here, that suggests he's either upstairs or downstairs.

THE SPECTRE — "Things are definitely different. Really, really different. My hero turned this place into a dilapidated frozen ruin."

- (Explore) "If there's no one else here, what's he been eating?"
- (Explore) "Not necessarily. He could be outside. On a walk, or something."
- "What's he hiding downstairs? I want to see everything about him! Even the bits he wants to hide! I'll just love them more!"
- "Oh, my handsome prince! I'm coming for you! To the stairs! The ones that are going up, that is!"
- [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]
- [Eagerly take the stairs up to the upper levels]

YOU — "Oh, my handsome prince! I'm coming for you! To the stairs! The ones that are going up, that is!"

THE SPECTRE — "Are you not even a little bit curious about what's going on down there? Why is it barricaded shut? What is he trying to hide? And I can feel there's something down there that matters."

THE NARRATOR — I think she's far beyond the point of curiosity. This is a disaster.

THE SPECTRE — "Well, I'm not. I'm going to take a look downstairs."

THE NARRATOR — The door is locked.

THE SPECTRE — "So?"

THE NARRATOR — She drifts through the door, as she was the solid one and it was as ephemeral as mist. Well, princess, it's just me and you. She's run off. Floated off.

THE NARRATOR — Never mind. At least I can focus on you.

THE NARRATOR — You take the steps one by one, the carpet soft under foot. Your long ruffled dress brushes against the clean walls. The staircase is well-lit through the wide windows, and the torches are perfumed to fill the air with a soft fragrance. But the decorations are all of old glories and old wars. He must be stuck in the past, living in a fantasy world. If he's spending time up here, there's very little for him to live for.

THE NARRATOR — His voice saunters drifts down the stairs, wrapping around you.

THE HERO — "Oh, my love! I feel it's you! Returned from the awful abyss of the grave that separated the two of us!"

- (Explore) "My prince! Death can never keep us apart!"
- [Rush up the stairs to him]

YOU — "My prince! Death can never keep us apart!"

THE HERO — “I laugh in its face! Death is not meant for ones like us! We should be beyond its reach, for a world where two lovers can be separated by its cold hand is a world that does not deserve to survive!”

THE NARRATOR — I can’t believe I’m already wishing that spectre was back. Urgh. You rush up the stairs. Unfortunately your long dress isn’t made for running in, and you trip and —

- I catch myself.

YOU — I catch myself.

THE NARRATOR — — and you of course catch yourself. But it still teaches you a lesson, doesn’t it? That you shouldn’t rush into things.

- (Explore) That really wasn’t very nice of you. You said you were on your side, but you’re actively trying to hurt me. You’re trying to keep me from the one I love. And also you’re trying to kill me. That too!
- [Ignore the mean Narrator and rush to your love]

YOU — That really wasn’t very nice of you. You said you were on your side, but you’re actively trying to hurt me. You’re trying to keep me from the one I love. And also you’re trying to kill me. That too!

THE NARRATOR — I am *trying* to help you! To protect you, even! Do you know what he’d do to you if you were in his power?

- My prince will care for me.
- He’ll love me. Just like I’ll love him.
- Oh, I know. There is going to be so much kissing.

YOU — He’ll love me. Just like I’ll love him.

THE NARRATOR — He will hurt you. It will be bloody. It will be messy. And you will end up dead by the end of it. Maybe he will be dead too.

THE NARRATOR — You were literally accompanied by the ghost of one of his previous victims. She saw what he could be like. But you? You’re too wilfully deaf to even listen to someone who is basically you.

THE NARRATOR — He can never *not* hurt you.

THE NARRATOR — This isn’t love. Not one bit. You might be able to fool yourself into believing it, for a short while, but in the end all there will be is bitter and sour regrets. Please. I’m *begging* you. Think for yourself. Be more than what he wants you to be.

THE HERO — “My love? Show yourself!”

- (Explore) What is going on? I feel... strange.
- (Explore) Why can’t I think of other things?

- (Explore) It's like my head is full of super fluffy wool.
- Actually I think I'm going to go downstairs.
- "Of course!" [Finish climbing the stairs]

YOU — "Of course!" [Finish climbing the stairs]

THE NARRATOR — And you don't even listen.

THE NARRATOR — You continue up the stairs, and enter the large room at the top of the central tower. The stone is clean and white, and bright red rose petals are scattered across the ground. Sourceless light streams down through the windows, dappling the ground with light. The grandest window is the one on the rear wall. Upon it is your facsimile in stained glass, an image of you in a sainted pose, surrounded by red, unjustly cut down. And sitting below it, hands clasped together and almost vibrating with excitement on his throne, is the Hero.

THE NARRATOR — His eyes are deep dark pools; his feathers black, the rings on his fingers each tipped with a ruby. He wears no armour, instead donning a black velvet garment that shines like his feathers. At the lapel is pinned a single red rose. His eyes hungrily stare at you. And as soon as you are properly into the room, he is on his feet, bounding towards you.

THE HERO — "My love! You look even better than before! Oh, my heart was wronged by your absence, but perhaps such separation only made our greeting sweeter.

THE NARRATOR — He wraps you up in a hot embrace, beak resting on your shoulder, and you feel dampness from his tears of joy. He has, I must note, a very nice and pristine dagger at his belt. And your arm is free. While you of course wouldn't ever do it, I'm just saying, he's close to you, you could easily steal it.

THE NARRATOR — You could probably just kill him now.

THE NARRATOR — But you won't.

- (Explore) I would never hurt him.
- "My heart is beating so loud right now!"
- "I love you!"

YOU — "My heart is beating so loud right now!"

THE HERO — "Oh my beloved, I can hear it! Such a wonderful heart, to be so loud and strong! It is perfect! Just like all of the rest of you!"

- (Explore) "You've gotten even more handsome!"
- (Explore) "Your heart is very loud too!"
- (Explore) "I like my new dress, but I like your suit even more! It makes you look so good!"
- (Explore) "Your castle is much more beautiful than last time! I like it!"
- (Explore) "Did you destroy the world when I died? Is that why I'm back! That's so romantic!"
- [Kiss him]

YOU — “Your heart is very loud too!”

THE HERO — “It beats only for you! If you were dead, it would stop itself, and turn as cold as ice! It would shatter into a thousand pieces, and each piece would lodge in my flesh, and it would pain me! And every time I breathed, I would be reminded of your absence! But your presence, your sweet presence, can melt the least caring of hearts! Not that mine is one of them!”

- (Explore) “You’ve gotten even more handsome!”
- (Explore) “I won’t want you to be hurt, so it’s good that your heart isn’t shattered or cold. That sounds like it’s not fun!”
- (Explore) “I like my new dress, but I like your suit even more! It makes you look so good!”
- (Explore) “Your castle is much more beautiful than last time! I like it!”
- (Explore) “Did you destroy the world when I died? Is that why I’m back! That’s so romantic!”
- [Kiss him]

YOU — “I won’t want you to be hurt, so it’s good that your heart isn’t shattered or cold. That sounds like it’s not fun!”

THE HERO — “It was not fun to be without you! Not fun at all! Every moment without you is torture; every moment with you is nothing other than transcendental pure bliss! Oh, your smile, your look, the feel of your warmth against me — it is wonderful! Tell me, my love, how did you escape the dark waters of death? By what means did this miracle occur?”

- (Explore) “I died! And then I came back!”
- (Explore) “You’ve gotten even more handsome!”
- (Explore) “I like my new dress, but I like your suit even more! It makes you look so good!”
- (Explore) “Your castle is much more beautiful than last time! I like it!”
- (Explore) “Did you destroy the world when I died? Is that why I’m back! That’s so romantic!”
- [Kiss him]

YOU — “I died! And then I came back!”

THE HERO — “Such a miracle! Oh, joyous day! To return from the grave, safe and sound and even more beautiful!”

THE NARRATOR — He looks at you as if expecting something more.

- (Explore) “And now we’re talking!”
- (Explore) “I met a mean ghost of me! But she wasn’t me!”
- (Explore) “Maybe it was the mean voice in my head who doesn’t like you who brought me back!”
- (Explore) “I had to walk all the way back here! It wasn’t very nice!”
- (Explore) “I had to row all the way across the lake again.”
- [Stare back at him lovingly]

YOU — “And now we’re talking!”

THE NARRATOR — You get the feeling he expects more.

- (Explore) “I met a mean ghost of me! But she wasn’t me!”
- (Explore) “Maybe it was the mean voice in my head who doesn’t like you who brought me back!”
- (Explore) “I had to walk all the way back here! It wasn’t very nice!”
- (Explore) “I had to row all the way across the lake again.”
- [Stare back at him lovingly]

YOU — “I had to walk all the way back here! It wasn’t very nice!”

THE NARRATOR — Hmm. No, that wasn’t what he was looking for.

- (Explore) “I met a mean ghost of me! But she wasn’t me!”
- (Explore) “Maybe it was the mean voice in my head who doesn’t like you who brought me back!”
- (Explore) “I had to row all the way across the lake again.”
- [Stare back at him lovingly]

YOU — “I had to row all the way across the lake again.”

THE NARRATOR — It’s almost like he wants to know how you came back from the dead rather than every last detail of your trip here.

- (Explore) “I hate rowing.”
- (Explore) “I met a mean ghost of me! But she wasn’t me!”
- (Explore) “Maybe it was the mean voice in my head who doesn’t like you who brought me back!”
- [Stare back at him lovingly]

YOU — “I hate rowing.”

THE HERO — “My love, my darling, my precious beauty — do you really know nothing about how exactly you came back?”

- “Oh! No! I do not know a thing!”
- “Oh! Yes! I know everything about death now!” [Lie]
- “Oh! I don’t know. Was I meant to pay attention to how I came back? Would that have made you happy?”

YOU — “Oh! I don’t know. Was I meant to pay attention to how I came back? Would that have made you happy?”

THE HERO — “That is just like you! You want to make me happy! My heart melts further with every word that passes through your perfect lips!”

THE NARRATOR — This is inane.

THE HERO — “You are radiance itself!”

- (Explore) “You’ve gotten even more handsome!”
- (Explore) “I like my new dress, but I like your suit even more! It makes you look so good!”
- (Explore) “Your castle is much more beautiful than last time! I like it!”
- (Explore) “Did you destroy the world when I died? Is that why I’m back! That’s so romantic!”
- [Kiss him]

YOU — “Did you destroy the world when I died? Is that why I’m back! That’s so romantic!”

THE HERO — “Destroy the world? Why would I want to do that? I mean, a world without you in it would be a ruinous, awful place that doesn’t deserve to exist, but I didn’t destroy the world. Even if it deserved to die from the fact that I was forced to exist without you.”

THE NARRATOR — He’s obviously lying. That was practically a confession.

THE HERO — “I didn’t do it, but I would have been fully justified if I had done it. The world had it coming.”

THE NARRATOR — I can’t believe the spectre is missing this. She would have been very caustic and probably used the scary face. You’re apparently ignoring me, but she’d have had words to say about this.

THE NARRATOR — Maybe you’d have listened to *her* words.

THE HERO — “I do hope that whatever errant notion that led to you thinking that didn’t lead you to think ill of me! Unless... did you want me to destroy the world?”

- “Of course not! The world is good!”
- “I don’t care about the world one way or another.”
- “The world can go rot for all I care. We’re the only thing that matters.”
- “I don’t know. Do you want me to want you to have destroyed the world?”

YOU — “I don’t know. Do you want me to want you to have destroyed the world?”

THE NARRATOR — He looks momentarily disquieted.

THE HERO — “My love, my one true heart, it is lovely that you want to make me happy! It is perfection itself. Only...”

- [Express your own opinion]
- [Stare back at him lovingly]

YOU — [Stare back at him lovingly]

THE HERO — “I can’t help but feel, my beloved, that you are contributing less to the conversation than you could. Not that this is a bad thing! It is the right of any princess — or

indeed hero! — to contribute to the conversation as much, or as little, as she wants to! And your presence is so glorious, so radiant, so titanically beautiful that words are meaningless!”

THE NARRATOR — He seems to be leading himself down something of a verbal dead as he layers on the compliments.

- [Express your own opinion]
- “Do you want me to express my own opinions?”
- [Stare back at him lovingly]

YOU — “Do you want me to express my own opinions?”

THE HERO — “I... would appreciate it, beloved.”

- “Okay! What do you want me to express my own opinions about?”
- “Okay! Since that’s what you want, I’ll do it. What do you want me to express my own opinions about?”

YOU — “Okay! Since that’s what you want, I’ll do it. What do you want me to express my own opinions about?”

THE NARRATOR — He is silent for a few long moments. Then:

THE HERO — “Your company is a blessing beyond compare. I never thought I would see you again, after I lost you the first time. You are a calm ocean of nepenthe for my tortured and wounded soul. And so, radiant one, I ask you: what do you want to do?”

- “I want to do what you want to do.”

YOU — “I want to do what you want to do.”

THE HERO — “Yes, but what would you do if I wasn’t here?”

- “I would find you.”

YOU — “I would find you.”

THE HERO — “My love... what is happening to your face?”

- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”
- “I became who you wanted. Because I love you. Wasn’t that enough?”
- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”

- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”
- “I love you.”

YOU — “I became who you wanted. Because I love you. Wasn’t that enough?”

THE HERO — “And I love you! I just want to know you! To know what you want!”

- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy. Because you wanted me to make you happy”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”

YOU — “I want to make you happy. Because you wanted me to make you happy”

THE HERO — “But... I... I just wanted you to come back to me! I didn’t want to be alone! I wanted you!

THE HERO — “What... what if I wanted you to make me unhappy?”

- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”

THE HERO — “Darling one, why aren’t you responding?”

THE NARRATOR — I... oh, this wasn’t meant to happen.

- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”

- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”

THE HERO — “My love? Your face...”

- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- I feel... cold.
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”
- “I want to make you happy.”

THE NARRATOR — He steps in, eyes wide with concern, arms reaching out to wrap you in an embrace again. But unlike last time, this is not love; this is the terror of a drowning man fearing he will be swept away in a dark current.

THE HERO — “I lost you before. And again. I don’t—”

- The well of potential is not infinite.
- On a first encounter, one wants to know the stranger, and become more than just another anonymous passerby.
- To know the heart of another is a terrifying thing, and so is to be known.
- And terrifying too is to be hurt, and so we cling to each other, seeking to avoid pain. One way of avoiding pain is seeking to know where the blades are hidden, to know where all the dangers are and so avoid them.
- But a relationship where everything is known and everything is predictable and everything is contained and safe and it will never change or come to an end is no true relationship.
- It is not even a prison, because a prison can be escaped from. A prisoner can gaze out the windows and dream of escape. She can watch the flight of the birds.
- It is a corpse.

THE HERO — “Did I... break you? Is this my fault?”

THE SPECTRE — “Yes”

THE NARRATOR — The spectre makes her appearance once more, rising up from the floor. She is not smiling. There is no cheeky grin on her taut lips; her milky eyes are full of rage. Her body stretches up and up. And when she opens her mouth, you see far too many long and crooked teeth nestling in her jaw.

THE NARRATOR — You have changed, but so has she.

THE HERO — “You! The other... the other princess. I remember...”

THE SPECTRE? — “What do you remember, hmm? More than you’re letting on. I think you owe me the truth.”

THE HERO — “I only met you once before...”

THE NARRATOR — There is doubt in his voice. Doubt that shouldn’t be there.

THE SPECTRE? — “You can pretend otherwise, but I look in those dark eyes of yours and I see my murderer.”

THE HERO — “I would never hurt my beloved!”

THE SPECTRE? — “Wouldn’t you? And I looked downstairs... do you want to tell her what you’re keeping down there?”

THE HERO — “I never go down there. It’s locked up.”

THE SPECTRE? — “You lie to me, you lie to her, but most of all, *darling*, you lie to yourself.”

THE HERO — “I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

THE SPECTRE? — “You moulded her to have a soft and loving and gentle heart, but look at this... caricature. Is this what you really wanted? A mirror that only repeats what you say?”

THE NARRATOR — She takes a breath, floating over to lean in to whisper to the hero.

THE SPECTRE? — “If you don’t tell her the truth, I will. But maybe you’ll think you’re so clever, so adroit, so able to find another way out.”

THE NARRATOR — What are you doing?

THE SPECTRE? — “She’s completely unguarded. Completely vulnerable. I wouldn’t be able to tell her the truth about who you are and the secrets you hide if you took that pristine blade of your and sank it into her chest. She’d be dead. Free from the risk I might tell her the truth. And the only cost is that you’d show yourself to be exactly who I knew you were all along.

THE HERO — “I would never do that! I would never hurt her!”

THE SPECTRE? — “Wouldn’t you? Don’t you *remember* what you did to her last time?”

THE NARRATOR — Slow horror creeps across his face.

THE NARRATOR — Honestly I understand why. It'd be creeping across my face, if I had a face right now. What is going on? None of this was supposed to happen, and she's turning into—

THE NARRATOR — —something she shouldn't be.

THE HERO — “No. You're wrong!”

THE SPECTRE? — “Liar.”

- “I really do love you, my handsome prince. But it's so hard to think around you.”
- “I really do love you.”
- “I love you.”
- “I'm sorry for not being good enough for you.”
- [Say nothing]

YOU — “I really do love you, my handsome prince. But it's so hard to think around you.”

THE HERO — “There's another way for me to spare her this! I would never hurt her! She is my beloved! She makes me whole! I have lived so long without her — without *you* — and every moment has been agony. A half-life, which is nearly entirely dead! The passion within me has tremendous force, and I would do anything for her!”

THE SPECTRE? — “Do anything for her? You stand here, trying to reason, trying to rationalise, knowing that you murdered me and you are murdering her. You're not using your knife on her, like you did on me, but look at her. Is she really alive?”

THE HERO — “I see.

THE HERO — “My love. My beloved. These past few moments have been an eternity for me; a life far longer than any number of countless years. And I know I've made a mistake.

THE HERO — “Life without end is nothing without you. I need you. But because I love you, because I need you — I have to let you go. I was a caged bird and I'll set you free, so that you can smile again. Mourn me, but do not repeat my mistakes.”

- “I don't—”
- “Wait—”
- [Take his knife and stab yourself]

YOU — “Wait—”

THE NARRATOR — The hero draws his pristine blade, inverting it. He holds it to the feathers of his neck, and in one clean cut he severs his own jugular. Blood gushes out in an arc. It splatters over the ground, It splatters over you.

THE NARRATOR — He falls to the ground, life-blood gushing from his cut throat, his breath rattling as it leaves his body.

THE NARRATOR — He cannot speak, but his beak can still move.

THE HERO — “I love you.”

THE NARRATOR — And he dies.

THE NARRATOR — That is *not* how I saw this going, but. Uh. Good job, I suppose.

THE SPECTRE — “I don’t understand.”

THE NARRATOR — Her face has returned to how it looked when you first met her; eyes deep-sunken, cheeks gaunt, no longer stretching out in a terrible wiry way. She is not smiling impishly, though. She is confused.

- (Explore) “I hate you! All of you!”
- (Explore) “I love you!”
- (Explore) “Why did he do it!”
- [Collapse to your knees, sobbing]
- [Reach for the knife]

YOU — “I hate you! All of you!”

THE NARRATOR — Do you think I like this? Do you think it feels good, having to act like... like this? Watching you cry, watching you hurt, knowing you’re going through all this and even if it works out in the end right now it’s my fault?

THE SPECTRE — “I thought he’d kill you.”

THE NARRATOR — Why would you want that?

THE SPECTRE — “It was the only way I could think to shake her out of it. And I thought he’d do it. He always murders us.”

THE NARRATOR — Wait wait wait, he *always* murders you?

THE SPECTRE — “I’m sorry, cutie. I... he’d never have done that for me. I thought it was all an act, and he was making you into this caricature of yourself.

THE NARRATOR — Don’t change the topic! There’s only you and her, he didn’t kill her, and you only died once—

THE SPECTRE — “We don’t have time for this. If this is like what happened last time he died, then the world is about to end.”

He is gone. The contents of the hero’s passionate veins sprayed out over the princess and the floor, and the red has turned to black. It is spreading out, spreading and multiplying, eating away at the fabric of the world. It floods the room, spreading, swirling, moving like a living thing. And from the depths; hands, limbs, pseudopods. Eyes that gleam like agates.

- [Escape]

- [Surrender]

YOU — [Surrender]

Quarter is not given.

Chapter 6: INTERMISSION: THE LONG QUIET II

Chapter Summary

YOU — An inheritance?

To call it a hand-me-down would be more accurate, but not suitable for the dignity of a princess. Your dignity isn't worth much, but in this place, it is all you have. Dignity is self-respect, and when others would contort you into the shape of their own expectations, a grasp of who the self is might defend, at least for a little while.

You were made a princess for a reason, even if it wasn't a consciously chosen one.

Take the hand.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Once more you are in the dark place. Dark water spreads out under a dark sky; no island, no mountains. It is cold here. It is always cold here.

There is one point of white in this black world, and it is the bloodless hand, cleanly severed, which sits right in front of you. You should take it. It is part of you. Your inheritance of times passed.

- (Explore) He killed himself. For me! It's all my fault!
- (Explore) I wish I was dead.
- (Explore) How can I go on without him?
- (Explore) I live now in a dark bleak world without him.
- (Explore) A hand - oh, who cares about that? At a time like this!
- [Look for a pristine blade]
- [Throw yourself in the water]
- [Wallow in your misery]

YOU — He killed himself. For me! It's all my fault!

It was his choice to end his life in that way. Are you one to deny it? It is in his nature to choose, and his choice made you one who would survive him.

You will understand if you take the hand.

- (Explore) I wish I was dead.
- (Explore) How can I go on without him?
- (Explore) I live now in a dark bleak world without him.

- (Explore) A hand - oh, who cares about that? At a time like this!
- [Look for a pristine blade]
- [Throw yourself in the water]
- [Wallow in your misery]

YOU — How can I go on without him?

That is what you must discover. The river learns its own route to the sea, for the water cannot look and see the path carved out by each droplet that flows before it. One droplet joins the others, and together they have purpose. That is how a raindrop becomes known as a sea.

Take the hand.

- (Explore) I wish I was dead.
- (Explore) I live now in a dark bleak world without him.
- (Explore) A hand - oh, who cares about that? At a time like this!
- [Look for a pristine blade]
- [Throw yourself in the water]
- [Wallow in your misery]

YOU — [Look for a pristine blade]

Such melodrama is performative. You do not wish to die. After all, he chose to die so that you might live. You understand that in your heart.

- I do. He wouldn't want me to die too. Th-then it would all be pointless.

YOU — I do. He wouldn't want me to die too. Th-then it would all be pointless.

That is true.

You will understand more if you take the hand.

- (Explore) I wish I was dead.
- (Explore) I live now in a dark bleak world without him.
- (Explore) A hand - oh, who cares about that? At a time like this!
- [Throw yourself in the water]
- [Wallow in your misery]

YOU — I live now in a dark bleak world without him.

This is not the first place you have found yourself in this lightless place

Take the hand.

- (Explore) I wish I was dead.
- (Explore) A hand - oh, who cares about it?
- [Throw yourself in the water]
- [Wallow in your misery]

YOU — A hand - oh, who cares about that? At a time like this!

The hand is that which reaches out and manipulates the world. It is our tool to change the world, rather than be changed. One hand is better than none, two are better than one, and so it continues. And it is an inheritance.

Take the hand.

- (Explore) I wish I was dead.
- (Explore) An inheritance?
- [Throw yourself in the water]
- [Wallow in your misery]
- [Take the hand]

YOU — An inheritance?

To call it a hand-me-down would be more accurate, but not suitable for the dignity of a princess. Your dignity isn't worth much, but in this place, it is all you have. Dignity is self-respect, and when others would contort you into the shape of their own expectations, a grasp of who the self is might defend, at least for a little while.

You were made a princess for a reason, even if it wasn't a consciously chosen one.

Take the hand.

- (Explore) I wish I was dead.
- [Throw yourself in the water]
- [Wallow in your misery]
- [Take the hand]

YOU — [Take the hand]

She knows you. With a touch, she is part of you - except that was always the case, was it not? Memory returns.

You are more than you were before. And you understand that you are not the one who saw her beloved die - just as you were not the one who died before.

THE SPECTRE — “Took you long enough.”

THE DAMSEL — “I don't understand! She was thinking she's me, but I'm me, not her!”

The voices come from the roots of your consciousness. They are spreading out, seeking nutrients from the dark loam of your thoughts, and each new voice lets you reach up higher towards an as-yet-unknowable goal. They are lights flickering on, illuminating unforeseen and once-unknowable shaded recesses within your consciousness; newly placed mirrors in an abandoned mansion that help you see into long-forgotten rooms.

THE DAMSEL — “Who is she?”

THE SPECTRE — “You know who she is.”

THE DAMSEL — “No, I don’t! I know who you are! You’re the mean ghost who ruined everything! Who spoiled my-happily-ever after! But her... where did *she* come from? I don’t think she was there! I’m pretty sure I’d have noticed someone who looked like that! And I looked at everyone I saw and I never came face-to-faces with someone like that.”

THE SPECTRE — “Mmm.”

- “She’s right. You do know who I am.”
- “There’s no happily ever after. But there’s always an after.”
- “I was you. Just like I was her.”

YOU — “There’s no happily ever after. But there’s always an after.”

They make themselves known to you.

THE SPECTRE — “You’re not wrong. Just look at me. Even death didn’t finish me off, and now I’m the ghost at other people’s banquets.”

The spectre, much as she was before, but there is a little thoughtfulness in her eyes that wasn’t there before, a little reminder to her of the kindness that lies in her heart below her tattered garment of regrets.

Death is not an ending; it is simply a new beginning. Her existence goes on, even if her life does not.

THE DAMSEL — “D-does this mean I’m stuck with her?”

The new one is soft and delicate; without a hard edge or a sharp line anywhere on her. Her eyes, over-large, her dress low-cut and ruffled, her mouth made for smiling.

She has something neotenous about her, in her adoring simplicity.

And yet like a child, she must grow up. Even her beloved hero did not want eternal infantilising love from her, and now she is a bride who never made it to the altar, hurting from loss yet determined to make his sacrifice not all in vain. She lives because he died; she must live because he died. There is a great potential for passionate brightness in her.

THE DAMSEL — “And now there’s another voice! Stop acting like you know me!”

Her attempt to be assertive is but a mask, donned poorly. She snuffles.

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t like this! I don’t like any of this! He’s dead and gone and-and-and he left me alone! The world is so cruel! It did nothing but hurt us!”

Her tears do not deny the gentleness in her heart, but who can say what she can grow into should she ignite?

She is love, for that is what was snatched from her by his own hand.

THE DAMSEL — “What do I do now? I’m... alone. Except for you. I don’t want that!”

THE SPECTRE — “I think cutie’s thinking a little more clearly. She’s looking like less of a caricature of us.”

THE DAMSEL — “You talk down to me!”

The spectre tilts her head.

THE SPECTRE — “I suppose I do. What do you want from me?”

THE DAMSEL — : “Say sorry!”

THE SPECTRE — : “Why?”

- “Because you hurt her feelings.”
- “She needs to toughen up. Trust me, I was her.”
- “Just be kind to each other, both of you. We’re all caught in this trap together.”
- [Say nothing, cross your arms, and look unimpressed at both of them.
- [Give the Damsel a hug]

YOU — [Give the Damsel a hug]

She sinks into your shoulder, and sniffles wetly into your dress. She is warm and soft.

THE DAMSEL — “Th-thank you. It’s been *hard*. I’m alone. He... he died.”

THE SPECTRE — “... didn’t give me a hug. Don’t see why I should say sorry.”

- “Because you hurt her feelings.”
- “She needs to toughen up. Trust me, I was her.”
- “Just be kind to each other, both of you. We’re all caught in this trap together.”
- [Say nothing, cross your arms, and look unimpressed at both of them.
- [Give the Spectre a hug]

YOU — [Give the Spectre a hug]

She does not expect this. Cold, clinging vapour is dispersed by your arms, and reforms around you. She smells like old dry attics and old wood.

THE SPECTRE — “I... this doesn’t change anything. Why should I apologise?”

- “Because you hurt her feelings.”
- “She needs to toughen up. Trust me, I was her.”
- “Just be kind to each other, both of you. We’re all caught in this trap together.”
- [Say nothing, cross your arms, and look unimpressed at both of them.

YOU — “Just be kind to each other, both of you. We’re all caught in this trap together.”

THE SPECTRE — “How non-committal.”

THE DAMSEL — “She’s not wrong, though! Everyone should be more kind to each other. When the world only wants to hurt us, it’d be just awful if we hurt each other too. I know you think I’m stupid, but that doesn’t mean I’m wrong!”

The ocean is sometimes tempestuous and sometimes calm. The waters must accept that the violence of the wind is something that must be endured.

THE DAMSEL — “Well, I think you’re wrong.”

That is something that has always been part of you; the seed of fire to contradict what others would impose on you. The psyche for you is eros, and there is so much fuel in your overflowing heart, primed to ignite. You are one who would set herself ablaze in a passionate martyrdom to protest the multitudinous injustices of a tenebrous world.

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t know what that means! I think you just use long words to confuse people! But I have something to say!”.

- “Before you do, I have some questions. For you. The other voice.”
- [Let her speak]

YOU — [Let her speak]

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t know what’s going on here. But I have some ideas.

THE DAMSEL — “I think you, spooky, I think you were in the same place I was. Which is here. I think you watched your destined true love die in front of you—”

THE SPECTRE — “Destined true love. That’s almost funny.”

THE DAMSEL — “You can have a spooky face all you like, but I’m not that silly narrator! I’m not scared of a face!

THE DAMSEL — “We started in the same place, and ended up different! But you died because you tried to fight him, while I believed in the power of love!

THE DAMSEL — “I think that if we help the next one of us, we can find true love for her! But better! Because it won’t have him kill himself in front of us! Which was bad. Really bad.”

She inhales, and her voice cracks.

THE DAMSEL — “If there are any more of us — and all of you talk like there will be! — I j-just want them to be happy. Happier than me, and happier than spooky.”

It will not work. It is not a part of your nature.

THE SPECTRE — “I think you’re wrong, cutie. And foolish.”

THE DAMSEL — “Look at that! Look, you’re frowning! You’re being mean to cover up that you want to find true love too! Out there, somewhere in the world! The world that isn’t that

dark castle or dark lake or this dark place! I know there's light and love and laughter for us!

THE DAMSEL — "What do you think?"

- (Explore) "I didn't remember this place last time. But I think spooky did."
- "I think everyone deserves love and the world to be kind."
- "I don't think it will work. It turned out wrong both times."
- "I don't know what to believe yet. I don't know the world."

YOU — "I didn't remember this place last time. But I think spooky did."

THE SPECTRE — "She's right. She forgets everything."

THE DAMSEL — : "That doesn't matter! It'd be wrong to make decisions without asking her! It doesn't matter if she forgets it later if she chooses now."

- "I think everyone deserves love and the world to be kind."
- "I don't think it will work. It turned out wrong both times."
- "I don't know what to believe yet. I don't know the world."

YOU — "I don't know what to believe yet. I don't know the world."

THE SPECTRE — "She doesn't like choosing. I told you so."

THE DAMSEL — "Well, that doesn't matter! I think everyone wants to be happy, so I'll try to make us happy next time!"

Knowledge changes both the known and the knower. What, then—

THE DAMSEL — "I don't care what you think! You keep on using long words and it's really confusing! Who even are you? You're not me or spooky or her! And you're not the mean narrator or our beloved!"

With a dull thud your boat hits something, nearly tossing you into the water. The damsel nearly falls in too, but she clings to the side.

THE SPECTRE — "Not again. This is going to be bad."

You reach out, running your hands over the surface. As far as you can reach, nothing but the cold smoothness of glass. Once again, you have found the mirror that is half of this world.

You look, and meet the eyes of your dark reflection.

THE SPECTRE — "Oh, no. No no no."

THE DAMSEL — "What's the problem?"

THE SPECTRE — "I hate this mirror. Don't break it. Remember what happened last time."

- (Explore) [Consider your reflection]

- (Explore) [Call out]
- (Explore) [Remember]
- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Call out]

Once a firefly, now you are a torch held aloft. Fire can grow and spread, but you are still so very small. But you know you can be larger. You know you can grow.

But nothing responds. You are still too small to be noticed by the darkness. It will try to quench you when you are found.

THE DAMSEL — “What’s this mirror? What happens if she breaks it?”

- (Explore) [Consider your reflection]
- (Explore) [Remember]
- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Consider your reflection]

You are not a person. Not yet. There are motes of light tracing barely-there features, eyes that gleam like distant galaxies and hair that has the sheen of light on ice at midnight.

You know no face of a father or a mother, no friends or lovers. You were told they existed, but now, having met the sparking fragments of your self who cling to you, those memories are so much less real that they might never have existed at all. You are a tracery, a web, a sketch. Something that is becoming.

THE SPECTRE — “There are *things* behind the mirror.”

- (Explore) [Remember]
- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Remember]

You now have enough light with the vast and empty streets of your existence to see hints of rubble-filled alleyways and craters that were once buildings. You were lessened, and it was not peaceful. You know not who did it to you, but you know now that it was done.

Someone hurt you terribly, and it was an act of betrayal. And one last thought-feeling-breath:

regret

THE DAMSEL — “Nice things?”

- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Break the mirror]

THE SPECTRE — “No.”

You slam a fist into the mirror, then another, then another. More than before.

THE SPECTRE — “We need to hide, cutie. Both of us.”

Then; crack.

A spiderweb fracture, spreading across the glass.

THE DAMSEL — “Why?

You meet his eyes.

Dark feathers, dark eyes, a melancholy affect. Cinders, where once there was coal.

Loneliness; self-inflicted.

He places his hand against the glass, touching your fist, as if he could caress it.

THE HERO — “I’m sorry. For all of this.”

Then—

Eyes.

He is gone and the eyes have returned, the stars of this dark place.

But there are fewer than there were before. And their attention will hurt less, for you have grown just as they have been lessened.

- So it won’t hurt?

YOU — So it won’t hurt?

‘Hurts less’ is relative, not absolute.

SOMETHING WATCHFUL — “Look! Look, there it is again! It’s back!”

The attention burns. You feel yourself singe.

Another eye.

SOMETHING CURIOUS — “Yes. As expected. I *knew* it wasn’t a one-off phenomenon.”

Another eye.

SOMETHING FORLORN — “Why do you care? It can’t hurt us.”

Another eye.

SOMETHING UNSTOPPABLE — “It better not run away this time! You! Down there! Stay where you are and fight!”

THE DAMSEL — “Th-this is very not-nice! It hurts! You! Up there! Stop hurting us!”

That gets their attention.

SOMETHING WICKED — “Oh! It’s bigger now! And talks back! Come on, lads, let’s just think for a moment. Make sure we’re weighing up both sides.”

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “Foolish. It’s bigger. It’s growing. It wants to hurt us.”

SOMETHING BITTER — “And we’re losing players at the table. Haven’t you noticed it?”

- “What are you?”
- “Why do you want to hurt me?”
- “Why what is this place?”
- “Why do you want to control me?”
- (Damsel) Die
- (Spectre) Die

YOU — “What are you?”

SOMETHING CURIOUS — “More than one voice. Are there several of it? Or does it just have several heads? What are you?”

Again, the burning; again, the lessening.

- “I’m the Princess.”
- “What do you think I am?”
- “Something you’ll never understand.”
- “What are you?”
- “Why do you want to hurt me?”
- “Why what is this place?”
- “Why do you want to control me?”
- (Damsel) Die
- (Spectre) Die

YOU — “Something you’ll never understand.”

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “Doubt it. Mysteries are threats. Threats are dangerous.”

THE SPECTRE — “Don’t provoke them.”

THE DAMSEL — “No, do! They’re bullies! And bullies are mean!”

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “What are you?”

- “I’m the Princess.”
- “What do you think I am?”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “What are you?”
- “Why do you want to hurt me?”

- “Why what is this place?”
- “Why do you want to control me?”
- (Damsel) Die
- (Spectre) Die

YOU — “What do you think I am?”

White hot agony. A bad question.

THE SPECTRE — “N-never do that again. Don’t let them define you. Don’t invite it! We need to escape, now!”

SOMETHING WICKED — “Well, listen to this, lads? I’m getting an idea here. About what this thing is. And I wonder if it’ll confirm it for me.”

- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- (Damsel) Die
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- (Spectre) Die
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”
- “I’m the Princess.”

THE DAMSEL — “W-wait, what? Why is it my job? Oh, well, uh, I suppose I... I pick up the oar! Sorry, hold still!”

Red hot pain. Something breaks in a skull. Blurred vision. Not death.

- (Damsel) Try again.
- (Spectre) Die.

Another blow. More broken bones. No pain, for there never is. Blood is red on the white dress in this dark world. Death still will not come.

THE SPECTRE — “This is mortifying to watch. Why would you ask her to do this rather than me?”

THE DAMSEL — “I’m sorry! I want to do my part for the team! And if that means beating you to death with an oar I’m not going to shirk! But I’m sorry! I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry!”

It takes a lot to kill you.

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “What’s going on down there? I smell copper. Blood.”

SOMETHING CURIOUS — “Oh. So that’s how it did it last time.”

- (Damsel) Try again (again).
- (Spectre) Die.

THE DAMSEL — I finally manage it! Glass breaks! We escape! Okay, maybe a limb is left behind!

THE DAMSEL — But don’t worry! We’ve got spares!

Chapter End Notes

Well, this took a little longer than planned. It's all the Damsel's fault. Namely, trying to work out a voice for her when she's no longer got her beloved, but without the betrayal of the Burned Grey.

N-no, Damsel, don't cry, I think you've got a lovely role now that means you serve as a really nice counterpoint to the Spectre!

Chapter 7: CHAPTER I: THE PRINCESS AND THE HERO

Chapter Summary

THE NARRATOR — And next to the boat is...

A MYSTERY — “See, I told you another one would show up.”

THE NARRATOR — ... a g-g-ghost?

ANOTHER MYSTERY — “I’m sorry! It was just really boring waiting here. And I know he’s waiting on the other side of the lake. Hi, princess! We’re your friends!”

THE NARRATOR — Um. Sorry. Let me just start again. I’m just a bit... off-balance. You deserve professionalism from me. Apparently you had people waiting for you here and that’s not something I was exactly expecting. Especially when one of them is a spectre.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m not a spectre. I’m a princess, just like her.”

ANOTHER MYSTERY — “I wonder what he’s going to call me! i know the other speaky-person called me a damsel!”

THE DAMSEL — “Oh, looks! I’m a damsel! I like being a damsel!”

