



Petals in Formaldehyde

A Gothic Play by Walter Andrew Rawl



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Synopsis: In this gothic tale of romance and corruption, a young man named Alexander tries to break his family's cult history and traditions when he falls in love with a woman named Helen. However, romance and the cult's deadly plans don't mix, and tragedy occurs when Helen falls ill.

Production notes: This play is chock full of references to the H.P Lovecraft mythos, so by all means, decorate the background with tentacle and sigil motifs. Flowers decorating the stage can appear and slowly disappear throughout the events of the play, correlating with Helen's physical health and Alexander's mental health. The story takes place in the 1910s - early 40s.

In Act Two, Scene One: the arguments between both families overlap. Actors should freeze while the other side is talking, similar to a tableau. When "/" is used, it means those two parts of dialogue are said at the same time. In several scenes, the "Cthulhu chant" is used. It can be pronounced: "Fin-glue-ee mug-lah naf-huh Cuh-thoo-loo Ruh-lay-uh wah-gon-ath-al fat-ahg-in." However, the actual pronunciation has several interpretations, so this exact version can be taken as a suggestion.

Characters:

YOUNG ALEXANDER
 ALEXANDER LEGRASSE
 HELEN BARKHAM
 EDWARD LEGRASSE
 ETHEL LEGRASSE
 GOSSIPER
 HORACE
 MARION
 NATHANIEL
 ARTHUR
 DANIEL BARKHAM
 MARIA BARKHAM
 DOCTOR
 DEAD PERSON 1
 DEAD PERSON 2
 ENSEMBLE

Character Description:

YOUNG ALEXANDER - Alexander, age 13. Slowly becoming numb to the frightening home environment he's found himself in, but still keeps what shard of childhood innocence he has close as he tries to stay sane.

ALEXANDER LEGRASSE - A traumatized romantic. He is constantly stressed and has issues socializing and trusting others. He should be dressed in clothes that would be seen as more appropriate for an 1890's setting (ruffles, a black coat, tied back hair if long). A red rose should be on his suit after Helen gives the pin to him.

HELENA BARKHAM - Her friends call her Helen. She shines as a burst of color in the desolate stage. She's cheery and has not a care in the world, your typical 20's golden girl enjoying life. She has a bit of a rebellious spirit to her, and she's always optimistic for the future. A foil to Alexander. Her costume should be a stark contrast to the color scheme of the rest of the stage.

EDWARD LEGRASSE - An authoritative and cruel man, Alexander's father. Dressed similarly to Alexander, but a bit more formal. He is an old man. He shows no remorse and has an aggressive approach to parenting.

ETHEL LEGRASSE - A cold, uptight manipulator and the wife of Edward. She acts well-meaning, but purposefully twists her words to get what she wants. Dress her in light gray and creme.

THE GOSSIPER - A random town person who seems to be more aware of the audience and their being a character than anyone else. An aloof, ghostly presence. They act as an informal narrator and omnipotent deity (but the latter role should not be immediately obvious). Wears a white masquerade mask to tie them to a Greek chorus, with eyes tilted in the way of the comedy mask. Gender flexible.

MAIN CULTISTS- Dress in dark hoods or cloaks. Very creepy. Should not look very individualistic at all. The rest of the cult can be filled out by the ensemble.

HORACE - An ominous, frightening presence and a loyal devotee to the Old Ones. A close friend of Edward's, and the first member of the cult outside of the Legrasse family.

MARION - A cruel person who mostly is in the Eldritch Dominion for the catharsis of violence. Gender flexible.

NATHANIEL - A more innocent and concerned member of the cult. Dragged in due to his emotional vulnerability.

ARTHUR - A hopeful businessman. Costume can be faded tones, but more colorful than Alexander. Suit and tie. The most important part of the costume is the red flower on his suit jacket. A bit naive. A clear parallel with Alexander in his best mindset.

DEAD PERSON 1 and 2 - Unfortunate townspeople who end up being murdered. Can be the same actor, as long as they differentiate between the two characters. Gender flexible.

DANIEL BARKHAM - Helen's father.