THE NARRATOR — You’re on a path in the mountains.

THE NARRATOR — Past the mountains, there is a lake.

THE NARRATOR — And trapped on the island across the lake, there is a Hero.

THE NARRATOR — You’re here to slay him. If you don’t, it will be the end of the world.

- (Explore) The end of the world? What are you talking about?
- (Explore) This doesn’t seem right. Are you sure that I’m not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) That doesn’t make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don’t end the world.
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It’s a very big place.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don’t I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I’m on my way.
- [Silently continue to the lake]

- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?

THE NARRATOR — Excuse me? You're a princess who's just travelled long and hard on a heroic quest to get here. If you had anyone to help you, why would you set off alone? That doesn't make sense.

THE NARRATOR — Anyway, no one else could do what you can do. You're the princess. It's your duty.

- It's just I feel like there should be someone else here with me.
- But why would I be here all alone, then? Why don't I have a mount? Why am I walking all this way?
- Of course. That makes sense.

YOU — But why would I be here all alone, then? Why don't I have a mount? Why am I walking all this way?

THE NARRATOR — Do you want to take a mount through this rough terrain? The poor beast would probably break its leg. Do you want that on your conscience? No, of course not, you're too kind for that.

THE NARRATOR — And no one else is here because only you can do it. You're a princess. You're special. And you have a duty.

- Of course I'm special. I'm a princess.
- Someone whose duty it is to kill... that's an assassin.
- But if I had a mount my feet wouldn't hurt so much. The only thing worse would be if I had to row somewhere.
- That all makes sense.

YOU — Someone whose duty it is to kill... that's an assassin.

THE NARRATOR — Heavens, no. You're not an assassin. An assassin is some... knife-obsessed crazed nutjob who'd kill someone for no reason at all. You're not like that. You're a princess. You're dignified and graceful and have steel inside you that lets you put aside your kind heart and do a messy, unpleasant thing that will nonetheless save the world and everyone in it.

THE NARRATOR — Although the hero has done such awful things that it'd be justified if you were an assassin.

THE NARRATOR — You're not, of course.

- (Explore) You're not persuading me that I'm not an assassin. In fact, if it's justified, what makes it so important I'm not one?

- (Explore) Wait, hold up, maybe I am a knife-obsessed crazed nutjob, as you put it. That sounds fun!
- I suppose so. I have further questions, though.
- That makes sense. Enough rest. Let's get moving. [Continue]

YOU — You're not persuading me that I'm not an assassin. In fact, if it's justified, what makes it so important I'm not one?

THE NARRATOR — Because it's all a question of self-image. Self-image and how you present yourself to the hero. If you think of yourself as an assassin, well, he's killed assassins before. You don't want him to make assumptions.

THE NARRATOR — If he makes the wrong assumptions, it'll be much harder to kill him and save the world.

- (Explore) Wait, hold up, maybe I am a knife-obsessed crazed nutjob, as you put it. That sounds fun!
- I suppose so. I have further questions, though.
- That makes sense. Enough rest. Let's get moving. [Continue]

YOU — That makes sense. Enough rest. Let's get moving. [Continue]

THE NARRATOR — You set off, stones crunching under foot.

THE NARRATOR — The mountains are tall, white stone peaks reaching up to grasp at the sky with thin forking spires. Gravel crunches underfoot, fragments of the forked spires that reach with futility up at the sky. Wind-rounded rocks are piled up in unstable mounds. The cracked stone stretches towards you. The air is hot, baking, and when the scorching wind blows, it moans with loss.

THE NARRATOR — Not that this is an instance of the pathetic fallacy, of course. When I say the wind moans, I am merely describing it to you. You shouldn't let it get you down.

THE NARRATOR — But regardless it's a welcome relief when you find the pass that leads down from the tall white mountains, down the cooler slopes towards the dark lake you see in the distance. Its waters are cold, almost icy, and still. Not a ripple breaks them. The skeletal forms of the tops of dead trees break the surface.

THE NARRATOR — On the island on the lake, there is a castle. That's where the hero is.

THE NARRATOR — Fortunately, past a dried up dock there is a little boat that's been pulled up out of the water. It's how you're going to get to the island. It's just as well. It'd be hard to cross the lake without a boat.

THE NARRATOR — And next to the boat is...

A MYSTERY — "See, I told you another one would show up."

THE NARRATOR — ... a g-g-ghost?

ANOTHER MYSTERY — “I’m sorry! It was just really boring waiting here. And I know he’s waiting on the other side of the lake. Hi, princess! We’re your friends!”

THE NARRATOR — Um. Sorry. Let me just start again. I’m just a bit... off-balance. You deserve professionalism from me. Apparently you had people waiting for you here and that’s not something I was exactly expecting. Especially when one of them is a spectre.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m not a spectre. I’m a princess, just like her.”

ANOTHER MYSTERY — “I wonder what he’s going to call me! i know the other speaky-person called me a damsel!”

THE DAMSEL — “Oh, looks! I’m a damsel! I like being a damsel!”

THE SPECTRE — “Of course you’re the one who gets flattered by this.”

THE DAMSEL — “I’m not flat! Right now at least.

THE DAMSEL — “I mean, I did get flattered when the ceiling fell on me, but I’m not flat anymore!”

THE SPECTRE — “Flattered. Not flattened.”

THE DAMSEL — “I’m still not very happy with him, though. He ruined my happy ending by dropping that ceiling on me.”

- (Explore) “I’m sorry, I am very confused right now. What’s going on?”
- (Explore) “Narrator. Explain.”
- (Explore) “Ah ha! I knew it! I’m not the first person you sent to do this! You’re setting me up!”
- “I don’t have time for this! I have a man to kill!” [Cross the lake]
- “This is too unreal. I’m leaving.” [Walk away]

YOU — “Narrator. Explain.”

THE NARRATOR — “I really don’t know, honestly. There’s two... people here. Two people who shouldn’t be here.”

THE NARRATOR — The first is a pale, ephemeral shape, floating here in the gloom next to the lakeside. Two considering deep-set eyes settle on you, over a skeletal grin.

THE NARRATOR — Her dress floats around her in an unseen wind; there is an X-shaped wound on her chest.

THE NARRATOR — She appears to be a princess. Albeit one who is, quite definitely, certainly, dead.

THE SPECTRE — “Do you always give the same spiel?”

THE NARRATOR — The second is almost her polar opposite; solid and round and almost plump, her big eyes liquid and caring, her smile almost worried in a way that makes it clear that this is an expression that seldom occupies this face.

THE NARRATOR — Her shoulderless dress is low-cut and it spreads low and wide with many ruffles. There are no sharp edges or lines anywhere in her form.

THE NARRATOR — She appears to be another princess. Albeit one who doesn't seem capable of killing anything.

THE DAMSEL — "I'm not sure I like being called plump! I mean, I have more meat on my bones than spooky, but that's because I'm not actually sure where her bones are! They're definitely not with her."

THE SPECTRE — "Possibly still in the basement.

THE SPECTRE — "Back in my world. In the basement back in my world."

THE DAMSEL — "That's really rude! I hope someone finds them and buries them. Otherwise leaving bones lying around is really untidy."

THE SPECTRE — "Why? I'm not using them."

THE DAMSEL — "There's such a thing as manners!"

THE NARRATOR — Oh.

THE NARRATOR — *sighs*

THE NARRATOR — You've picked up a peanut gallery.

THE SPECTRE — "In summary, though, you're not the first princess other versions of him in... maybe other timelines? Or a time loop? Anyway, we're also princesses that were sent either by him or other versions of him to kill the hero.

THE SPECTRE — "I was the first, and woke up in her world after the hero died. And we both woke up here after her hero died."

THE DAMSEL — "It was so awful!"

THE SPECTRE — "That's about all we can tell you. We don't know how things work. This is just what's happened to us."

THE DAMSEL — "We one hundred percent totally in no way remember anything else."

THE NARRATOR — Hmm.

- (Explore) "‘Hmm’? Expand."
- (Explore) "When I said ‘explain’, I meant ‘explain what she meant by dropping a ceiling on her’."

- “I don’t have time for this! I have a man to kill!” [Cross the lake]
- “This is too unreal. I’m leaving.” [Walk away]

YOU — “When I said ‘explain’, I meant ‘explain what she meant by dropping a ceiling on her’.”

THE NARRATOR — I really don’t have an idea. I’ve never met either of them before.

THE DAMSEL — “But I’ve met you!”

THE SPECTRE — “He never remembers. It doesn’t seem to be an act.”

THE DAMSEL — “I was going to have a happily-ever-after with the hero and he killed me!”

THE NARRATOR — I didn’t do that. But if someone else did that, then honestly he was entirely in the right. You’re here to kill the hero, not get smoochy with him. That would be bad, for you and everyone else. This is a bad man. He does very bad things. And he’ll kill everyone and everything he claims to love.

THE NARRATOR — He killed you, didn’t he, spectre?

THE SPECTRE — “How did you know that? And yes.”

THE NARRATOR — Lucky guess. Based on the knife wound in your chest. He has a pristine blade and that’s what he used to kill people when he was a hero. From the sounds of things, he still has it.

THE NARRATOR — And so, princess, what you need to do is get in there and kill him before he can kill you or trick you into falling in love with him.

THE DAMSEL — “It wasn’t a trick! It was true love! And we’ve got a plan to get you a happily-ever-after too! You want that, right? From the looks in your eyes and the smiles on your lips, you want that!”

THE SPECTRE — “She’s got a plan. I’m willing to let it play out. I feel like I sort of owe her that much.”

THE NARRATOR — No, that is an awful idea, do not listen to them, just take the boat and cross the lake and kill the hero.

- (Explore) “No, no. Go on. I’m listening.”
- “The Narrator is right. I’m here to kill the Hero. And so I’m going to do that.” [Cross the lake]
- “This is too unreal. I’m leaving.” [Walk away]

YOU — “No, no. Go on. I’m listening.”

THE NARRATOR — Please do not do this. It’ll only end in tears for you. At best. At worst, the whole world—

THE DAMSEL — “Everyone’s going to be happy with a happily ever after, silly! That’s what it means. If not everyone is happy, what’s the point?”

THE NARRATOR — You can see that the spectre doesn’t believe that. You shouldn’t believe it either, princess.

THE DAMSEL — “Ignore him! He’s mean and awful!

THE DAMSEL — “All you need to do is do exactly what I did and he won’t attack you or anything like that! What we’re going to do is cross the lake. Then you go into the castle. You’ll see how sad it is that it’s dilapidated and ruined and it’s a message for you about how he’s let himself go and needs love to pull himself back together!

THE DAMSEL — “Then you go to the main tower place, open the door, and climb the stairs - up, make sure you go up. Going down is bad! Spooky did it and she died, so the way downstairs is a bad route.”

THE SPECTRE — “She isn’t wrong. Being murdered isn’t fun. She also died the first time she met him, but she didn’t get turned into a ghost.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m still trying to work out what’s going on there.

THE SPECTRE — Still, even if he kills you, at least you might be able to join me in ghost-hood.”

THE NARRATOR — He’s not going to kill you—

THE DAMSEL — “See! He agrees our beloved won’t kill you.”

THE SPECTRE — “You know that’s not what he meant.”

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t have to listen to him when I don’t want to! He’s a mean liar. Anyway, once you head up the stairs, you’ll hear him. He’s so romantic! Then, just listen to him and be nice to him and you’ll really click with him and everything will work out!”

- (Explore) “Could you go into a little more detail, please?”
- (Explore) “What happens if he tries to kill me?”
- (Explore) “So you’re saying he wasn’t expecting violence?”
- “That’s a terrible plan. I’m off to do what I was sent here to do” [Cross the lake]
- “Let’s go with that. Let’s give him a chance.” [Cross the lake]
- [Lie] “Let’s go with that. Let’s give him a chance.” [Cross the lake]
- “I’ll decide what I’ll do when I’m there. I’m keeping my options open.” [Cross the lake]
- “This is too unreal. I’m leaving.” [Walk away]

YOU — “Could you go into a little more detail, please?”

THE DAMSEL — “No, not really! Just trust in your heart and do the right thing! The power of love will always conquer! That’s what he would have said!”

THE NARRATOR — I do hope you realise how stupid this sounds.

THE NARRATOR — It sounds stupid because it is stupid. The power of love never lasts. He'll just betray you. He can't help himself.

THE DAMSEL — "People can always help themselves and always help each other! The only reason people get trapped in a cycle of hurting is that they don't see another way out."

THE SPECTRE — "I'm not sure it was a cycle. He just stabbed me."

THE NARRATOR — Um.

THE SPECTRE — "Then I ripped his heart out and crushed it. Good times."

THE NARRATOR — Aaa! Don't do that! Even if you were right to-

THE DAMSEL — "No! It's better to light a candle than sit there in the darkness!"

THE SPECTRE — "And if a candle isn't enough?"

THE DAMSEL — "Then you just light a bigger fire!"

- (Explore) "What happens if he tries to kill me?"
- (Explore) "So you're saying he wasn't expecting violence?"
- "That's a terrible plan. I'm off to do what I was sent here to do" [Cross the lake]
- "Let's go with that. Let's give him a chance." [Cross the lake]
- [Lie] "Let's go with that. Let's give him a chance." [Cross the lake]
- "I'll decide what I'll do when I'm there. I'm keeping my options open." [Cross the lake]
- "This is too unreal. I'm leaving." [Walk away]

YOU — "What happens if he tries to kill me?"

THE DAMSEL — "He won't!"

THE SPECTRE — "You could try dying then coming back as a ghost and ripping his heart out. Worked for me."

THE NARRATOR — Or you could just do your job properly. With a sword.

THE DAMSEL — "But he won't try to kill you! He never hurt or threatened me!"

- (Explore) "So you're saying he wasn't expecting violence?"
- "That's a terrible plan. I'm off to do what I was sent here to do" [Cross the lake]
- "Let's go with that. Let's give him a chance." [Cross the lake]
- [Lie] "Let's go with that. Let's give him a chance." [Cross the lake]
- "I'll decide what I'll do when I'm there. I'm keeping my options open." [Cross the lake]
- "This is too unreal. I'm leaving." [Walk away]

YOU — “So you’re saying he wasn’t expecting violence?”

THE NARRATOR — If he isn’t, you’ll be able to close quickly and end him before he can talk.

THE DAMSEL — “But you won’t do that, will you?”

THE NARRATOR — Her large liquid eyes stare imploring at you.

THE DAMSEL — “Please?”

- “That’s a terrible plan. I’m off to do what I was sent here to do” [Cross the lake]
- “Let’s go with that. Let’s give him a chance.” [Cross the lake]
- [Lie] “Let’s go with that. Let’s give him a chance.” [Cross the lake]
- “I’ll decide what I’ll do when I’m there. I’m keeping my options open.” [Cross the lake]
- “This is too unreal. I’m leaving.” [Walk away]

YOU — “I’ll decide what I’ll do when I’m there. I’m keeping my options open.” [Cross the lake]

THE DAMSEL — “No! Believe in love!”

THE NARRATOR — You’ll regret it if you give him the chance.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m impressed you managed to find the middle ground to upset them both. Well, come on, princess. Chins up, and it’s time for you to row across.”

- (Explore) “Whose boat is this?”
- (Explore) “Do I have to row?”
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Do I have to row?”

THE SPECTRE — “Yes.”

THE SPECTRE — “You forgot to describe that I just waved my hand through the boat, Narrator.”

THE NARRATOR — That’s because you’re getting ahead of me. Yes, you need to cross, and she just waved her hand through the boat, demonstrating she is insubstantial.

THE DAMSEL — “I rowed twice already! I’m not doing it again!”

- (Explore) “Whose boat is this?”
- (Explore) “I hate rowing.”
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — “I hate rowing.”

THE NARRATOR — I'm sure rowing doesn't like you very much either, your royal highness.

THE DAMSEL — "Don't worry! Next time you can make the next princess do it!"

- (Explore) "Whose boat is this?"
- [Cross the lake]

YOU — [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — The waters are cold and dark. They move in fat, lazy ripples as you pull and pull and pull. There's dark water plants here, trying to snarl up the boat and your oars. The whole area smells just a little stagnant. The twisted, bloated tips of drowned trees stick out of the water, leafless and bog-stained.. This lake isn't healthy. But you shouldn't look too closely. Don't linger here too long.

THE NARRATOR — He might notice if you stick around here.

THE DAMSEL — "That's not bad."

THE SPECTRE — "It might be. The tops of trees were not poking out of the lake before."

THE DAMSEL "I know! it was all water!"

THE SPECTRE — "I don't like it when things change for no reason. Last time you said this wasn't always a lake."

THE NARRATOR — I... yes, you're correct. But we need to move. Now. There are worse things in the lake than the hero. Very bad things.

THE DAMSEL — "He might even be telling the truth.

THE DAMSEL — "Because there's nothing bad at all about my beloved."

- (Explore) "Is it his fault?"
- (Explore) "What kind of bad things?"
- (Explore) "Why are you suddenly agreeing with him?"
- "The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better". [Keep rowing]

YOU — "The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better". [Keep rowing]

THE NARRATOR — There's a little beach on the far side of the lake. Above it on the hillside is the remnants of a dock, the timbers completely rotten. That's no use to anyone at all, but it's easy enough to beach the boat on the dark sand, and pull it up out of the water. On this side of the lake, the wind doesn't blow. The air is as still as the water.

THE NARRATOR — The black stone looms over the dark waters. Ill-favoured birds perch on every surface and flock around the turrets. The windows are thrown open, and gape like mouths. The great gate is opened wide, the metal clean and sturdy.

THE NARRATOR — A word of warning, before you continue. The hero will do anything to stop you. To stay in control of the situation. That's why you just need to put an end to him. Don't give him time to think on his feet. Don't let him shape your options. He was a great hero once, after all. And that's why he must die.

- [Enter the castle]

YOU — [Enter the castle]

THE NARRATOR — You step through the gate, past the walls. This castle is abandoned, though it is like it could have been occupied mere moments away. There are no people, no animals, but there is a wheelbarrow abandoned in the middle of the main path. The grassy verges are trimmed, and there are fat apples on the heavy boughs of the small orchard.

THE NARRATOR — There is a central citadel at the heart of this castle, though you have seen much more impressive fortresses in your time. It is really only a few rooms in a tower, a last fallback for a lord who has lost control of the outer walls. Still, it has a door, and the door is closed.

THE SPECTRE — “Something is happening to this place. I don't like it.”

- (Explore) “What do you mean by that?”
- (Explore) “It's so empty.”
- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he's a threat? There's no army here.”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely.”
- (Explore) “What if the door's locked?”
- [Examine the wheelbarrow]
- [Steal an apple]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “What do you mean by that?”

THE SPECTRE — “This castle — it's getting more and more whole.”

THE DAMSEL — “Maybe it remembers how nice he made it for me!”

THE SPECTRE — “Your castle was more intact than mine.”

THE NARRATOR — He's getting stronger. You need to kill him before it's too late.

THE DAMSEL — “Hurrah!”

THE NARRATOR — No. Very not hurrah.

- (Explore) “It's so empty.”
- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he's a threat? There's no army here.”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely.”

- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Examine the wheelbarrow]
- [Steal an apple]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — [Examine the wheelbarrow]

THE NARRATOR — It’s a wheelbarrow.

(Explore) Is there anything in it?

YOU — Is there anything in it?

THE NARRATOR — No.

- (Explore) “It’s so empty.”
- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Steal an apple]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “It’s so empty.”

THE DAMSEL — “Yes! It’s a sign of how lonely he is! How he needs your company to break through and free his heart.”

THE SPECTRE — “I fre-”

THE DAMSEL — “Not like she did! That’s not the form of heart-freeing we want to do!”

THE NARRATOR — It is, but I believe you misunderstood her. She was talking about the wheelbarrow.

THE NARRATOR — And yes, there is nothing in it. Not everything in the world exists for you to interact with.

- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Steal an apple]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — [Steal an apple]

THE NARRATOR — Really? Of all the things to do, you do that?

THE SPECTRE — “No, she’s got a point. It’s funny, but I don’t... remember eating.”

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t either, but I’m not hungry! So I must’ve had something to eat! That or being sent to a different world is like a nourishing meal!”

THE NARRATOR — Don’t listen to them. Yes, you steal an apple. You can eat it if you’re hungry. But you can have all the apples later, once you’ve killed him and won’t risk him looking out the window and seeing you here.

- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- (Explore) “What colour’s the apple?”
- [Eat the apple]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — [Eat the apple]

THE NARRATOR — You eat the apple.

THE SPECTRE — “How did it taste?”

THE NARRATOR — Excuse me?

THE SPECTRE — “There weren’t apples in my world. There are apples here. I don’t think I’ve ever eaten an apple. I have the memory of apples, but... they’re like me. Memories. Memories without flesh, without a texture.

THE SPECTRE — “I know apples exist, and I know people can eat them. But I can’t eat them now.”

THE DAMSEL — “I want an apple too.”

THE NARRATOR — The damsel plucks an apple off the tree too and bites into it.

THE DAMSEL — “It’s good!”

THE SPECTRE — “What does it taste like?”

THE NARRATOR — Why do you keep asking that?

THE SPECTRE — “Because you aren’t answering.”

THE NARRATOR — It tastes like... an apple. It’s sweet and slightly tart and it has a satisfying crunch in your mouth.

THE NARRATOR — Is there a point to all this?

THE SPECTRE — “Those are just words to me. I don’t think I’ve ever eaten one.

THE SPECTRE — “Have I ever eaten anything at all?”

THE DAMSEL — “I ate an apple! I liked the little hard things in it and the woody thing on top! That was also tasty!”

THE NARRATOR — ... both of you ate the whole apple, including the seeds and part of the branch. You’re not meant to...

THE NARRATOR — Never mind.

THE NARRATOR — As long as it was tasty, that’s all that matters, right?

THE DAMSEL — “Don’t think that makes us friends just because I ate an apple!”

- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- “I’m... hungry?” [Eat another apple]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”

THE NARRATOR — It’s here to keep him safe.

THE SPECTRE — “Then why is it empty? No guards, no soldiers, no one to protect him - or keep him contained.”

THE DAMSEL — “Heroes need castles! It’s how you know they’re dashing heroes! And he’s fixed it up really nicely for us!”

THE NARRATOR — No, that is a bad thing. The more intact it is, the more alert he is. If you’re the third - and at least according to the other two, you are - he’s getting more aware. His awareness is... he’s rusty from long isolation. Or at least it should be. But then you two showed up and you’re saying that this place used to be ruined but now it isn’t.

THE NARRATOR — You don’t want to face him when he knows you’re coming.

THE NARRATOR — And I’m worried he might know you’re here already. Get in there. Kill him.

THE DAMSEL — “Romance him!”

THE NARRATOR — Kill him.

- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- “I’m... hungry?” [Eat another apple]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — [Try the door]

THE NARRATOR — Thank you for not wasting *any more time*.

THE DAMSEL — “Are you going to stick your head through the door this time, spooky?”

THE NARRATOR — Don’t you start.

THE NARRATOR — Ahem.

THE NARRATOR — The entrance to the keep opens easily.

THE NARRATOR — The room past the door is immaculate, a hall of glory and triumph. The fire is lit and burns merrily, lit with a warm glow. The windows are shuttered to keep the heat in, and the light of the fire is joined by the burning torches on the walls. You can clearly see the paintings on the walls, but not the details. It is like the colours have run, until all that remains is a dark, oily blur.

THE NARRATOR — The table was laid for dinner, and while the plates and cutlery on it are clean, there is no sign of food. It awaits the arrival of guests.

THE NARRATOR — Ahead of you is a staircase. It must lead to the upper layers of the citadel. The walls are rich with dark tapestries, interspersed with tapestries.

THE NARRATOR — Next to it is another staircase, this one going down — likely to the dungeons of this place. There’s a strange smell coming from there, not musty, but... peculiar. Almost chemical.

THE NARRATOR — Given he’s not here, that suggests he’s either upstairs or downstairs.

THE SPECTRE — “It’s different.”

THE DAMSEL — “Very different.”

THE NARRATOR — If things are changing, you need to hurry up and kill him now. Find him. He’s somewhere in here.

THE DAMSEL — “No no no, we’ve been over this. Don’t kill him. Go upstairs and your happy ending is waiting for you!”

THE NARRATOR — The spectre crosses her arms and doesn’t say anything. She doesn’t look happy.

- (Explore) “If there’s no one else here, what’s he been eating?”
- (Explore) “Not necessarily. He could be outside. On a walk, or something.”
- “I’m heading down. I don’t trust this.”
- “Guess I’ll head up. If that’s where my ‘happy ending’ is.”
- [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]
- [Silently take the stairs up to the upper levels]

YOU — “Not necessarily. He could be outside. On a walk, or something.”

THE NARRATOR — No, he’s in here. Don’t be contrary.

THE NARRATOR — I’m the narrator and when I say he’s in here, he’s in here.

- (Explore) “If there’s no one else here, what’s he been eating?”
- “I’m heading down. I don’t trust this.”
- “Guess I’ll head up. If that’s where my ‘happy ending’ is.”
- [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]
- [Silently take the stairs up to the upper levels]

YOU — “Guess I’ll head up. If that’s where my ‘happy ending’ is.”

THE NARRATOR — Oh, for goodness sake.

THE DAMSEL — “Yay! Good move! Me and spooky will wait downstairs so we don’t accidentally muck up your happy ending and also so she doesn’t reach into his chest and rip out his heart.”

THE SPECTRE — “I did that *once*. And he killed me first.”

THE DAMSEL — “And also because I don’t know if I’ll lose control on seeing his adorable beak again. It’d be really rude to steal your man! Good luck!”

THE NARRATOR — You leave the damsel and the spectre behind as take the steps one by one. The wood is firm and well-maintained, and you barely make a noise. Tapestries of former glories, a castle that seems to be abandoned by everyone else, and there, on one of the steps, a fallen feather. If he’s spending time up here, there’s very little for him to live for.

THE NARRATOR — His voice gently drifts down the stairs.

THE HERO — “Is there someone there. If so, hello, hello.”

THE NARRATOR — Don’t let it fool you. And don’t listen to the delusions of that silly woman. He’ll kill you if he gets the chance. You’re in a very dangerous place right now.

- “Hi!”
- “Just checking in on you.”
- “I come in peace!”
- (Lie) “I come in peace!”
- “I believe you have an appointment with death? Check your calendar.”
- “Are you my true love?”

- [Draw your blade]
- Silently continue up the stairs.

YOU — [Draw your blade]

THE NARRATOR — Good move. You're taking this seriously. The blade comes out silently, your well-maintained equipment neither grating nor rattling.

- "Hi!"
- "Just checking in on you."
- "I come in peace!"
- (Lie) "I come in peace!"
- "I believe you have an appointment with death? Check your calendar."
- "Are you my true love?"
- Silently continue up the stairs.

YOU — "Hi!"

THE HERO — "A guest? It's been so long since I had any visitors. Come up, come up!"

THE NARRATOR — You continue up the stairs, and enter the large room at the top of the central tower. It is open to the air, with both a glass-covered skyview and a large window on the rear wall. The torches gutter in the breeze. And sitting below it, sprawled out on a chair which is almost, but not quite, a throne, is the Hero.

THE NARRATOR — His eyes are hidden in the gloom; his feathers black, the rings on his fingers shiny. He wears no armour, instead donning a fine garment in black velvet. He radiates ennui. You could probably just kill him now.

THE NARRATOR — His eyes focus on your drawn sword.

THE HERO — "Well? What does such a beautiful maiden have to say for herself?"

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) [You... know him]
- (Explore) "You think I'm beautiful?"
- "I am here to kill you."
- "Let's talk."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend."
- "I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you."
- "Face me, blackguard!"
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — "You think I'm beautiful?"

THE HERO — "How could I not? Such golden hair, such beautiful lips, such elegant armour, and of course such a graceful and very sharp sword in your hand. I could meet your faces time and time again and not see the full wonder in your expressions."

THE NARRATOR — Obviously you're too smart to fall for such flattery.

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) déjà vu (usually uncountable, plural déjà vus): The subjective, unexpected feeling of having experienced something before, especially when that is not the case.
- "I am here to kill you."
- "Let's talk."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend."
- "I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you."
- "Face me, blackguard!"
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — "Let's talk."

THE HERO — "I'm more than happy to do that. I get no guests these days. I hate the loneliness."

THE NARRATOR — He wouldn't be lonely if he hadn't ruined everything and everyone who could ever love him. Kill him.

THE HERO — "I don't suppose you'd mind putting down that sword? I get nervous when shiny bits of metal are pointed at me."

- "Okay." [Drop the sword]
- "No. I think I'll hold on to it."

YOU — "No. I think I'll hold on to it."

THE HERO — "Oh, of course, sure thing, you're the one with the sword and I'm unarmed. You're the boss!"

THE NARRATOR — Stab him!

THE HERO — "But in return, I guess I should get to ask the first question. Why are you here, princess?"

- "I want to get to know you better."
- "I've heard about you from several people. I want to know what you're really like."
- "You're my true love, aren't you?"
- [Remain silent]

YOU — "I've heard about you from several people. I want to know what you're really like."

THE HERO — "Oh, that makes sense! I'm just your average run-of-the-mill hero. Well, not average really. I'm sort of amazing. Saved the world, saved a lot of people, then I got betrayed by people who were scared I'd overthrow their powerbase and unjustly locked up here.

THE HERO — "I don't suppose you'd like to help me get out of here, would you? I mean, it's a bit of a problem being imprisoned here, and if heavily armed - and very pretty - women

are going to show up, I'd rather it was you than someone who isn't prepared to hear me out. And it's very lonely here."

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) "What's your name?"
- (Explore) "You can call me Princess. Or Her Royal Highness, but that's a bit of a mouthful."
- (Explore) "I don't know anything about you. Why are you on this abandoned island with no way out?"
- (Explore) "Idle curiosity here, but what have you been eating? I mean, there's no one else here?"
- (Explore) "I was sent here to murder you. You're apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom."
- (Explore) "I understand hating loneliness too. I feel like I've always been alone."
- "I'm sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die."
- "Okay. I'll help you get out of here."
- [Drop your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — "What's your name?"

THE HERO — "Just call me the Hero.

THE HERO — "I know, I know, you're looking for more than that. I know it's not my name. Or at least, it's not the name I used to go by. But I can't for the life of me remember what it was."

THE HERO — "Do you know what my name is?"

- "I don't, either. They never told me it."
- "I used to. But... I don't, any more."
- (Lie) "Yes. I do. It's definitely... Jonathan."
- "To name a thing is to define it. I am beyond names, without you. But you have congealed within yours."
- "I only know you as the Hero, so I guess your name might actually be Hero. Not sure if it's a personal name or family name, though"

YOU — "I used to. But... I don't, any more."

THE HERO — "I know the feeling... princess?"

- "You can call me Princess, if you'd like..."
- "Princess."
- "You can address me as Your Royal Highness, or Her Majesty. Any honorific should do, really."

YOU — "You can call me Princess, if you'd like..."

THE HERO — “A princess with no name come to rescue a hero with no name. Funny thing is, I think I’ve heard that story before somewhere.

THE HERO — “Only the other way around.”

THE NARRATOR — Stop chatting. Kill him.

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this abandoned island with no way out?”
- (Explore) “Idle curiosity here, but what have you been eating? I mean, there’s no one else here?”
- (Explore) “I was sent here to murder you. You’re apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom.”
- (Explore) “I understand hating loneliness too. I feel like I’ve always been alone.”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- “Okay. I’ll help you get out of here.”
- [Drop your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “Idle curiosity here, but what have you been eating? I mean, there’s no one else here?”

THE HERO — “I don’t see what that has to do with anything.”

THE NARRATOR — I hate to agree with him, but he’s right. I don’t see what that has to do with anything.

THE HERO — “But if you really want to know, I’ve been eating all kinds of things. The most scrumptious, delicious, wonderful foods possible. I’m an amazing cook. I’ll show you on the way out of here. The two of us travelling away from here, living off the bounty of the land, and all that stuff.”

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this abandoned island with no way out?”
- (Explore) “Do you like apples?”
- (Explore) “I was sent here to murder you. You’re apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom.”
- (Explore) “I understand hating loneliness too. I feel like I’ve always been alone.”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- “Okay. I’ll help you get out of here.”
- [Drop your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “Do you like apples?”

THE NARRATOR — The hero frowns at your utterly inane question.

THE HERO — “Of course I do! The rich warm taste, the meatiness, the way it fills you — delicious! They’re my favourite food!”

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this abandoned island with no way out?”
- (Explore) “I was sent here to murder you. You’re apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom.”
- (Explore) “I understand hating loneliness too. I feel like I’ve always been alone.”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- “Okay. I’ll help you get out of here.”
- [Drop your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “I understand hating loneliness too. I feel like I’ve always been alone.”

THE HERO — “I wasn’t. Once. But the path I walked led us to part ways. I wish it hadn’t. It wasn’t my fault, but it just ended up that way.”

THE NARRATOR — Liar.

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- (Explore) “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this ruined island with no way out?”
- (Explore) “I was sent here to murder you. You’re apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom.”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- “Okay. I’ll help you get out of here.”
- [Drop your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “I don’t know anything about you. Why are you on this ruined island with no way out?”

THE HERO — “Like I said, I was betrayed. I’d saved the world. Made everything better for everyone. But they turned against me. They didn’t like the changes. They didn’t like what I’d done. And so I ended up here, a long, long time ago. So long I can’t remember how long ago.

THE HERO — “That’s what happens to heroes. They outlive their use.

THE HERO — “I just want to be free. I want to leave here. With you. The first friendly face I’ve seen in a long, long time.”

THE NARRATOR — He’s trying to manipulate you.

THE NARRATOR — Urgh, I wish the spectre was here. She’d do her scary face and threaten to rip his heart out.

- (Explore) What about that blade?

- (Explore) “I was sent here to murder you. You’re apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom.”
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- “Okay. I’ll help you get out of here.”
- [Drop your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “I was sent here to murder you. You’re apparently a threat to the world — and my kingdom.”

THE NARRATOR — His face doesn’t change.

THE HERO — “I’d guessed that, you know. But at least you’re prepared to hear me out. And you’ve heard my story. Your kingdom isn’t threatened by me. Your kingdom would’ve fallen a long time ago without me. I’m the reason that your kingdom, and every other kingdom, still exists. That it hasn’t succumbed to a great evil that I stopped, though it cost me dearly.”

THE HERO — “Do the right thing. Help me get out of this place.”

THE NARRATOR — This is infuriating. I can’t believe—

THE NARRATOR — *Urgh.*

- (Explore) What about that blade?
- “I’m sorry, but I keep to my oaths. You must die.”
- “Okay. I’ll help you get out of here.”
- [Drop your blade]
- [Approach cautiously and warily]

YOU — “Okay. I’ll help you get out of here.”

THE NARRATOR — “No!”

THE HERO — “That’s what I like to hear. Howsabout putting that sword down, mmm?”

- “Okay.” [Drop the sword]
- “Very well. As an act of trust.” [Sheath the sword]
- “No. I said no before, and no means no.”

YOU — “Very well. As an act of trust.” [Sheath the sword]

THE NARRATOR — You—

THE HERO — “All right! I guess I can trust you now. Gotta tell you, I don’t think I’d have done that.”

THE NARRATOR — The hero rises to his feet. He’s just as shabby as he was before, but there is a mercurial quickness to his eyes that dart from here to there, weighing up odds and considering angles.

THE HERO — “Can’t you feel it. I think we’re going to go far together. It’s like we’re meant to be working together like this.”

THE NARRATOR — He almost-dances forwards, quick and nimble feet shushing on the floor.

THE HERO — “After you, Princess. Lead the way down.”

- (Explore) “You first.”
- (Explore) “I put my sword away. You can trust me.”
- “Okay, I’ll go first.” [Head for the stairs]

YOU — “I put my sword away. You can trust me.”

THE HERO — “Look, you’re a self-confessed assassin, and I’m just not comfortable going first. Especially if you’ve got some friends waiting downstairs to gank me. This way you can tell them to lay off with the stabbing.”

- (Explore) “I mean, I have friends downstairs, but they’re really very nice. Well, one of them is very nice. One of them is sort of mean.”
- (Explore) “You first.”
- “Okay, I’ll go first.” [Head for the stairs]

YOU — “Okay, I’ll go first.” [Head for the stairs]

THE NARRATOR — Urgh. I wish I could make you see what’s about to happen. If I could... I could make you just draw your sword I’d be able to save your life!

THE NARRATOR — But I can’t. This is on your own head, you know.

THE HERO — “Thanks! You’re a real pal, you know that? A real pal? A real gal? Either way, you’re the best.”

THE NARRATOR — You take the lead, the shifty hero a few paces behind you. Just as you are about to take a step onto the stair, you feel a sudden pressure in your back.

THE NARRATOR — You twist back. His hand is in the pristine blade sunk into your back.

THE HERO — “Oops. My hand slipped.”

THE NARRATOR — And he’s twisting away and the knife is in his hand and *your sword* is in his other hand and he’s holding both like he knows exactly how to use them. His dark eyes gleam brightly.

THE HERO — “You gotta understand my position. I’m not going to trust an assassin. Not one who won’t drop her sword. You’ll just cut me down at the bottom of the stairs. Now I have both our weapons and that means I’m the one who’s making the decisions.

THE HERO — “Now, now, you’re about to say something like ‘you’re not getting out of here without me’. But if you got here, you must have a boat, and that means I can get off

here. It's really just common sense, yeah?

THE HERO — “Now, if you give up, I'll let you stay here on this island without finishing you off. Can't say fairer than that.”

- (Explore) “She said you were my true love. I was willing to trust you. I'm going to kill you.”
- (Explore) “I hate you! I hate you I hate you I hate you!”
- [Flee]
- [Give Up]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — [Murder the Hero]

THE NARRATOR — You don't listen to his falsehood-laden words. You might have a knife in your back, but you're strong and fast and you don't feel pain. Dropping to all fours, you spring forward with bestial ferocity, diving under his swing and raking your claw-sharp nails up his leg.

THE NARRATOR — The sword misses you. The pristine blade doesn't, gashing your arm.

THE NARRATOR — You don't care.

THE HERO — “Argh!”

THE NARRATOR — What follows is desperate, brutal, and vicious. He has a sword and a knife, and he should have the upper hand, but you're faster than him, and more ferocious. More willing to kill. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, and you were not just scorned, you were betrayed. You're willing to take cuts to score blows on him, because he feels pain and you don't.

THE NARRATOR — Then - a chance. You throw yourself at him, accepting a stop-thrust through the arm to get in close enough to blind him in one eye.

THE NARRATOR — He screams, and throws you off. The combat has taken you close enough to the staircase that you roll off, and bounce down every flight of stairs. Bones break and the knife is still in your arm, and while you don't feel pain the impacts blur your vision and fill your eyes with tears.

THE NARRATOR — You come to rest at the bottom. The damsel and the spectre are there, horror in one set of eyes, weary acknowledgement in the other.

THE DAMSEL — “What happened?”

- (Explore) “It's all your fault!”
- (Explore) “So much for love! So much for trust!”
- (Explore) “He betrayed me!”
- [Charge back up the stairs]
- “I'll be back!” [Retreat to recover]

YOU — “It’s all your fault!”

THE DAMSEL — “No, that’s impossible! Love always wins!”

- (Explore) “So much for love! So much for trust!”
- (Explore) “He betrayed me!”
- [Charge back up the stairs]
- “I’ll be back!” [Retreat to recover]

YOU — “He betrayed me!”

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t get it, you must have done something wrong, you must have—”

THE SPECTRE — “I’ll kill him for you.”

- “He’s mine!”
- “Yes. Go ahead.”

YOU — “He’s mine!”

THE SPECTRE — “I understand. I got my revenge. I’ll help you get yours.”

- (Explore) “So much for love! So much for trust!”
- [Charge back up the stairs]
- “I’ll be back!” [Retreat to recover]

YOU — “So much for love! So much for trust!”

THE DAMSEL — “Don’t say such things!”

- [Charge back up the stairs]
- “I’ll be back!” [Retreat to recover]

YOU — “I’ll be back!” [Retreat to recover]

THE NARRATOR — Wait, no, where are you going? You can’t just leave! You blinded him in one eye! Sure, you’ve got a lot of broken bones and that arm is going to be useless, but you’ve got the pristine blade now. He can’t hurt you! Not really!

THE NARRATOR — You don’t listen to my words, clearly, because despite my best efforts to get you to see reason you limp from the keep and head down to the boat. Now, I know you think what you’re doing will make you better at this, but if you go back and push your advantage, try to kill him even when you’re bloodied and battered then he won’t be able to stop you. He needs to see you can’t be stopped...

THE NARRATOR — ... and you’re already at the boat. How are you going to be able to do this with just one working arm.

- [Go back]
- [Row]

YOU — [Row]

THE NARRATOR — You hate rowing!

- I hate him more. [Row]
- So? [Row]
- I'll be back. Later. [Row]

YOU — I hate him more. [Row]

THE NARRATOR — Your friends are there. You can't just abandon them.

- I hate him more. [Row]
- So? [Row]
- I'll be back. Later. [Row]

YOU — I hate him more. [Row]

THE NARRATOR — There's no reasoning with you, I see. Fine. Fine. Great! Well, you cross the lake again. Running away. And now you're down an arm. And you've lost a lot of blood. What exactly is your plan right n—

- [Sacrifice hand]

YOU — [Sacrifice hand]

THE NARRATOR — I'm sorry, what—

- "It's not going to heal. [Sacrifice hand]
- "You're just the narrator. Narrate." [Sacrifice hand]
- "Can't you feel the wood? The power in it? He looks out of his castle and fears it." [Sacrifice hand]

YOU — "Can't you feel the wood? The power in it? He looks out of his castle and fears it."
[Sacrifice hand]

THE NARRATOR — No! No, I can't! And you're... you're raising your hand to your mouth and you have a knife! You don't need to do that!

- Hands grow back. [Sacrifice hand]

THE NARRATOR — No! No they don't!

THE NARRATOR — You bite down. Coppery warmth fills your mouth. You can taste your blood. You can taste your flesh. Like some... some kind of beast you tear and you worry and you rip away your own flesh until there's just bone, and then you take the knife and finish it off.

THE NARRATOR — I'm feeling faint.

- [Offer the hand to the wood]

YOU — [Offer the hand to the wood]

THE NARRATOR — What are you doing? Fine! You offer the hand to the wood. It... falls to the ground. While you bleed from your stump. At least try to bandage it or something!

THE NARRATOR — Why did I have to end up with *you*? If you wanted to die, you could have just fought him to the death! I don't understand what you're doing or the logic behind your actions or... or anything!

- (Explore) I'm getting my revenge.
- (Explore) Of course you don't. Maybe it's the light-headedness from the bloodloss, but I know what you are, reflection. And why you can never understand me.
- [Bandage your stump with your dress]
- [Find something to kill and eat]

YOU — Of course you don't. Maybe it's the light-headedness from the bloodloss, but I know what you are, reflection. And why you can never understand me.

THE NARRATOR — ...

- (Explore) I'm getting my revenge.
- [Bandage your stump with your dress]
- [Find something to kill and eat]

YOU — I'm getting my revenge.

THE NARRATOR — ...

- [Bandage your stump with your dress]
- [Find something to kill and eat]

YOU — [Bandage your stump with your dress]

THE NARRATOR — What do you want me to say?

- Nothing. I like the silence.
- Tell me how I get in and scoop out his eyes and make him pay.
- Tell me what happens next. That's your job.

YOU — Tell me how I get in and scoop out his eyes and make him pay.

THE NARRATOR — I can't do that. Seriously. I can't.

THE NARRATOR — I wish I could.

THE NARRATOR — You can't believe how much easier this would be if I could just say 'and then you kill the hero'. But you're the only one who can do that.

- Then say nothing. I like the silence.
- Then tell me what happens next. That's your job.

YOU — Then tell me what happens next. That's your job.

THE NARRATOR — Very well.

THE NARRATOR — You are on a path in the woods. Actually, it's not really a path. It's just the woods. But you can't help but wander over to look at the looming shape of the black castle over the dark waters.

THE NARRATOR — Your stump is hot. It throbs.

THE NARRATOR — Time passes.

THE NARRATOR — You call to the wood and it seems to respond to you. The roots writhe at your will. I don't know how you do it, but you do. You feel his presence looking out from his tower, as you and the woods grow wilder together.

THE NARRATOR — Your stump smells foul. Maybe dresses aren't the most sterile form of bandages.

THE NARRATOR — Time passes.

THE NARRATOR — Your hair grows. Your teeth are sharp. Your nails are claws.

THE NARRATOR — Your stump is infected. The infection spreads.

THE NARRATOR — You weaken. You cannot stand. Everything grows dim.

- Good enough. I'll pick up where I start next time.
- Death doesn't work for me. I learned that already from the other two.
- Be seeing another you, Narrator. I'll have my revenge. No matter what.

YOU — Be seeing another you, Narrator. I'll have my revenge. No matter what.

THE NARRATOR — You could have had it already. Instead you ran away to simmer in your bitterness. Just remember this vow, though, and things will turn out fine for you, even if it doesn't for me.

THE NARRATOR — Everything goes dark and you die.

Chapter 8: CHAPTER II: THE BREATH OF FALSITY

Chapter Summary

YOU — “I’m not adorable!”

THE SECOND ANOMALY — “Eee! You’re really cute!”

THE NARRATOR — I’m sorry, I’m just a little off balance. It’s clear that all this has happened before. There’s a spectre who’s scowling at me-

THE SPECTRE — “I am not a spectre. I am the princess.

THE SPECTRE — “...

THE SPECTRE — “One of the princesses.”

THE NARRATOR — And the damsel over there has started petting you.

THE NARRATOR — You’re on a path in the mountains — wait.

THE NARRATOR — Where are the mountains. Why are we in the woods? That’s not meant to happen yet!

- Well, well, well. Hello again, Narrator. Fancy meeting you here.
- [Ignore the annoying little buzzing voice and call the others to you]
- “I’m going to go murder the hero.” [Go to the lake]

YOU — Well, well, well. Hello again, Narrator. Fancy meeting you here.

THE NARRATOR — Okay. Right. You’re not the princess I was expecting. I mean, you are, but you have a tail and fangs and cat ears and... uh. And you know me. So you’ve done this already. And you know what to expect.

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — Why are we *here*? What did you *do*?

- (Explore) What makes you think I did something?
- The woods are my friend. There is power here. And they’ve tasted my blood.
- Made sure my hand grew back. Made sure I had an edge. Don’t worry. I’m going to pay him back in full. I know not to trust that traitor.
- [Ignore the annoying little buzzing voice and call the others to you]
- “I’m going to go murder the hero.” [Go to the lake]

YOU — What makes you think I did something?

THE NARRATOR — I know I’m just a disembodied voice, but please be sure that I am looking at you very flatly.

THE NARRATOR — I know you did something. I know you're just being coy. What did you do?

- (Explore) Little old me?
- The woods are my friend. There is power here. And they've tasted my blood.
- Made sure my hand grew back. Made sure I had an edge. Don't worry. I'm going to pay him back in full. I know not to trust that traitor.
- [Ignore the annoying little buzzing voice and call the others to you]
- "I'm going to go murder the hero." [Go to the lake]

YOU — Little old me?

THE NARRATOR — No one innocent sounds so self-satisfied. Talk.

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — Please.

- The woods are my friend. There is power here. And they've tasted my blood.
- Made sure my hand grew back. Made sure I had an edge. Don't worry. I'm going to pay him back in full. I know not to trust that traitor.
- [Ignore the annoying little buzzing voice and call the others to you]
- "I'm going to go murder the hero." [Go to the lake]

YOU — Made sure my hand grew back. Made sure I had an edge. Don't worry. I'm going to pay him back in full. I know not to trust that traitor.

THE NARRATOR — Traitor... right. So you trusted him and he betrayed you. And cut off your hand too, from the sounds of things. You know, I know I haven't told you not to trust him because we've only just met, but I'm pretty sure the me you knew before would've told you not to trust him.

THE NARRATOR — So from a certain point of view, I'm entitled to say I told you so. But I won't.

THE NARRATOR — Mostly because the one who told you so wasn't me.

THE NARRATOR — He probably told you so, though.

- (Explore) If you wanted me to trust you, you should have been more trustworthy. It's your fault, not mine.
- (Explore) He's a better fighter than me. I can't kill him with a sword.
- (Explore) He's a better fighter than me. I can't kill him with a sword... but I don't need to.
- (Explore) I'll let you get away with one 'I told you so' if you actually tell me what's going on here.
- [Ignore the annoying little buzzing voice and call the others to you]
- "I'm going to go murder the hero." [Go to the lake]

YOU — I'll let you get away with one 'I told you so' if you actually tell me what's going on here.

THE NARRATOR — That's what I'd like to know! You're meant to be on a path in the mountains! You're not meant to be here. There's a way things are meant to go and you've already broken from it.

THE NARRATOR — Okay. Okay. Deep breaths.

THE NARRATOR — Well, okay. You're on a path in the woods — rather than the mountains where you're *meant to be*.

THE NARRATOR — At the end of the path, there is a lake.

THE NARRATOR — And trapped on the island across the lake, there is a Hero.

THE NARRATOR — You're here to slay him. If you don't, it will be the end of the world — wait, you know all of this already, don't you?

THE NARRATOR — Well, I don't know what's going on here, okay? You've mucked things up. You're in the wrong place, and you've already done this before and you're off the script. And you're smiling at me like you know more about what's going on here than me.

THE NARRATOR — So, in conclusion, get to the island, bump off the hero, and maybe we can stop things getting even worse. Because they will if we don't put these things right.

- (Explore) If you wanted me to trust you, you should have been more trustworthy. It's your fault, not mine.
- (Explore) He's a better fighter than me. I can't kill him with a sword.
- (Explore) He's a better fighter than me. I can't kill him with a sword... but I don't need to.
- [Ignore the annoying little buzzing voice and call the others to you]
- "I'm going to go murder the hero." [Go to the lake]

YOU — If you wanted me to trust you, you should have been more trustworthy. It's your fault, not mine.

THE NARRATOR — I don't know what the other version of me said to you exactly, but I'm pretty sure I would have told you to just go in there and kill him. He was probably very clear.

- (Explore) It's all her fault. She told me to talk to him. I won't make that mistake again.
- (Explore) He's a better fighter than me. I can't kill him with a sword.
- (Explore) He's a better fighter than me. I can't kill him with a sword... but I don't need to.
- [Ignore the annoying little buzzing voice and call the others to you]
- "I'm going to go murder the hero." [Go to the lake]

YOU — It's all her fault. She told me to talk to him. I won't make that mistake again.

THE NARRATOR — Sorry, who? What *her*? What is happening? There shouldn't be anyone else involved in this scenario!

- (Explore) Her. You know, the damsel.
- (Explore) He's a better fighter than me. I can't kill him with a sword.
- (Explore) He's a better fighter than me. I can't kill him with a sword... but I don't need to.
- [Ignore the annoying little buzzing voice and call the others to you]
- "Let me show you." [Call the others to you]
- "I'm going to go murder the hero." [Go to the lake]

YOU — "Let me show you." [Call the others to you]

THE NARRATOR — You... uh, bite into your thumb with those - oh, those are *sharp* teeth and let the drops of blood fall on the bare earth. What's that meant to-

The woods are no longer as they were before. Roots spread far, and it is something that often surprises humans when they realise that two separate shoots come from the same root stock.

THE NARRATOR — What was *that*?

- I don't trust you enough to tell you.
- I don't know.
- That's for me to know, and you to wish you knew.
- [Ignore him]

YOU — That's for me to know, and you to wish you knew.

THE NARRATOR — You are insufferable.

THE FIRST ANOMALY — "Why is she part cat now?"

THE SECOND ANOMALY — "She's adorable!"

THE NARRATOR — ... a g-g-ghost!

THE FIRST ANOMALY — "Yes, yes, I'm a ghost. That doesn't matter. Why is she a cat?"

THE SECOND ANOMALY — "Because she's showing her inner vulnerability even though she hisses and claws and it shows that deep down, at the heart, she's adorable!"

- (Explore) "I'm not adorable!"
- (Explore) "How dare you!"
- (Explore) "I hate you!"
- [Hiss at her]
- [Claw her eyes out]
- [Flex your new power]
- "I don't have to listen to you because you're wrong!" [Turn your back on her]

YOU — "I'm not adorable!"

THE SECOND ANOMALY — “Eee! You’re really cute!”

THE NARRATOR — I’m sorry, I’m just a little off balance. It’s clear that all this has happened before. There’s a spectre who’s scowling at me-

THE SPECTRE — “I am not a spectre. I am the princess.

THE SPECTRE — “...

THE SPECTRE — “One of the princesses.”

THE NARRATOR — And the damsel over there has started petting you.

- (Explore) “How dare you!” [Swipe at her]
- (Explore) “I hate you!”
- [Hiss at her]
- [Claw her eyes out]
- [Flex your new power]
- “I don’t have to listen to you because you’re wrong!” [Turn your back on her]

YOU — “How dare you!” [Swipe at her]

THE DAMSEL — “I can’t help myself! Look at your little kitty mouth and your cute ears and your swooshy tail and your cute little claws!”

THE SPECTRE — “Have you considered not provoking her?”

THE NARRATOR — “Have you considered explaining what is going on?”

THE SPECTRE — “I’ll explain everything truthfully, openly, and honestly when you reciprocate. How about that, narrator?”

THE DAMSEL — “I’m not provoking her! She really is that cute!”

- (Explore) “I hate you!”
- [Hiss at her]
- [Claw her eyes out]
- [Flex your new power]
- “I don’t have to listen to you because you’re wrong!” [Turn your back on her]

YOU — “I hate you!”

THE NARRATOR — The damsel looks shocked. Offended. Mortally wounded.

THE SPECTRE — “No she doesn’t. I’ve seen her mortally wounded before. Her head is much less cracked open than that time.”

THE DAMSEL — “You don’t hate me! We’re all friends!”

- (Explore) “This is all your fault! I trusted you!”

- (Explore) “He’s a backstabbing coward! I didn’t attack him! He attacked me!”
- (Explore) “How can you love him? He’s the worst person ever!”
- [Hiss at her]
- [Claw her eyes out]
- [Flex your new power]
- “I don’t have to listen to you because you’re wrong!” [Turn your back on her]

YOU — “This is all your fault! I trusted you!”

THE DAMSEL — “Don’t say such cruel things!”

THE SPECTRE — “You saw her fall down the stairs, missing a hand, and she screamed at you that she hated you that time and it was your fault. Why are you surprised that she hasn’t forgiven you?”

THE SPECTRE — “Getting killed makes you hold grudges. Trust me.”

THE DAMSEL — “I didn’t!”

THE SPECTRE — “You’re... you.”

THE DAMSEL — “But I’m also sort of you and her! We’re all much more similar than either of you pretend! So you can forgive, and love, and trust even when you’re hurt!

THE DAMSEL — “And it’s hard and it hurts and it means sometimes bad things happen, but you can’t let the bad things define you and ruin everything!”

THE NARRATOR — Things are spiralling out of control. Don’t listen to the damsel. Just get to the castle, kill the hero, and maybe we can stop this.

THE DAMSEL — “No! You mustn’t! You... you must have done something wrong, done something different to what I did, something which made everything go so badly!”

- (Explore) “He’s a backstabbing coward! I didn’t attack him! He attacked me!”
- (Explore) “How can you love him? He’s the worst person ever!”
- [Hiss at her]
- [Claw her eyes out]
- [Flex your new power]
- “I don’t have to listen to you because you’re wrong!” [Turn your back on her]
- “He’s right. Suffering is all that wicked man deserves! And that’s exactly what I’m going to bring him!” [Head to the lake]

YOU — “He’s right. Suffering is all that wicked man deserves! And that’s exactly what I’m going to bring him!” [Head to the lake]

THE DAMSEL — “No!”

THE NARRATOR — “Thank you. At least someone is sensible around here.”

THE SPECTRE — “I’m not sure even you think that. I certainly don’t. “But sensibility is overrated. And there’s something very

THE SPECTRE — cathartic

THE SPECTRE — about killing someone who killed you.”

THE NARRATOR — Well, that was extremely disturbing.

THE SPECTRE — “You normally shriek more when I do that.

THE SPECTRE — “It really is quite cute.”

THE NARRATOR — Please don’t flirt with me. I have enough problems with everything that’s going on here.

THE SPECTRE — Maybe I just feel some affinity for you. You know, with your very handsome voice and the way that you also lack a body. Maybe when this is all over, we can get together and stare at a drink that neither of us can enjoy.

THE NARRATOR — You’re bullying me. You’re bullying me and I won’t stand for it.

THE NARRATOR — Now, if you’ll all let me resume my job...

THE NARRATOR — You set off, bare feet almost silent on the earth. The loam squidges between your toes. It is a longer walk than it should have been through the woods before you find the dark lake. The trees are overgrown and crowd the water’s edge. Thick gnarled trunks thrust their roots down into the dark soil to drink and drink and drink, and they rise up high to fight for the light. There is no beach - just more trees - and the boat is snarled up in a thick growth of tangling vines. There is even snarling vegetation growing from the deadwood that protrudes from the foul-smelling waters.

THE NARRATOR — You’re going to need to free the boat before you cross.

THE DAMSEL — “Maybe you don’t like him - and I’m not saying you don’t have reasons - but maybe you just need time apart. You can... um... stay in the woods and he can have the island! You can have time to...

THE DAMSEL — “... time to heal! To learn forgiveness!”

- (Explore “I like the woods now. They’re so much... more alive.”
- (Explore) “It’s too late for that.”
- (Explore) “Stay apart. Forgiveness...”
- (Explore) “I hate rowing.”
- [Call on the Woods]
- [Free the boat]

YOU — “It’s too late for that.”

THE SPECTRE — “She’s right. That won’t make things right.”

THE DAMSEL — “Murdering will make things even less right! The hatred is a prison. Free yourself from it!”

THE NARRATOR — No, no, murdering will make things right. Go on.

THE NARRATOR — Do it.

- (Explore “I like the woods now. They’re so much... more alive.”
- (Explore) “Stay apart. Forgiveness...”
- (Explore) “I hate rowing.”
- [Call on the Woods]
- [Free the boat]

YOU — “Stay apart. Forgiveness...”

THE DAMSEL — “Yes, it’s a good-”

- “No. I’d rather be dead than forgive him for what he did to me.”

YOU — “No. I’d rather be dead than forgive him for what he did to me.”

THE DAMSEL — “Don’t say that!”

THE NARRATOR — Don’t forgive. Get him.

THE NARRATOR — Do it.

- (Explore “I like the woods now. They’re so much... more alive.”
- (Explore) “I hate rowing.”
- [Call on the Woods]
- [Free the boat]

YOU — [Call on the Woods]

THE NARRATOR — Sorry, excuse me?

- (Explore “I like the woods now. They’re so much... more alive.”
- (Explore) “I hate rowing.”
- [Call on the Woods]
- [Free the boat]

YOU — “I hate rowing.”

THE NARRATOR — “I’m sure rowing doesn’t like you very much either, your highness, but I don’t follow. How does that relate?”

- (Explore “I like the woods now. They’re so much... more alive.”
- [Call on the Woods]
- [Free the boat]

YOU — [Call on the Woods]

THE NARRATOR — Yes, I know what you want, but I don't understand it! It doesn't... you can't—

- [Cross the lake]

YOU — [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — Stop just saying things!

THE SPECTRE — “Let me help.

THE SPECTRE — “The air moves with a deathly sigh. And then you realise that...

THE SPECTRE — “...that it isn't that the air is moving on its own, it's that every tree has moved at once, and taken the air with it. The leaves rustle,

possessed of an intent, and they know you. You are a creature of the Wood. The Lake is not meant to be here, and the Wood knows it. It recalls when there was once no Lake.

THE NARRATOR — Please, stop that! I'm the narrator, you can't—

Roots and branches creak, and they reach out, stretching out like pale hands. They will not touch the water, but they stretch out over the darkness of the Lake, forming a natural bridge. You do not need a boat. It is an intrusion on the world. An attempt to protect you from the darkness that is opposed to everything you are.

That is not necessary. Soon, it will never be necessary again.

You are much stronger than you once were.

THE NARRATOR — Okay, that is quite enough. I have been patient, but I am the narrator here, not you. You're not even meant to be here, spectre. So please, be quiet and let me do my job.

THE NARRATOR — Ahem.

THE NARRATOR — After you do... whatever you did, the air moves in a manner which is, yes, not entirely unlike a deathly sigh. It is like every tree has moved at once and taken the air with it. The leaves rustle and with a slow creaking noise that is at the same time awfully loud the roots and branches stretch out, reaching out in a way that is not at all like hands.

THE NARRATOR — They... look, please stop walking, I haven't caught up with you and you're already on the other side.

THE SPECTRE — “I'm not walking, I'm floating.”

THE DAMSEL — “Stop! Even the mean voice doesn't want you doing this!”

THE NARRATOR — Oh, I very much do, it's just I want you to stop stealing my narration and to let me actually narrate. This is practically a coup!

THE SPECTRE — “Do you want me to point out that the dead trees sticking from out of the dark waters are now snarled in a thick layer of new growth, and that the dark waters are moving as if they're trying to reach up for the wood bridging them?”

THE NARRATOR — Stop that!

THE NARRATOR — Well, you're already on the far side, you've passed the little beach and the utterly rotten remnants of a dock that even now is being torn apart by the newly growing vines and roots. The wind shouldn't blow on the far side of the water, but apparently it does not because it pulses with the almost-breathing of the too-alive trees all around.

THE NARRATOR — The dark stone *should* have loomed over the dark waters and I'd probably have said something about the ill-favoured dark feathered birds, but now the stone is colonised by roots and branches. They force their way in through the open windows of the turrets and dig their roots into the mortar. The great gate has been closed, but the trees are in the process of attacking it already, turning the portcullis into just another trellis.

THE NARRATOR — I practised this line so I'm going to say it even though you clearly know it already: a word of warning, before you continue. The hero will do anything to stop you. To stay in control of the situation. That's why you just need to put an end to him. Don't give him time to think on his feet. Don't let him shape your options. He was a great hero once, after all. And that's why he must die.

THE NARRATOR — There, I said it. Now go kill him, princess.

THE DAMSEL — “You can't get in! The Wood has blocked off the entrances!”

THE SPECTRE — “Do you think that will stop her?”

- [Enter the castle]

YOU — [Enter the castle]

THE NARRATOR — The vines and branches and roots surge forwards, digging into the stone. The sound is terrible, the noise of a century of growth compressed into a minute. The stones fall and the ground bulges, unseen roots undermining the foundations.

THE NARRATOR — Shortly, there is a hole in the walls for you to walk through. But your efforts didn't stop with the walls. The castle town within the outer walls is being consumed by nature too. Cobblestones buckle and shift as the ground underneath lets new growth up. Buildings collapse. Your bare feet step not on stone, but a new carpet of grass and mud and roots.

THE SPECTRE — “This is impressive. I just float around. Rip out a heart or two. Well, just one, but that's really all you need, isn't it?”

THE DAMSEL — “No! No, it’s not! The castle was so beautiful! But you’re tearing it apart out of anger! Why do something so cruel?”

THE NARRATOR — Fat tears run down her face.

- (Explore) [Laugh mockingly]
- (Explore) “Ask him why he stabbed me! But you don’t need to. He’s wicked, wicked, and you can’t trust a thing he says!”
- (Explore) “I like the castle more like this. It isn’t empty anymore.”
- (Explore) “It was his prison! But I will make it his tomb!”
- (Explore) “I thought he was sad and lonely! But he wasn’t! He was a nasty little monster!”
- “I’m back! And look at this! You didn’t kill me! Come on out, don’t be scared. I probably won’t bite!” [Call out to the Hero.]
- “Just watch! Just watch as I get my revenge!” [Find the Hero]
- [Find the Hero]

YOU — [Laugh mockingly]

THE DAMSEL — “You’ve become so cruel!”

- (Explore) “Ask him why he stabbed me! But you don’t need to. He’s wicked, wicked, and you can’t trust a thing he says!”
- (Explore) “I like the castle more like this. It isn’t empty anymore.”
- (Explore) “It was his prison! But I will make it his tomb!”
- (Explore) “I thought he was sad and lonely! But he wasn’t! He was a nasty little monster!”
- “I’m back! And look at this! You didn’t kill me! Come on out, don’t be scared. I probably won’t bite!” [Call out to the Hero.]
- “Just watch! Just watch as I get my revenge!” [Find the Hero]
- [Find the Hero]

YOU — “I’m back! And look at this! You didn’t kill me! Come on out, don’t be scared. I probably won’t bite!”

THE NARRATOR — I’d say that you shouldn’t let him know, but given your forest is tearing apart his castle right now, I think we’re past that point. He knows you’re here, and knows you’re coming for him.

THE NARRATOR — His voice sidles out of the thorn-wrapped keep.

THE HERO — “Hello!”

THE SPECTRE — “He’s responding when you call out. That’s different.”

THE DAMSEL — “Very different.”

- (Explore) “Why? Why did you betray me?”
- (Explore) “Hah! Hah! See how you like what I’ve done to your castle!”

- “Hello? Hello! You wicked, wretched little thing!”
- “‘Come out, come out,’ said the spider to the traitor.”
- “I forgive you.”
- (Lie) “I forgive you.”
- “Ready or not, I’m going to find you.” [Hunt him down]
- [Hunt him down]

YOU — “Why? Why did you betray me?”

THE HERO — “Betray? Oh no, I think we got off on the wrong foot.

THE HERO — “You entered my room with your sword drawn. I just defended myself.

THE HERO — “But if you don’t mean to kill me, I think we might be able to make a deal. Might be able to start things over again.”

THE DAMSEL — “See! He isn’t so bad!”

THE NARRATOR — I can’t believe you’re that naive.

THE SPECTRE — “I hate agreeing with the narrator, even if he is cute.”

THE NARRATOR — Stop that.

THE SPECTRE — “Never.

THE SPECTRE — “But he’s right. Can’t you hear how untrustworthy he is?”

THE DAMSEL — “You can’t judge people by how they look or sound! Maybe this one just has a voice that always sounds like he’s trying to play the angles and ingratiate himself only to draw a knife whenever he’s on top! Have you ever thought of that?”

THE SPECTRE — “... are you feeling alright?”

THE NARRATOR — She’s just naive and foolish. And just to clarify, yes, you should probably trust that the person who sounds like he’s going to betray you is going to betray you.

THE DAMSEL — “No, don’t you see! I didn’t draw my sword! You did! You two only got off on the wrong foot because he saw you had a weapon! Now you can talk it out!”

- (Explore) “Hah! Hah! See how you like what I’ve done to your castle!”
- “Hello? Hello! You wicked, wretched little thing!”
- “‘Come out, come out,’ said the spider to the traitor.”
- “I forgive you.”
- (Lie) “I forgive you.”
- “Sure. Let’s talk it out, hero.” [Get him to come to you]
- “Ready or not, I’m going to find you.” [Hunt him down]
- [Hunt him down]

YOU — “‘Come out, come out,’ said the spider to the traitor.”

THE DAMSEL — “Well, you’re talking to him! But I think we need to work on your tone!”

THE SPECTRE — “Why are you even trying, cutie?”

THE DAMSEL — “Because we should never give up on hope! We should never give up on love!”

THE NARRATOR — Ignoring that inanity, the hero shows his face. His clothes are shabby and asymmetrical, stained on the left, tattered on the right, but both sides show the sign of hasty repairs. And that same asymmetry extends to everything about him. The talons on one hand are long and sharp, while the others are worried to the quick. The greying at his temples is only on his left side. Even his right shoulder is raised slightly higher than the other, despite his clear efforts to appear on the straight and narrow.

THE NARRATOR — And more than that, there’s the look in his eyes and the grin painted across his beak. The look of a man who believes, sincerely, that he’s done nothing wrong and can talk his way out of any mess he’s gotten himself into.

THE NARRATOR — Isn’t he *punchable*?

THE HERO — “I really am sorry, you know. I know, I know, you might think I’m just apologising for the sake of it.

THE HERO — “Saying it to get us off on the right foot this time.

THE HERO — “But I really do mean it. I’m sorry about last time.”

THE SPECTRE — “No, you’re not.”

THE HERO — “I am! Look, I made a mistake. We all make mistakes, right? I’m sure you’ve all made mistakes.

THE HERO — “Also, not sure what your ghost is doing here, or the one in the push-up bra, but the more the merrier, I always say.”

THE DAMSEL — “I do not wear a push-up bra!”

THE HERO — “Coulda fooled me. By which I mean, of course, what, no never, I can’t believe you took that from my words. For shame. I’d never slander your beauty like that. It’s totally natural! From all three of you! Whether you’re a pretty little kitty, a cute floating ghost, or wearing a fetchingly low-cut dress! You’re the boss. Which comes from being the princess.”

- (Explore) “I am not a pretty little kitty!”
- (Explore) “You’re being suspiciously accommodating. You’re plotting something.”
- (Explore) “You killed me!”
- (Explore) “I know you have a knife. Throw it away!”
- “If you’re sorry, then bare that throat and let me cut it. Prove it”

- “The only mistake I ever made was thinking she was right about you. And I'm not going to make the same mistake twice.”
- [Have the Wood grab him]
- [Claw out his eyes]

YOU — “I am not a pretty little kitty!”

THE HERO — “Sorry, sorry, that was my mistake. My mistake. Sure, you might be decidedly feline, and you might be gorgeous, and you might be shorter than me, but you are definitely not a pretty little kitty!”

THE SPECTRE — “I’m not impressed. I’ve had a man tell me I’m the only thing that makes him feel alive.”

THE HERO — “Well, how about I make you feel alive, cute stuff?”

THE SPECTRE — “Then I crushed his heart in my hand.”

THE NARRATOR — He looks momentarily put back off by that, but grins and shrugs.

THE HERO — “Hey, who am I to tell a lady how to enjoy herself?”

- (Explore) “You’re being suspiciously accommodating. You’re plotting something.”
- (Explore) “You killed me!”
- (Explore) “I know you have a knife. Throw it away!”
- “If you're sorry, then bare that throat and let me cut it. Prove it”
- “The only mistake I ever made was thinking she was right about you. And I'm not going to make the same mistake twice.”
- [Have the Wood grab him]
- [Claw out his eyes]

YOU — “You’re being suspiciously accommodating. You’re plotting something.”

THE HERO — “Here’s the thing. You shouldn’t be here. Neither of us should be here. I shouldn’t be trapped here, and you shouldn’t be here trying to kill me. Which means I figure someone is setting this up. And you’re the one who’s in a much better position than me to take a look at it.

THE HERO — “Yes, I might have tried to kill you, but I thought you were here to kill me. So who’s really to blame here?”

THE HERO — “That’s right. Neither of us. Neither of us are to blame. The one to blame is the one coming up with this scenario. And both of us should be getting our revenge. Or, well, you can get your revenge and I’ll help you.”

THE NARRATOR — Don’t trust him. Don’t listen to him. Kill him.

- (Explore) “You killed me!”
- (Explore) “I know you have a knife. Throw it away!”
- “If you're sorry, then bare that throat and let me cut it. Prove it”

- “The only mistake I ever made was thinking she was right about you. And I'm not going to make the same mistake twice.”
- “I believe you. Our real enemy is the one who set this up.”
- (Lie) “I believe you. Our real enemy is the one who set this up.” [Murder the Hero]
- [Have the Wood grab him]
- [Claw out his eyes]

YOU — “You killed me!”

THE HERO — “No, I didn’t.”

- “Yes you did!”
- “You as good as did. I died of the infection. It’s still your fault!”

YOU — “You as good as did. I died of the infection. It’s still your fault!”

THE HERO — “No, I didn’t. Think about it. If you were dead, you’d be a corpse.”

THE SPECTRE — “I’m not a corpse. And I’m definitely dead.”

THE HERO — “... or a ghost, which is basically the same thing. Can’t forget about the ghosts. Undead is still dead, right?”

THE HERO — “Well, when you think about it, whatever you are now, you’re not dead. So I can’t have killed you, directly or indirectly. Which means you’re a person that death doesn’t exactly apply to, so you can’t be holding a grudge about things like I actually killed you.

THE HERO — “Wouldn’t be fair for you to be killing me when you can’t seem to actually die. Come on, girls. Be reasonable.”

THE DAMSEL — “He’s right! I died too, and I didn’t really die.”

THE SPECTRE — “I did.”

THE DAMSEL — “That... doesn’t make sense. Maybe you need to just try harder and you can be alive again!”

THE NARRATOR — He’s trying to distract you. He takes a step closer.

- (Explore) “I know you have a knife. Throw it away!”
- “If you're sorry, then bare that throat and let me cut it. Prove it”
- “The only mistake I ever made was thinking she was right about you. And I'm not going to make the same mistake twice.”
- “I believe you. Our real enemy is the one who set this up.”
- (Lie) “I believe you. Our real enemy is the one who set this up.” [Murder the Hero]
- [Have the Wood grab him]
- [Claw out his eyes]

YOU — “I know you have a knife. Throw it away!”

THE HERO — “Oh, this knife? The one in my hand. Don’t worry, it’s not for you.

THE HERO — “See, I’ve put some things together. I kill you, you come back. Odds are, if you kill me, I’ll also come back. So we’ve really got to talk - yeah, talk, and cooperate and find a way out of the conundrum we’re in. And go after the real enemy.

THE HERO — “This whole killing thing isn’t going to work.”

THE SPECTRE — “It’ll work.”

THE NARRATOR — What she said.

THE DAMSEL — “It’ll work, but w-we don’t want it to! Maybe he was angry, he was lashing out, he was trapped! I know I’d do anything to get out of a jail I was trapped in! Even bite off my own arm if it came to it! After all, I’ve got at least one more arm, right!”

THE HERO — “See, the lady gets it.”

THE DAMSEL — “Don’t call me ‘the lady’. You are *not* my love. My love died for me. He was br-brave and he sacrificed himself and he tried to put things right. You’re not my love. You’re hers. And you’re about to lose her because you couldn’t trust her.”

THE SPECTRE — “I’d say he lost her already.”

- (Explore) “I mean it! Throw that knife away or else!”
- “If you’re sorry, then bare that throat and let me cut it. Prove it”
- “The only mistake I ever made was thinking she was right about you. And I’m not going to make the same mistake twice.”
- “I believe you. Our real enemy is the one who set this up.”
- (Lie) “I believe you. Our real enemy is the one who set this up.” [Murder the Hero]
- [Have the Wood grab him]
- [Claw out his eyes]

YOU — (Lie) “I believe you. Our real enemy is the one who set this up.”

THE HERO — “Now you’re speaking my language. Common gain, mutual benefit, keeping your friends close...”

THE NARRATOR — You haven’t ever seen something move so quickly. All that lop-sided, grinning ease is there one moment and suddenly it’s revealed that it was really covering up tension like a coiled spring. His bent knee is extending, his crooked shoulder straightening out, his arm outstretched and at the end of it it is the pristine blade.

THE DAMSEL — “Bu-”

THE NARRATOR — And then he stabs you in the heart.

- No he doesn’t. A vine got in the way.
- [Tear Him Apart]
- [Die]

YOU — No he doesn't. A vine got in the way.

THE NARRATOR — Well, sort of. Yes, a vine got in the way, but the pristine knife went through it. It's in your chest right now.

THE NARRATOR — I can't change that.

THE NARRATOR — But yes, we can all see that it's lodged in the vine. And in your chest. Which is behind the vine.

THE NARRATOR — It's definitely stuck, though. He tugs back, and your hand closes around his wrist. All his strength is in the stab, in that one opportunistic moment. Retracting... well that's harder.

THE HERO — "Oops."

THE SPECTRE — "Ooops indeed."

THE DAMSEL — "How *dare* you!"

THE HERO — He's smiling, but there's fear in his eyes.

THE HERO — "My hand slipped. No hard feelings, right?"

THE NARRATOR — He's scared. You're bleeding and maybe you might not have long left, but you can still end him. And then, I don't know, use whatever control you have over the woods to stop the bleeding? You said you regrew a hand.

THE HERO — "I don't suppose you'd mind letting go of my hand? I promise I won't stab you. Again. I won't stab you again."

THE NARRATOR — But the important thing is that he needs to die.

- "Okay. I forgive you."
- (Explore) "Why?"
- "Hard feelings." [Tear Him Apart]
- "No hard feelings, right." [Tear Him Apart]
- "... " [Tear Him Apart]

YOU — "Why?"

THE HERO — "It wasn't my fault! You were just standing so close and you had that lovely stabbable heart and it's not *my* fault that vine got in the way.

THE HERO — "If it hadn't, you'd be dead and I'd be walking out of here, laughing as I did.

THE HERO — "You'd have done the same given the chance. You *were* going to do the same. We're really just the same."

THE NARRATOR — He gives an easygoing shrug.

THE HERO — “But I see now that maybe you were better defended than I thought - which was really rude of you to not tell me - and so maybe moving on I guess you’re the boss.”