MARIA BARKHAM - Helen's mother.

DOCTOR - A doctor who, to be frank, has no idea what he's doing, and comedically reflects the state of medicine in the early 1900s.

ENSEMBLE - The ensemble will be referenced occasionally as extras. Note that when other roles are not onstage, leads filling in the ensemble in different costumes should be considered.

Act One

Scene One - Void / Eldritch Dominion Meeting Hall

The curtains are closed. A pub table and stool (which will be referred to as the "Gossiper's Table") is on downstage right. A champagne bottle is on top of it. Restaurant chatter is heard in the background. Enter GOSSIPER, holding two champagne glasses. They sit down and pour themselves a glass, placing the other glass toward the audience. Their monologue can be broken up by the GOSSIPER sipping champagne.

GOSSIPER

Good afternoon! Welcome to Massachusetts, my friend. Care for some champagne? ... I hope the train ride wasn't too crowded.

They chuckle.

Oh, of course it wasn't, I kid. Nobody ever comes here. And for good reason. What is there to do? The garden is the only half-pleasant place in town, so if you need something to do, there's that. ... But enough about gardens. I know full well that's not quite what you want to hear, is it? The *real* Innsmouth drama.

Restaurant chatter dies down.

Well, a few people have gone missing around the same time every few months. No bodies found. I know that sounds dark, but trust me, it gets far more interesting. In Innsmouth, there's this freaky cult...

Open curtains to the Eldritch Dominion meeting hall. The CULT (MAIN and ENSEMBLE) are looming in complete stillness ominously in the background. DEAD PERSON 1 is lying neatly under a black sheet in the center of a dimly lit room.

GOSSIPER (CONT'D)

Rumors say they pray through human sacrifice.

ETHEL, EDWARD and YOUNG ALEXANDER enter. EDWARD has his arm around ALEXANDER paternally, smiling. YOUNG ALEXANDER is covering his eyes.

GOSSIPER (CONT'D)

Edward Legrasse started it a couple decades ago. Here we are in 1914, and the madman's got a kid.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Can I see now?

EDWARD

Patience, Alexander.

GOSSIPER

Not a great environment to raise the poor boy.

ETHEL

Oh, Edward, he's waited long enough.

GOSSIPER

But with how insane the kid's life will end up, there's only one thing we can be sure of..

EDWARD

I suppose so. Alright.

YOUNG ALEXANDER uncovers his eyes. His face sinks from excitement to disturbed confusion.

GOSSIPER

It'll make for quite the gossip.

Light down on GOSSIPER.

EDWARD

Happy birthday, son.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

What is this?

EDWARD

You're thirteen now. They have been calling to you all your life. It's time you responded.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Responded? How?

Awkward beat. EDWARD gestures toward the hidden DEAD PERSON 1 slowly and dramatically.

What is it?

Gently, EDWARD passes a dagger to YOUNG ALEXANDER. Beat. ALEXANDER grabs it.

EDWARD

Would you like to see...?

ETHEL

Oh, dear, he's far too young to actually- without the cloth?

EDWARD

He's plenty mature enough.

During the previous line, EDWARD shoves past his family and rips the sheet off. HORACE quickly walks over and calmly picks up the sheet. He folds it. While he does this, YOUNG ALEXANDER gasps sharply. He slowly walks over to DEAD PERSON 1.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Oh my! Is he alright? What's going on?

NATHANIEL

We did you the favor of knocking him out this time.

MARION

Don't get used to it.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Coming to a horrible realization, frightened.
 Oh, oh... no, no, no no. I can't- I can't, in good conscience, steal a man's blood while he can't wake up!

MARION

Oh, we're taking more than *blood*, kid.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Beginning to panic.

Wha-?!

ETHEL

Glaring authoritatively at MARION.

Marion, you're not helping.

MARION rolls their eyes. EDWARD walks over to YOUNG ALEXANDER, guiding him to DEAD PERSON 1. EDWARD grabs his son's hands tightly, holding the dagger in YOUNG ALEXANDER's hand.