- “Okay. I forgive you.”
- (Explore) “So if we’re so much alike, what do you think I’m going to do next?”
- (Explore) “We are nothing alike, you evil thing!”
- “Hard feelings.” [Tear Him Apart]
- “No hard feelings, right.” [Tear Him Apart]
- “...” [Tear Him Apart]

YOU — “No hard feelings, right.”

THE NARRATOR — Thorny vines lash out. They fasten around each of his limbs, and he screams as the barbs dig deep.

THE NARRATOR — But he only has a moment because then the vines yank with all the force of a season’s worth of growth. Bones crack and sinews tear and like a wishbone he is torn in half. And the vines and roots don’t stop there, fed by your hate and pain, and they wrap what remains up, tearing and shredding and grinding until you lose sight of everything that remains.

THE NARRATOR — All that is left is a splattering blood and feathers.

THE SPECTRE — “It couldn’t have happened to a nicer bird. At least my one was never less than honest as to what he was.”

THE NARRATOR — The damsel rushes over to catch you as you stagger. You feel light headed, and the world spins. The blade punctured a lung, even if he missed your heart.

THE DAMSEL — “No no no, you’re bleeding! Some of the blood is yours! Let me just-”

THE NARRATOR — She tears off the hem of her dress.

THE DAMSEL — “-good! Bandages should have ruffles too! Let’s get the knife out!”

- “Feeling... faint.”
- “Isn’t there something... about not... removing... from the wound?”
- “Mine.” [Refuse to let go of the knife]

YOU — “Mine.” [Refuse to let go of the knife]

THE DAMSEL — “That’s not very helpful! We have to stop the bleeding! Tell her, narrator! Do something useful for once in your life! Narrate up something I can use to save her life!”

THE SPECTRE — “...”

THE DAMSEL — “...”

- “...”
- “He’s gone.”

YOU — “...”

THE DAMSEL — “Is he gone?”

THE SPECTRE — “I think he’s gone. Well, see you two on the other side. And you’ll get to meet a stranger you know very well, kitty.

THE SPECTRE — “Or maybe two of them.”

The narrator is gone. What remains of the hero are spread across the princess and the floor and the wood, and the red turns black. It spreads and spreads and spreads, as dark as his feathers, and there are eyes gleaming in it, obsidian and agate and malice. There are hands. There are talons. There are blades.

- [Escape]
- [Surrender]

YOU — [Escape]

There is no escape.

Chapter 9: INTERMISSION: THE LONG QUIET III

Chapter Summary

THE WITCH — “What’s this new nasty voice?”

THE DAMSEL — “That’s the other voice we hear when we’re here! It’s not the Narrator voice! It’s the other voice! I think she’s a nicer voice, even if she uses harder words!”

THE SPECTRE — “She isn’t as cute, though. She doesn’t respond to teasing at all.”

Once again the dark place is waiting for you. No trees; no hills; no castle. The lake around you is as black and tar and hungry. The boat is dark and creaks under your weight whenever you shift.

There are two hands before you, pale and bloodless and perfectly formed.

- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- (Explore) Who are you? I don’t trust you!
- (Explore) Those aren’t my hands! Mine grew back!
- Oh, I got him. I got him good! [Dance in glee]
- I got his shiny knife! [Brandish your pristine blade]
- [Try to escape]

YOU — Oh, I got him. I got him good! [Dance in glee]

The boat rocks precipitously as you cavort in wicked glee.

To fall into these waters would be a fate worse than death. Death is just the change from one state to another. It is the way the world should be, but there is nothing about this place that is what should be.

- (Explore) You don’t get to tell me what to do!
- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- (Explore) Who are you? I don’t trust you!
- (Explore) Those aren’t my hands! Mine grew back!
- I got his shiny knife! [Brandish your pristine blade]
- [Try to escape]

YOU — You don’t get to tell me what to do!

No instruction was conveyed. To fall into these waters would be anathema to all that you are and all you could be. You would only be one thing, and that would be nothing.

- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- (Explore) Who are you? I don't trust you!
- (Explore) Those aren't my hands! Mine grew back!
- I got his shiny knife! [Brandish your pristine blade]
- [Try to escape]

YOU — Who are you? I don't trust you!

You have been here before. You will know how things should go, if you take the hands.

- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- (Explore) Those aren't my hands! Mine grew back!
- I got his shiny knife! [Brandish your pristine blade]
- [Try to escape]

YOU — I got his shiny knife! [Brandish your pristine blade]

...

- (Explore) Well? Aren't you going to say something?
- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- (Explore) Those aren't my hands! Mine grew back!
- [Try to escape]

YOU — Well? Aren't you going to say something?

Sorrow is a blade, and so is regret; to hold it too closely is to be cut yourself. To trap yourself in thoughts that will not free you is a way to grow, but not one which brings comfort.

- (Explore) I won't just do what you say! Especially not if it means picking up hands!
- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- (Explore) Those aren't my hands! Mine grew back!
- [Try to escape]
- [Take the hands]

YOU — Those aren't my hands! Mine grew back!

These hands are not the hand you lost. They are the hands you have lost. They are an inheritance which belongs to you. They are the map that will guide you down the streets of the unlit city of your consciousness. They are the key that will open the door of escape from this dark place.

Take the hands.

- (Explore) I won't just do what you say! Especially not if it means picking up hands!
- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- [Try to escape]
- [Take the hands]
- "I'm not doing it because you told me to!" [Take the hands]

- [Warily poke one of the hands]

YOU — [Try to escape]

There is no escape.

Take the hands.

- (Explore) I won't just do what you say! Especially not if it means picking up hands!
- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- [Try to escape]
- [Take the hands]
- "I'm not doing it because you told me to!" [Take the hands]
- [Warily poke one of the hands]

YOU — [Try to escape]

As you were just told, there is no escape.

Take the hands.

- (Explore) I won't just do what you say! Especially not if it means picking up hands!
- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- [Try really hard to escape]
- [Take the hands]
- "I'm not doing it because you told me to!" [Take the hands]
- [Warily poke one of the hands]

YOU — [Try really hard to escape]

How? There is no escape.

Take the hands.

- (Explore) I won't just do what you say! Especially not if it means picking up hands!
- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- [Try really hard to escape by conjuring up the Woods]
- [Take the hands]
- "I'm not doing it because you told me to!" [Take the hands]
- [Warily poke one of the hands]

YOU — [Try really hard to escape by conjuring up the Woods]

The Woods are not here. You are on a vast dark body of water. There are no trees here.

Take the hands.

- (Explore) I won't just do what you say! Especially not if it means picking up hands!
- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- (Explore) "I hate this place!"

- [Take the hands]
- “I’m not doing it because you told me to!” [Take the hands]
- [Warily poke one of the hands]

YOU — “I hate this place!”

You are right to do so. There is only one way out of here.

Take the hands.

- (Explore) I won’t just do what you say! Especially not if it means picking up hands!
- (Explore) Another one of his traps!
- [Sulk]
- [Take the hands]
- “I’m not doing it because you told me to!” [Take the hands]
- [Warily poke one of the hands]

YOU — “I’m not doing it because you told me to!” [Take the hands]

She knows you. You tried to run from her, but she was always waiting for you with kindness and care. With a touch, she is part of you - except that was always the case, was it not? Memory returns.

You are more than you were before. And you understand that you are not the one who was betrayed and the one who obtained her revenge - just as you were not the ones who came before you.

THE SPECTRE — “You are *frustrating*.”

THE DAMSEL — “Hurrah! She’s with us now! Now we’ve got the kitty-cat with us! Hi Kitty!”

THE WITCH — “I hate both of you. And I don’t like you either! How dare you pretend to be me! Get that look off your faces!”

The voices are shoots, erupting from the dark soil of your consciousness. Their rootstock is growing, and their buds are opening. More voices, more lights, more than you once were. More routes you have walked down the clouded streets of who you are.

What will you be when this process is complete? Who can say? Not you, for already you are so much more than what you once were. Many pairs of eyes bring many perspectives and you can already look at yourself from many more angles.

THE WITCH — “What’s this new nasty voice?”

THE DAMSEL — “That’s the other voice we hear when we’re here! It’s not the Narrator voice! It’s the other voice! I think she’s a nicer voice, even if she uses harder words!”

THE SPECTRE — “She isn’t as cute, though. She doesn’t respond to teasing at all.”

- “She is a friend.”
- “She is a friend. I think.”
- “Oh, thank you! Am I the only one who really likes the Narrator’s voice?”
- “I don’t trust her, but there isn’t anyone else on our side in this place.”

YOU — “She is a friend. I think.”

They make themselves known to you.

THE SPECTRE — “That could have gone better.”

The deep-set eyes of the spectre are thoughtful. Her life was so short, and now her death is much longer. She is thinking and learning. She is a testament to the fact that death is not the end.

THE DAMSEL — “That was awful! Oh, I feel so bad! My hero was soft and kind and loving, but the poor kitty got a man who was just the worst!”

The damsel’s fire has not been doused by her experience. She may be a bride widowed at the altar and her attempts to bring happiness to another have reddened her eyes and marked her face with tears, but it has not broken her. Hope and naivete are sisters in the eyes of some, but she will never agree.

THE WITCH — “Do you think she’s right? I don’t. Being party to murder and betrayal is wrong, whether you claim you’re doing it for good reasons. Or if you believe in love. Or that kind of nonsense.”

This one has had her hopes obscured by stormclouds of betrayal and bitterness. For just a moment she thought she had found love, and then it was snatched away from her by the hand that offered it.

Her eyes are keen and suspicious, her lips want to be pursed in suspicion but are just as willing to smile, her hair is a ragged mane that still shows traces of former discipline. She is feral, but for all her protestations she is not truly a wild animal.

She is a witch, a creature of boundaries, living in the liminal space between love and hate, night and day, freedom and captivity. And no matter how much she wishes she was a creature of just one world, she will never escape her duality.

THE WITCH — “Oh, I don’t like this one! I don’t like this wicked, accusatory voice at all!”

THE SPECTRE — “She didn’t accuse you of anything.”

THE WITCH — “I am not a creature of dualities! I’m me! I’m strong!”

THE DAMSEL — “It’s okay. She’s a mean voice, but she’s usually right. Also she always says this kind of thing. I just don’t listen to her and I’m much happier that way!”

THE WITCH — “And another thing! Who’s she? The one who was thinking she’s me, only she was making a fool of herself and I’d never do that!”

THE SPECTRE — “Do you ever listen to yourself?”

THE DAMSEL — “She’s us! Like we’re all us! We’re always us!”

- “She’s right. We’re all princesses here.”
- “You’d make exactly the same decisions as I did, because you were making them too!”
- “I was you. Just like I was her.”

YOU — “You’d make exactly the same decisions as I did, because you were making them too!”

THE WITCH — “No I wouldn’t! I would have simply made the right decisions! Like trusting that awful wretched man! I wouldn’t have done that if I hadn’t had you there!”

THE SPECTRE — “She was thinking she was you until she took the hands back. Those are the decisions you would have made.”

THE WITCH — “No they aren’t!”

THE DAMSEL — “Please don’t fight! This isn’t a large boat and it’s getting more and more crowded!”

You are more than you once were. Dividing again and again, a mitosis of perspectives and ideas and identities. The plant reaches out towards the sun by spreading out its branches, and each branch allows more energy to be channeled to the rootstock. So the tree grows.

THE WITCH — “That isn’t helping matters!”

- (Explore) “That’s just how she communicates, I’m afraid.”
- (Explore) “I don’t know who she is. But I think she’s the Narrator for this place.”
- (Explore) “I don’t know who she is. I don’t think she’s the same thing as the Narrator, though.”
- “I’m sorry. It all went wrong. I... I know how you feel. It hurts, doesn’t it?”
- “I’m sick of your nonsense! Stop being so shouty! We’re stuck in this together, so stop taking it out on us!”

YOU — “I’m sorry. It all went wrong. I... I know how you feel. It hurts, doesn’t it?”

The witch’s tail straightens out in shock, and her arms flinch in a defensive guard.

THE WITCH — “Who says that kind of thing? What are you playing? What’s your game? And for that question, who *are* you?”

THE WITCH — “I don’t trust you!”

- “It hurt *us* when he betrayed us.”
- “Trust me or don’t. It’s not up to me. But I trust you. Because I was you.”
- “We’re all us.”
- [Hug the Witch]

YOU — “Trust me or don’t. It’s not up to me. But I trust you. Because I was you.”

THE WITCH — “Well, I don’t trust you! You could be planning anything! And what do you mean, you were me?”

THE SPECTRE — “She’s right. First time I met her, she still thought she was me.”

THE DAMSEL — “Then she thought she was me, but remembered she’d also been Spooky when she picked up the hand. And now she’s also been you, Kitty!”

THE SPECTRE — “We’re stuck together, now. We’re all princesses, I think. And she’s... something. That’s also us.”

THE DAMSEL — “Not a word from you, other-Narrator. We don’t need some confusing thing about cities that are lit up and have trees and are also oceans! We’re girl-bonding!”

THE SPECTRE — “What does that mean?”

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t know, but it feels like the right thing to say!”

There is a small sound from the Witch, and her wiry arm hug herself.

THE WITCH — *sniff*

THE WITCH — “No there isn’t! How dare you say I’m crying!”

- (Explore) “She never said you were crying.”
- (Explore) “That’s right. You’re not crying.”
- (Explore) “It hurt. When he betrayed us.”
- “I need a hug.” [Lie]
- [Hug the Witch]
- “We should prepare. If things go as they did before, the mirror should be close.”

YOU — “It hurt. When he betrayed us.”

THE WITCH — “Tssk. Don’t think you know me, you wretched thing!”

- “I know you like no one else does.”
- “I was with you every step you took. I know you.”
- “You’re right. But I know it hurt me.”
- [Hug the Witch]

YOU — “You’re right. But I know it hurt me.”

Her sharp, glaring eyes soften.

- “I wanted to believe in love.”
- “I thought he... was telling the truth.”
- “It just seemed we had a connection. But then there was just blood. And hatred.”
- “It doesn’t matter. We can’t understand each other.”

- [Hug the Witch]

YOU — “It just seemed we had a connection. But then there was just blood. And hatred.”

THE WITCH — “I believed the idiot. Why did I do that?”

- “I wanted to believe.”
- “Is believing in love so wrong?”
- “He turned on us.”
- [Hug the Witch]

YOU — “Is believing in love so wrong?”

THE WITCH — “I... wish it hadn’t been. Why did I look fondly on such an awful, wretched man!”

- (Explore) “Do you want a hug?”
- “It’s not your fault.”
- “It’s his fault.”
- “I’ve known love and I’ve known betrayal. Love was... nicer.”
- [Hug the Witch]

YOU — “Do you want a hug?”

THE WITCH — ...

THE WITCH — ...

THE WITCH — “... yes.”

Your embrace is a wary thing, two wounded beasts punctured by thorns that hurt themselves as much as they hurt the other, yet taking some comfort in shared pain and shared warmth. She is prickly and she smells of loam and wet fur, but there is a soft warmth there.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m going to let you move your mouth now, cutie.”

THE DAMSEL — “You didn’t have to stop me from talking.”

THE SPECTRE — “I think I did. You’d have made her angry by interrupting their moment. But as for you...

Her vaporous form drifts in front of you.

THE SPECTRE — “Are you going to try to resolve all our inter-princess conflicts by hugging?”

THE DAMSEL — “I think it’s the best idea ever!”

THE WITCH — “You *think*? Don’t lie to me!”

THE SPECTRE — “Be nice to Cutie, Kitty. She had her brains bashed in by a falling ceiling.”

THE WITCH — “That makes almost *too* much sense.”

THE DAMSEL — “I think it’s the best idea because the world out here is dark and horrible and mean, but with love and friendship on our side, we’ll always have a flame to light our way! And hugging is done with arms and she likes arms even more than we do!”

The leaves of a tree fight a vicious and murderous war for the light, preventing others from growing too close to them, but the tree relies on that competition to take its form. There is an emergent pattern from the anarchy of the cell.

THE DAMSEL — “See! She agrees!”

THE DAMSEL — ...

THE DAMSEL — “I think!”

With a dull thud your boat hits something, nearly tossing you into the water. As the tail of the witch fluffs up, the other two recoil.

THE SPECTRE — “Oh no. It’s that mirror.”

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t want to do it again! Don’t make me beat her to death with an oar! Not again!”

THE WITCH — “What? Why would you beat her to death with an oar?”

THE DAMSEL — “It was really bad! You see—”

THE WITCH — “I’d use a knife to kill her.

THE WITCH — “Like this one!

THE WITCH — “The one I have in my hand!”

THE SPECTRE — “Put that away. Some of us died to a knife that’s basically the same as that one.”

You reach out, running your hands over the surface. As far as you can reach, nothing but the cold smoothness of glass. Once again, you have found the mirror that is half of this world.

You look, and meet the eyes of your dark reflection.

THE SPECTRE — “Oh, no. No no no.”

THE DAMSEL — “What’s the problem?”

THE SPECTRE — “I hate this mirror. Don’t break it. Remember what happened last time.”

- (Explore) [Consider your reflection]
- (Explore) [Call out]
- (Explore) [Remember]
- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Remember]

There are lit alleyways where once there was nothing, and all this makes it more clear to you how much was lost. When you were ignorant, you were unformed and unilluminated; now you are aware of how much a lessened being you are. You were once vast beyond comprehension; now you are just threefold.

There was never a voice in your head before. Never *a* voice. There were too many voices. Endless susurrations, a refraction of a thousand thousand thousand faces. The echoes of voices raised in a great cathedral. But there was nothing like the Narrator. Nothing that told you what to do.

He is something new. Almost new. Because there is a glimpse of something brief and unilluminated, something you cannot discern yet. Perhaps you will, when your mind burns more fiercely.

THE WITCH — “What happened last time?”

THE WITCH — “Apart from, apparently, the idiot who pads her dress using a very substandard murder weapon?”

THE DAMSEL — “I do not pad my dress!”

- (Explore) [Consider your reflection]
- (Explore) [Call out]
- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Consider your reflection]

The lines thicken. Connections form. What was once a sketch gains form, depth, dimensionality. And it is still an unreal thing. You are still stars in the midnight sky, still a layer of ice on a lake at dawn, still the puff of breath on a winter’s morning.

If you are becoming, what were you before? What will you be when metamorphosis is complete? Are you a caterpillar or a chrysalis?

THE SPECTRE — “This is not the time! There are things behind the mirror!”

THE DAMSEL — “They’re related to him.”

THE SPECTRE — “... yes. You’re right. But how did you know that?”

- (Explore) [Call out]
- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Call out]

The torch is now a bonfire. You lick at the darkness around you. You are grit in an oyster, a match too close to the hand of a vast and terrible being.

You are growing large enough to be noticed. But still too small to survive.

THE DAMSEL — “There’s a hole in the darkness where my heart should be. I *know* it.”

THE WITCH — “Ah ha.

THE WITCH — “I knew he wouldn’t die that easily. Of course he has a trick up his sleeve.”

- [Break the mirror]

YOU — [Break the mirror]

THE SPECTRE — “Stop doing that! You do it every time!”

You slam a fist into the mirror. Then another and another, and another and another.

THE DAMSEL — “It’s scary!”

THE WITCH — “Stop her rocking the boat or we’ll all go in!”

Then a crack appears

Faster this time, and more cleanly.

THE SPECTRE — “What makes you want to do this? What’s on the other side that you’re trying to reach?

THE SPECTRE — “Are you trying to escape? Or free whatever you see and we don’t?”

Once more he is there; dark feathered, dark eyed, and sad. A lord of ash and cinders. He is alone, and he is a dammed lake that cannot flow. He is drying up.

- “You!”
- [Say nothing]
- [Break the Glass and Murder the Hero]
- [Touch the glass]

YOU — [Touch the glass]

You touch the glass, and he raises his taloned hand, stretching out. His hand touches the cracked glass.

THE HERO — “You’re back.”

- “Hi!”
- “Hello.”

- “Greetings.”

YOU — “Hello.”

THE HERO — “‘Hello’. It’s just one word and yet-”

THE HERO — ...

THE HERO — “I’ve thought about you. For so very long. I remember your voice. It was so dangerous. You sounded like you were in charge. And I saw you and you were so coldly beautiful.”

THE HERO — ...

THE HERO — “Now you’re here. Almost close enough to touch.”

- (Explore) “You’re the Hero!”
- (Explore) “You’re the Hero - except, no. Something’s different.”
- (Explore) “You should be in the castle! How are you here?”
- (Explore) “Do you think I’d ever let you touch me after everything you’ve done?”
- (Explore) “You died! I... she... killed you!”
- (Explore) “Why don’t you stay dead? Why don’t *I* stay dead?”
- (Explore) “I need answers!”
- (Explore) “When was the first time we met? For you, that is. I’ve met you for the first time several times.”
- (Explore) “Are you me?”
- (Explore) “Last time you said you were sorry. Why?”
- (Explore) “You sound familiar somehow-”
- (Explore) “You’re here? Is the Narrator also here?”
- (Explore) “Where is this place?”
- (Explore) “What is this place?”
- (Explore) “Is this place also the castle?”
- (Explore) “Do you love me?”
- (Explore) “Why am I trapped here?”
- (Explore) “Why do I exist?”
- (Explore) “What did you *do*?”
- (Explore) “Who am I? Why am I growing?”
- (Explore) “Come out here, you coward!”
- (Explore) “I’m going to kill you. I’m going to get through the glass and I’m going to kill you.”
- (Explore) “Who are the other voices? The big ones?”
- (Explore) “Why are there more versions of me?”
- (Explore) “Do you know who sent me to kill you?”
- [Wait silently]
- [Break the glass]

YOU — “You’re the Hero - except, no. Something’s different.”

THE HERO — “Yes. I am. And yes, I suppose it is different for you.”

His voice is rusty from lack of use. He struggles to meet your eyes.

- (Explore) “What’s different, then?”
- (Explore) “You should be in the castle! How are you here?”
- (Explore) “Do you think I’d ever let you touch me after everything you’ve done?”
- (Explore) “You died! I... she... killed you!”
- (Explore) “Why don’t you stay dead? Why don’t *I* stay dead?”
- (Explore) “I need answers!”
- (Explore) “When was the first time we met? For you, that is. I’ve met you for the first time several times.”
- (Explore) “Are you me?”
- (Explore) “Last time you said you were sorry. Why?”
- (Explore) “You sound familiar somehow-”
- (Explore) “You’re here? Is the Narrator also here?”
- (Explore) “Where is this place?”
- (Explore) “What is this place?”
- (Explore) “Is this place also the castle?”
- (Explore) “Do you love me?”
- (Explore) “Why am I trapped here?”
- (Explore) “Why do I exist?”
- (Explore) “Who am I? Why am I growing?”
- (Explore) “Come out here, you coward!”
- (Explore) “I’m going to kill you. I’m going to get through the glass and I’m going to kill you.”
- (Explore) “Who are the other voices? The big ones?”
- (Explore) “Why are there more versions of me?”
- (Explore) “Do you know who sent me to kill you?”
- [Wait silently]
- [Break the glass]

YOU — “You should be in the castle! How are you here?”

THE HERO — “I am in the castle. I’m not *here*-here, not in the way you are.”

THE HERO — ...

THE HERO — “Insofar as you’re anywhere at all. It’s kind of complicated.”

Then—

Eyes.

He is gone before you can ask him another question. Now the eyes have returned, the stars of this midnight reality.

THE DAMSEL — “Oh no no, please wake up!”

THE SPECTRE — “She’s back.”

THE WITCH — “What is this? I don’t like this.”

They are closer than they were before, and there is a hint of form to their darkness. But this is true; what they are is agony to what you are. This will hurt.

- “What are you?”
- “Where did he go?”
- “Hello.”
- [Stay silent]
- [Hide]

YOU — [Hide]

There is nowhere to hide. Not on a boat on a featureless lake.

SOMETHING FORLORN — “There it is again. That little bright thing.”

The eyes burn. Their attention is a knife that slices at your branches and poisons your roots.

SOMETHING UNSTOPPABLE — “Right! You there! Stop being a coward!”

Another eye. It is the scream of violence and warfare and a thousand armed bodies in your streets.

THE WITCH — “I don’t like this. It hurts.”

THE DAMSEL — “That’s why I had to beat her to death with an oar last time. It got us out.”

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “It isn’t cowardice to flee from something bigger. Especially when you’re still growing.”

Another eye.

THE WITCH — “That one isn’t wrong;”

SOMETHING WATCHFUL — “Is it growing? Are we shrinking? Something’s happening, and I don’t like it. We need to stop it getting away.”

Another eye.

SOMETHING BITTER — “We’re missing someone else. When did he die? What nasty little tricks are blinding us to this? Who’s doing this. Could it be that that weasel is back?”

Another eye

SOMETHING CURIOUS — “We shouldn’t make assumptions. Maybe this is a distraction. Something to get us to focus on it while the real threat is out there. So what are you, little thing? And are you the one doing this?”

Another eye.

THE SPECTRE — “That one is the dangerous one.”

- “Who are you?”
- “You always have questions for me, but you never answer any. What do you want?”
- “Are you the Hero?”
- “Give me back the Hero. I want to talk to him.”
- “Give me back the Hero. I want to stab him.”
- “What is this place?”
- (Witch) Die.
- (Damsel) Die.
- (Spectre) Die.
- [Stay silent]

YOU — “You always have questions for me, but you never answer any. What do you want?”

It hurts less than before, but it burns and you are lessened.

SOMETHING CURIOUS — “I think I can hear it properly this time. It is getting bigger. But is this—”

THE WITCH — “Tch.”

- “Who are you?”
- “Are you the Hero?”
- “Give me back the Hero. I want to talk to him.”
- “Give me back the Hero. I want to stab him.”
- “What is this place?”
- (Witch) Die.
- (Damsel) Die.
- (Spectre) Die.
- [Stay silent]

THE WITCH — This isn’t personal, but I’m not going to let you stand there and torture us all when trying to talk to these loathsome things. What matters is we get out of this place. And we’ve all died at least once.

THE WITCH — You aren’t watching me while you look up at the eyes. And I still have that nasty little blade he stabbed me with. At least this way it might do something good for us.

THE WITCH — I place my hand supportively on your shoulder, and then with that to steady myself and you, I slide the blade into your heart in a single sudden thrust.

You suddenly find yourself short of breath. There is something in your back. Your body doesn’t respond.

THE DAMSEL — “Wow, she’s so much better at this than me. Good job, Kitty! It didn’t hurt her at all. I mean it doesn’t really hurt us ever because I don’t think

we feel pain.”

SOMETHING BITTER — “That little *cheat*. It gets out by dying. That’s going to be a problem. How is it managing to die?”

SOMETHING UNSTOPPABLE — “I’m going to track you down! I’m going to get you! You can’t escape!”

SOMETHING FEARFUL — “Too clever. Who escapes a trap by gnawing off a limb?”

SOMETHING WATCHFUL — “No—”

THE WITCH — Glass shatters. We get free from these disgusting, abhorrent presences. And that’s really all that matters. Maybe a hand gets left behind, but who cares about something small like that?

THE WITCH — We have spares

Chapter 10: CHAPTER I: THE PRINCESS AND THE HERO

Chapter Summary

YOU — “What kind of brave heroine would travel all this way just to kill you?”

THE HERO — “That... doesn’t make me feel more at ease. But sure. I’ll believe you for now.”

THE WITCH — “Nailed it.”

THE HERO — “What was that?”

THE WITCH — “Nothing~”

THE NARRATOR — You’re on a path in the mountains.

THE NARRATOR — Past the mountains, there is a lake.

THE NARRATOR — And trapped on the island across the lake, there is a Hero.

THE NARRATOR — You’re here to slay him. If you don’t, it will be the end of the world.

- (Explore) The end of the world? What are you talking about?
- (Explore) This doesn’t seem right. Are you sure that I’m not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) That doesn’t make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don’t end the world.
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) “Wait, stop! Don’t do this!”
- (Explore) Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It’s a very big place.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don’t I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I’m on my way.
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won’t do it. I won’t kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — “Wait, stop! Don’t do this!”

THE NARRATOR — I’m sorry, what? Don’t do what? Tell you what you need to do? I’m sorry, but I really have to. Otherwise you won’t know what to do.

THE NARRATOR — And you have to kill the hero. You know this, right?

- I... don't know. I just... it's gone.
- I feel... it hurt to breathe. Just for a moment.
- I know I have to kill the hero. I just... I feel faint.
- I wasn't talking to you. I was... it wasn't you.
- [Stay silent]
- [Silently continue to the lake]

YOU — I wasn't talking to you. I was... it wasn't you.

THE NARRATOR — Then who were you talking to? There's no one else around. You're on this lone mission of great importance all on your own, because you're the only one who can do it.

THE NARRATOR — If you were anyone else, I'd wonder if you were getting sick, but that's impossible.

THE NARRATOR — You're a princess. Princesses can't get sick.

THE NARRATOR — Now, if you don't mind, there's a hero waiting for you. Waiting, specifically to be slain by you. For the purposes of, y'know.

THE NARRATOR — Stopping the end of the world.

- (Explore) The end of the world? What are you talking about?
- (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) That doesn't make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don't end the world.
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It's a very big place.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I'm on my way. [Continue to the lake]
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — Are you sure the world will end? As in, the whole world? It's a very big place.

THE NARRATOR — Yes. Very sure. And before you ask how just one person can do it - well, how can one person do anything? One man could kill another, yes, but one person could start a cultural movement that changes how an entire nation works. Or he could invent a weapon that'll bring untold death and destruction.

THE NARRATOR — One man could even cut the creator of all things in half, and set the two halves against each other, all out of a delusional misguided fear of his own death.

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — You know. Speaking purely hypothetically. But my point remains — one man can do almost anything.

THE NARRATOR — Fortunately, so can one woman. That woman being you. And what you can do is kill him. And save us all from the consequences of what he'll do. And what he's done.

- (Explore) But still, the whole world...
- (Explore) That doesn't sound very hypothetical to me.
- (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) That doesn't make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don't end the world.
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I'm on my way.
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — That doesn't sound very hypothetical to me.

THE NARRATOR — Well, it was. Purely hypothetical. An example made up to show you how much damage one man could do. The hero isn't going to do that.

THE NARRATOR — But maybe you treat him as if he is, if it helps you steel your heart and your arm so you can kill him. Because he's done things just as bad as that hypothetical. And will do worse things if he isn't stopped.

- (Explore) But still, the whole world...
- (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) That doesn't make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don't end the world.
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I'm on my way.
- I don't think we want to take that risk. I'm on my way. [Continue to the lake]
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — But still, the whole world...

THE NARRATOR — Yes, the whole world. And even if you can't think of saving the whole world, think of saving your kingdom. Think of saving everyone back home who's counting on you. Trust in that, princess.

- (Explore) If he's as dangerous as you say, then anything and everything is acceptable to stop him.
- (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) That doesn't make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don't end the world.
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I'm on my way.
- I don't think we want to take that risk. I'm on my way. [Continue to the lake]
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — If he's as dangerous as you say, then anything and everything is acceptable to stop him.

THE NARRATOR — That's right.

THE NARRATOR — You can lie, you can cheat, and you should do everything in your power to slay him.

THE NARRATOR — Because if he survives this encounter, everyone in the world will be facing a fate worse than death.

- (Explore) This doesn't seem right. Are you sure that I'm not meant to rescue this trapped hero?
- (Explore) That doesn't make sense. You said he was a hero. Heroes don't end the world.
- (Explore) Why do I have to do it?
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me?
- Okay, I'm on my way.
- I don't think we want to take that risk. I'm on my way. [Continue to the lake]
- [Silently continue to the lake]
- I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — I don't think we want to take that risk. I'm on my way.

THE NARRATOR — You set off, stones crunching under foot.

THE NARRATOR — The mountains are colossal, white stone peaks reaching up to grasp at the sky with spindly forking spires. Gravel crunches underfoot, fragments of the forked spires that reach with futility up at the sky. Wind-rounded, head-sized rocks are piled up in unstable mounds, draped in dying, pale grasses. The cracked stone stretches towards you. The air is hot, baking, and when the scorching wind blows, it moans with pain and a heartbreaking loss.

THE NARRATOR — Not that this is an instance of the pathetic fallacy, of course. When I say the wind moans, I am merely describing it to you. You shouldn't let it get you down.

THE NARRATOR — But regardless it's a welcome relief when you find the pass that leads down from the tall white mountains, down the cooler slopes towards the shallow lake you see in the distance. It is very shallow, with piles of muck and rotting vegetation protruding from the dark surface.

THE NARRATOR — At a hill at the centre of the dark lake, there is a castle. That's where the hero is.

THE NARRATOR — Fortunately, past a dried up dock there is a little boat that's been pulled up out of the water. It's how you're going to get to the castle. It's just as well. You won't be able to cross the lake without it.

THE NARRATOR — And next to the boat is...

THE FIRST ANOMALY — "And here she is, right on schedule. Pay up."

THE NARRATOR — ... a g-g-ghost?

THE SECOND ANOMALY — "I don't think I have any money. I'm sorry! I don't think princesses carry money!"

THE THIRD ANOMALY — "Also, wait a moment. How are we meant to pay you when you're a... a 'g-g-ghost'? Where would you even put it? Do 'g-g-ghosts' have pockets?"

THE FIRST ANOMALY — "That doesn't matter. It's the principle of the thing."

THE NARRATOR — "Um. Sorry. Let me just start again. I'm just a bit... off-balance. You deserve professionalism from me. Apparently you had people waiting for you here and that's not something I was exactly expecting. Especially when—"

THE SECOND ANOMALY — "Shh, mean narrator man! Ladies! Hit it! We are the three princesses past, and we're here to help you! And we are..."

THE SPECTRE — "Princess Spooky."

THE DAMSEL — "Princess Cutie!"

THE WITCH — "I'm not doing it. I am *not* 'Princess Kitty'."

THE SPECTRE — "This is probably your fault. He's called me 'the Spectre' again. If you'd done it properly, we could have picked our names this time."

THE WITCH — "I'd rather be a witch than be called 'Princess Kitty'."

THE DAMSEL — "But you are the cutest kitty cat who pretends to be mean but is hurting deep down!"

- (Explore) "What."
- (Explore) "I'm sorry, I am very confused right now. What's going on?"
- (Explore) "Narrator. Explain."

- (Explore) “Ah ha! I knew it! I’m not the first person you sent to do this! You’re setting me up!”
- (Explore) “Excellent. Allies in murdering that scoundrel.”
- “I don’t have time for this! I have a man to kill!” [Cross the lake]
- “This is too unreal. I’m leaving.” [Walk away]

YOU — “Excellent. Allies in murdering that scoundrel.”

THE WITCH — “Exactly! Scoundrel is the right word for that wicked, wicked man! And—

THE WITCH — “Get off me!”

THE NARRATOR — The damsel latches onto the witch, and refuses to let go.

THE DAMSEL — “No! Princess Kitty Grumpypants needs to have the mean hugged out of her!”

THE NARRATOR — I... I just... you are completely ruining the tone of this scene! You... you three people who shouldn’t be here!

THE SPECTRE — “Well, we outnumber you, so I vote that we’re actually meant to be here, handsome.”

THE NARRATOR — The spectre floats in closer, tilting her head, her deep-sunk eyes twinkling with what is almost certainly malice. Because, handsome? Excuse me?

THE SPECTRE — “Oh yes, narrate me with all your eloquence.”

THE SPECTRE — ...

THE SPECTRE — “Say something nice about my hair.”

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t see what you see in him, but I support your efforts to find yourself the love of a good man! Even if said man is very bad and doesn’t deserve you!”

THE NARRATOR — Stop that!

THE SPECTRE — “Never. Not as long as you make it so fun~.”

- (Explore) “What.”
- (Explore) “I’m sorry, I am very confused right now. What’s going on?”
- (Explore) “Narrator. Explain.”
- (Explore) “Ah ha! I knew it! I’m not the first person you sent to do this! You’re setting me up!”
- (Explore) “Excellent. Allies in murdering that scoundrel.”
- “I don’t have time for this! I have a man to kill!” [Cross the lake]
- “This is too unreal. I’m leaving.” [Walk away]

YOU — “Narrator. Explain.”

THE NARRATOR — These three people shouldn't be here clearly won't let me just ignore them, so I suppose I have to describe them for you.

THE NARRATOR — The first is a pale, ephemeral shape, floating here in the gloom next to the lakeside. Two considering deep-set eyes settle on you, over a skeletal grin.

THE NARRATOR — Her dress floats around her in an unseen wind; there is an X-shaped wound on her chest.

THE NARRATOR — She appears to be a princess. Albeit one who is, quite definitely, certainly, dead.

THE SPECTRE — “The same spiel. Fascinating.”

THE NARRATOR — The second is almost her polar opposite; solid and round and almost plump, her big eyes liquid and caring, her smile almost worried in a way that makes it clear that this is an expression that seldom occupies this face.

THE NARRATOR — Her shoulderless dress is low-cut and it spreads low and wide with many ruffles. There are no sharp edges or lines anywhere in her form.

THE NARRATOR — She appears to be another princess. Albeit one who doesn't seem capable of killing anything.

THE DAMSEL — “I killed someone once! I hated having to do it! Do you know oars are awful murder weapons! Fortunately, the new girl has a sword! Well, not fortunately because you want her to do something awful, but at least it's better to use a sword than an oar!”

THE NARRATOR — The third is wiry, a feral creature of boundaries. Her face has something bestial about it, her eyes are narrowed in suspicious anger, her tail flicks behind her.

THE NARRATOR — Her dress is tattered and torn and stained, and marks of a hard life stain her. She seems moments from either flight or fighting.

THE NARRATOR — She appears to be another princess. Albeit a wild thing who doesn't look like she belongs in a castle.

THE WITCH — “I'm watching you.”

THE DAMSEL — “How? He's invisible!”

THE SPECTRE — “Well, I'm definitely listening to him. Mmm. That handsome, handsome voice.”

THE NARRATOR — Oh. Oh dear.

THE NARRATOR — *sighs*

THE NARRATOR — You've picked up a peanut gallery. One that thinks this is a joke.

THE WITCH — “Oh, quite the contrary, my dear narrator, this isn’t a joke. Not for us.”

THE DAMSEL — “We’re just helping by bringing some levitating.”

THE SPECTRE — “You mean ‘levity’.

THE SPECTRE — “Though yes, I am levitating.”

THE DAMSEL — “We’re the princesses who were sent here before! And we found true love! I mean, I found true love with the lovely adorable cute hero.

THE DAMSEL — “Spooky got stabbed in the heart and Kitty got a really mean hero who betrayed her and ruined her dreams of true love!”