EDWARD

It's not as hard as you may believe. All you do is raise the dagger in both hands, say a brief prayer to the Old Ones, and do one swift motion downward. Don't dare waver, you have to commit to the motion, otherwise he may wake.

A short beat while YOUNG ALEXANDER looks into his father's eyes, frozen.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Father I... I think the actual mechanics of the action... aren't what's frightening me. And I think you know that.

EDWARD, from this point, is getting increasingly frustrated. He lets go of his son's hands and moves from behind him to facing him.

EDWARD

Whatever could be bothering you so much?

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Offended, volume raising.

The horrible wrongness of it-

EDWARD

Standing up.

Even after all of your lessons?

YOUNG ALEXANDER

I never knew it would escalate... to...

EDWARD

Bluntly.
Yes, you did.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

He stands.
But I thought I could talk to you before-

EDWARD

AND WHAT? What could I do? Change the Necronomicon? Change the will of the Old Ones? Let your nightmares drive you mad?!

YOUNG ALEXANDER

You could let me leave.

Beat.

EDWARD

The Old Ones need you.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Did I ever say I cared what happened to them?

This has caught everyone off guard. EDWARD slaps YOUNG ALEXANDER.

EDWARD

Angrily, but quieter.
The prayer. Ph'nglui mglw'nafh... Ph'nglui mglw... You know the rest, Alexander. Do it.

Exit EDWARD. He storms off. A door is slammed. The lights slowly fade into a spotlight on YOUNG ALEXANDER.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

At his house at R'lyeh, Cthulhu- dead Cthulhu waits d-dreaming.

He takes a deep breath.

Ph'nglui mglw'nafh... Cthulhu R'lyeh... wgah'nagl... fhtagn.

YOUNG ALEXANDER stabs DEAD PERSON 1. He starts crying. Exit CULTISTS. ETHEL begins to leave, but stops and turns

around. She walks back over to her son, standing by his side.

ETHEL

Sweetie, I know this can be upsetting.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

The nightmares are getting worse.

ETHEL

... So I've heard.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

I feel like I'm getting worse.

ETHEL

That's only natural.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Is it?

ETHEL

Attempting to be comforting.

I know we dabble in the unnatural, but look at the other side of things. Nature. Things are born, they grow, they get weaker, and they die, and then...

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Trying to laugh it off.

And... then? Mother, you're asking me questions that very smart people can't solve. Do you really expect that of me?

ETHEL

No, no. You're thinking far too big. You're so clever. No, what I'm talking about is physical. When things die, they rot.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

... Am I rotting?

ETHEL

You're not. As most go through life, they gradually rot, inside and out. Both their flesh and their souls grow weaker, fouler. But things are different for you. Something out there chose you.

We knew it as soon as you were born. You're being preserved. And as long as you're loyal to the Old Ones, you won't rot for a long time. So just keep going, Alex, and you'll be okay.

YOUNG ALEXANDER stands up.

YOUNG ALEXANDER

Thanks, Mom.

YOUNG ALEXANDER and ETHEL freeze as the lights go down. Light up on GOSSIPER.

GOSSIPER

Well, she was half right.

Beat, letting the audience think about what they said. To the audience, looking at the champagne bottle.

Ah, it seems we're out. Care for a refill?

Exit GOSSIPER with their glass and the champagne.

Scene Two - 20 Years Later, The Diner

The curtains come closed and the full set for the diner is added. Add another stool to the GOSSIPER's table. ENSEMBLE in the background to fill out the scene. MAIN CULTISTS, EDWARD, ETHEL and ALEXANDER are sitting at a table together. Everyone is talking except ALEXANDER. He notices no one is paying attention to him, so he sneaks away from the table to the GOSSIPER's table, about to sit down. At the same time, the GOSSIPER enters with a full champagne bottle and two glasses and tries to sit down at their table.

ALEXANDER

Oh, I'm sorry, you were going to sit here, weren't you?

GOSSIPER

No, no, it's okay. The more, the merrier. Sit down.

ALEXANDER sits down.

What's going on at the really busy table over there, do you think? Some sort of nutcase convention?