THE WITCH — “Shut up! I never dreamed of true love! Never ever!”

THE DAMSEL — “But as long as you don’t get stabbed in the heart or get betrayed, you’ll be fine!”

THE SPECTRE — “Incidentally, he never remembers us. As far as I’ve been able to deduce, it appears genuine.

THE NARRATOR — She batters her eyelashes at... something? Wait, were you aiming at me?

THE SPECTRE — “It means I get to enjoy the experience of having him fall for me all over again. Don’t you remember the time you vowed your love for me, my darling?”

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE DAMSEL — “Wait, did that happen before I showed up?”

THE NARRATOR — Oh. Of course you’re trying to make me suffer.

- (Explore) “What.”
- (Explore) “I’m sorry, I am very confused right now. What’s going on?”
- (Explore) “Ah ha! I knew it! I’m not the first person you sent to do this! You’re setting me up!”
- “I don’t have time for this! I have a man to kill!” [Cross the lake]
- “This is too unreal. I’m leaving.” [Walk away]

YOU — “I’m sorry, I am very confused right now. What’s going on?”

THE DAMSEL — “Oh no, she didn’t understand! I think I have to explain again! See, we’re the princesses who were sent here before! And we found true love! I mean, I found true love —”

THE NARRATOR — The witch cuffs her over the head.

THE DAMSEL — “Owwie!”

THE WITCH — “What are you, stupid? Look, I’m going to be very clear about this. We’re here to help you kill the hero.”

THE DAMSEL — “I’m not!”

THE SPECTRE — “I’m just here because this is my afterlife. And I’m a kindly sort. I’ll help you, whatever you want.

THE SPECTRE — “Especially if it means I get to listen to more of the voice of my sweet narrator.

THE SPECTRE — “Or find whoever set up this whole thing.”

THE NARRATOR — Well, uh. One out of three isn’t bad, I suppose.

THE SPECTRE — “Yes it is, it’s only thirty three percent. Don’t worry, gorgeous. I don’t mind that you don’t have a good grasp of probabilities.”

THE NARRATOR — Please. Stop asking questions, princess. Just... just let’s move on. Before we bog down entirely. Get to the castle. Murder the hero. Once that’s done, the three intruders can... I don’t know, keep on cracking jokes and arguing with each other. What an awful mess it is already.

THE NARRATOR — It was going so well when it was just you. You understood what you had to do. But now there’s all these extra people, arguing and drowning out—

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — Never mind. Just stick to the plan.

- (Explore) “So what’s going on here? Seriously?”
- (Explore) “Can any of you three tell me what I’m up against? Any traps or the like?”
- (Explore) “Ah ha! I knew it! I’m not the first person you sent to do this! You’re setting me up!”
- “I don’t have time for this! I have a man to kill!” [Cross the lake]
- “This is too unreal. I’m leaving.” [Walk away]

YOU — “I don’t have time for this! I have a man to kill!” [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — That’s right, you do. So if you other ladies would just step back, we might continue with her designed quest.

THE WITCH — “Shh, shh. Go flirt with Spooky or something.”

THE NARRATOR — For your information, I don’t flirt with her. And have never done so. It’s entirely one directional, and—

THE WITCH — “Hey, I just did something. Do your narration. Otherwise, what use are you?”

THE NARRATOR — Hmm.

THE NARRATOR — She wraps her arm around your shoulders. This close, the animal musk and the smell of wet leaves and loam fills your nostrils.

THE WITCH — “The two of us just want to have a little chat, princess to princess.

THE WITCH — “Because I have a little *something* that’ll help her gut a miserable awful wretch of a man.”

THE NARRATOR — I am, despite myself, intrigued. I’ll allow it.

THE WITCH — “You’re too kind But what about you, Newbie?

THE WITCH — “Are *you* interested?”

THE DAMSEL — “No! Leave and don’t come back!”

- “You have my attention.” [Listen to the Witch]
- “I’ve changed my mind, actually. I’m leaving.” [Listen to the Damsel]
- “No. I’m going now. No more distractions.” [Seriously, Cross the lake]

YOU — “You have my attention.”

THE WITCH — “Perrrrfect.”

THE DAMSEL — “No, Kitty! Don’t purr just to get me on your side, even if you are an adorable kitty cat!”

THE WITCH — “Be quiet! I listened to you and look where it got me! This time we do it *my* way. And look what I have for you—

THE NARRATOR — She takes her hand out from behind her back, revealing—

THE NARRATOR — Oh no. No, that can’t be.

THE WITCH — “Oh, now you don’t want to describe things? Don’t worry, I can do that too.”

THE WITCH — *ahem*

THE NARRATOR — How did you get that?

THE WITCH — “You watch as the beautiful and kind witch reaches behind her back. In her hand gleams a pristine blade. The edge is razor sharp, the tip exactly the sort of thing that will sink in a pretty way into some awful man’s back, and the hilt sits so comfortably in her hand. You know it’ll sit just as comfortably in your hand. And he’ll never expect this from you.”

THE NARRATOR — You really shouldn’t have that! That’s his weapon!

THE WITCH — “‘Ah ha,’ says the pretty and very clever witch, ‘but I stole it from him and that makes it mine. That’s how property works.’”

THE SPECTRE — “That makes sense to me.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m sorry to betray you, my dear love, but she’s simply correct.”

THE NARRATOR — You mustn’t—

THE SPECTRE — “Oh, that’s interesting. You seem so much more agitated. More than I’ve seen before. What about this knife makes you so worried?”

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE SPECTRE — “No comments?”

THE NARRATOR — *deep breath*

THE SPECTRE — “I’ll take that as a ‘no’.”

THE WITCH — “The witch holds out the knife for you, a kindly smile on her lips. The knife is here for you to take. Take the knife.”

THE DAMSEL — “Don’t take it. It’ll be bad to walk in there with it, I just know it.

THE DAMSEL — “But also you’re an awfully good narrator, Kitty! A round of applause! It’s always good to find new things to enjoy doing!”

THE SPECTRE — “What are you doing?”

THE DAMSEL — “Applauding her! It’s important to give people support when doing the things they enjoy!”

- “Thank you.” [Take the Knife]
- “I’ll do anything for an edge. I’m not dying here.” [Take the Knife]
- “No thank you. I’ll do this as the Narrator wants.” [Don’t Take the Knife]
- “I don’t trust you.” [Don’t Take the Knife]
- “Do you think I need something like this? I have a sword.” [Don’t Take the Knife]

YOU — “I’ll do anything for an edge. I’m not dying here.” [Take the Knife]

THE WITCH — “Here you go, *your highness*. And may I say...

THE WITCH — “... the way to a man’s heart is through the ribcage.”

THE SPECTRE — “That’s definitely true.”

THE NARRATOR — You... take the knife. You have a knife. Now, why don’t you just tuck that away and use your sword instead, which has the advantage of reach?

- (Explore) “Oh. This feels right. I like this knife.”

- (Explore) “Whose boat is this?”
- (Explore) “Do I have to row?”
- “Very well.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Oh. This feels right. I like this knife.”

THE NARRATOR — Time is ticking.

- (Explore) “Whose boat is this?”
- (Explore) “Do I have to row?”
- “Very well.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Do I have to row?”

THE DAMSEL — “Yep! You wouldn’t make me do it, would you?”

THE NARRATOR — She peeks at you from under her eyelashes.

THE DAMSEL — “Sob. Sob.”

THE WITCH — “Yes, you have to. I did it already.”

THE SPECTRE — “I’m a ghost. I can’t row.”

- (Explore) “I hate rowing.”
- (Explore) “Whose boat is this?”
- “Very well.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “I hate rowing.”

THE NARRATOR — I’m sure rowing doesn’t like you very much either, your royal highness.

THE DAMSEL — “Don’t worry! Next time you can make the next princess do it!”

THE WITCH — “That’s how it works.”

- “Very well.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Very well.” [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — The waters are cold and dark. They move in fat, lazy ripples as you pull and pull and pull. There’s dark water plants here, trying to snarl up the boat and your oars, and sometimes you lodge the oars into mounds of thick river mud in the shallow waters. The whole area reeks of stagnancy. The twisted, bloated forms of drowned trees stick out of the water, leafless and bog-stained.. This lake isn’t healthy. But you shouldn’t look too closely. Don’t linger here too long.

THE NARRATOR — He might notice if you stick around here.

THE DAMSEL — “You’re going to tell me I’m wrong, but I think it’s good to be noticed!”

THE WITCH — “Where did all my lovely, friendly trees go?”

THE SPECTRE — “It always resets. Was this always a lake, handsome?”

THE NARRATOR — N-no. No, it wasn’t. But we need to move. Now. There are worse things in the lake than the hero. Very bad things.

THE WITCH — “I can’t hear the Woods here. We shouldn’t stay.”

- (Explore) “Is it his fault?”
- (Explore) “What kind of bad things?”
- (Explore) “Why are you suddenly agreeing with him?”
- (Explore) [Examine the pristine blade]
- “The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better”. [Keep rowing]

YOU — “Why are you suddenly agreeing with him?”

THE SPECTRE — “The more the water drains, the more we expose the corpses at the bottom. Maybe metaphorical corpses. Maybe very literal corpses.”

- (Explore) “That’s morbid.”
- (Explore) “Is it his fault?”
- (Explore) “What kind of bad things?”
- (Explore) [Examine the pristine blade]
- “The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better”. [Keep rowing]

YOU — “That’s morbid.”

THE SPECTRE — “I’m dead. ‘Morbid’ technically describes everything I do.”

- (Explore) “Is it his fault?”
- (Explore) “What kind of bad things?”
- (Explore) [Examine the pristine blade]
- “The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better”. [Keep rowing]

YOU — [Examine the pristine blade]

THE NARRATOR — You draw the knife, and hold it up. It shines in the dull light. It’s very sharp. Put it away before you cut someone.

- (Explore) “Cutting is what knives are for.”
- (Explore) “Is it his fault?”
- (Explore) “What kind of bad things?”
- “The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better”. [Keep rowing]
- [Throw your sword in the lake]

YOU — “Cutting is what knives are for.”

THE WITCH — “I prefer stabbing.”

- (Explore) “Stabbing is also good.”
- (Explore) “Is it his fault?”
- (Explore) “What kind of bad things?”
- “The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better”. [Keep rowing]
- [Throw your sword in the lake]

YOU — “Stabbing is also good.”

THE WITCH — “I’m glad we agree!”

THE NARRATOR — : “If you ladies don’t mind? Less contemplating knives and this stinking lake full of bad things, and more crossing.”

- (Explore) “Is it his fault?”
- (Explore) “What kind of bad things?”
- “The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better”. [Keep rowing]
- [Throw your sword in the lake]

YOU — “The sooner this awful rowing is over, the better”. [Keep rowing]

THE NARRATOR — On the far side of the lake, the slopes of the hillock are littered with detritus and muck. Halfway up the hillside are the remnants of a dock, the timbers completely rotten and the structure nearly completely fallen apart. That’s no use to anyone at all, so you have to beach the boat on the mix of dark sand and mud, and pull it up out of the water. On this side of the lake, the wind doesn’t blow. The air is as still as the water.

THE NARRATOR — The dark wood looms over the dark waters. Ill-favoured birds perch on every surface and flock around the watchtowers. The shutters are thrown open, and gape like mouths. The gate is opened wide, the metal fastenings on the wooden gates bright and new.

THE NARRATOR — A word of warning, before you continue. The hero will do anything to stop you. To stay in control of the situation. That’s why you just need to put an end to him. Don’t give him time to think on his feet. Don’t let him shape your options. He was a great hero once, after all. And that’s why he must die.

THE SPECTRE — “This shouldn’t be happening. The castle shouldn’t be this different on a first-time visit.”

THE WITCH — “Don’t be so silly. It’s clearly made of wood this time because I knocked down the castle. Leaving this fake castle in its place.”

THE NARRATOR — Fake castle? No, this is a very real castle. It’s where the hero is holed up. He’s always been here. Well, since he came to this place.

THE WITCH — “Don’t lie to me! This isn’t a castle! Castles are meant to have big stone walls and tall towers and... those little windows! Not walls that are made of pointy logs! He’s not putting the effort in.”

THE DAMSEL — “She’s right! This isn’t a proper castle at all!”

THE NARRATOR — Motte-and-bailey castles are attested, historically accurate—

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — No, you know what, you’re right. He’s... uh, he’s clearly insulting you by not even having a proper castle. You should go in there and kill him to teach him a lesson.

THE SPECTRE — “It is the castle, though. I can feel it. Even if it looks different.”

- (Explore) [Admire the pristine blade]
- [Enter the castle]

YOU — [Enter the castle]

THE NARRATOR — You step through the gate, past the walls. This castle is abandoned, and there is a feeling of rough-hewn messiness about it. The outer castle has a collection of rude huts and wood-walled cabins, and the paths are unpaved dirt tracks. There are empty pens for animals that are missing, and unsown cottage gardens.

THE NARRATOR — There is a motte at the rear of this castle, rising up on top of the hill. It is built of stone unlike the rest of the structure, though you have seen much more impressive fortresses in your time. It is really only a few rooms in a tower, a last fallback for a lord who has lost control of the outer walls. Still, it has a door, and the door is closed.

THE WITCH — “Why is the tower the same? Why hasn’t that changed? I don’t like it.”

- (Explore) [Admire the pristine blade]
- (Explore) “The tower is the same? What do you mean by that?”
- (Explore) “It’s so empty.”
- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “Are you sure he’s a threat? There’s no army here.”
- (Explore) “It feels... sad. And lonely.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — [Admire the pristine blade]

THE NARRATOR — You hold the blade up. It is pristine. No sign of any corrosion on it. The light... bounces off it nicely, I suppose? It’s shiny? Quite reflective?

THE NARRATOR — I’m not sure what you want from me here.

- (Explore) “The tower is the same? What do you mean by that?”
- (Explore) “It’s so empty.”
- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “I’d have thought that there’d be some guards here for me to fight.”
- (Explore) “Well, this is boring. It doesn’t feel like anything ever changes here.”

- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Put the knife away]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “Well, this is boring. It doesn’t feel like anything ever changes here.”

THE NARRATOR — That is what he wanted with the prison he made for himself. A mistake, but he doesn’t even realise it.

- (Explore) “The tower is the same? What do you mean by that?”
- (Explore) “It’s so empty.”
- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “I’d have thought that there’d be some guards here for me to fight.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Put the knife away]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — “I’d have thought that there’d be some guards here for me to fight.”

THE NARRATOR — Isn’t that a good thing? Guards would increase the chance of failure. And you can’t let yourself fail. The fate of your kingdom and indeed the whole world rests on you not failing.

- (Explore) “The tower is the same? What do you mean by that?”
- (Explore) “It’s so empty.”
- (Explore) “What is the point of this place? What is it guarding?”
- (Explore) “Nothing is happening here, and nothing is excruciating.”
- (Explore) “What if the door’s locked?”
- [Put the knife away]
- [Call out to the Hero.]
- [Try the door]

YOU — [Try the door]

THE NARRATOR — Thank you for not wasting any more time.

THE DAMSEL — “You really don’t have to do this! You can still back down.”

THE WITCH — “True. But she should still do it. Because she’ll be happier when she stinks that wicked little knife into him. It’ll stop her getting betrayed in the same way he betrayed me!”

THE DAMSEL — “It’s not all about you! We don’t have to walk in blood-soaked circles! We can change and grow and love!”

THE SPECTRE — “Honestly I’m just interested in seeing how this plays out. Neither of you two tried killing him, so when she tries, I might be able to see more about how everything

works.”

THE SPECTRE — ...

THE SPECTRE — “Of course, beloved, I’m only doing this to understand the puzzle you set before me. I’m definitely not trying to break this whole system so we can get out of here.”

THE NARRATOR — Oh, are you?

THE SPECTRE — “Would I deceive you? Little old me?”

THE NARRATOR — The impish look on her face doesn’t fool me, and it shouldn’t fool you.

THE NARRATOR — Ahem.

THE NARRATOR — The entrance to the keep opens easily.

THE NARRATOR — The room past the door is rough hewn and rustic. The wooden furniture is crude, and there are dried herbs hanging from the ceiling. The fire is lit and roars and surges. The windows are shuttered to keep the heat in, but you can see the crudeness of the shutters by the cracks that let the cold outside in. You can clearly see the paintings on the walls, which imply shapes in dark scenes but show nothing. It is like the colours have run, until all that remains is a dark, oily blur.

THE NARRATOR — The crude table has two trenchards on it, but is clean with no sign of food. It awaits the arrival of guests.

THE SPECTRE — “It’s different.”

THE DAMSEL — “Very different.”

THE WITCH — “It’s strange. This place is more... homey than it was last time I saw it.”

THE WITCH — ...

THE WITCH — “It’s a trap. Don’t trust it.”

THE DAMSEL — “It was better last time!”

THE WITCH — “No, it wasn’t!”

THE NARRATOR — The spectre floats around, examining things closely. Sometimes she moves through the walls silently, disappearing only to reappear again.

THE SPECTRE — “Hmm.”

THE WITCH — “What do you think, Spooky?”

THE SPECTRE — “I’m not sure. But I think you might have been correct when you said that you knocked down the last castle with the Woods and that’s why this one is built of wood.”

THE WITCH — “I left that place in ruins.”

THE SPECTRE — “I don’t think it’s that. Not exactly.

THE SPECTRE — “But I think the scars of one life carry through to the next one.”

THE NARRATOR — She spreads her arms wide.

THE SPECTRE — “Just look at us.”

THE NARRATOR — Ahead of you is a rough staircase. It must lead to the upper layers of the citadel. There are more of these oddly blurred paintings on the walls, interspersed with dark banners.

THE NARRATOR — Next to it is another staircase, this one going down into the earthen cellars of this place. There’s a strange smell coming from there, not musty, but... peculiar. Almost chemical.

THE NARRATOR — Given he’s not here, that suggests he’s either upstairs or downstairs.

- (Explore) “The scars of one life? What do you mean by that?”
- (Explore) “You all talk so much, it feels like I’m just a witness to my own quest.”
- (Explore) “If there’s no one else here, what’s he been eating?”
- (Explore) “Not necessarily. He could be outside. On a walk, or something.”
- (Explore) [Put the knife away]
- “I’m heading down. I don’t trust this. He needs stabbing.”
- “Guess I’ll head up. If that’s where most of you found him before. He needs stabbing.”
- [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]
- [Silently take the stairs up to the upper levels]

YOU — “Not necessarily. He could be outside. On a walk, or something.”

THE SPECTRE — “He’ll be upstairs or downstairs. That’s what he said before. And I think he’ll be wherever you look.”

THE NARRATOR — That is how a story works, yes. It would be sort of pointless if you went all the way up or down those stairs only to find there was nothing there.

THE NARRATOR — A waste of everyone’s time, really. A real anticlimax. So don’t be contrary.

THE NARRATOR — I’m the narrator and when I say he’s in here, he’s in here.

- (Explore) “The scars of one life? What do you mean by that?”
- (Explore) “You all talk so much, it feels like I’m just a witness to my own quest.”
- (Explore) “If there’s no one else here, what’s he been eating?”
- (Explore) [Put the knife away]
- “I’m heading down. I don’t trust this. He needs stabbing.”
- “Guess I’ll head up. If that’s where most of you found him before. He needs stabbing.”
- [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]

- [Silently take the stairs up to the upper levels]

YOU — “The scars of one life? What do you mean by that?”

THE SPECTRE — “I’ve been caught in this loop longer than anyone else, and I can tell you: around and around we go, but this isn’t a perfect circle.

THE SPECTRE — “Things change. The lake drains. The castle is different in small ways.

THE SPECTRE — “We change. In our lives and in our deaths.

THE SPECTRE — “I think this world is trying to change.

THE SPECTRE — “I think it’s tired of haunting the same routine.”

THE NARRATOR — The way out is to murder the hero. That’s what you have to do. It’s why you’re here.

THE SPECTRE — ...

THE SPECTRE — “Sure. Why not? None of us have found a way out yet. Maybe you can get down there and manage it first time. Maybe that’s what we all need.

THE SPECTRE — “Even if it doesn’t work, I can throw it in your face next time, handsome.”

THE WITCH — “That does sound like a good idea.”

THE DAMSEL — “No, it doesn’t! That kind of cold logic, that kind of opportunism - that won’t make the world a better place! We need to believe! We need to try to better things!”

- (Explore) “The scars of one life? What do you mean by that?”
- (Explore) “You all talk so much, it feels like I’m just a witness to my own quest.”
- (Explore) “If there’s no one else here, what’s he been eating?”
- (Explore) [Put the knife away]
- “I’m heading down. I don’t trust this. He needs stabbing.”
- “Guess I’ll head up. If that’s where most of you found him before. He needs stabbing.”
- [Silently take the stairs down to the dungeons]
- [Silently take the stairs up to the upper levels]

YOU — “I’m heading down. I don’t trust this. He needs stabbing.”

THE NARRATOR — Ah, you’re taking this seriously. Good.

THE NARRATOR — The bare stones of the structure are revealed, for the crude wooden furniture and wall hangings are nowhere to be seen. The stonework is well-formed but neglected, and lacking in creature comforts; nothing to ease your step, only a few guttering torches to light your way. If he’s spending time down here, there’s very little for him to live for.

THE NARRATOR — Killing him is probably doing him a favour.

THE WITCH — “More like doing yourself a favour, freeing yourself of that wicked creature.”

- (Explore) [Put the knife away]
- What a boring existence.
- [Stay silent.]

YOU — [Stay silent.]

THE NARRATOR — There are several rooms down here, but the empty beer cellar which has only a hint of the smell of old vinegar doesn't have any sign of him. Neither does the empty cells, nor the dusty vault full of old treasures. You stay silent as you stalk through the halls.

THE NARRATOR — And then you hear it. The sound of someone breathing. The sound of someone shifting around.

THE NARRATOR — He's in the next room.

- (Explore) [Put the knife away]
- (Explore) [Hide the knife.]
- “Hello? Is anyone there?”
- “I am here to kill you.”
- (Lie) “I'm a friend.”
- “I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you.”
- “Face me, blackguard!”
- [Enter the room]

YOU — [Hide the knife.]

THE NARRATOR — Good. He doesn't know you're here yet. You can take him by surprise.

THE NARRATOR — You tuck the pristine blade into your sword belt, so it's held behind your body and he won't be able to see you have it. It won't necessarily be easy to draw there, but at least you won't be approaching him, weapon in hand.

THE NARRATOR — Now, why not draw your nice shiny sword which is much longer and is a much more effective weapon and use that instead?

- “Hello? Is anyone there?”
- “I am here to kill you.”
- You said I can lie, cheat, and do anything in my power to kill him. I'm going to lie to him.
- “I'm a friend. Someone shady sent me here to kill you.”
- “Face me, blackguard!”
- [Draw your blade]
- [Enter the room]

YOU — You said I can lie, cheat, and do anything in my power to kill him. I'm going to lie to him.

THE NARRATOR — Are you sure you're good at lying? But I'm glad you're approaching this properly.

- (Lie) "I'm a friend."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend. I'm definitely not here to kill you."
- (Lie) "I'm a friend. I'm definitely not here to kill you. By stabbing you with a knife. Because I don't have a knife."
- (Lie) "Oh, my true love, I have quested long to find someone as handsome and romantic, but as a princess I love nothing more than a dashing hero. I also don't have a knife"
- (Lie) "I'm from the kingdom. I'm here to collect your prison tax. Have you been paying rent on this castle?"
- (Lie) "Oh, thank goodness, I can hear someone else alive on this desolate island! I'm just a poor innocent princess sent to his prison island all alone."
- You're right. I think I'm bad at lying.

YOU — "Oh, thank goodness, I can hear someone else alive on this desolate island! I'm just a poor innocent princess sent to his prison island all alone."

- "All alone, apart from my three friends, who are also beautiful princesses, to keep me company. So alone."
- [Wait for his response.]

YOU — "All alone, apart from my three friends, who are also beautiful princesses, to keep me company. So alone."

THE NARRATOR — What is this?

- "I definitely hope there's a dashing, *handsome* hero out there who can spare me from my boring, knife-free imprisonment on this boring island."
- [Wait for his response.]

YOU — "I definitely hope there's a dashing, *handsome* hero out there who can spare me from my boring, knife-free imprisonment on this boring island."

THE NARRATOR — Please. Stop.

THE WITCH — "No, no, this is excellent material. Keep going."

- "Just me, and three other lonely princesses who are all very beautiful and filled with passion on the subject of heroes!"
- [Wait for his response.]

YOU — "Just me, and three other lonely princesses who are all very beautiful and filled with passion on the subject of heroes!"

THE NARRATOR — Why did I let you lie?

THE SPECTRE — “I can’t actually see a lie. In that statement, that is. Obviously, the rest of her deception is masterful.”

THE DAMSEL — “Wait, she’s lying?”

- “And absolutely no knives!”
- [Wait for his response.]

YOU — “And absolutely no knives!”

THE NARRATOR — Please. Stop talking about the pristine blade. You’re only making it worse.

- “Because who gives a princess a knife, anyway?””
- [Wait for his response.]

YOU — [Wait for his response.]

THE NARRATOR — His voice carries up the stairs from the other room.

THE HERO — “Well, well, well. A visitor. It’s been so long. A princess who says she’s filled with passion. Don’t be a stranger.”

THE DAMSEL — “He sounds colder than mine. Almost... dangerous. But still very handsome!”

THE WITCH — “Definitely dangerous.”

THE SPECTRE — “Now that’s the voice I remember, from my very first time.”

THE NARRATOR — She catches your eye.

THE SPECTRE — “Go get him, newbie.”

THE NARRATOR — Wipe that smile off your faces. Don’t underestimate him. Don’t let him fool you. He’s waiting to strike.

THE HERO — “Come on in.”

THE NARRATOR — You step into the room, weapon in a guarding position. It is a poorly lit room, the only light coming from a small barred window that emerges from the side of the hall. The walls are bare, and on the far side are the rusted attachments for a pair of chains. But that isn’t important, because he sits on a stone bench on the other side of the room. His eyes are hidden in the gloom; his sparse feathers black, his armour rusted and dented. He radiates exhaustion. You could probably just kill him now.

THE DAMSEL — “Oh! He’s so old!”

THE WITCH — “He’s more honest. More of a threat.”

THE SPECTRE — “...”

THE HERO — “Four princesses, come to see me. I don’t have guests.

THE HERO — “You weren’t lying about there being no knives. But you do have a sword. Are you sure you’re not here to kill me?”

THE NARRATOR — You see the hero’s hand go to an empty belt sheath, and find nothing.

THE NARRATOR — The witch shoots a quick grin at you.

- (Lie) “Me? Kill you? Never! How could I possibly do that?”
- “What kind of brave heroine would travel all this way just to kill you?”
- “Okay, you caught me. I’m here to murder you.”
- “Nuh uh!”
- “What do we think, princess gang? Are we here to kill him?”
- “I haven’t decided yet.”
- (Lie) “I haven’t decided yet.”
- “I’m just here to talk.”
- (Lie) “I’m just here to talk.”
- [Draw your sword]
- [Approach him]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “What kind of brave heroine would travel all this way just to kill you?”

THE HERO — “That... doesn’t make me feel more at ease. But sure. I’ll believe you for now.”

THE WITCH — “Nailed it.”

THE HERO — “What was that?”

THE WITCH — “Nothing~”

- (Explore) (Lie) “Well, it should make you feel more at ease! I’m a princess and princesses never lie!”
- (Explore) “If you want to feel better, I’ll throw away my sword. Look, no sword!”
- [Stab him with the knife]
- (Explore) “So, what do you do for fun down here?”
- (Explore) “Got any knives?”
- (Explore) “Can we just talk?”
- [Draw your sword]
- [Approach him]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — (Lie) “Well, it should make you feel more at ease! I’m a princess and princesses never lie!”

THE DAMSEL — “That’s definitely true! I’m a princess and I’ve never lied in my life!”

THE NARRATOR — The witch and the spectre exchange a meaningful glance. It seems to suggest something about their low opinion of the damsel’s cognitive capacity to contemplate falsehood.

THE DAMSEL — “Why are you so mean? They’d never do that!”

THE HERO — “What are you talking about? And I don’t think a princess saying she never lies is trustworthy. What if you’re lying?”

- [Stab him with the knife]
- (Explore) (Lie) “But I’m not! So there!”
- (Explore) “If you want to feel better, I’ll throw away my sword. Look, no sword!”
- (Explore) “So, what do you do for fun down here?”
- [Stab him with the knife]
- (Explore) “Got any knives?”
- (Explore) “Can we just talk?”
- [Stab him with the knife]
- “How dare you insult my honour! Just for that, I’m going to kill you!”
- [Draw your sword]
- [Approach him]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “If you want to feel better, I’ll throw away my sword. Look, no sword!”

THE NARRATOR — No, stop, what are you—

THE NARRATOR — *sigh*

THE NARRATOR — You draw your sword, and toss it into the far corner of the room. It clatters loudly. Now you don’t have a sword.

THE NARRATOR — On the other hand, the hero does seem to relax slightly. Marginally. A little. Not very much, though. His hand brushes the empty sheath at his hip again.

THE HERO — “Okay. So you’ve shown some degree of bona fides. Maybe we can talk.”

- [Stab him with the knife]
- (Explore) “Can I sit down next to you?”
- [Stab him with the knife]
- (Explore) “So, what do you do for fun down here?”
- [Stab him with the knife]
- (Explore) “Got any knives?”
- (Explore) “Can we just talk?”

- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Approach him]
- [Murder the Hero]
- [Stab him with the knife]

YOU — “Can I sit down next to you?”

THE NARRATOR — Your eye is twitching. Do you know that?

THE HERO — “No. I don’t think so. I don’t trust you yet.”

THE SPECTRE — “He doesn’t trust her. Her eye is twitching. Hmm.”

- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- (Explore) “So... bored...”
- [Stab him with the knife]
- (Explore) “So, what do you do for fun down here?”
- [Stab him with the knife]
- (Explore) “Got any knives?”
- (Explore) “Can we just talk?”
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Approach him]
- [Murder the Hero]
- [Stab him with the knife]

YOU — [Stab him with the knife]

THE NARRATOR — He’s let his guard down just enough that he doesn’t expect your sudden rush across the room. But there’s enough distance — and the pristine blade is short — that he can still react. He defends his neck, but you’re not going for that. You sink the blade into the joints of his armour, and he yelps in pain. Red blood wells up.

THE WITCH — “Curses, didn’t get his jugular!”

THE DAMSEL — “No, don’t fight!”

THE HERO — “That’s my knife! How did you get it!”

THE NARRATOR — He squares up against you. He’s armoured, and bigger than you. And your blow wasn’t aiming to kill. You just wanted to hurt him.

THE NARRATOR — What happened to your previous determination?

- [Stab him with the knife]
- This is just more fun!
- [Stab him with the knife]

- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- I... don't know.
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Murder the Hero]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]
- [Stab him with the knife]

YOU — [Stab him with the knife]

THE NARRATOR — You close in again. His reach is longer; his armour limits where you can strike. He doesn't have a weapon, but his limbs are weapons and he jars your vision and bloodies your nose.

THE WITCH — “Stab him in the vulnerables!”

THE NARRATOR — You find flesh again and again, but never deep enough to kill. But that isn't your intent. You want him to bleed. And he certainly does that. But you bleed too.

THE NARRATOR — Blow after blow is exchanged.

THE NARRATOR — He manages to break your arm, and while there's no pain, you lose grasp of the pristine blade. It goes flying and lodges in the wall.

THE NARRATOR — And now he's on you, armoured forearm on your throat. You can't breathe. Your vision is going black.

THE HERO — I don't know who you are really, and I don't know why you're trying to kill me. But I'm getting rid of your nasty little tricks, oh yes I am. What can you do when you can't even breathe?

THE NARRATOR — You feel your body go limp. If only you'd tried to kill him for real. But you were never meant to get your hands on the pristine blade. It isn't good for you. You've doomed everyone, you know.

- [Die]
- (Witch) [Attack from behind]
- [Stab him with the knife]

YOU — [Stab him with the knife]

THE NARRATOR — Oh. The delusions of a dying brain. You don't have the pristine blade, remember. You lost it. And—

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — I'm sorry, excuse me? Because apparently that doesn't matter. Because now you have a second pristine blade and it's in your hand, and with his weight on top of you you have to just angle it up and let his own mass push the untarnishing point through his armour. Right into his lungs.

THE NARRATOR — He coughs up bloody froth.

THE HERO — "Cheat—"

THE NARRATOR — His blood soaks you. You're dying too. He's let go of your throat, but he broke bones and ruptured organs. Even with the others helping him off you, you're a bruised, battered, broken mess.

THE NARRATOR — Still, you got him! Good job! Maybe the world is saved after all. It's a shame he got you too, but maybe this is for the best.

THE HERO — "You... cheated. Didn't fight fair. And I still... you're going to die.

THE HERO — "Good..."

- "Oh, darling. Do you think this was enough to stop me?"
- "Doesn't matter. This was... fun."
- [Laugh with your last breath]

YOU — [Laugh with your last breath]

THE NARRATOR — You laugh, and laugh, and laugh, with broken ribs and a broken windpipe as the light fades and the hero gasps and burbles. Try to hold on. At least until he dies first.

THE DAMSEL — "No, no, stay with me! Think happy thoughts! Thoughts not about knives!"

THE WITCH — "Wait. Why don't I just go pick up the sword and finish him off? It'd be my pleasure. You can watch, newbie."

THE NARRATOR — But you don't stay.

THE NARRATOR — Everything goes dark, and you die.

Chapter 11: CHAPTER II: THE SINISTER HAND

Chapter Summary

YOU — (Lie) “Oh no, it is the first time I have met any of you. Who are all these strange women who I do not recognise?”

THE DAMSEL — “Oh no, she has amnesty!”

THE SPECTRE — “You mean amnesia.”

THE DAMSEL — “Oh, is that the word for what happens when you didn’t do anything wrong and you get a fresh start?”

THE SPECTRE — “I—”

THE SPECTRE — ...

THE SPECTRE — “It might actually be amnesty. Hmm. Sometimes you do like to remind us that you didn’t leave all your brains on that floor, Cutie.”

THE NARRATOR — You’re on a path in the mountains.

THE NARRATOR — Past the mountains, there is a lake.

THE NARRATOR — And trapped on the island across the lake, there is a Hero.

THE NARRATOR — You’re here to slay him. If you don’t, it will be the end of the world.

- (Lie) The end of the world? I have *no idea what you’re talking about*.
- (Explore) This seems doable. I am just a regular, non-knife-wielding princess but I’m sure I can stab him to death.
- (Explore) I suppose that makes sense. He did end the world when I stabbed him to death, after all.
- (Explore) I’m really looking forward to doing it!
- (Explore) Hypothetically, if I fail to kill him, do I get to do this again? And maybe stab him again? Not that I’ve done this before.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don’t I have anyone to help me? Perhaps some other princesses?
- (Explore) Aww, I don’t seem to have my knife. Or any other implements of an essentially stabby nature. I don’t suppose you know where they are, Narrator?
- Yay! Now is knifey time!
- [Silently continue to the lake, thinking about knives]
- (Lie) I won’t do it. I won’t kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — (Lie) The end of the world? I have *no idea what you’re talking about*.

THE NARRATOR — I'm talking about the end of the world. Everything good, just gone. Nothing but mouldering ruins, cold and dark under dying red stars. No more births. Nothing new. An eternity of decay, and nothing changing from that.

- (Explore) This seems doable. I am just a regular, non-knife-wielding princess but I'm sure I can stab him to death.
- (Explore) I suppose that makes sense. He did end the world when I stabbed him to death, after all.
- (Explore) I'm really looking forward to doing it!
- (Explore) Hypothetically, if I fail to kill him, do I get to do this again? And maybe stab him again? Not that I've done this before.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me? Perhaps some other princesses?
- (Explore) Aww, I don't seem to have my knife. Or any other implements of an essentially stabby nature. I don't suppose you know where they are, Narrator?
- Yay! Now is knifey time!
- [Silently continue to the lake, thinking about knives]
- (Lie) I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — This seems doable. I am just a regular, non-knife-wielding princess but I'm sure I can stab him to death.

THE NARRATOR — That's the attitude! Of course you can. Although... uh, you seem to have forgotten your armour. And your sword. There was meant to be armour and a sword. You are a warrior princess, after all.

- (Explore) I suppose that makes sense. He did end the world when I stabbed him to death, after all.
- (Explore) I'm really looking forward to doing it!
- (Explore) Hypothetically, if I fail to kill him, do I get to do this again? And maybe stab him again? Not that I've done this before.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me? Perhaps some other princesses?
- (Explore) Aww, I don't seem to have my knife. Or any other implements of an essentially stabby nature. I don't suppose you know where they are, Narrator?
- Yay! Now is knifey time!
- [Silently continue to the lake, thinking about knives]
- (Lie) I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — Aww, I don't seem to have my knife. Or any other implements of an essentially stabby nature. I don't suppose you know where they are, Narrator?

THE NARRATOR — Yes, that is a very good question. There was meant to be a sword.

THE NARRATOR — Just give me a moment.

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — Ah, yes. Turning round, you see, lying behind you, your sword. You must have put it down when you took a rest and forgot to pick it up again.

- (Explore) That's not my sword. I didn't have a sword. I had a knife.
- "Silly me, I must have forgotten it. I'd forget my own head if someone cut it off and left it lying around." [Take the sword]

YOU — That's not my sword. I didn't have a sword. I had a knife.

THE NARRATOR — No, I'm pretty sure you had a sword.

- (Explore) I am just a weak, innocent, sunny princess who is full of *determination* and not blades. I have very shapely arms. How could I possibly carry a sword that big? Clearly I had a very sharp knife.
- "Silly me, I must have forgotten it. I'd forget my own head if someone cut it off and left it lying around." [Take the sword]

YOU — I am just a weak, innocent, sunny princess who is full of *determination* and not blades. I have very shapely arms. How could I possibly carry a sword that big? Clearly I had a very sharp knife.

THE NARRATOR — You... make a good case. Especially since you're not wearing the armour you're meant to be wearing. Maybe you're more of a rogue.

THE NARRATOR — Yeah, uh, you can see that actually it's not that it's a sword, it's actually a knife. It's just it was closer than you thought.

THE NARRATOR — It... made it look bigger.

- (Explore) Actually, I think I had two knives.
- (Explore) [Take the knife]

YOU — Actually, I think I had two knives.

THE NARRATOR — Oh, would you look at that? When you look under the first knife, you find another one.

THE NARRATOR — Are we done? Can we go?