ALEXANDER

He chuckles.
Seems like it.

GOSSIPER

What do you think they talk about?

ALEXANDER

Eldritch Dominion secrets, plans, that sort of thing, I'd figure.

GOSSIPER

Pondering.
"Eldritch Dominion." Huh. Never heard it called that before.

ALEXANDER realizes he has said too much.

Not to interrogate you or anything, but where did you hear that?

ALEXANDER

Oh, a- a friend of mine.

GOSSIPER

Marion? I heard they were wrapped up in that nonsense.

ALEXANDER

Yeah, it was Marion.

GOSSIPER

How do you know them?

Beat. GOSSIPER takes a sip of champagne. ALEXANDER is silent.

Care for some champagne?

ALEXANDER

Isn't that illegal?

GOSSIPER

What would you care about legality? After all, I think we both know that the disappearances and the Dominion aren't exactly unconnected.

ALEXANDER is shocked and confused. ETHEL notices ALEXANDER is missing.

ALEXANDER

I mean- h-how could you prove that we- that they-

ETHEL storms over to the table.

ETHEL

Alex, sweetie, do you know what day it is?

ALEXANDER

I believe it's Saturday.

ETHEL

Tonight is a full moon.

ETHEL begins to lose her patience when ALEXANDER doesn't get it.

And thus, it's a ritual day.

Beat.

So stop fraternizing and get back over here. Now.

ETHEL walks back over to the table. ALEXANDER sighs and follows. GOSSIPER ignores the interaction and goes back to their champagne.

EDWARD

Well, I'm sure you'll all be thrilled to hear that the operation in Devil's Reef is going marvelously smoothly! In about five years, we'll reconvene with the Deep Ones THEMSELVES!

HORACE

Where does Cthulhu fit into this?

EDWARD

What we're doing now is miniscule compared to the Rising planned. Once the lower beings are pleased, we'll work our way up the chain to Cthulhu itself. Patience, Horace, conversing with gods takes time and connections. We need to please those in our own beach before we can reach the depths of R'lyeh.

MARION

What a brilliant point. I look forward to the outcome.

NATHANIEL

As for this outcome, I'm a little concerned. So from what I understand, in a few years, everything's gonna be destroyed?

EDWARD

Nonsense, "a few years". The Rising will take decades, even centuries, to perfect.

ETHEL

You're not getting cold feet now, are you, Nathaniel? Because our little prodigy here might have a word or two to say about that.

Everyone looks at ALEXANDER.

ALEXANDER

Actually, I was having second thoughts myself. Is it not too late to back out of the-

EDWARD

YOU WANT TO BACK OUT NOW?!

Whispering so that no one hears him, but angry.

After all the blood you've spilled?

Back to normal tone.

What are you hoping to save here? Your reputation?

ALEXANDER

Our victim's lives.

EDWARD

So you'd rather sacrifice yours?

Beat. ALEXANDER looks away.

Just what I thought. Do not. Question me.

NATHANIEL

If you're worried about social stuff, I mean, we're all friends, aren't we?

The ELDRITCH DOMINION looks at NATHANIEL, annoyed.

...okay.

ETHEL

Alex, you've been going down this road for years. Stay strong, don't turn back now. We're right beside you.

Awkward beat.

MARION

Anything else to discuss?

EDWARD

Any questions about the ritual tonight?

NATHANIEL raises his hand slowly. Before his arm is fully extended, MARION grabs his hand and puts it back down.

Alright then, the meeting adjourned! See you all tonight.

NATHANIEL

Bye, Mr. Legrasse!

MARION and NATHANIEL leave. HORACE stands up and firmly shakes EDWARD's hand.

HORACE

Farewell, Edward.

EDWARD

Good day, Horace.

Exit HORACE. EDWARD stands up.

EDWARD

Your mother and I are going home. You can stay out and drink with your friends if you want, but you better be home and sober by tonight.

EDWARD grabs ETHEL's hand and leads her offstage. The GOSSIPER looks at ALEXANDER for a short beat, and there is an unsettling connection between the two. The GOSSIPER picks up the champagne glasses and leaves. Fade lights and remove diner set.