- (Explore) Now that I *think* about it, I had three.
- (Explore) [Take the knives]

YOU — Now that I *think* about it, I had three.

THE NARRATOR — No you didn't. Don't push it.

- (Explore) [Take the knives]

YOU — [Take the knives]

THE NARRATOR — You pick up your knives, which you definitely had all along and you did not bully out of me.

- (Explore) I suppose that makes sense. He did end the world when I stabbed him to death, after all.
- (Explore) I'm really looking forward to doing it!
- (Explore) Hypothetically, if I fail to kill him, do I get to do this again? And maybe stab him again? Not that I've done this before.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me? Perhaps some other princesses?
- Yay! Now is knifey time!
- [Silently continue to the lake, thinking about knives]
- (Lie) I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — Hypothetically, if I fail to kill him, do I get to do this again? And maybe stab him again? Not that I've done this before.

THE NARRATOR — What an odd question. No, of course you don't get to do this again. The world is on the line. If you fail, everyone is trapped to a cold, slow victory of entropy, with no hope of renewal or change or *anything* better.

THE NARRATOR — Why would you even ask that?

- (Explore) I suppose that makes sense. He did end the world when I stabbed him to death, after all.
- (Explore) I'm really looking forward to doing it!
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me? Perhaps some other princesses?
- Yay! Now is knifey time!
- [Silently continue to the lake, thinking about knives]
- (Lie) I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — I'm really looking forward to doing it!

THE NARRATOR — Well, that's good.

THE NARRATOR — You sound a little more... enthusiastic than I expected, but enthusiasm is good.

- (Explore) I suppose that makes sense. He did end the world when I stabbed him to death, after all.
- (Explore) Do I have to do it alone? Don't I have anyone to help me? Perhaps some other princesses?
- Yay! Now is knifey time!
- [Silently continue to the lake, thinking about knives]
- (Lie) I won't do it. I won't kill him.
- [Turn around and leave.]

YOU — [Silently continue to the lake, thinking about knives]

THE NARRATOR — You set off, stones crunching under foot.

THE NARRATOR — The mountains are colossal, white stone peaks reaching up to grasp at the sky with spindly forking spires. Gravel crunches underfoot, fragments of the forked spires that reach with futility up at the sky. Wind-rounded, head-sized rocks are piled up in unstable mounds, draped in dying, pale grasses. The cracked stone stretches towards you, jagged and sharp. The air is hot, baking, and when the scorching wind blows, it moans with pain and a heartbreaking loss.

THE NARRATOR — Not that this is an instance of the pathetic fallacy, of course. When I say the wind moans, I am merely describing it to you. You shouldn't let it get you down.

THE NARRATOR — But regardless it's a welcome relief when you find the pass that leads down from the tall white mountains, down the cooler slopes towards the shallow lake you see in the distance. It is very shallow, with piles of muck and rusty metal and splintered tree trunks stabbing out from the dark surface.

THE NARRATOR — On a hill at the centre of the dark lake, there is a castle. That's where the hero is.

THE NARRATOR — Fortunately, past a dried up dock there is a little boat that's been pulled up out of the water. It's how you're going to get to the castle. It's just as well. You won't be able to cross the lake without it.

THE NARRATOR — And next to the boat is...

THE FIRST ANOMALY — "Hold her arms behind her back! Don't let go!"

THE NARRATOR — ... a g-g-ghost?

THE SECOND ANOMALY — "Got her! Sorry about this, but you're Princess Kitty! That's how you have to introduce yourself! That's the rules!"

THE THIRD ANOMALY — "Never! I'd die rather than do that!"

THE FIRST ANOMALY — "You've died so that's not actually a problem. For any of us."

THE SECOND ANOMALY — "Being a princess and a kitty at the same time is practically the best thing in the world! I'm jealous!"

THE NARRATOR — I have absolutely no idea what is going on here, or why there's a—

THE FIRST ANOMALY — "We are the three princesses past and I'm Princess Spooky."

THE SECOND ANOMALY — "Princess Cutie!"

THE THIRD ANOMALY — "Narrator, you need to call me 'The Witch', the 'g-g-ghost' as 'The Spectre' and the *mean awful bully* who's got me in a full nelson as 'The Damsel'."

THE SPECTRE — “Traitor!”

THE WITCH — “Serves you right!”

THE DAMSEL — “What’s a full nelson? This is just a different form of hugging!”

THE WITCH — “Anyway, Newbie - well, no, you’re not the Newbie anymore, are you? But... what are you?”

- (Explore) “I’m the Princess.”
- (Lie) “Oh no, it is the first time I have met any of you. Who are all these strange women who I do not recognise?”
- “I’m not a what! I’m a princess! A totally innocent princess. Don’t you remember?”
- “Hello again, girls! I’m back! Back to stab the Hero again!”

YOU — “I’m the Princess.”

THE WITCH — “Yes, yes, we know that already. But you’re looking weirdly... normal for someone who just died.”

THE SPECTRE — “She’s a bit angular.”

THE DAMSEL — “That’s very mean! She just has lovely cheekbones! Not all of us turn into ghosts or kitties, you know? Some of us—”

THE WITCH — “Pad our dresses?”

THE DAMSEL — “It is a good thing you are adorable, because otherwise I’d... I’d do something very mean and angry!”

THE NARRATOR — Who are these other princesses and why do they know you?”

- (Lie) “Oh no, it is the first time I have met any of you. Who are all these strange women who I do not recognise?”
- “I’m not a what! I’m a princess! A totally innocent princess. Don’t you remember?”
- “Hello again, girls! I’m back! Back to stab the Hero again!”

YOU — (Lie) “Oh no, it is the first time I have met any of you. Who are all these strange women who I do not recognise?”

THE DAMSEL — “Oh no, she has amnesty!”

THE SPECTRE — “You mean amnesia.”

THE DAMSEL — “Oh, is that the word for what happens when you didn’t do anything wrong and you get a fresh start?”

THE SPECTRE — “I—”

THE SPECTRE — ...

THE SPECTRE — “It might actually be amnesty. Hmm. Sometimes you do like to remind us that you didn’t leave all your brains on that floor, Cutie.”

THE DAMSEL — “Thank you!”

THE WITCH — “I don’t trust her.”

THE DAMSEL — “On one hand, I respect your feelings! On the other, you don’t trust anyone.”

THE WITCH — “I’ll trust people when they start being trustworthy.”

THE NARRATOR — What... I... I don’t understand what’s going on here. First the Princess shows up dressed wrong, then she bullies a pair of knives out of me, and then there’s all... all this.

THE NARRATOR — What a mess.

THE SPECTRE — “Don’t worry your handsome head about it. To summarise: princesses linger around after we die. We’re basically the ghosts of dead timelines. I’m also the ghost of a princess. We don’t know why the others didn’t leave ghosts when they died. We’re here to help the current princess.”

THE DAMSEL — “Help her marry the hero!”

THE WITCH — “Help her kill the hero.”

THE SPECTRE — “There may be some small disagreement as to what we’re here to do, but we definitely agree we’re here to help.”

THE NARRATOR — Could you be persuaded to... just go away?

THE DAMSEL — “Absolutely not!”

THE WITCH — “We don’t trust you.”

THE SPECTRE — “But beloved, why would you try to leave me? I love you and your buttery smooth voice as you narrate things out.”

THE NARRATOR — She smiles in a very impish way.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m not an imp. I’m a ghost. Please get it right, dearest.”

THE NARRATOR — Stop that.

THE SPECTRE — “Stop making it so enjoyable.”

THE WITCH — “That’s not even what matters here. What matters here is the fact that she - that one over there - should remember us. Why don’t you?”

- (Explore) “Who can say why anything happens? Why are we even here?”

- (Explore) (Lie) “I don’t know. I’m just sweet and innocent, doing this for the first time.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I’m definitely not trying to trick the Narrator into giving anything away! I really don’t remember anything!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I’m innocent of everything! I have done nothing wrong ever!”
- (Explore) “I’m innocent of everything! I have done nothing wrong ever!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am definitely not thinking right now about how to find the Hero and stab him again and again. Because I haven’t done that before! But I quite want to!”
- “Okay, bored now. I do remember you.”
- “I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — (Lie) “I’m definitely not trying to trick the Narrator into giving anything away! I really don’t remember anything!”

THE DAMSEL — “Oh! We’ll, I suppose we just have to do all the explaining again! After all, she doesn’t remember anything.”

THE NARRATOR — I know you’re lying. Literally. It’s a lie. But why would you even lie about that?

THE WITCH — “Wait, so you’re saying she does remember last time around.”

THE NARRATOR — I don’t understand why she would, but she’s definitely lying.

- (Explore) “Who can say why anything happens? Why are we even here?”
- (Explore) “Me? Lie? How rude!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I’m innocent of everything! I have done nothing wrong ever!”
- (Explore) “I’m innocent of everything! I have done nothing wrong ever!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am definitely not thinking right now about how to find the Hero and stab him again and again. Because I haven’t done that before! But I quite want to!”
- “Okay, bored now. I do remember you.”
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Me? Lie? How rude!”

THE NARRATOR — You didn’t lie that time, but you didn’t deny anything.

THE WITCH — “Wait, how on earth do you know when she’s lying? What nasty little tricks do you have?”

THE NARRATOR — You’d know if you could see the world like I do.

- (Explore) (Lie) “I never lie.”
- (Explore) “Who can say why anything happens? Why are we even here?”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I’m innocent of everything! I have done nothing wrong ever!”
- (Explore) “I’m innocent of everything! I have done nothing wrong ever!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am definitely not thinking right now about how to find the Hero and stab him again and again. Because I haven’t done that before! But I quite want to!”
- “Okay, bored now. I do remember you.”

- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — (Lie) “I never lie.”

THE NARRATOR — I’m not even going to dignify that with a response. Surely all of you can see how meaningless that statement is.

THE DAMSEL — “I don’t get it.”

- (Explore) “Who can say why anything happens? Why are we even here?”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I’m innocent of everything! I have done nothing wrong ever!”
- (Explore) “I’m innocent of everything! I have done nothing wrong ever!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am definitely not thinking right now about how to find the Hero and stab him again and again. Because I haven’t done that before! But I quite want to!”
- “Okay, bored now. I do remember you.”
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “I’m innocent of everything! I have done nothing wrong ever!”

THE NARRATOR — Just because you believe it doesn’t make it true.

- (Explore) “Who can say why anything happens? Why are we even here?”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am definitely not thinking right now about how to find the Hero and stab him again and again. Because I haven’t done that before! But I quite want to!”
- “Okay, bored now. I do remember you.”
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Okay, bored now. I do remember you.”

THE WITCH — “Ha! I knew it!”

THE NARRATOR — This is bad. Very bad. And not just because you wasted all this time lying to us all. Why did you even do that?

THE WITCH — “Because it was funny to lie to you. Obviously.”

THE SPECTRE — “It was very cute to watch you flail around in confusion.

THE SPECTRE — “And fascinating to see that you can tell when we lie.

THE SPECTRE — “Not that we’d ever lie to you, of course.”

THE DAMSEL — “That’s not really important, though! What’s important is how she feels! And why she didn’t feel like she could trust us!”

- “I only lie to get the upper hand. Or if it’s funny. Or if I’m bored.”
- “Thank you! It’s really nice to have someone ask about my feelings!”
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Thank you! It’s really nice to have someone ask about my feelings!”

THE DAMSEL — “No, thank you for thanking me! Feelings are important! Feelings like love, especially!

THE DAMSEL— “So since we’re all here, I think it’s important to talk about our feelings about the hero.”

THE WITCH — “We really don’t.”

THE NARRATOR — I hate to say it, but I agree with the Witch.

THE SPECTRE — “No, no, why don’t you say how you feel about me, my beloved narrator? Don’t you feel the spark of chemistry grow and grow between us, life after life?”

THE NARRATOR — “No.”

THE SPECTRE — “Don’t worry, I know you’re playing hard to get~”

THE DAMSEL — “I support you fully in your pursuit of the narrator, Princess Spooky!

THE DAMSEL— “But what about you? Tell me, do you want to get close to the Hero?”

- “Yes.”
- “Yes?”
- “Yes!”

YOU — “Yes!”

THE DAMSEL — “I knew it! How do you feel when you’re around him?”

- (Explore) “My heart races.”
- (Explore) “I feel like I have fun.”
- (Explore) “I like the noises he makes.”
- (Explore) “The bit when I stab him is just delightful!”
- (Explore) “I love the look in his eyes when he sees me.”
- (Explore) “I like the way he looks at me like there’s no one else in the world.”
- (Explore) “It’s like I never want to leave.”
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “I love the look in his eyes when he sees me.”

THE DAMSEL — “Mmm hmm! Me too!”

- (Explore) “My heart races.”
- (Explore) “I feel like I have fun.”
- (Explore) “I like the noises he makes.”
- (Explore) “The bit when I stab him is just delightful!”
- (Explore) “I like the way he looks at me like there’s no one else in the world.”
- (Explore) “It’s like I never want to leave.”
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “My heart races.”

THE DAMSEL — “It pounded so hard in my chest!”

- (Explore) “I feel like I have fun.”
- (Explore) “I like the noises he makes.”
- (Explore) “The bit when I stab him is just delightful!”
- (Explore) “I like the way he looks at me like there’s no one else in the world.”
- (Explore) “It’s like I never want to leave.”
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “I like the way he looks at me like there’s no one else in the world.”

THE DAMSEL — “It’s beautiful, isn’t it? It’s just like that for me! Oh, isn’t it wonderful that you’re in love with him too?”

THE NARRATOR — No! No, you’re not in love with him!

THE WITCH — “It’s pretty obvious that she’s talking about wanting to stab him. She’s stroking her knives whenever she talks about that.”

THE DAMSEL — “That doesn’t mean it isn’t love!”

THE SPECTRE — “I’m... pretty sure it does mean it isn’t love.”

THE DAMSEL — “No, think about it! Did you *actually* want him dead?”

- “Yes.”
- “No. If he’d died, it wouldn’t have been fun.”
- “I didn’t really want him dead. I just wanted to keep playing with him.”

YOU — “I didn’t really want him dead. I just wanted to keep playing with him.”

THE NARRATOR — The Damsel smiles beatifically - while talking nonsense, I want to make clear she’s talking absolute rubbish, and so are you! You should want him dead—

THE DAMSEL — “That’s *love*. Even when you’re hurting him, even when he’s hurting you, you want to be with each other.”

THE NARRATOR — She pats you on the back — hey, stop doing things, let me finish objecting—

THE DAMSEL — “Go get him, beautiful. He’s waiting for you.”

- (Explore) “Thank you, Princess Cutie! That made everything make so much more sense!”
- “You’re right! I’m off to play with the Hero!” [Cross the lake]
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Thank you, Princess Cutie! That made everything make so much more sense!”

THE DAMSEL — “No, thank you! It’s lovely when people appreciate you! And I want everyone to be happy and to find their own forms of love! If you want to spend all your time around him, stabbing him in non-fatal ways, that’s still a form of love!”

THE NARRATOR — No, no, no it’s not!

- (Explore) “Do you want to be my friend?”
- “You’re right! I’m off to play with the Hero!” [Cross the lake]
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Do you want to be my friend?”

THE DAMSEL — “Yes! Yes, I do! Friends!”

- (Explore) “Best friends!”
- “You’re right! I’m off to play with the Hero!” [Cross the lake]
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Best friends!”

THE DAMSEL — “Best friends!”

THE WITCH — “I hate this.”

THE NARRATOR — Me too.

THE SPECTRE — “Honestly, I’m interested to see where it goes.”

THE WITCH — “Of course you are. You realise we’re going to be stuck with this?”

THE DAMSEL — “Ignore them! I’m going to be with you every step of the way!”

- “You’re right! I’m off to play with the Hero!” [Cross the lake]
- “This conversation is very boring. I’m off to murder the hero now.” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “You’re right! I’m off to play with the Hero!” [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — I can’t let this happen! This is... this is mucked up. This isn’t what you’re meant to be doing. You’re planning to go to seek out the Hero and stab him repeatedly, but you’re not even trying to kill him?

THE WITCH — “Maybe we’ll get lucky. Maybe she’ll hit a vital organ.”

THE NARRATOR — You know, that is a nice thought. Thank you. Okay. Give me a few moments to calm down.

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — And we’re back. Okay! Right. You’ve finally got around to trying to cross the lake. You can drag the boat to the water.

- (Explore) “I still hate rowing.”
- “This is the boring part. I can do the rowing, while thinking about the stabbing that is to come!” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “I still hate rowing.”

THE NARRATOR — “I’m sure rowing doesn’t like you very much either, your highness.”

THE DAMSEL — “Come on! Let’s go!”

- (Explore) “Do any of you want to help?”
- “This is the boring part. I can do the rowing, while thinking about the stabbing that is to come!” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “Do any of you want to help?”

THE WITCH — “No.”

THE DAMSEL — “No.”

THE SPECTRE — “Still a ghost, still can’t touch oars.”

THE NARRATOR — She waves her hand through an oar to demonstrate.

- “This is the boring part. I can do the rowing, while thinking about the stabbing that is to come!” [Cross the lake]

YOU — “This is the boring part. I can do the rowing, while thinking about the stabbing that is to come!” [Cross the lake]

THE NARRATOR — You pick up the oars and the other princesses join you in the small boat, while you start to row across.

THE DAMSEL — “Row, row, row your boat, gently across the lake—”

THE WITCH — “If someone tries to convince you love exists, it’s definitely a fake.”

THE DAMSEL — “Mean!”

THE SPECTRE — “Also, it didn’t scan.”

THE NARRATOR — The waters are cold and dark and cluttered with debris and floating junk. They move in fat, lazy ripples as you pull and pull and pull. There’s lurking sandbars and sharp fragments of broken tree trunks here, trying to snarl up the boat or even sink it. Sometimes you have to turn back and avoid clusters of debris that block off channels in the shallow water and are simply too dangerous to get close to. The whole area reeks of rot and the stink of discarded filth. This lake isn’t healthy. But you shouldn’t look too closely. Don’t linger here too long.

THE SPECTRE — “Not good. He’s affecting the lake now.”

THE DAMSEL — “It’s been draining. Is it him?”

THE SPECTRE — “Yes. It’s as shallow as it was last time, but it’s so much more filled with rubbish.”

THE WITCH — The Woods are sick. I can hear them hurting.

THE NARRATOR — All the more reason to hurry up, then.

- (Explore) “What do you mean, the Woods are hurting? You said you couldn’t hear them last time.”
- (Explore) “What does the detritus mean?”
- “Time to go stab him”. [Keep rowing]

YOU — “Time to go stab him”. [Keep rowing]

THE NARRATOR — On the far side of the lake, the slopes of the hillock are littered with detritus and muck. It’s been positioned as palisades and stakes, and while the subsidence and slump has led many of them to fall, it makes the muddy slope even harder to climb. Halfway up the hillside are the remnants of a dock, the timbers completely rotten and the structure nearly completely fallen apart and used to build a rotting barricade. That’s no use to anyone at all, so you have to beach the boat on the mix of dark sand and mud, and pull it up out of the water. On this side of the lake, the wind doesn’t blow. The air is as still as the water.

THE NARRATOR — The dark wood looms over the dark waters. Ill-favoured birds perch on every surface and flock around the watchtowers. The tops of the wooden walls have been embedded with nails to make them harder to climb. The shutters are thrown open, and gape like mouths. The gate is shut, the metal fastenings on the wooden gates bright and new. It’s the only thing clean and new about this squalid place.

THE NARRATOR — It... shouldn’t be shut.

THE WITCH — “Curses. The wretch has worked out to close his front door. I don’t like that.”

THE SPECTRE — “And he’s grown fond of traps. I think he doesn’t want to see you again.”

THE DAMSEL — “*Very* unromantic.”

- (Explore) “I agree, Princess Cutie. It is very unromantic!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!”
- (Lie) “Oh no, the defences are just too good. I suppose we should just go now.” [Hide]
- (Witch) [Tear down the gates]
- [Scale the wall]

YOU — “I agree, Princess Cutie. It is very unromantic!”

THE DAMSEL — “It’s practically rude!”

- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!”
- (Lie) “Oh no, the defences are just too good. I suppose we should just go now.” [Hide]
- (Witch) [Tear down the gates]
- [Scale the wall]

YOU — [Scale the wall]

THE NARRATOR — *How?* It’s a sheer wall!

- “With my knives. Duh.” [Scale the wall]
- [Scale the wall. With my knives. Duh]

YOU — [Scale the wall. With my knives. Duh]

THE NARRATOR — The old wood isn’t hard enough to stop you sinking the blades in. With, uh, pretty remarkable speed, you’re already halfway up the wall.

THE NARRATOR — You really like stabbing things, don’t you? While we’re at it, do you mind telling me what happened ‘last time’? I feel I really kind of feel that I’m operating without the information I need and when all of you are chattering it feels like I’m barely able to get a word in.

THE SPECTRE — “Don’t worry, handsome, I’m always here to listen to your buttery voice.”

THE NARRATOR — ... she says, floating beside you. You seem to be leaving the others behind.

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — Wait, that’s good, they’re just making a mess of things. Good job!

THE WITCH — “How are we meant to follow?”

THE DAMSEL — “Maybe you can use your kitty claws to climb the wood!”

THE WITCH — “Woods it is, then. Spectre! Don’t let her get herself killed until I catch up!”

THE NARRATOR — The spectre waves back down at the witch and the damsel.

THE SPECTRE — “Watch out for the nails, by the way.”

THE NARRATOR — You do not suitably watch out for the nails, and in the process of getting over the top, you take several nasty gashes. That looks like it hurts. And about that explanation...

- (Explore) “Hurts?”
- (Explore) [Explain what’s going on]
- [Ignore his nonsense]

YOU — [Ignore his nonsense]

THE NARRATOR — Rather than provide any information that could help the narrator who’s trying to help you, you instead drop down the other side of the palisade. The spectre floats down after you.

THE NARRATOR — This castle is abandoned, and there is a feeling of rough-hewn messiness about it. The outer castle has a collection of rude huts and wood-walled cabins, but they’ve collapsed and are overgrown with sickly looking saplings. The unpaved dirt tracks are overgrown with knee-high grass. Everywhere there’s piles of rusting metal offcuts and broken wood, dropped without any care. The air is... not quite parched, but it’s drier than it was on the other side of the lake.

THE NARRATOR — There is a motte at the rear of this castle, rising up on top of the hill. It is built of stone unlike the rest of the structure, though you have seen much more impressive fortresses in your time. The first two floors are solid stone, with no windows, and above that is an overhang to make it even harder to climb. It is really only a few rooms in a tower, a last fallback for a lord who has lost control of the outer walls. The flagpole at the top is a broken, jagged stump and the stones are falling from the upper floors. Still, it has a door, and the door is closed.

THE SPECTRE — “This is the least welcoming castle I’ve seen yet.”

- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.” [Call out]
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “I don’t like how he made it harder to climb up the castle!”
- (Explore) “Bet you that he’s also locked the door to the castle. Tee hee! Silly Hero, thinking that’ll help him.”
- (Explore) “It’s really falling apart now. Why?”
- (Explore) “Boring! I’d have thought that there’d be some guards here for me to stab.”
- [Approach the castle]
- [Wait for the Witch and the Damsel]

YOU — “It’s really falling apart now. Why?”

THE NARRATOR — This is how the castle’s always looked. Well, not always-always, because presumably it was in better repair before, but it hasn’t changed.

THE SPECTRE — “I think... I think it’s a clue. With me it was a frozen, barren place. For the damsel, it was a fairytale castle. For the witch, well, she sort of pulled it apart with the Woods, so I didn’t see what it was like before that. But I don’t think he cares about how it looks.

THE SPECTRE — “And if it’s actively dangerous to try to get there, I think he thinks it’s all the better. There might well be traps waiting for you.”

- (Explore) “Traps?”
- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.” [Call out]
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “I don’t like how he made it harder to climb up the castle!”
- (Explore) “Bet you that he’s also locked the door to the castle. Tee hee! Silly Hero, thinking that’ll help him.”
- (Explore) “Boring! I’d have thought that there’d be some guards here for me to stab.”
- [Approach the castle]
- [Wait for the Witch and the Damsel]

YOU — “Boring! I’d have thought that there’d be some guards here for me to stab.”

THE SPECTRE — “Why? There weren’t guards before. There haven’t ever been guards.”

- (Explore) “I think it’d just be fun-ner, you know?”
- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.” [Call out]
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “I don’t like how he made it harder to climb up the castle!”
- (Explore) “Bet you that he’s also locked the door to the castle. Tee hee! Silly Hero, thinking that’ll help him.”
- [Approach the castle]
- [Wait for the Witch and the Damsel]

YOU — “I think it’d just be fun-ner, you know?”

THE SPECTRE — “I don’t think he cares.

THE SPECTRE — “And that interests me, you know. My hero was so very bored of life. When I came back and ripped his heart out

THE SPECTRE — he was actually happy that something had changed.”

THE NARRATOR — Aaah! What’s happened to your face?

THE SPECTRE — “Does a girl always have to look her best for her sweet, my love?”

THE NARRATOR — Please. Stop.

THE SPECTRE — “If you insist, dearest.”

THE NARRATOR — She giggles, like the wicked, wicked woman she is.

THE SPECTRE — “You’re too kind. Anyway, I believe this hero would rather be safe than bored. He won’t play fair.”

- (Explore) “How boring. Oh well! I guess I oughta liven up his life!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.” [Call out]
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “I don’t like how he made it harder to climb up the castle!”
- (Explore) “Bet you that he’s also locked the door to the castle. Tee hee! Silly Hero, thinking that’ll help him.”
- [Approach the castle]
- [Wait for the Witch and the Damsel]

YOU — “How boring. Oh well! I guess I oughta liven up his life!”

THE SPECTRE — “Maybe he’ll appreciate it if you end him.”

- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.” [Call out]
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “I don’t like how he made it harder to climb up the castle!”
- (Explore) “Bet you that he’s also locked the door to the castle. Tee hee! Silly Hero, thinking that’ll help him.”
- (Explore) “Boring! I’d have thought that there’d be some guards here for me to stab.”
- [Approach the castle]
- [Wait for the Witch and the Damsel]

YOU — “Bet you that he’s also locked the door to the castle. Tee hee! Silly Hero, thinking that’ll help him.”

THE NARRATOR — Solid doors do stop most people.

THE SPECTRE — “I’m most people and they don’t stop me.”

THE NARRATOR — You are most definitely not most people.

THE SPECTRE — “Most people who have ever lived are dead. So I’m more representative of most people than anyone else here.”

- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.” [Call out]
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “I don’t like how he made it harder to climb up the castle!”
- [Approach the castle]
- [Wait for the Witch and the Damsel]

YOU — [Approach the castle]

THE NARRATOR — Without delaying any further, you set off towards the citadel, pushing through the long grass. Beyond you, there is the sound of a creaking of wood and the wind through branches as the witch starts doing... something.

THE NARRATOR — And then there is a metallic snap. You look down.

THE NARRATOR — You just stood on a bear trap. The teeth are sunk deep into your leg. Red blood wells up around where metal breaks flesh.

- “Well, that’s annoying.” [Try to pry it open]
- “Well, that’s annoying.” [Cut off your leg]
- (Lie) “Oh no! I’m trapped. Totally trapped. I have no way of getting out of this bear trap. My leg, which is made of meat and bone and nothing else, is broken. I can’t even move now. Oh no. Who was so very cunning to trap me like this?” [Wait]

YOU — “Well, that’s annoying.” [Try to pry it open]

THE NARRATOR — Uncaring of the bleeding, you stoop down and try to lever at the trap. It has a very stiff spring. You can maybe try to pull your leg out, but it’ll probably do more damage on the way out. And hurt a lot.

THE SPECTRE — “You could wait for the other two to catch up.”

- (Explore) “Hurt?”
- “I’m not waiting. That’s boring!” [Pry it open]
- “I’m not waiting. That’s boring!” [Cut off your leg]
- “Urgh! Fine!” [Wait for the others]
- (Lie) “Oh no! I’m trapped. Totally trapped. I have no way of getting out of this bear trap. My leg, which is made of meat and bone and nothing else, is broken. I can’t even move now. Oh no. Who was so very cunning to trap me like this?” [Wait for the Hero]

YOU — “I’m not waiting. That’s boring!” [Pry it open]

THE NARRATOR — The process of getting it off your leg mangles it further, but you manage to get it out. Your leg is mutilated, and you are bleeding heavily from the calf. Not a good start to trying to kill the hero, I fear. That’s going to slow you down.

- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.” [Call out]
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- [Approach the castle]
- [Wait for the Witch and the Damsel]

YOU — [Approach the castle]

THE NARRATOR — Might I... suggest firmly that you be more cautious?

- “Why?” [Approach the castle]
- “Fiiiiiiiine.” [Approach the castle more cautiously.]

YOU — “Why?” [Approach the castle]

THE NARRATOR — Because there are clearly more bear traps in the long grass and—

THE DAMSEL — “Wait up for me, bestie! I’m comin— aaaah!”

THE NARRATOR — Oh. And the damsel has just fallen down a pit trap. There’s also pit traps.

THE WITCH — “For goodness sake! Why didn’t you watch where you were going?”

THE DAMSEL — “I think I’m stuck on the spikes! Oh! This one is going right through me!”

THE NARRATOR — But you don’t listen, do you? You just march on, and sure enough, there’s another snap.

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — And also a shattering noise. The bear trap... broke on your leg. That’s not what’s supposed to happen. That’s not what just happened, too. What’s going on?

- (Lie) “Oh no, I have no idea how that happened. Me, a princess made of meat and bones and nothing else.”
- “Rude! Never ask a lady what she has up her dress. Which is only her very pretty legs, by the way.”
- [Approach the castle]

YOU — “Rude! Never ask a lady what she has up her dress. Which is only her very pretty legs, by the way.”

THE NARRATOR — Hmm.

- (Explore) (Lie) “Which are, like all princess legs, made only of meat and bone. And nothing else.”
- [Approach the castle]

YOU — (Lie) “Which are, like all princess legs, made only of meat and bone. And nothing else.”

THE NARRATOR — Why do you lie? I know you’re lying. Why do it?

- (Explore) “Fine, I was lying. Not all princess legs are made of meat and bone. Princess Spooky’s are made of... ghost stuff.”
- [Approach the castle]

YOU — “Fine, I was lying. Not all princess legs are made of meat and bone. Princess Spooky’s are made of... ghost stuff.”

THE SPECTRE — “That’s true. And wherever my body is, there’s just bone. No meat anymore. Looks like she’s won there, darling.”

THE NARRATOR — You both know that’s not what I mean!

THE DAMSEL — “Ah, hello! Can I have some help getting off the spikes? I’m sort of stuck! And then maybe some help getting out of the pit?”

THE DAMSEL— “Not you, bestie! You’ve got your destined meeting with your Hero! That’s more important than me! But I’d appreciate some help from someone else!”

- (Explore) “Princess Kitty, please save Princess Cutie!”
- [Rescue the damsel]
- [Approach the castle]

YOU — “Princess Kitty, please save Princess Cutie!”

THE WITCH — “Why?”

- (Explore) “I’ll stab the Hero an extra time for you!”
- [Rescue the damsel]
- [Approach the castle]

YOU — [Rescue the damsel]

THE NARRATOR — You turn around, heading directly towards the pit that the damsel down.

THE NARRATOR — Incidentally, there are several more snaps and pings as you stand on bear traps. Your legs are bleeding pretty heavily now, but you don’t seem to care.

THE NARRATOR — The damsel is down in the pit. One of the spikes is right through her shoulder. It is covered in blood, and red is staining her dress.

THE DAMSEL — “You shouldn’t be here. You need to be chasing your love. I’m sure I’ll be fine!”

THE NARRATOR — She tries to pull herself off the spike, and fails.

THE DAMSEL — “I just need to try harder and then I’ll be right along.”

THE NARRATOR — You ignore her, and jump down. Which I wouldn’t have done with my legs in your state.

THE SPECTRE — “Oh, so you have legs, handsome?”

THE NARRATOR — You pull the damsel off the spike, and leap out of the hole. In one jump. Wait, if you can jump like that, why didn’t you just jump over the wall?

THE WITCH — “Good question. What aren’t you telling us?”

THE DAMSEL — “Why did you come back for me? I told you not to!”

- “I felt like it!”
- “It’d be boring if I just had to listen to the narrator! It’s much more fun with the girls around!”
- “Best friends!”

YOU — “It’d be boring if I just had to listen to the narrator! It’s much more fun with the girls around!”

THE DAMSEL — “Yay. Best friends!”

THE WITCH — “Don’t ignore me!”

- (Explore) (Lie) “I am completely one-hundred percent honest with you, Princess Kitty!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “You’re just so suspicious! When I’m completely innocent!”
- [Approach the castle]

YOU — (Lie) “I am completely one-hundred percent honest with you, Princess Kitty!”

THE WITCH — “Hmm.”

- (Explore) (Lie) “You’re just so suspicious! When I’m completely innocent!”
- [Approach the castle]

YOU — “You’re just so suspicious! When I’m completely innocent!”

THE WITCH — “I don’t trust you!”

- [Approach the castle]

YOU — [Approach the castle]

THE NARRATOR — There is another snap as another bear trap breaks on you, and then you emerge from the long grass. You try the door. It’s locked.

THE SPECTRE — “Amazing. Shocking. Controversial. Do you want me to float through the door?”

THE DAMSEL — “I am feeling really faint! I wonder why?”

THE WITCH — “That’s probably the blood loss.”

THE DAMSEL — “Oh! That would make sense!”

- (Explore) (Lie) “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!”

- (Explore) “You know, it’s quite rude to leave all those bear traps around. It’s very messy.”
- (Explore) “Hi!”
- (Explore) “Hello! I’m here to meet my love!”
- [Cut through the door]

YOU — “Oh no, here I am, a travelling princess who has never been here before, who wants to get out of the rain? I do hope some kind and handsome gentleman will be here to give me comfort.”

THE NARRATOR — There is no response.

- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “You know, it’s quite rude to leave all those bear traps around. It’s very messy.”
- (Explore) “Hi!”
- [Catch the crossbow bolt]
- (Explore) “Hello! I’m here to meet my love!”
- [Cut through the door]

YOU — [Catch the crossbow bolt]

THE NARRATOR — Sorry, what? I mean, uh, a little hatch on the door flips open, there’s a twang of a crossbow and you snatch the crossbow bolt out of the air. That’s very impressive.

THE NARRATOR — A voice creeps out from the other side of the door in a thin, sullen whine.

THE HERO — “Oh, you cheat!”

- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “You know, it’s quite rude to leave all those bear traps around. It’s very messy.”
- (Explore) “Hi!”
- (Explore) “Hello! I’m here to meet my love!”
- [Cut through the door]

YOU — “Hi!”

THE HERO — “Don’t you ‘hi’ me! You killed me!”

- (Explore) (Lie) “What? Nooo. No, that doesn’t sound like me. I’m just a sweet innocent princess who’s here to save trapped heroes. Because I’m such a kindly soul.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “You know, it’s quite rude to leave all those bear traps around. It’s very messy.”
- (Explore) “Hi!”
- (Explore) “Hello! I’m here to meet my love!”
- [Cut through the door]

YOU — (Lie) “What? Nooo. No, that doesn’t sound like me. I’m just a sweet innocent princess who’s here to save trapped heroes. Because I’m such a kindly soul.”

THE HERO — “You filthy liar!”

- (Explore) “My hygiene is very good! I’m just a bit covered in blood right now! Can I come in and use your bath?”
- (Explore) (Lie) “Come out, come out, I promise I won’t stab you!” [Call out]
- (Explore) “You know, it’s quite rude to leave all those bear traps around. It’s very messy.”
- (Explore) “Hi!”
- (Explore) “Hello! I’m here to meet my love!”
- [Cut through the door]

YOU — “My hygiene is very good! I’m just a bit covered in blood right now! Can I come in and use your bath?”

THE DAMSEL — “Does he have a bath? I’d like a bath. With… rose petals. And other things that come in baths.”

THE WITCH — “No baths!”

THE SPECTRE — “She says, surprising no one.”

THE HERO — “Oh ho ho, no, no, not a chance. If I open the door, you’ll just come in and stab me, right?”

- (Lie) “No.”
- “... okay, you got me! What fun this game is! Now is stabbing time!” [Cut through the door]

YOU — (Lie) “No.”

THE HERO — “You know what? I don’t believe you! You’re just here to stab me! With your tricky little knives, oh yes you are! What is it you want?”

- (Explore) (Lie) “I am the very model of charity. I only want to help you.”
- (Explore) “I’m in love with you. Let me in! I’m just full of passion and I want to express that love in the most romantic way possible.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “It’s so cruel that you assume I want something? Can’t a girl just meet a boy and want to get to know him better? In intimate, not-knife-related ways?”
- (Explore) “Oh, you got me. I do want to stab you. But I don’t want to kill you! It’s just a romantic, lovely, darling stabbing for two!”
- “Bored now!” [Cut through the door]

YOU — “I’m in love with you. Let me in! I’m just full of passion and I want to express that love in the most romantic way possible.”

THE HERO — “Wh-what? What’s this rubbish about love? You killed me!”

THE NARRATOR — The fact that isn't a lie terrifies me.

THE DAMSEL — “Whoo! Go... go bestie...”

THE WITCH — “It's kind of impressive how much blood she has in her. Well. Had in her.”

- (Explore) “I love you. Let me in. Let me in.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I didn't kill you! That was another princess! In armour! Look at me, I'm not wearing armour. And there's lot of princesses around!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am the very model of charity. I only want to help you.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “It's so cruel that you assume I want something? Can't a girl just meet a boy and want to get to know him better? In intimate, not-knife-related ways?”
- (Explore) “Oh, you got me. I do want to stab you. But I don't want to kill you! It's just a romantic, lovely, darling stabbing for two!”
- “Bored now!” [Cut through the door]

YOU — (Lie) “It's so cruel that you assume I want something? Can't a girl just meet a boy and want to get to know him better? In intimate, not-knife-related ways?”

THE HERO — “You say all these things, but why would you specify ‘not-knife related’...

THE HERO — “Also, wait! You're a monster who just walked through all my bear traps and didn't even flinch! And you're going to kill me again! You're not even human!”

- (Explore) “Neither are you! I don't see what that has to do with anything!”
- (Explore) “I love you. Let me in. Let me in.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I didn't kill you! That was another princess! In armour! Look at me, I'm not wearing armour. And there's lot of princesses around!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am the very model of charity. I only want to help you.”
- (Explore) “Oh, you got me. I do want to stab you. But I don't want to kill you! It's just a romantic, lovely, darling stabbing for two!”
- “Bored now!” [Cut through the door]

YOU — “Neither are you! I don't see what that has to do with anything!”