Scene Three - The Garden

A bench in the middle of a public garden in Innsmouth. Flowers and overgrown bushes are scattered around, poorly cared for. Enter ALEXANDER, who sits dejectedly on the bench. He sighs. After a moment, he puts his head in his hands.

Enter HELEN. She notices ALEXANDER before he notices her. She awkwardly inches her way toward him. She sits down beside him.

HELEN

Hey, um, I don't really know you, but I've seen you at the diner once or twice, and you seem sort of down. You okay?

ALEXANDER

I don't think you could help any of my problems.

HELEN

Oh, why?

ALEXANDER

I'm Alexander Legrasse.

HELEN

Oh, I'm Helena Barkham! Nice to meet you!

ALEXANDER

Have you not heard the rumors?

HELEN

Oh, I'm new. I'm from Pennsylvania. If you want Pennsylvania drama, I'm fully knowledgeable, but Massachusetts? Eh...

ALEXANDER

Well, in short, it may not be a good idea get involved in my problems.

HELEN

I'm a lot more clever than you think.

ALEXANDER

Oh, I'm sure you're plenty clever! It's just that my parents want me to get into some... pretty dangerous work.

HELEN

Ooh, dangerous? I'm intrigued.

ALEXANDER

Like, unlawful.

HELEN

Hey, one of the guys at the bar told me that about my drinking!

ALEXANDER chuckles.

ALEXANDER

Well, now I'm just curious: why did you move here? Nobody moves here. Unless you're from Florida or New Jersey, I don't see how Innsmouth is an improvement.

HELEN

My parents are anthropologists and they wanted to study this weird cult that's apparently here. I mean, being that you're native to here, I'd assume, you'd probably know already.

ALEXANDER

Uhm... about that.

He can't look her in the eyes, and his leg begins bouncing a bit as he blurts out his next line:

My parents run the cult.

HELEN

She inhales sharply, with pity.

Oooooh, that's-uh, I'm s-sorry, I'm- I'm sure it's not all that weird. I didn't learn what I know from that reliable a source, to be honest, so it could be perfectly fine and I wouldn't even-

ALEXANDER

Oh, no, it's weird.

HELEN

Fish gods?

ALEXANDER

Yup.

HELEN

Inaudible chanting?

ALEXANDER

Lighthearted laugh.

Oh, don't even get me started. My childhood was filled with learning creepy prayers and languages.

HELEN

Cool! Can you say something in one of them?

ALEXANDER

Joking.

Are you alright with provoking some sort of squid monstrosity?

HELEN

I've been told not to be provocative.

They both laugh.

I doubt the human sacrifice bit is true though.

Beat. ALEXANDER looks nervous.

Please tell me it's not true.

Short pause.

Oh my god, I'm so sorry I even brought it up.

ALEXANDER

No, no, it's alright. You talk about the Eldritch Dominion, it's gonna come up eventually. Please-please just don't be scared of me. I really disagree with everything they're doing and I'm trying to use any power I have as the "chosen one" to put a stop

to all the depravity. The- the problem lies in the fact that nobody will listen to me.

HELEN

I'm not scared of you! You seem like a nice person! And maybe... that's the problem. If they won't listen to you, make 'em!

ALEXANDER

Make them?

HELEN

Yeah. I believe in you.

ALEXANDER

You know what, Helena? I will make them listen. I won't help with one more ritual.

HELEN

Alright! And y'know what? Call me Helen. My friends call me Helen. And I'd call you a friend!

The lights fade to blue. The roaring sounds of crashing waves are heard.

ALEXANDER

A friend...?

HELEN

Yeah. I'd love to invite you to my house sometime.

ALEXANDER

Sounds marvelous.

They look into each other's eyes for a moment. HELEN snaps out of it and turns forward.

HELEN

Wow, it's... getting late.

ALEXANDER

It sure is. Oh, oh no! If the sun has set, I'll be late for the ritual!

ALEXANDER starts standing up, but HELEN grabs his arm and sits him back down.

HELEN

No, you don't even have to go to tell them you're not going. Just sit here with me. We can simply enjoy the stars for awhile. Let me know when you've fully missed it.

ALEXANDER

Yeah. I suppose so. I'd like that.

Beat. Pointing at the stars.

There's scorpius. Venus should be somewhere... that way.

HELEN

Wow, you know about constellations?

ALEXANDER

A lot of the Dominion's gods eat stars. I have been trained to make sure none of them are missing.

HELEN laughs.

HELEN

Oh, I could never do that. I think I'm too distracted by all the gorgeous shimmering in the sky and I wouldn't notice! I mean, think about it! Millions of miles away, and they're so bright, they make it all the way here.

Beat. HELEN turns to ALEXANDER.

One thing I love about stars is that they're the same wherever you go. No matter where you go in the world, you're still looking at the same stars. God, I must sound like a toddler. 'Wow, pretty light!'

ALEXANDER

No, that's... that's beautiful.

Beat. ALEXANDER struggles to think of a compliment, and nervously, yet sincerely says:

You have a wonderful mind.

HELEN

Why, thank you! From what I've heard you've been through, staying strong in your morals? So do you.

HELEN puts her hand on ALEXANDER's. She holds it. He is shocked.

ALEXANDER

I think I've missed the ritual by now. Thank you, Helen.

HELEN

Well then, I suppose I'll go home. We should definitely meet up sometime soon!

She pulls a fountain pen and a scrap of paper from a pocket in her dress. She writes something down and hands it to him.

This is where I live, you should write me sometime! Or just stop by if you'd like.

ALEXANDER

Sounds great, I definitely will. It was a pleasure meeting you.

HELEN holds his hand dramatically and curtsies.

HELEN

A pleasure, Mr. Legrasse.

HELEN shifts to holding his hand with concern and care. She gently hugs him briefly. Exit HELEN. ALEXANDER looks shocked and flustered at where she exited and at the paper.

ALEXANDER

What just happened?

Blackout.

Scene Four - The Diner

ALEXANDER and HELEN are enjoying lunch together in the diner. GOSSIPER is also there, having lunch with a random person in the background.

HELEN

So, do you hang out in the garden a lot?

ALEXANDER

Oh, absolutely. It's the nicest place in Innsmouth.

HELEN

Really? I would've thought that'd be the beach.

ALEXANDER

Oh, no, no, no. Especially if the Deep Ones know who you are, avoid the beach like the plague. Plus, the whole place is gross. All the plants are dead. It's not even just the plants. If you're a fan of wildlife, you're gonna be really disappointed.

HELEN

She chuckles.

Alright then, I can strike that off my tourist list. But aren't all the flowers in the garden dying too?

ALEXANDER

Well, people don't take too good care of them, but they're doing just fine. Even if they die now, they'll be back next year.

HELEN

Perennials. I should've known.

ALEXANDER

Pleasantly surprised.

"Perennials"... are you the kind of person who likes plants?

HELEN

Somewhat! I'm more of a rose, tulip kind of person.

ALEXANDER

I like roses too!

HELEN

I mean, who doesn't? Ooh- have you ever put a white rose in dye and water and watched it change colors?

ALEXANDER

No, I haven't!

HELEN

Oh, you can make all sorts of colors. I like making pink or blue ones, but nothing beats the classic red.

ALEXANDER

You want to know something odd? I think the soil has some sort of natural colorant in it here.

HELEN

Really?

ALEXANDER

Yes, I once tried to plant white roses in the garden, and within a few days, they turned pitch black.

HELEN

Black? Wow. I've heard trees on blackwater rivers do that to the water, but such rich soil this close to the ocean? That's fascinating. If only I knew more about botany.

ALEXANDER

It could be something natural, but knowing Innsmouth, it feels... unnatural. I don't know what sort of natural phenomenon could do that. The Dominion suggests-

As ALEXANDER says "the Dominion", enter NATHANIEL from stage right. ALEXANDER notices him.

Aaaand speak of the devil.