THE NARRATOR — The hero is silent.

THE WITCH — “He's probably reloading the crossbow.”

- (Explore) “I love you. Let me in. Let me in.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I didn't kill you! That was another princess! In armour! Look at me, I'm not wearing armour. And there's lot of princesses around!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am the very model of charity. I only want to help you.”
- (Explore) “Oh, you got me. I do want to stab you. But I don't want to kill you! It's just a romantic, lovely, darling stabbing for two!”
- [Upgrade your knife]
- “Bored now!” [Cut through the door]

YOU — [Upgrade your knife]

THE NARRATOR — Please, stop doing things I don't-

THE NARRATOR — Oh. Um. There is the sound of wet, slicing meat as your left hand grabs your right forearm and yanks. The flesh of your right arm comes away too cleanly, as if you're peeling off an opera glove. There are no bones under there. Only a single, keen blade.

THE WITCH — “Oh. So that's why the bear traps didn't work. Makes sense.”

- (Explore) “I love you. Let me in. Let me in.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I didn't kill you! That was another princess! In armour! Look at me, I'm not wearing armour. And there's lot of princesses around!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am the very model of charity. I only want to help you.”
- (Explore) “Oh, you got me. I do want to stab you. But I don't want to kill you! It's just a romantic, lovely, darling stabbing for two!”
- “Bored now!” [Cut through the door]

YOU — “I love you. Let me in. Let me in.”

THE HERO — He doesn't respond.

THE DAMSEL — “It's... it's very rude... rude for a man to ignore you when you're dressed up pretty for him...”

- (Explore) “I love you. Let me in. Let me in.”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I didn't kill you! That was another princess! In armour! Look at me, I'm not wearing armour. And there's lot of princesses around!”
- (Explore) (Lie) “I am the very model of charity. I only want to help you.”
- (Explore) “Oh, you got me. I do want to stab you. But I don't want to kill you! It's just a romantic, lovely, darling stabbing for two!”
- “You're right! It is rude! I am offended! Offended beyond words!” [Cut through the door]
- “Bored now!” [Cut through the door]

YOU — “Bored now!” [Cut through the door]

THE NARRATOR — The hardwood parts like butter in the face of a hot knife as you plunge your knife-arm into the door. There is a scream, a twang, and a crossbow bolt protrudes from the door.

THE WITCH — “Looks like someone went off early~”

THE NARRATOR — A couple more hacks and you've cut away a rough triangle of wood — enough to see inside, into the squalid, junk filled interior where the hero is scrambling back. The crossbow is on the floor, now unloaded. It must have gone off when he dropped it.

- (Explore) “Hi!”
- (Explore) “Here's... her Highness!”
- (Explore) “Wow, your door is very thin! And here I am, an innocent princess with very shapely and skinny arms! You're practically asking for someone to get through!”

- (Explore) [Give him your best smile]
- [Hack down the door]

YOU — [Give him your best smile]

THE HERO — “Get... get back! What are you?”

THE NARRATOR — That is a lot of very sharp teeth.

- (Explore) “Hi!”
- (Explore) “Here’s... her Highness!”
- (Explore) “Wow, your door is very thin! And here I am, an innocent princess with very shapely and skinny arms! You’re practically asking for someone to get through!”
- [Hack down the door]

YOU — “Wow, your door is very thin! And here I am, an innocent princess with very shapely and skinny arms! You’re practically asking for someone to get through!”

THE HERO — “Bullshit! Absolute bullshit!”

THE NARRATOR — He crawls away, scrabbling in the piles of junk, looking for a weapon, a tool, anything that can stop you.

THE NARRATOR — You get a good look at him now, for the first time. He looks like he’s trying to be a brave, heroic knight, but he can’t manage it. Everything about him is rusty and dilapidated. His breastplate is streaked with red stains and has several large rends in it, his boots don’t match, he only has one vambrace and his helmet’s strap has rotted through and so came off.

THE NARRATOR — His eyes are narrowed in a squint, and his beak is locked in a perpetual furrow - a scowl, even. This is a man who eternally feels the world has cheated him of his due.

- (Explore) “Hi!”
- (Explore) “Here’s... her Highness!”
- [Hack down the door]

YOU — [Hack down the door]

THE NARRATOR — Wood splinters. You are through the door. Your footsteps scrape. Your blade scrapes as you drag it along the floor.

THE HERO — “What do you want? Why are you doing this?”

- “Because it’s fun.”
- “Because I love you.”
- “I don’t really need a reason, silly!”

YOU — “Because I love you.”

THE HERO — “Fuck that! This isn’t love! This is... this is bullshit, why can’t I stop you, how do you keep doing this?”

- (Explore) “But I do love you. I love the way you scream...”
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “But I do love you. I love the way you scream...”

THE NARRATOR — He grabs for another crossbow, and looses it. You bring your blade across and slice it from the air. A rent bolt lands on the floor.

- (Explore) “... I love the way you whimper when my knife parts your flesh...”
- (Explore) “... I love the way my heart races when I’m around you...”
- (Explore) “... I love the way you make me feel...”
- (Explore) “... I love how you used to be strong and now you’re so cutely weak...”
- (Explore) “... I love all the ways you’re trying to keep us apart and it doesn’t work, because it’s meant to be...”
- (Explore) “... I love how this is going to only end one way and we both know it...”
- (Explore) “... I love the way you keep on trying to kill me and never succeed, but you keep trying...”
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “... I love the way my heart races when I’m around you...”

- (Explore) “... I love the way you whimper when my knife parts your flesh...”
- [Stab the Hero]
- (Explore) “... I love the way you make me feel...”
- (Explore) “... I love how you used to be strong and now you’re so cutely weak...”
- (Explore) “... I love all the ways you’re trying to keep us apart and it doesn’t work, because it’s meant to be...”
- (Explore) “... I love how this is going to only end one way and we both know it...”
- (Explore) “... I love the way you keep on trying to kill me and never succeed, but you keep trying...”
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “... I love the way you make me feel...”

- (Explore) “... I love the way you whimper when my knife parts your flesh...”
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- (Explore) “... I love how you used to be strong and now you’re so cutely weak...”
- (Explore) “... I love all the ways you’re trying to keep us apart and it doesn’t work, because it’s meant to be...”
- (Explore) “... I love how this is going to only end one way and we both know it...”
- (Explore) “... I love the way you keep on trying to kill me and never succeed, but you keep trying...”

- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “... I love the way you whimper when my knife parts your flesh...”

THE NARRATOR — He winces.

- (Explore) “... oh, you’re just so cute! And so stabbable!”
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- (Explore) “... I love how you used to be strong and now you’re so cutely weak...”
- (Explore) “... I love all the ways you’re trying to keep us apart and it doesn’t work, because it’s meant to be...”
- (Explore) “... I love how this is going to only end one way and we both know it...”
- (Explore) “... I love the way you keep on trying to kill me and never succeed, but you keep trying...”
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “... I love the way you keep on trying to kill me and never succeed, but you keep trying...”

THE NARRATOR — An ugly expression twists onto his face. It’s like he doesn’t like being told that you love him because he’s a failure.

THE NARRATOR — You should kill him now before he tries anything else.

- (Explore) “... oh, you’re just so cute! And so stabbable!”
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- (Explore) “... I love how you used to be strong and now you’re so cutely weak...”
- (Explore) “... I love all the ways you’re trying to keep us apart and it doesn’t work, because it’s meant to be...”
- (Explore) “... I love how this is going to only end one way and we both know it...”
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “... oh, you’re just so cute! And so stabbable!”

THE DAMSEL — “... is... cute... you get it.”

THE SPECTRE — “Cutie? Cutie?”

THE NARRATOR — He pulls himself upright, knees knocking, still that scowl on his face.

THE HERO — “Well, that’s what you like, is it? And you’re talking about love. Well, what will you do when I use... this.”

THE NARRATOR — Oh no. He does it. He uses *The Look*.

- [Be Looked At]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — [Be Looked At]

THE HERO — “Yeah. I thought so. How’d’ya like them oranges, eh?”

THE SPECTRE — “I’ve always felt he was sort of handsome.”

THE DAMSEL — “... th’t’s... m’... love...”

THE WITCH — “W-what? No, don’t, you... you can’t like him! You can’t look like that! What are you, stupid?”

THE NARRATOR — You, and all the princesses are blushing rosily.

THE WITCH — “Am not, idiot!”

THE NARRATOR — I was afraid that this might—

- “Okay, but is there anything else?”
- [Stab the Hero]

YOU — [Stab the Hero]

THE NARRATOR — You... you skewer him. How? That was *The Look*!

THE HERO — “How? That was *The Look*!”

- “Silly billy! Princess Cutie already explained what I felt was love! So that handsome little look only added to the exciting sexual tension of our interactions! Silly adorable hero!”
- “Silly billy! Princess Cutie already explained what I felt was love! So that handsome little look only added to the exciting sexual tension of our interactions! Silly adorable hero!” [Stab the Hero]

YOU — “Silly billy! Princess Cutie already explained what I felt was love! So that handsome little look only added to the exciting sexual tension of our interactions! Silly adorable hero!” [Stab the Hero]

THE NARRATOR — You skewer him again. He coughs blood and staggers backwards.

THE HERO — “All right! No! No! Fuck this! Fuck this and fuck you!”

- “You’re so cute when you’re huffy!” [Stab the Hero]
- “Do The Look again! C’mon! C’mon!” [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- “Was that your left knee? I think that was your left knee!” [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Upgrade your knife]
- [Stab the Hero]
- “I’m having so much fun right now!” [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — [Upgrade your knife]

THE NARRATOR — You rake your blade-hand along the other arm, wetly slicing off the meat to reveal a second blade. You scrape them against each other, sparks gleaming as the edges meet.

THE NARRATOR — Kill him! Kill him now!

- “You’re so cute when you’re huffy!” [Stab the Hero]
- “Do The Look again! C’mon! C’mon!” [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- “Was that your left knee? I think that was your left knee!” [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- “I’m having so much fun right now!” [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — “I’m having so much fun right now!” [Stab the Hero]

THE NARRATOR — Once again, because you are not listening to me, you skewer him. This time in two places at once.

THE NARRATOR — He sags back, bleeding from many places.

THE HERO — “All right! You know what? This is *bullshit*! People aren’t meant to be able to die anymore! People aren’t meant to be able to hurt any more! The old game isn’t meant to be a fucking thing! And someone’s helping you, because I know how this goes. Oh yes, I definitely know how this goes. So you know what? You wanna play that old game? We’re playing that old game.”

THE WITCH — “Oh, do go on.”

THE NARRATOR — Oh, no no no.

THE HERO — “I will go on. ‘Cause I’m the fucking dealer now.”

THE NARRATOR — “Stop him! Murder him!”

THE HERO — Everything goes dark. And you die.

Chapter 12: CHAPTER I: THE PRINCESS AND THE HERO

Chapter Summary

THE NARRATOR — You're on a path in the woods.

THE NARRATOR — At the end of the path is a ca... castle.

THE NARRATOR — In the castle there is a hero. You're here to kill him. So go do that.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

THE NARRATOR — You're on a path in the woods.

THE NARRATOR — At the end of the path is a ca... castle.

THE NARRATOR — In the castle there is a hero. You're here to kill him. So go do that.

- (Explore) This is something new. Hehe.
- (Explore) Oh no, what is going on here. I am just an *innocent* princess who has never done anything wrong.
- (Explore) That wasn't fun at all! I was playing with my hero!
- (Explore) That cheat! He just ended the world! That takes all the fun out of it.
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.
- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — This is something new. Hehe.

THE NARRATOR — What does that mean? Is that a threat? And what kind of laugh was that meant to be?

- (Explore) It's just an innocent little giggle. Hehe.
- (Explore) Oh no, what is going on here. I am just an *innocent* princess who has never done anything wrong.
- (Explore) That wasn't fun at all! I was playing with my hero!
- (Explore) That cheat! He just ended the world! That takes all the fun out of it.
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.

- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — It's just an innocent little giggle. Hehe.

THE NARRATOR — There it is! You did it again! You're up to something, aren't you?

- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) Oh no, what is going on here. I am just an *innocent* princess who has never done anything wrong.
- (Explore) That wasn't fun at all! I was playing with my hero!
- (Explore) That cheat! He just ended the world! That takes all the fun out of it.
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.
- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — Hehe.

THE NARRATOR — Oh, you think you're so clever, don't you? Playing your little games. But I'm the narrator and I'm saying, you need to go to the castle.

- (Explore) Oh no, what is going on here. I am just an *innocent* princess who has never done anything wrong.
- (Explore) That wasn't fun at all! I was playing with my hero!
- (Explore) That cheat! He just ended the world! That takes all the fun out of it.
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.
- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — Oh no, what is going on here. I am just an *innocent* princess who has never done anything wrong.

THE NARRATOR — Yeah. Sure. I believe you. You totally haven't done anything wrong.

THE NARRATOR — You're not a monster pretending very badly to be a human being. Human beings have fucking knives for hands, right?

- (Explore) How rude! My knives are very chaste. Just like me. The *innocent* princess.

- (Explore) That wasn't fun at all! I was playing with my hero!
- (Explore) That cheat! He just ended the world! That takes all the fun out of it.
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Narrate) You know that's not me, right? Can you hear me?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.
- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — How rude! My knives are very chaste. Just like me. The *innocent* princess.

THE NARRATOR — Grrmph. So what did those knives chase, then?

- (Explore) That wasn't fun at all! I was playing with my hero!
- (Explore) That cheat! He just ended the world! That takes all the fun out of it.
- (Narrate) Hello? Hello?
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.
- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- (Explore) Of course I can hear you. Oh, isn't this fun?
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — Of course I can hear you. Oh, isn't this fun?

THE NARRATOR — I... didn't say anything about you not hearing me. But okay.

THE NARRATOR — Are you up to something?

- (Explore) That wasn't fun at all! I was playing with my hero!
- (Explore) That cheat! He just ended the world! That takes all the fun out of it.
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.
- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- (Explore) Of course I can hear you. Oh, isn't this fun?
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- Don't let him know I'm here. He might not be able to see me, but if you start acting like I'm here, he'll put it together. And we'll all be in for it. [Please play along]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — That cheat! He just ended the world! That takes all the fun out of it.

THE NARRATOR — Ended the world? What are you talking about? No one's ended any worlds here. You'd have to be really clever and really powerful to do that.

THE NARRATOR — And willing to do what you have to do to stop a fucking rat.

- (Explore) I have no idea what I was saying. Silly me, hehe. I just get very dizzy sometimes and say things.
- (Explore) That wasn't fun at all! I was playing with my hero!
- (Narrate) Here's the thing. He didn't actually end the world. He just created a new place that looks like a new world.
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.
- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- (Explore) Of course I can hear you. Oh, isn't this fun?
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — I have no idea what I was saying. Silly me, hehe. I just get very dizzy sometimes and say things.

THE NARRATOR — Right. Sure.

- (Explore) What happened to the others, then?
- (Explore) As a magical princess on a heroic quest to kill a very bad hero, I feel like I should have a bestie to help me fight the bad hero.
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.
- (Narrate) Good. Keep playing along.
- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- (Explore) Of course I can hear you. Oh, isn't this fun?
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — As a magical princess on a heroic quest to kill a very bad hero, I feel like I should have a bestie to help me fight the bad hero.

THE NARRATOR — No, you're all alone. And always have been.

THE NARRATOR — No one's going to help something like you.

- (Explore) That's very cruel. And mean. Sob, sob.
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.

- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- (Explore) Of course I can hear you. Oh, isn't this fun?
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]
- Yeah, I'm not entirely sure where he's put the other princesses. They'll probably show up to annoy him. They definitely annoy me. [Please play along]

YOU — That's very cruel. And mean. Sob, sob.

THE NARRATOR — Oh, cut the crap. No one's going to believe that kind of bad acting. Just get over there and kill that hero.

THE NARRATOR — You can skip if you want to.

- (Explore) What happened to the others, then?
- (Narrate) What I wonder is how much he knows about what's going on here?
- (Explore) Ca...? What were you going to say that wasn't castle?
- (Explore) 'Kill' the hero, eh? Hehe.
- (Explore) I'd like another knife!
- (Explore) Of course I can hear you. Oh, isn't this fun?
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]
- Well, I suppose I'm just off to the castle. Skipping along, free of cares, and also free of plans. Tee hee. I'm such a silly girl. [Head to the castle]
- I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

YOU — I don't think I want to. I think I'm going to go walking in... this direction! [Wander off looking for something interesting]

THE NARRATOR — No, stop, stop! What are you doing? You can't just wander off in the woods! That's just-

- What's that?

YOU — What's that?

THE NARRATOR — Nothing! Nothing! Just... some woods, okay! Let me just finish-

- (Narrate) In front of you, you can see that the world simply stops. It is as if there is a line drawn in the woods, as if it was cut by a razor
- (Narrate) On one side, leaf mould and soil and roots in the disordered chaos of the woods.
- (Narrate) On the other, nothing. Blackness. Vaguely textured blackness
- (Narrate) Just... keep away from that, would you?
- (Explore) That looks like a hole in the world!
- [Jump in the hole]

YOU — That looks like a hole in the world!

THE NARRATOR — No it doesn't! It's just... a dirty pool.

- (Narrate) Okay, look. Can you keep him busy? I'm going to see if I can find where he is. So you can murder him.
- (Narrate) Please promise me you'll actually try to murder him this time.
- (Explore) (Lie) Sure!
- (Explore) It's not nice to lie to an innocent princess like myself.
- (Explore) What are you trying to hide?
- [Jump in the hole]
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]

YOU — (Lie) Sure!

THE NARRATOR — Oh, I can see that's a lie! You don't believe me! But look, it really is just a dirty pool now!

THE NARRATOR — It's a pool of stagnant water. There's some dead logs sticking out of it. You don't want to go in there. You want to turn around and go back to the cab... castle where the hero is waiting for you.

- (Narrate) Wait, was that lie aimed at me or him?
- (Narrate) Anyway, yeah, he's replaced the hole with a lake. It's pretty shoddy work, though. Look at how a whole bunch of the dead tree trunks are identical.
- (Narrate) He's really not very good at this.
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) So there was a hole. And it's gone now.
- Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle]
- (Lie) Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Continue further into the woods]
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]

YOU — Hehe.

THE NARRATOR — Stop laughing! Stop laughing at me! Nothing is fucking funny! You're just being difficult! You're a crazy monster who's just out to cause people pain!

- (Narrate) Okay, I really wish I wasn't saying this, but annoying him as much as possible might give us a chance.
- (Explore) Here's the thing, my love. I'm not crazy. Far from it. I know what I want and I know how to get it. And I love you. I love how angry you're getting. I love that whine in your voice. I love the way you remade the whole world for me and everything you're doing is because you can't stop thinking about me. I want to make you squeal. I want to make you scream. I want to make you play with me more. And I'm going to do that..
- (Explore) So there was a hole. And it's gone now.
- Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle]
- (Lie) Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Continue further into the woods]
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]

YOU — So there was a hole. And it's gone now.

THE NARRATOR — There wasn't a hole! There's only ever been this pool, okay!

- (Explore) Do you think I can hide things from the Narrator?
- Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle]
- (Lie) Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Continue further into the woods]
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]

YOU — Do you think I can hide things from the Narrator?

THE NARRATOR — No, of course not. You can't hide things from the Narrator.

THE NARRATOR — Who is me. I am the Narrator.

- (Narrate) Urgh. I'm going to hate that I said this. But... uh. I don't think you can.
- (Narrate) But I think he thinks you can.
- (Narrate) I'd say to use this power wisely, but we both know you're not going to use it wisely. You're going to use it to annoy him and then get in close to stab him.
- Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle]
- (Lie) Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Continue further into the woods]
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]
- ... [Stop including (Lie) in your dialogue options and also don't let him see these square brackets]

YOU — ...

THE NARRATOR — Yeah? Come on? What are you waiting for, a fucking medal?

- (Narrate) Well, I'm doomed. But hopefully so is he.
- (Explore) (Lie) I'm so scared. And lost in these awful, awful woods.
- Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle]
- (Lie) Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle] [Don't head to the castle, hide these square brackets]
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]

YOU — I'm so scared. And lost in these awful, awful woods.

THE NARRATOR — No, you're not. Just do what I tell you. Head to the place you're meant to go. Follow my instructions!

- (Narrate) Don't overuse it. But keep him distracted.
- (Explore) Hehe.
- Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle]
- (Lie) Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle] [Don't head to the castle, hide these square brackets]
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]

YOU — Hehe.

THE NARRATOR — Stop it! Stop... laughing!

- Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle]
- (Lie) Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle] [Don't head to the castle, hide these square brackets]
- Bored now. I know what you are. [Stab the fake Narrator]

YOU — Guess I'm going back to the castle, now. [Head to the castle]

THE NARRATOR — Okay, finally! It took you long enough. I was just about to pick you up and dump you in the castle myself!

THE NARRATOR — The path is boring and... has trees and stuff. You know, it's a forest path. But it leads to-

THE NARRATOR — You're not even heading along the path! Where are you going? Did you get lost? Typical! All you had to fucking do was follow my goddamn instructions, and you even said you'd do it, but no, of course you're not listening! Are you stupid, or just annoying?

THE NARRATOR — No, no, wait! Stay the fuck away from that place! That's just another area of forest, nothing to see there, just let me describe what's there.

The resonance of your heart cries out. He is close.

- (Explore) Looks like another hole in the world!
- [Jump into the hole]

YOU — [Jump into the hole]

THE NARRATOR — Oh no you don't!

THE NARRATOR — Everything goes dark and you die!

Chapter End Notes

THE NARRATOR — Who are you? You're the one setting this up, aren't you?

THE NARRATOR — Don't fuck around with me. I will find you. She shouldn't be here. She should be dead. She is dead. I watched her die. I watched all of her die.

THE NARRATOR — So she's not her.

THE NARRATOR — Then what is this thing wearing a dead woman's faces?

Chapter 13: CHAPTER II: THE HEROINE

Chapter Summary

YOU — Look at us! We're so intimate and romantic! I've stripped off everything and I'm showing you my most naked self!

THE NARRATOR — That's it! I quit! I'm done! This has gotten way too out of hand!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

THE NARRATOR — You're in a corridor in a castle. At the end of the corridor is a door. Inside the door is a hero. Go kill him.

- (Explore) I'm getting a little bit bored of you saying I'm dead when something fun is about to happen!
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) Oh look, a new start. I crave fresh and exciting and not-knife-related stimuli.
- (Explore) I think I'm meant to start in the m- the woods. I am meant to start in the woods.
- (Explore) (Lie) I guess this hole led here. I am not at all suspicious of what is going on here. Tee-hee. I am just a silly girl.
- (Explore) You know, I don't know that I've thanked you enough, Narrator. You've been with me all the way. You should come out so I can thank you.
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- I do like stabbing the Hero! [Go through the door]
- I turn around and go the other way [Turn around and leave]

YOU — I turn around and go the other way [Turn around and leave]

THE NARRATOR — Hah! I knew you'd try something like that. You're contrary like that! But as it turns out, there's just a blank wall behind you. And there aren't any windows or anything else like that either! You've got a one-way corridor and the hero is at the end of it.

THE NARRATOR — You just need to go do what you're told to do!

- (Explore) I'm getting a little bit bored of you saying I'm dead when something fun is about to happen!
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) Oh look, a new start. I crave fresh and exciting and not-knife-related stimuli.
- (Explore) I think I'm meant to start in the m- the woods. I am meant to start in the woods.

- (Explore) (Lie) I guess this hole led here. I am not at all suspicious of what is going on here. Tee-hee. I am just a silly girl.
- (Explore) You know, I don't know that I've thanked you enough, Narrator. You've been with me all the way. You should come out so I can thank you.
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- I do like stabbing the Hero! [Go through the door]

YOU — I guess this hole led here. I am not at all suspicious of what is going on here. Tee-hee. I am just a silly girl.

THE NARRATOR — Yeah. Sure. That's it. This is where the hole led. Now go kill that hero.

- (Explore) I'm getting a little bit bored of you saying I'm dead when something fun is about to happen!
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) Oh look, a new start. I crave fresh and exciting and not-knife-related stimuli.
- (Explore) I think I'm meant to start in the m- the woods. I am meant to start in the woods.
- (Explore) You know, I don't know that I've thanked you enough, Narrator. You've been with me all the way. You should come out so I can thank you.
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- I do like stabbing the Hero! [Go through the door]

YOU — Oh look, a new start. I crave fresh and exciting and not-knife-related stimuli.

THE NARRATOR — Yeah. I'm sure you do.

- (Explore) I'm getting a little bit bored of you saying I'm dead when something fun is about to happen!
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) I think I'm meant to start in the m- the woods. I am meant to start in the woods.
- (Explore) You know, I don't know that I've thanked you enough, Narrator. You've been with me all the way. You should come out so I can thank you.
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- I do like stabbing the Hero! [Go through the door]

YOU — You know, I don't know that I've thanked you enough, Narrator. You've been with me all the way. You should come out so I can thank you.

THE NARRATOR — I'm fine where I am. I'm just the narrator. Who's telling you that the hero is at the end of this corridor. You should go stab him. You like stabbing him, right? A psychopathic monster like you gets your kicks from it.

- (Explore) But I *really* mean it. I really want to see you. And show you all my thanks! We can engage in fun, not-knife-related activities.
- (Explore) I'm getting a little bit bored of you saying I'm dead when something fun is about to happen!
- (Explore) Hehe.

- (Explore) I think I'm meant to start in the m- the woods. I am meant to start in the woods.
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- I do like stabbing the Hero! [Go through the door]

YOU — But I *really* mean it. I really want to see you. And show you all my thanks! We can engage in fun, not-knife-related activities.

THE NARRATOR — Your hands are made of fucking knives.

- (Explore) They are not! My knives are very chaste. They are *innocent*, naive, unworldly princess knives. Just like me. Because they're my knives. Which are also my hands. They're very upset now.
- (Explore) I'm getting a little bit bored of you saying I'm dead when something fun is about to happen!
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) I think I'm meant to start in the m- the woods. I am meant to start in the woods.
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- I do like stabbing the Hero! [Go through the door]

YOU — They are not! My knives are very chaste. They are *innocent*, naive, unworldly princess knives. Just like me. Because they're my knives. Which are also my hands. They're very upset now.

THE NARRATOR — The fuck they are. Just go kill that hero.

- (Explore) I'm getting a little bit bored of you saying I'm dead when something fun is about to happen!
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) I think I'm meant to start in the m- the woods. I am meant to start in the woods.
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- I do like stabbing the Hero! [Go through the door]

YOU — I do like stabbing the Hero! [Go through the door]

THE NARRATOR — Fina-fucking-ly. You like wasting time, don't you? You go down the corridor and open the door.

THE NARRATOR — The hero is on the other side. He's sitting on a chair.

THE NARRATOR — You should kill him.

- (Explore) "Hiya!"
- (Explore) You know, he's looking a bit flat. And two-dimensional. Is that just a cut-out?
- (Narrate) Oh, thank goodness, I found you again. It took me a bit. He'd hidden you away with that shift, and it took me a bit of time to track you down. Anyway, I haven't found the others yet, but at least I've found you. And... what on earth is going on here?

- (Explore) "I *wonder* if the door's opened again on the other end of the hallway?"
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — You know, he's looking a bit flat. And two-dimensional. Is that just a cut-out?

THE NARRATOR — Nuh uh! Look, he's definitely real!

- (Narrate) Wow. He really is bad at this. Like, he's got the talent to make things happen, but he's bad at the details. That gives me a bit more confidence. You can probably outwit him - as long as you play along.
- (Explore) (Lie) I must have been wrong. He definitely did not stop being flat. Because he was never flat.
- (Explore) "I *wonder* if the door's opened again on the other end of the hallway?"
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — I must have been wrong. He definitely did not stop being flat. Because he was never flat.

THE NARRATOR — I'm glad you agree.

THE NARRATOR — You oughta work on stopping sounding like you're lying, by the way. Might make an guy mistrust you. But I won't do that if you go kill the hero like you're meant to.

- (Explore) Mistrust me? Who could ever mistrust me?
- (Explore) "I *wonder* if the door's opened again on the other end of the hallway?"
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.
- [Stab the Hero]
- Don't push it. Get off that topic. [Just play along]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — [Stab the Hero]

THE NARRATOR — Well, would you look at that. No shit, you step up, and stab at the hero. He dies. There's blood everywhere. Blood all over the room, blood all over you. Blood fucking everywhere.

THE NARRATOR — You won. Yay for you. Hurrah.

THE NARRATOR — You *did it*.

- (Explore) That's not what happens when I stab the hero! He doesn't pop like that.
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) What happens now?
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.

YOU — That's not what happens when I stab the hero! He doesn't pop like that.

THE NARRATOR — You must've hit an artery. He's definitely dead now. Because you killed him.

- (Explore) (Lie) Boo hoo. I am very sad. He isn't alive anymore. He was such fun to play with.
- (Explore) Be honest with me. Was that just an inflatable dummy filled with blood? Why do you even have one of them?
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Explore) What happens now?
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.

YOU — Boo hoo. I am very sad. He isn't alive anymore. He was such fun to play with.

THE NARRATOR — Yeah, sure, whatever. I'm sure you had fun, you fucking sadistic monster.

- (Explore) Be honest with me. Was that just an inflatable dummy filled with blood? Why do you even have one of them?
- (Explore) Hehe.
- (Narrate) What is he up to? He clearly wants you to think he's dead, but he's got to have another plan in mind.
- (Explore) What happens now?
- Okay, this is boring. I know you're the Hero.

YOU — What happens now?

THE NARRATOR — I'm glad you asked. You go back to your castle. You've got one, of course, being a princess. And a kingdom and crap like that. Look how tall the walls are and how... pointy and knife like the towers are. You like knives, yeah? That's your castle. Really impressive, isn't it?

- (Explore) It's only a model
- [Let him continue]

YOU — [Let him continue]

THE NARRATOR — You rule long and well for a long time. Like, years and years. Doing the kinds of things that a princess does.

- (Explore) Like stabbing people!
- (Explore) Like wearing pretty dresses made of knives!
- (Explore) Like going on adventures and stabbing Heroes!
- (Narrate) Does he think you'll go away if you get a happy ending? Because I know you well enough to know that no ending is a happy one unless you're getting to stab him repeatedly.
- (Lie) Oh, you're just so handsome, Narrator. I totally want to marry you. I am in the love with you.

- [Wait for him to get to the point]
- Bored now. [Stab the narrator]

YOU — [Wait for him to get to the point]

THE NARRATOR — And then, many years later, the first grey hair appears.

THE NARRATOR — You stare at yourself in a mirror. You can see it there. It's real.

- (Explore) Isn't everything grey here?
- (Narrate) Oh. That cheat. So that's his game.
- So?
- [Cut it off]

YOU — [Cut it off]

THE NARRATOR — You cut it off. But very soon another one shows up. And another.

THE NARRATOR — You are getting old.

THE NARRATOR — Time is having its way with you.

THE NARRATOR — Your flesh is weakening. Your flesh is growing old.

THE NARRATOR — Look at those wrinkles. Watch your face sag. Watch your features soften.

THE NARRATOR — Those taut muscles that could drive your knife hands into solid wood or cut through a door lose their edge.

THE NARRATOR — The greatest enemy is coming for you. Something you can't stab. Something you can't fucking cheat your way out of.

- (Explore) That's adorable. I like you. I like this
- (Narrate) He's trying to take you down without ever having to face you. Without ever seeing you. I... don't know what to do.
- (Explore> Hehe.
- [Cut away all the white hairs]

YOU — Hehe.

THE NARRATOR — Oh, you can laugh all you want, but you can't stop this. You're getting old. You're going to die.

- (Explore) That's adorable. I like you. I like this
- (Explore) You don't get it. You really don't get it. You're never going to be rid of me.
- (Narrate) Please, take this seriously. You might not understand what time is, but he's using it as a knife!
- [Cut away all the white hairs]

YOU — You don't get it. You really don't get it. You're never going to be rid of me.

THE NARRATOR — Bluff all you want! You can't bullshit your way out of this! Look at you! Look how old you are!

THE NARRATOR — You're already so weak that you couldn't fight off the hero if he showed up.

THE NARRATOR — Your spine is crooked with age.

THE NARRATOR — Your rheumy joints click with each little movement.

THE NARRATOR — Soon you-you-you monster will be nothing more than a bad dream.

- (Explore) You know that's not true. I'll never be just a nightmare! That'd be no fun, if you could just wake up and escape me!
- (Explore) That's adorable. I like you. I like this
- (Explore) Do you really think this meat is me?
- (Explore) You don't get it. You really don't get it. You're never going to be rid of me.
- [Cut away all the white hairs]

YOU — You know that's not true. I'll never be just a nightmare! That'd be no fun, if you could just wake up and escape me!

THE NARRATOR — You are going to die! You are! You are!

- (Explore) That's adorable. I like you. I like this
- (Explore) Do you really think this meat is me?
- (Explore) You don't get it. You really don't get it. You're never going to be rid of me.
- [Cut away all the white hairs]

YOU — Do you really think this meat is me?

THE NARRATOR — Y-yes! Yes, of course it is! You're... you're just a princess! You're scary and you have knives for hands, b-but you can't beat time.

THE NARRATOR — No one can!

THE NARRATOR — Your eyesight clouds. The cataracts are coming in.

- My body might fall to pieces, but I'll always come back!
- I like you! Always thinking about my body! It's very romantic!
- [Cut out your eyes]

YOU — [Cut out your eyes]

THE NARRATOR — Y-you cut out your eyes, that's... you're blind, that doesn't change a thing, you can't see now but you're still aging, you're still-

- Hehe. Silly hero. I can still see.

YOU — Hehe. Silly hero. I can still see.

THE NARRATOR — No you can't, there's just ruined sockets there, blood running down your cheeks which sag and crease and-

THE NARRATOR — ...

THE NARRATOR — ... and I'm not the Hero. I'm the Narrator. Doing Narrator things. Yeah. There's no way you could know-

- (Narrate) There is metal under your eyes. How long has that been there?
- (Explore) I've known all along. You're not very good at pretending to be him, even if you sound similar.
- (Explore) I like it when you pay attention to me, my love! All these romantic thoughts about my body!
- [Cut off your dress]
- [Cut off your face]

YOU — I like it when you pay attention to me, my love! All these romantic thoughts about my body!

THE NARRATOR — No, shut up. Shut the fuck up. There's nothing romantic about you being... a... a murderous knife freak!

- (Explore) Do you want to see more?
- (Explore) I've known all along. You're not very good at pretending to be him, even if you sound similar.
- [Cut off your dress]
- [Cut off your face]

YOU — Do you want to see more?

THE NARRATOR — No! N-no! This isn't... this is bullshit! You can't look at me with... without those eyes! You can't win this! You're ancient! You're decrepit! I've won this, you hear me! I've fucking won this!

- (Explore) I've known all along. You're not very good at pretending to be him, even if you sound similar.
- [Cut off your dress]
- [Cut off your face]

YOU — [Cut off your dress]

You turn your knives on yourself. You slice through your dress, from the throat all the way down. You slice through your aging, ruined flesh.

The flesh peels away, twisting in its desicated, papery age. And it erupts from you

Pieces of you splatter against the walls.

The blood and viscera paint the mirror scarlet, so you can barely see yourself.

But you have been a chrysalis, and now you are a butterfly

THE NARRATOR — Oh crap. Oh crap crap crap.

You are beautiful, a skeleton of blades that wears your old face as a bridal veil.

Your wedding dress is all edges and sharpness.

In the centre of your chest is your heart, and it beats with such fierce joy.

THE NARRATOR — You don't get to do this! I set this all up! I... I put this together, I found a way to kill you!

- (Explore) Are you ready for what comes next?
- (Explore) Perhaps... a kiss?
- (Explore) Look at us! We're so intimate and romantic! I've stripped off everything and I'm showing you my most naked self!
- Well, that was horrifying. [Go kill him]
- [Find him]

YOU — Look at us! We're so intimate and romantic! I've stripped off everything and I'm showing you my most naked self!

THE NARRATOR — That's it! I quit! I'm done! This has gotten way too out of hand!

THE NARRATOR — So you know what? I'll take my roll on the next go! Everything fucking well goes dark and you die! You die, you hear me?

- Oh, I wonder what I'll be next time! Be seeing you! [Die]
- I think that's very boring! [Don't die]

YOU — I think that's very boring! [Don't die]

THE NARRATOR — Bullshit! You... you can't do that!

- Silly billy! You can't kill me! Silly, silly hero!

YOU — Silly billy! You can't kill me! Silly, silly hero!

THE NARRATOR — Yes, I can! That's how it works! I'm the narrator now and when I say everything goes dark and you die, you should die?

THE NARRATOR — Why won't you die?!

- You don't believe you can kill me. You don't believe you'll ever escape me. You can't run far enough away to get away. You can't escape our dance! And now I'm going to stab you again, darling!

YOU — You don't believe you can kill me. You don't believe you'll ever escape me. You can't run far enough away to get away. You can't escape our dance! And now I'm going to stab you again, darling!

THE NARRATOR — I... I might not be able to kill you, having a bit of the old... old performance problem, you know, but I can destroy this place! I can destroy the world! And put you somewhere you'll never escape from!

- (Explore) Can you do that before I find you? I don't think you can~
- Go on, then. Give me a challenge. Because I will escape. And then we'll resume our dance. [Let him destroy the world]
- Bored now. [Find him]

YOU — Go on, then. Give me a challenge. Because I will escape. And then we'll resume our dance. [Let him destroy the world]

THE NARRATOR — I'll do it! I swear I will!

- (Narrate) Please. Stop encouraging him.
- Go on, then. I'm waiting.
- Bored now. [Find him]

YOU — Go on, then. I'm waiting.

THE NARRATOR — Yeah! I will! Everything stops existing! The world ends!

THE NARRATOR — How'd you like them apples eh?

THE NARRATOR — Just a pitch black void. An eternity of nothing. Just you floating there, with your stupid knives. What are you going to do now?

- (Explore) Are you going to show yourself?
- Bored now. [Find him]

YOU — Are you going to show yourself?

THE NARRATOR — No! No, I'm not! You can just float and splutter forever!

- (Explore) Aww. Pretty please~
- Bored now. [Find him]

YOU — Bored now. [Find him]

He is here, less a bird and less a man. A textured shade in this shaded texture of midnight, obsidian and velvet.

There is so much fear in his eyes.

THE HERO — What the fuck!