NATHANIEL

Hey there, Alexander!

Beat. ALEXANDER doesn't want to talk to NATHANIEL, but sighs and responds anyway.

ALEXANDER

Hello, Nathaniel.

NATHANIEL

I'm here to officially request your presence at the meeting hall. We've got something special for you!

ALEXANDER

For me? What?

NATHANIEL

It's a surprise, but it's gonna be a whole lot of fun!

HELEN

Alex, if they're doing something important, you can go.

ALEXANDER

But I want to stay here with-

NATHANIEL

Your lady friend seems to agree. I don't think you'll wanna miss this.

Beat. ALEXANDER stands up.

ALEXANDER

Wait, is it- a party?

NATHANIEL

Hmmm... a bit more formal than that, but you could say it's a party.

ALEXANDER

Oh, finally! Can Helen come?

NATHANIEL

As much as I'd like to say "of course!", being burned at the stake by your father doesn't sound ideal today.

ALEXANDER

Dejected.
Alright.

He turns to HELEN.

I'll check in with you later, Helen.

HELEN

That's alright with me! Have fun at the party.

NATHANIEL exits stage left, and ALEXANDER follows.

Scene Five - Eldritch Dominion Meeting Hall

ENSEMBLE (cult) are running around the back and middle of of the stage. They appear to be setting up a big event or even a birthday party, but something is off. Enter NATHANIEL and ALEXANDER.

ALEXANDER

Wow, you weren't wrong when you said 'formal'. No matter, I'm just happy you guys are celebrating my birthday this year.

NATHANIEL

That's today?!

ALEXANDER looks shocked and mildly offended.

ALEXANDER

Well, yes, is that not what all the hubbub is about?

NATHANIEL

Oh, well, happy birthday! But, no, today's festivities aren't for that. Today is the Festival.

ALEXANDER

Please tell me it isn't the one where we-

NATHANIEL

It's the one where we go up on the hill and sacrifice a goat.

ALEXANDER sighs.

ALEXANDER

And who, pray tell, is sacrificing said goat?

Beat.

NATHANIEL

...Happy birthday?

ALEXANDER

Are you KIDDING ME?! Who scheduled this?

MARION

It's in the Necronomicon for once every century, you can miss one birthday.

ALEXANDER

Once every century? But the Eldritch Dominion hasn't even been around that long.

MARION

Alexander, is complaining the only thing you know how to do?

ALEXANDER

Excuse me...?

MARION

You're lucky you're a grown man now, otherwise I'm almost certain you would have earned a few lashings from Edward for those sorts of remarks. Plus, you didn't even come to the ritual last night! I honestly can't believe you've grown into such a disgrace.

Beat.

ALEXANDER

You're right. I have grown! What's stopping me from backing out of the Dominion?

NATHANIEL

Wait, but you're the chosen one! We need you!

ALEXANDER

And what is even the point of this festival?

HORACE

We do NOT question the words in the unholy book.

ALEXANDER

You all can miss one festival, can you not? Pretend Nathaniel's the 'chosen one' for today. Congratulations, Nathaniel.

Exit ALEXANDER. ENSEMBLE and HORACE and MARION look at NATHANIEL with confusion and disgust. HORACE looks back at where ALEXANDER exited.

HORACE

That traitor...

MARION

The Old Ones are not going to appreciate this.

NATHANIEL

Might I be the chosen one? Even for today?

MARION

Cold, annoyed.

Go anywhere near that sacrificial goat and we'll burn you alive.

NATHANIEL looks dejected.

NATHANIEL

Oh...

Close curtains.

Scene Six - Helen's Porch

Enter ALEXANDER, frustrated. He knocks on HELEN's door. She opens it, delighted to see him.

HELEN

Oh, hi! What's going on, Alexander?

ALEXANDER

I'm a bit frustrated, to be honest.

HELEN

HELEN fully exits the door.

Oh, well, what's troubling you?

ALEXANDER

Well, you see, it's my birthday, and-

HELEN

Happy birthday!

ALEXANDER

Thank you. Remember that party that Nathaniel mentioned?