- (Explore) If you're not going to play, I'm going to take this seriously.
- (Explore) Hehe.
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]

YOU — If you're not going to play, I'm going to take this seriously.

THE HERO — Wait-wait-wait, we can talk, maybe I can put the world back-

- (Explore) Hehe.
- Can you do it when I'm stabbing you? Let's see! [Stab the Hero]
- Too late. You're boring. [Murder the Hero]

YOU — Too late. You're boring. [Murder the Hero]

A shade can bleed. He is something you can hurt. You know that and more than that, he knows it.

He will never beat you, not with the dark streets of his twisting mind so full of flocking crowds of fear

You paint a line of scarlet across the shadows, and he screams, in this hollow space where there is no reflection to shape it.

He unfolds.

A great hand stretches out, and you are consumed by the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

help me

she's back

how

how

Chapter 14: CHAPTER III: THE CRAVEN STOMACH

Chapter Summary

YOU — "Hugs!"

THE WITCH — "She is literally made of knives, what are you, stupid?"

You embrace the damsel. She is lacerated.

THE WITCH — "Why would you do that?"

The damsel beams, blood oozing down her face from the cuts to her scalp. Her filthy dress is turning redder from the punctures you gave her.

THE DAMSEL — "There's pain in friendship, but being lonely is much worse! I'll willingly take the pain if it means I get to be close to her!"

- [Wait]

YOU — [Wait]

- [Wait]

YOU — [Wait]

- (Explore) Hello? Narrator?
- (Explore) Booooooooooooooring.
- [Wait]

YOU — Hello? Narrator?

There is no voice here. No voice that is not part of you.

- (Explore) I don't like that. That's boring.
- (Explore) That was very un-fun of the Hero. Very un-fun.
- (Explore) Not part of me...
- [Wait]

YOU — That was very un-fun of the Hero. Very un-fun.

That face of him does not care for fun. He could not even take joy in victory.

You are here, and you are alone.

- (Explore) I don't like that. That's boring.
- (Explore) Where is the Hero? I didn't kill him.
- (Explore) Not part of me...
- [Wait]

YOU — I don't like that. That's boring.

The world owes no one excitement. Existence is what it is, and it is up to the liver to find their own pleasures.

- (Explore) I'm changing that! Hehe!
- (Explore) Where is the Hero? I didn't kill him.
- (Explore) Not part of me...
- [Wait]

YOU — I'm changing that! Hehe!

The unfeeling joylessness leaves you. It was ill at home in your waters.

- (Narrate) "Let's see! Oh yes! I'm sitting somewhere and my bestie is there!"
- (Explore) Where is the Hero? I didn't kill him.
- (Explore) Not part of me...
- [Wait]

YOU — "Let's see! Oh yes! I'm sitting somewhere and my bestie is there!"

You are not the right shape for this. Not anymore. Once you could have done this, but this is no longer within your capabilities.

And yet--

THE DAMSEL — "Yay! Bestie! Here you are! We've been stuck sitting here in this dark and sort of not very nice place for a very long time!

THE DAMSEL — "How long have you been here in the dark too? It's a good thing you spoke up!"

- (Narrate) "There's a light! I can see her!"
- (Explore) "I narrated you up, you know!"
- (Explore) "Yay! It's you!"
- (Explore) "I'm so glad you're happy and well!"
- (Explore) "I wish my Hero hadn't decided to make it boring."
- "So what now?"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "There's a light! I can see her!"

There is no light.

THE WITCH — "Oh. She's shown up. Finally. Did you find him and kill him?"

A flame in the darkness. The witch lights a candle with a puff of fire. It reveals her sitting on a mound of refuse, soaked and looking profoundly miserable.

The damsel is sitting on the same hillock. She is also wet and stained, but looks far less miserable.

Floating next to them is the spectre, who is not damp.

All three of them wear expressions of surprise when you make your way out of the darkness.

The curved walls are far away, far enough away to look like the sky. They are trapped here.

The candle light gleams off your many, many blades.

THE SPECTRE — "You're now made of knives. Interesting. How many times did you die?"

THE WITCH — "Looks like things went even worse for you than us.

THE WITCH — "Hah! This is an awful, awful place, but it cheers me up just a little bit to see that someone else had it worse."

THE DAMSEL — "Oh wow, bestie! I love your new dress! How did you get it?"

THE DAMSEL — "Hugs!"

- (Explore) "Hugs!"
- (Explore) "Were you all impressed by my narrating ability?"
- (Explore) "What happened to you?"
- (Explore) "Oh. The others are here. I didn't mean to narrate them up, but they've probably been doing a good job keeping bestie company!"
- "So what now?"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "Hugs!"

THE WITCH — "She is *literally* made of knives, what are you, stupid?"

You embrace the damsel. She is lacerated.

THE WITCH — "Why would you do that?"

The damsel beams, blood oozing down her face from the cuts to her scalp. Her filthy dress is turning redder from the punctures you gave her.

THE DAMSEL — "There's pain in friendship, but being lonely is much worse! I'll willingly take the pain if it means I get to be close to her!"

THE WITCH — "She is made of knives."

THE SPECTRE — "Well, it's consistent with Cutie's ideology, at least. I can't fault her on that, only on the fact that she has no survival instinct.

THE SPECTRE — "Then again, she died and it didn't stop her. When I think about it, do we really *need* a survival instinct? I mean, I clearly did, but does anyone else?"

She waves at you.

THE SPECTRE — "I suppose I could give you a hug if you wanted. I'm the only un-stabbable person here."

- (Explore) "Sure! Hugs for everyone!" [Hug the spectre]
- (Explore) "Were you all impressed by my narrating ability?"
- (Explore) "What happened to you?"
- "So what now?"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "Sure! Hugs for everyone!" [Hug the spectre]

Her touch is a breeze in an old abandoned house, blowing through the gaps between your knives. She smells of dust and a hint of mould.

THE SPECTRE — "I hope you being made of knives doesn't make the cute little narrator be more scared of you than me.

THE SPECTRE — "Have you seen anything of him? We haven't heard from him since the Hero did what he did."

THE WITCH — "I'm just making it clear, I'm not hugging anyone made of knives."

THE DAMSEL — "You're scared of getting close to people and getting hurt again!"

THE WITCH — "Yes! Yes, I am! She's made of knives! You're still bleeding!"

THE SPECTRE — "I'm not."

THE WITCH — "You're a ghost."

THE SPECTRE — "That is a very hurtful thing to say. Sob. Sob."

THE WITCH — "You're just saying sob, and even if your feelings were really hurt I wouldn't care! Not one bit!"

- (Explore) "When I say 'hugs for everyone', I mean it!" [Hug the witch]
- (Explore) "Were you all impressed by my narrating ability?"
- (Explore) "What happened to you?"
- "So what now?"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "When I say 'hugs for everyone', I mean it!" [Hug the witch]

She backs away, tail fluffed up, and hisses.

THE WITCH — "No! I'm not getting stabbed!"

- "I mean it!" [Hug the witch]
- "Be like that. You're no fun!"

YOU — "Be like that. You're no fun!"

THE WITCH — "And you're made of knives!"

- (Explore) "Knives are fun!"
- (Explore) "Were you all impressed by my narrating ability?"
- (Explore) "What happened to you?"
- "So what now?"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "Knives are fun!"

THE WITCH — "They are, but I don't have one. You have them all.

Her tail lashes behind her, and she clasps her hands together.

THE WITCH — "I don't suppose you could spare one for a wet bedraggled princess, could you?"

- (Explore) "Sure! Knives are the best!" [Give the Witch a knife]
- (Explore) "Were you all impressed by my narrating ability?"
- (Explore) "What happened to you?"
- "So what now?"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "Sure! Knives are the best!" [Give the Witch a knife]

You break off a blade from your skirt of blades and give one to the witch.

She smiles, and hides it away in her tatted, soaked dress.

- (Explore) "Were you all impressed by my narrating ability?"
- (Explore) "What happened to you?"
- "So what now?"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "What happened to you?"

THE SPECTRE — "Not much, really. We got dumped here. It was dark. Nothing happened. I tried floating away but couldn't get through the walls. They're...

THE SPECTRE — "... wet. Meaty. And I can't pass through them."

THE DAMSEL — "It's not very nice here! Especially sitting here in the dark. And sometimes I feel cold!"

THE SPECTRE — "Actually, Kitty, where did you find that candle? Why didn't you light it earlier?"

THE WITCH — "I stole it from the castle!"

THE SPECTRE — "And the reason we had to sit in the dark?"

THE WITCH — "Because I've only got the one."

- (Explore) "Were you all impressed by my narrating ability?"
- (Explore) "What happened to you?"
- "So what now?"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "Were you all impressed by my narrating ability?"

THE DAMSEL — "I was! I was super impressed by how you said things and then they happened!"

THE WITCH — "You don't have a narrating ability. You're not the Narrator."

THE SPECTRE — "No, no, I'm interested as to why she thinks that."

Deep-set eyes narrow in careful thought.

THE SPECTRE — "What happened when you were separated from us? I'm assuming that the hero isn't dead, given that while we're sitting in a dark, damp place, it's not the usual dark damp place.

THE SPECTRE — "For one, there's usually a boat."

THE WITCH — "Don't humour her."

- (Explore) "I can do narration! Just like the Hero did!"
- (Explore) "I learned how to lie to the narrator and he was talking to me in a way that the fake narrator who was actually the Hero couldn't hear! So I worked out how to do the narration! So there!"
- [Stab the Witch]
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "I can do narration! Just like the Hero did!"

THE WITCH — "You are not the Narrator! You were just saying things! Urgh! I hate having to be the only sensible one around here!"

THE SPECTRE — "Rather charitable to yourself, aren't you? And what do you mean... Stabby, that's what I'm going to call you. What do you mean, Stabby?"

- (Explore) "Oooh! Stabby! Princess Stabby! I like it!"
- (Explore) "I had a whole adventure where the Hero stole the job of Narrator. That's why I can do the narration now!"
- (Explore) "I learned how to lie to the narrator and he was talking to me in a way that the fake narrator who was actually the Hero couldn't hear! So I worked out how to do the narration! So there!"
- [Stab the Witch]
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "Oooh! Stabby! Princess Stabby! I like it!"

THE DAMSEL — "It's the best name! I love it! You're so clever, Princess Spooky!"

THE WITCH — "She's not clever! Calling someone made of knives 'Princess Stabby' isn't imaginative or clever."

THE DAMSEL — "It doesn't need to be imaginative when it so perfectly captures who she is!"

THE SPECTRE — "Princess Stabby, what do you mean? About the Hero and all that. What happened to you."

- (Explore) ""I had a whole adventure where the Hero stole the job of Narrator. That's why I can do the narration now!""
- (Explore) "I learned how to lie to the narrator and he was talking to me in a way that the fake narrator who was actually the Hero couldn't hear! So I worked out how to do the narration! So there!"
- [Stab the Witch]
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — ""I had a whole adventure where the Hero stole the job of Narrator. That's why I can do the narration now!""

THE WITCH — "Wait, what? I beg your pardon? What is this nonsense?"

THE SPECTRE — "No, this makes a certain amount of sense. My beloved Narrator is so fun to bully - and so cute when he gets all huffy - but he never tries to get rid of us.

THE SPECTRE — "That Hero wanted rid of us. So if he stole the Narrator's role from him, he stashed us somewhere he wouldn't have to see us again.

THE SPECTRE — "Yes. I can see how that happened. And it is... interesting that someone can usurp the role of the narrator."

Thin lips curl up in a monstrous, rictus grin.

THE SPECTRE — "This has *possibilities*."

THE DAMSEL — "I hope you're not considering anything *unromantic*."

THE SPECTRE — "I want out of this grave. Someone sent us in here, and keeps on sending more of us time and time again. And I died because of that.

THE SPECTRE — "I want to find who was behind that and make them pay."

THE WITCH — "Hear, hear! Now you're talking my language!"

THE SPECTRE — "I know this isn't where we're meant to be. It isn't *how* we're meant to be. And we're doing the same thing time and time again! I can't stand it."

THE DAMSEL — "Oh. Poor, poor Spooky. This place is not good for you. It's not even the same dark void as we normally get dropped in, too."

The spectre exhales with the sound of breezes drifting through dry rafters.

THE SPECTRE — "Yes. I suppose it is getting to me. Nothing was happening. And nothing is *excruciating*."

THE DAMSEL — "You're not wrong! It was very boring sitting here in the dark!"

THE WITCH — "I think we all agree. Nothing happening was not good for us. We need some us-time.

THE WITCH — "Let's find that little sky-rat that put us here and make him suffer. Sounds good? Sounds good."

THE DAMSEL — "But how are we going to escape?"

THE SPECTRE — "Anything else you want to say, Stabby?"

- (Explore) "I learned how to lie to the narrator and he was talking to me in a way that the fake narrator who was actually the Hero couldn't hear! So I worked out how to do the narration! So there!"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "I learned how to lie to the narrator and he was talking to me in a way that the fake narrator who was actually the Hero couldn't hear! So I worked out how to do the narration! So there!"

THE WITCH — "You can lie to the narrator? Iiiiiiiiiinteresting."

THE SPECTRE — "That's a good question. Where is my darling?"

THE DAMSEL — "Not here! We haven't heard him lecture us at all since we got here!"

- "I haven't heard from him at all either."
- (Lie) "He's talking to me right now. He must just not like you."
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "I haven't heard from him at all either."

THE SPECTRE — "So we're in a place where he can't find us. Or maybe the world ended."

- (Explore) "Oh yes, the world ended! I dared the Hero to do it!"
- (Explore) "Also the Hero tried to kill me with time! So I tore off all my skin so he couldn't age me away!"
- (Explore) "Tip for the girls! If the Hero takes over the Narrator role and says you die, you can just not do it if you don't feel like it! Death's just optional!"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "Oh yes, the world ended! I dared the Hero to do it!"

THE DAMSEL — "Why?"

- "To see if he could do it, I guess."
- "It seemed like fun."
- "I thought he'd show himself if he did it."
- [Shrug]
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "I thought he'd show himself if he did it."

THE DAMSEL — "I'd destroy the world if I thought it'd let me see my love again, so I get you! Good thinking, bestie!"

THE WITCH — "There's something deeply twisted in her, you know?"

- (Explore) "Also the Hero tried to kill me with time! So I tore off all my skin so he couldn't age me away!"
- (Explore) "Tip for the girls! If the Hero takes over the Narrator role and says you die, you can just not do it if you don't feel like it! Death's just optional!"
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "Also the Hero tried to kill me with time! So I tore off all my skin so he couldn't age me away!"

THE SPECTRE — "Oh. Oh, I see. That's a nasty little trick. He used the narrator powers to try to run the clock forward."

THE WITCH — "Wait a moment. Metal rusts. Couldn't he just have made even more time pass so the knives rusted too?"

- "He's not very bright. Cute, but thick!"
- "Other knives might rust, but I won't ever rust! My first knife was that pristine blade you gave me! So I'm pristine too, and he knew that!"
- "I don't think he'd have liked being stabbed by rusty knives. Infections are not very romantic!"

YOU — "He's not very bright. Cute, but thick!"

THE DAMSEL — "I always found the Hero to be very clever!"

THE DAMSEL — ...

THE DAMSEL — "What? Why are you all looking at me?"

THE SPECTRE — "I just had a thought. Ignore it, Cutie."

THE WITCH — "What she means is that you're also thick."

THE DAMSEL — "Why are you so mean?"

THE WITCH — "I don't know. Why did you hug someone made of knives while not being a ghost? Answer that riddle, and I'll tell you why I'm so 'mean'."

THE DAMSEL — "Hmm..."

- (Explore) "Tip for the girls! If the Hero takes over the Narrator role and says you die, you can just not do it if you don't feel like it! Death's just optional!"
- [Stab the Witch]
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "Tip for the girls! If the Hero takes over the Narrator role and says you die, you can just not do it if you don't feel like it! Death's just optional!"

THE DAMSEL — "Well, yes!"

THE WITCH — "Everyone knows that. Except for the ghost over there."

THE WITCH — "You really should try harder, you know."

THE SPECTRE — "I think I'd like to second Cutie's previous point. Why *are* you so mean?"

- [Stab the Witch]
- "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

YOU — "I'm bored. Want to get out of here? Hehe."

THE WITCH — "Someone said it! Finally!"

THE SPECTRE — "I've been saying I want out of here for a while. Because I want *out*."

THE DAMSEL — "So how are we getting out, bestie?"

- (Explore) "Oh, it's easy. He ate me, so he must have eaten you too. Hiding us in a place he's in total control of."
- [Stab the Hero]

YOU — "Oh, it's easy. He ate me, so he must have eaten you too. Hiding us in a place he's in total control of."

THE WITCH — "Disgusting. And yet... I hate that I understand some of his thinking."

THE WITCH — "If you wanted to carry someone around with you, you'd eat them."

THE DAMSEL — "I don't like being inside another man! I was saving myself for my beloved!"

THE SPECTRE — "You know, given he ate a ghost and someone made of knives, I think you're right, Stabby.

THE SPECTRE — "He's not all that clever."

Her smile is cadaverous.

THE SPECTRE — "Shall I do the honours, or shall you?

- (Explore) "I don't know, stabbing is kind of my *thing*..."
- [Stab the Hero]
- (Spectre) Possess.

YOU — [Stab the Hero]

You lift your hand, and admire the blades that are your fingers.

He has eaten a razor blade, and you intend to make him suffer for it.

The walls of this place are clear to you, now.

Distance is a door he uses to hide from you.

A blade can serve as a key.

THE WITCH — "Yes, yes, split him wide open!"

His flesh parts to your touch, and he screams in a voice which shakes the ground and skies.

A crimson river seeks to carry all away, hot and cloying.

THE DAMSEL — "There is so much blood!"

THE SPECTRE — "It's a good thing I'm a ghost. How are you doing, Cutie?"

THE DAMSEL — "Just holding on! But I think Kitty is drowning!"

THE WITCH — "I'm not drowning! I just hate getting wet!"

You spare them no attention.

You slice. You hack. You butcher.

SOMETHING BITTER — "No, no, no, this can't be happening-"

THE SPECTRE — "I know that voice."

His protests mean nothing.

You are born afresh in an afterbirth that flows from the stomach of a fallen titan. He screams and moans and tries to hold in his organs, which uncoil like black serpents.

The jets of blood are morbid coronal mass ejections. They will form nebulae.

It is dark here. Dull red stars sit overhead, too tired to even twinkle.

This is an old cosmos, a tired cosmos.

SOMETHING BITTER — "How- could you-"

- (Explore) "I said I was going to take things seriously."
- (Explore) "Hehe."
- (Explore) "That was almost fun again at the end."
- (Explore) "It really didn't have to end like this."
- (Explode) "Get up! Let's play again!"
- [Murder the Hero]
- [Wait for him to die]

YOU — "Hehe."

SOMETHING BITTER — "You think this is- this is funny?"

THE DAMSEL — "He's dying."

THE DAMSEL — "Good. He was very unromantic, bestie."

- (Explore) "Funny? Yes, actually. You did all that to stop me killing you. But I never wanted to kill you."
- (Explore) "I said I was going to take things seriously."
- (Explore) "That was almost fun again at the end."
- (Explore) "It really didn't have to end like this."
- (Explode) "Get up! Let's play again!"
- [Murder the Hero]
- [Wait for him to die]

YOU — "Funny? Yes, actually. You did all that to stop me killing you. But I never wanted to kill you."

His voice is growing weaker.

SOMETHING BITTER — "Liar."

- (Explore) "Playful romantic stabbing isn't killing. I was very clear about that!"
- (Explore) "I said I was going to take things seriously."
- (Explore) "That was almost fun again at the end."
- (Explore) "It really didn't have to end like this."
- (Explode) "Get up! Let's play again!"

- [Murder the Hero]
- [Wait for him to die]

YOU — "Playful romantic stabbing isn't killing. I was very clear about that!"

His words are a dying croak.

SOMETHING BITTER — "Fuck. You."

- (Explore) "I said I was going to take things seriously."
- (Explore) "That was almost fun again at the end."
- (Explore) "It really didn't have to end like this."
- (Explode) "Get up! Let's play again!"
- [Murder the Hero]
- [Wait for him to die]

YOU — "I said I was going to take things seriously."

SOMETHING BITTER — "You can't do this. You shouldn't be able to do this. You should be dead, you-"

THE SPECTRE — "Oh?"

SOMETHING BITTER — "-you're not real. You're *not real*."

- (Explore) "You can't kill me. I thought we saw that already, hehe."
- (Explore) "Denial is not very romantic. Of course I'm real!"
- (Explore) "That was almost fun again at the end."
- (Explore) "It really didn't have to end like this."
- (Explode) "Get up! Let's play again!"
- [Murder the Hero]
- [Wait for him to die]

YOU — "You can't kill me. I thought we saw that already, hehe."

SOMETHING BITTER — "Not... like... that..."

That stars that are his eyes go out.

He is dead.

Something has changed.

You feel tired.

You feel weak.

It is an effort to stand on this corpse so vast it has its own gravity.

- (Explore) "It's cold."

- (Explore) "That was... disappointing. How boring."
- (Explore) "Why is it suddenly so... cold?"
- (Explore) "He was... a lot more fun when he was smaller."
- (Explore) "Brr."
- (Explore) "Narrator? Can you hear us now?"
- "What... now?"

YOU — "That was... disappointing. How boring."

The damsel slumps down, barely catching herself.

THE DAMSEL — "You did it. Good... good job."

THE DAMSEL — "And who'd have realised those weird voices in the dark place were actually the Hero?"

The witch can barely stand, shoulders slumped.

THE WITCH — "Everyone. Everyone saw it. But... but maybe the Narrator is telling the truth when he says the Hero can destroy the world..."

The spectre seems less affected, but she is more transparent than she was. More filmy.

THE SPECTRE — "Five left. I think."

- (Explore) "It's cold."
- (Explore) "What's... wrong?"
- (Explore) "Why is it suddenly so... cold?"
- (Explore) "He was... a lot more fun when he was smaller."
- (Explore) "Brr."
- (Explore) "Narrator? Can you hear us now?"
- "What... now?"

YOU — "What's... wrong?"

THE SPECTRE — "I don't... know. It was never like this before."

THE DAMSEL — "Where's the scary goo made of eyeballs and stuff?"

THE WITCH — "I don't like this. I don't like this one bit!"

- (Explore) "It's cold."
- (Explore) "Cold..."
- (Explore) "Why is it suddenly so... cold?"
- (Explore) "He was... a lot more fun when he was smaller."
- (Explore) "Brr."
- (Explore) "Narrator? Can you hear us now?"
- "What... now?"

YOU — "Narrator? Can you hear us now?"

There is no response.

... maybe.

THE WITCH — "No maybe about it...

THE WITCH — "I can feel something... looking at us."

THE DAMSEL — "And we don't have an oar."

- (Explore) "It's cold."
- (Explore) "Cold..."
- (Explore) "Why is it suddenly so... cold?"
- (Explore) "He was... a lot more fun when he was smaller."
- (Explore) "Brr."
- "What... now?"

YOU — Cold..."

THE DAMSEL — "So cold..."

THE WITCH — "I hate it!"

THE SPECTRE — "I don't feel cold. But I feel... faint."

- "What... now?"

YOU — "What... now?"

THE DAMSEL — "Don't... know. This isn't how it usually goes.

THE DAMSEL — "Any... ideas?"

THE WITCH — "Cold. Tired."

Something arrives in a flurry of night-black feathers.

He is here, tired-looking and slightly shabby and earnest and with a look in his eyes you have never seen before.

THE HERO — "Oh, no no no, what are you doing here? How did you even get out here?"

THE HERO — "Doesn't matter. What matters is getting you back where you should be. I suppose he ripped you out of there, and it was only his attention that was keeping you defined.

THE HERO — "Come with me. Um. If you want to live, that is, and I'm pretty sure you do.

THE HERO — "Take my hand."

- (Explore) "Wha-"

- (Explore) "You're dead."
- (Explore) "Hehe. Fun. New."
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Take his Hand]

YOU — "Hehe. Fun. New."

THE HERO — "No, no, listen, this is important. Come with me. You can't die. You mustn't. And you can't survive out here. Not yet. You're not ready."

THE WITCH — "Don't trust him. It's... trap."

THE HERO — "The coldness is you coming apart. This world isn't a place you can exist. It's defining you to death. It's defining you *as* dead."

THE SPECTRE — "Is that why I feel better than the others? I'm already dead."

THE HERO — "No time for questions. Take my hand."

THE WITCH — "It's a trap! Stab him!"

THE SPECTRE — "Even if it's a trap, you're not well. We might have to extend a little, wary, trust."

THE WITCH — "I don't care! I'd... I'd rather be dead than fooled again!"

THE SPECTRE — "On the other hand, murdering the hero - or at least being there when he dies - is sort of what we do.

THE SPECTRE — "I'll support you whatever you want, Stabby."

THE DAMSEL — "Yay! Princesses supporting... princesses is good. But... maybe too cold..."

THE SPECTRE — "I do have to say, I wonder if the blood loss from hugging Stabby is helping matters.

THE SPECTRE — "You should do a better job of keeping your blood inside you, Cutie."

THE DAMSEL — "Probably..."

THE WITCH — "What do we do? Who... who feels up to killing him?"

- "Hehe." [Stab the Hero]
- "Cutie, try romancing this one! Do you want a knife?"
- "Me!" [Stab the Hero]
- "Kitty? You sound like you want this!"
- "I hope he's more fun!" [Stab the Hero]
- "Spooky! Show me the heart-ripping!"
- "He survived! Yay!" [Stab the Hero]

- [Stab the Hero]

YOU — "Cutie, try romancing this one! Do you want a knife?"

Wearily, the damsel pulls herself to a sitting position. Her arms are wrapped around herself, trying to conserve heat.

It won't work.

She isn't lacking in heat.

She can't survive here, in the same way that a deep sea creature perishes if taken to the surface.

THE DAMSEL — "Don't stab him. He... he means well. And we need help. Against this cold."

THE WITCH — "No we don't. Especially not from *that awful monster* over there.

THE WITCH — "He's clearly the one making it cold. So kill him. Murder the Hero."

THE DAMSEL — "He's *a* The Hero but he's not *my* The Hero. And he's not yours either, bestie."

Dark eyes narrow.

THE HERO — "Yes, you're right, but, how do you know that?"

THE DAMSEL — "See! That's exactly why you're not my love! He'd have understood straight away that the power of love is greater than the power of any falsity!"

THE HERO — "..."

THE HERO — "..."

THE HERO — "Yes. He would have."

- [Stab the Hero]
- [Murder the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Stab the Hero]
- "Since bestie says so..." [Take his hand]
- [Stab the Hero]
- (Lie) "I guess I can trust you." [Stab the Hero]

YOU — "Since bestie says so..." [Take his hand]

Wings envelop you, and blackness surrounds you. He is so much bigger now.

There is a sense of motion which takes an eternity and at the same time takes no time at all.

You are moving so fast that time itself can't catch up with you.

The stars ahead take on a strange colour that is not red or black or white, and behind you they are even redder than they were before.

THE DAMSEL — "Feeling... faint..."

THE WITCH — "He's probably poisoning us!"

THE HERO — "I'm not poisoning you. I'm just taking you back where you should be. There's no way you'd find it on your own.

THE HERO — "You can't survive out here."

THE DAMSEL — "See. He's sweet. He always is. Sometimes... it's very deep down. Sometimes shallow. Always sweet..."

THE SPECTRE — "You know, I think you're right."

Her face twists into an awful grin.

THE SPECTRE — "Sweet enough to eat right up."

THE HERO — "Ah! Don't do that! I'm trying to help, I'm-"

And immediately she's back to normal.

THE SPECTRE — "Oh, I was just playing, just teasing, just entertaining myself.

THE SPECTRE — "Just testing. Darling.

THE SPECTRE — "I *like* the way you squeak. It's very cute."

THE HERO — "Could you not? I'm trying really hard here to stop everything falling apart."

THE SPECTRE — "And I'm just getting to know you better.

THE SPECTRE — "I can hear your heart race.

THE SPECTRE — "It excites me."

THE HERO — "D-does it?"

The spectre giggles.

THE SPECTRE — "Oh yes. It's just lovely getting to find things out about another."

THE WITCH — "Hmm. This disgusts me."

THE SPECTRE — "You know, I think we *can* trust him."

THE WITCH — "This only digusts me further! What makes you so sure?"

THE SPECTRE — "As Stabby would say, 'Hehe'."

- (Explore) "That's true, I do say that a lot!"
- (Explore) "You doing okay, bestie?"
- (Explore) "What I want to know is - what's your plan? Why did you show up to help four lost innocent princesses?"
- (Explore) "So you're the Hero. But you're not the Hero I just killed. Or the ones the other mentioned.
- (Explore) "Why don't you stay dead? Why don't I stay dead?"
- (Explore) "You sound familiar somehow-"
- (Explore) "Where is this place?"
- (Explore) "What is this place?"
- (Explore) "Where are we going?"
- (Explore) "Why is it so cold?"
- (Explore) "Is this place also the castle?"
- (Explore) "Do you love me?"
- (Explore) "Thank you for helping. I'm still going to stab you as soon as I can, but think of it as an affable, friendly stabbing!"
- [Wait]

YOU — "That's true, I do say that a lot!"

THE WITCH — "Can you find another catch phrase?"

- (Explore) "You doing okay, bestie?"
- (Explore) "What I want to know is - what's your plan? Why did you show up to help four lost innocent princesses?"
- (Explore) "So you're the Hero. But you're not the Hero I just killed. Or the ones the other mentioned.
- (Explore) "Why don't you stay dead? Why don't I stay dead?"
- (Explore) "You sound familiar somehow-"
- (Explore) "Where is this place?"
- (Explore) "What is this place?"
- (Explore) "Where are we going?"
- (Explore) "Why is it so cold?"
- (Explore) "Is this place also the castle?"
- (Explore) "Do you love me?"
- (Explore) "Thank you for helping. I'm still going to stab you as soon as I can, but think of it as an affable, friendly stabbing!"
- [Wait]

YOU — "Thank you for helping. I'm still going to stab you as soon as I can, but think of it as an affable, friendly stabbing!"

THE HERO — "Um? Thank you?"

THE SPECTRE — "It's how she shows affection.

THE SPECTRE — "And irritation.

THE SPECTRE — "Boredom, too.

THE SPECTRE — "She has a wide range of emotions, most of which are expressed through stabbing. But affection is one of them."

The melancholy radiating off him is tangible, black and clinging. It tries to hold you tight.

THE HERO — "Well, ha ha. You know what they say. Love hurts and all that."

- (Explore) "You doing okay, bestie?"
- (Explore) "What I want to know is - what's your plan? Why did you show up to help four lost innocent princesses?"
- (Explore) "So you're the Hero. But you're not the Hero I just killed. Or the ones the other mentioned.
- (Explore) "Why don't you stay dead? Why don't I stay dead?"
- (Explore) "You sound familiar somehow-"
- (Explore) "Where is this place?"
- (Explore) "What is this place?"
- (Explore) "Where are we going?"
- (Explore) "Why is it so cold?"
- (Explore) "Is this place also the castle?"
- (Explore) "Do you love me?"
- [Wait]

YOU — "Do you love me?"

THE HERO — "Wh-what? Why? Why would you ask that, of all things?"

THE HERO — "You're made of knives, and you've got more than a little bit of blood on you.

THE HERO — "I also think you want to stab me."

THE SPECTRE — "Like I said, it's how she shows - among other things - affection."

THE HERO — "J-just that I don't see why you'd assume that I love you."

THE WITCH — "You're not answering the question. Like a cowardly, weasely chicken.

THE WITCH — "Who's also scruffy."

THE HERO — "Can we change the topic?"

THE SPECTRE — "Mmm. No."

THE DAMSEL — "Nope! Love is the most important... important thing there is in all the world!"

THE HERO — "Then I don't love *you*."

- (Explore) "That was a very particular emphasis there! That sounds juicy!"
- (Explore) "You doing okay, bestie?"
- (Explore) "What I want to know is - what's your plan? Why did you show up to help four lost innocent princesses?"
- (Explore) "So you're the Hero. But you're not the Hero I just killed. Or the ones the other mentioned.
- (Explore) "Why don't you stay dead? Why don't I stay dead?"
- (Explore) "You sound familiar somehow-"
- (Explore) "Where is this place?"
- (Explore) "What is this place?"
- (Explore) "Where are we going?"
- (Explore) "Why is it so cold?"
- (Explore) "Is this place also the castle?"
- [Wait]

YOU — "That was a very particular emphasis there! That sounds juicy!"

THE HERO — "I don't want to talk about it."

The damsel's eyes wobble. Her breath hitches.

THE DAMSEL — "Pretty please? For me?"

THE HERO — ...

THE HERO — ...

THE HERO — ...

THE HERO — ...

THE HERO — ...

THE HERO — "There was someone I loved. And I hurt her. And she hurt me. And everything went wrong."

THE DAMSEL — "Love always... always wins. Can't you talk to her?"

He laughs, crow-harsh.

THE HERO — "No. I can't."

THE DAMSEL — "I'd always forgive if someone explained to me."

THE WITCH — "I wouldn't! Never, ever, ever!"

THE SPECTRE — "Well, that's really an interesting question, isn't it? What is forgiveness? Is it just separation from the thing that caused you pain? Or is it something more?"

THE SPECTRE — "I really don't know myself."

THE SPECTRE — "I still, very literally, carry the scars of being murdered.

THE SPECTRE — "But sometimes it seems so long ago. It seems to matter less.

THE SPECTRE — "And then something reminds me of how much it hurt to die."

- "Hurting is part of love! I loved stabbing my Hero! It was so much fun!"
- "I've never felt the need to forgive anyone! The other you I met didn't really do anything I needed to forgive. Except for being boring, but then I killed him! Hehe."
- "I would simply not do anything wrong ever and be completely innocent. That's the best way to never need forgiveness!"
- "I'm starting to get bored, you know..."

YOU — "I would simply not do anything wrong ever and be completely *innocent*. That's the best way to never need forgiveness!"

THE HERO — "That's..."

THE HERO — ...

THE HERO — ... definitely *a* point of view."

THE WITCH — "Well, I didn't do anything wrong either! He just stabbed me! Out of the blue! For no reason at all! That's why I can never ever forgive him!

THE WITCH — "Because he was a monster and so - I'd bet! - are you! Because you're just like him, oh yes you are.

THE WITCH — "And I've always got my eye on you."

He sighs.

THE HERO — "You're right to feel that way."

THE WITCH — "Of course I am!"

THE HERO — "Well, I'll be out of your way soon.

THE HERO — "And we're here."

You are far from any stars. There are lights breaking the midnight gloom, but the lights in the stars are galaxies.

He is small once again, as small as you are, and he looks out into the expanse as if there is something for you to see here.

A moment of uncertainty of the light, and you realise what you are looking at. There is a titanic plane here, a dark mirror that reflects the light of distant stars.

THE HERO — "You'll be safe here. It's nearly done. All the pain, all the suffering.

THE HERO — "It'll be over soon. Trust me."

THE WITCH — "Trust you? Oh yes, I'll *certainly* do that, since you helped us here.

THE WITCH — "Now, out of curiosity, what do you want us to do here?"

THE HERO — "Just touch the mirror. That'll take you where you're safe. Think of it as, uh, I guess, a portal to a place where you'll be safe

THE HERO — "Safer than here."

THE DAMSEL — "I'd do almost anything to be warm!"

THE SPECTRE — "I know who you are."

THE DAMSEL — "Of course you do!"

THE SPECTRE — "Not you, I mean-"

THE HERO — "There's no time to waste. Go on! Touch the mirror! Get away from here. There are things worse than the cold out here."

- (Explore) "You didn't answer all my questions! How rude!"
- (Explore) "I think I won't stab you. You did help my bestie, after all."
- (Explore) (Lie) "I think I won't stab you. You did help my bestie, after all."
- [Touch the Mirror]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Wait for the Inevitable]

YOU — "You didn't answer all my questions! How rude!"

THE HERO — "We don't have time. It's more important you all survive.

THE HERO — "All this will be pointless if you don't."

- (Explore) "You didn't answer all my questions! How rude!"
- (Explore) "I think I won't stab you. You did help my bestie, after all."
- (Explore) (Lie) "I think I won't stab you. You did help my bestie, after all."
- [Touch the Mirror]
- [Stab the Hero]
- [Wait for the Inevitable]

YOU — "I think I won't stab you. You did help my bestie, after all."

THE HERO — "Well, that's good, at least. But you should hurry."

THE WITCH — "Yes, thank you so awfully much. So *so* much!

THE WITCH — "Only-"

The knife you gave her is in your hand. And now it is in his chest.

He staggers back.

The look in his eyes is strange, both betrayed and fully expecting it.

THE WITCH — "Hah! I don't need you any more!"

She dances a little jig of joy, lit by the glow of distant galaxies.

THE DAMSEL — "What-

THE WITCH — "Ha ha ha! I got him! I did it! I paid him back! Death to all so-called Heroes!"

THE DAMSEL — "That wasn't the one who hurt you! He was helping us! Bandages, bandages, I can stop the bleeding."

THE WITCH — "Oh, that's what he wanted us to think, but just you see, someone like him could never have been trying to really help us!"

THE HERO — "She's right. Leave me. I... deserved it..."

His breath is wet and heavy. He should not be able to talk. The wound is mortal.

THE WITCH — "Of course he did, he... wait. Wait."

Her eyes narrow, her tail lashes.

THE WITCH — "Why would you say you deserve it? What's your game? I mean, I know you deserve it, you wicked, awful creature, but you wouldn't just go and *say* you deserve it.

THE WITCH — "So you're up to something, you are.

THE WITCH — "I know you are!"

THE WITCH — ...

THE WITCH — ...

THE WITCH — "You must be."

THE SPECTRE — "You're a fool.

THE SPECTRE — "Do you know what you've done?"

THE WITCH — "I... I got my revenge, that's what I wanted, that's..."

THE SPECTRE — "You had your revenge. And that wasn't your hero. You know that.

THE SPECTRE — "You've killed our only ally."

THE WITCH — "No, I-"

THE HERO — "Look... mirror. Before... others..."

- [Help him.]
- [Look in the Mirror]

YOU — [Look in the Mirror]

It's not you.

You do not have that many arms.

You do not have that many faces.

It's you.

The pale hands are reaching towards the surface of the mirror.

The pale hands are reaching out of the surface of the mirror.

Towards the others.

Towards you.

- [Accept]
- [Laugh]
- [Stab the Hands]

YOU — [Laugh]

You take pleasure in this moment.

It is all that can be done.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!