

SPIN

A one-act play based on Edgar Allan Poe's poems
The Raven and *Lenore*

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[Read my work on New Play Exchange](#)

SETTING

Lowell, Massachusetts, 1845. The play moves between locations quickly, so scenery should be simple and nonliteral.

CHARACTERS

Productions are encouraged to cast actors of all genders, races, dis/abilities, and other identity markers.

The play's 8 characters can be performed with as few as 5 actors. Suggested doubling is indicated below.

LENORE ROOKWOOD. Woman. Late teens-30s

GUY DE VERE. Man. 20s-40s.

MRS. BROOKE. Woman. 30+.

TOWNSPERSON 1. Any gender/age.

TOWNSPERSON 2. Any gender/age.

SERVANT. Any gender/age.

CHILD. Any gender. Age 6. (Played by one of the adult actors.)

ATHENA MORTIMER. Woman. 20s-30s.

SUGGESTED DOUBLING

Actor 1 plays LENORE ROOKWOOD

Actor 2 plays GUY DE VERE

Actor 3 plays ATHENA MORTIMER & SERVANT

Actor 4 plays MRS. BROOKE & TOWNSPERSON 1

Actor 5 plays TOWNSPERSON 2 & CHILD

PROPS

There are two less-common props in this play: the stick shuttles and the drop spindle. Both are cheaply obtained and easy to learn to use:

- Stick shuttles
 - [Amazon purchase option](#)
 - [Suggested tutorial](#)
- Drop spindle
 - [Amazon purchase option](#)
 - [Suggested tutorial](#)

MUSIC

The song Lenore sings is an Irish spinning song, [Siuil a Ruin](#) ["Shool uh roon"]. It's a folk tune, so it's in the public domain. [Here's a recording](#) for reference.

Prologue

In the darkness, we hear a rustle of wings. Then, a haunting song:

LENORE'S VOICE (singing)

I'LL SELL MY ROCK, I'LL SELL MY REEL
I'LL SELL MY ONLY SPINNING WHEEL
TO BUY MY LOVE A SWORD OF STEEL

Lights up on LENORE. Her face is deathly pale.

LENORE

Once, he loved me madly. And now, he is merely...mad.

Again we hear the rustle of wings. GUY DE VERE appears in a pool of light, looking haunted. He addresses something that sits just above his line of sight, something the audience cannot see.

GUY

(In verse; rhythmically) Ghastly grim and ancient raven
wandering from the Nightly shore
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian
shore!

LENORE

Quoth the raven-

GUY

(In verse) -nevermore.
Prophet!--

LENORE

-said he..

GUY

(In verse; rhythmically) -thing of evil! Prophet still, if
bird or devil!

GUY (cont'd)

By that Heav'n that bends above us-by that God we both
 adore-
 Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant
 Aidenn,
 It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name-

LENORE

Lenore.

GUY

Quoth the raven-

LENORE

Nevermore.

GUY gives a cry just as his light cuts out.

GUY

No!

*We hear the rustle of wings. LENORE looks up, toward the
 unseen sound.*

LENORE

Like the raven, I too have flown. And since my flight,
 others swoop in to weave their stories. Stories about me.
 About my death. Feathery nonsense, all of it. I should like
 you to know the truth. Truth from a woman's lips, before
 men take up the thread. Before one man spins his web. Spins
 his lies.

We hear the rustle of wings.

End of scene.

Scene 1.

A small general store. There's a pair of chairs and a small table or a barrel. MRS. BROOKE is sweeping. We hear the sound of a shopdoor bell. GUY DE VERE enters.

GUY

(Solemn but courteous) Mrs. Brooke.

MRS. BROOKE

Mr. De Vere!

GUY

(Weary.) Don't. Please.

MRS. BROOKE

I've not said a word.

GUY

It's not a social call.

(From his pocket, he pulls a black armband, the kind worn during mourning.)

I'm in need of a new armband.

(The armband is in tatters. She holds it up to examine.)

GUY *(cont'd)*

I stood too close to the punch press at the mill.

MRS. BROOKE

So I see. You might have sent your man for it.

GUY

My servants are...away.

MRS. BROOKE

All of them? At harvest time?

GUY

Yes. I- I surprised them with a little impromptu...holiday. No sense in all of them rattling around that big empty house. Just for me.

MRS. BROOKE

Hmmm.

GUY

They work hard. They deserve a chance to visit their families.

MRS. BROOKE

Oh, indeed. Indeed. It's most generous of you, as always.
(Beat.) It's rather early days yet. To be back at the mill.

GUY

Mrs. Brooke, I'm grateful for your concern-

MRS. BROOKE

Now, don't you "Mrs. Brooke" me-

GUY

-Mrs. Brooke-

MRS. BROOKE

-as if I didn't carry him in my arms as a boy, same as my own son!-

GUY

-Mrs. Brooke. If production stops, my employees can't earn a wage. Their families won't eat.

MRS. BROOKE

Is that how keeping a business works? I thank you for the lesson.

GUY

No! I didn't mean- *(Tears threaten him. He looks away.)*

MRS. BROOKE

Guy. Come sit.

She sits down and hands him a handkerchief. He takes it but remains standing.

GUY

Forgive me. I forget myself.

MRS. BROOKE

You've run yourself ragged. She would not have been pleased to see it.

GUY

She would not have been pleased to see me shirk my duties.

MRS. BROOKE

Are you in earnest? There's not a man anywhere in Lowell who'd begrudge you a bit of time to mourn.

GUY

The girls at the mill might.

MRS. BROOKE

At three dollars a week, they wouldn't dare, and you know it. Those girls adore you.

GUY

I didn't want to send someone else. For the armband. I wanted to come to town myself. Isn't that strange? I crave to be surrounded by the noise—the horses and carriages. The crier in the South Common, shouting out our doom. The silence is deafening. I cannot stop my mind from spinning.

MRS. BROOKE

Come now.

GUY

(Sitting.) I fear I shall never know a love like it again.

MRS. BROOKE

"When I was a child, I spake as a child..." These are a little boy's tears, for the loss of his mother. Of course you will love again. But it will be a man's love. For his wife. It is the natural order of things.

GUY

How?

MRS. BROOKE

Put away childish things. Calm your mind and carry on.
(Beat.) I will fetch you your armband.

MRS. BROOKE exits. The shopdoor bell rings. LENORE enters, stamping her feet to warm them. She wears a shawl around her shoulders and carries a basket. GUY leaps to his feet. His smile comes too fast and too bright.

GUY

Good day.

LENORE

Pardon me- I didn't mean to interrupt.

GUY

Not at all. Please, come in.

LENORE

Are you the proprietor, sir?

GUY

Ah. That's Mrs. Brooke. She's just in the back. I don't believe I've had the pleasure, Mrs...?

LENORE

Miss. Eleanor Rookwood.

GUY

Miss Rookwood. Guy De Vere.

MRS. BROOKE enters, new armband in hand. She sees LENORE and stops short.

MRS. BROOKE

And who might you be?

LENORE

Good day, ma'am. Eleanor Rookwood.

MRS. BROOKE

Yes, I feared as much.

LENORE

I beg your pardon?

MRS. BROOKE

Why exactly are you here?

GUY

Mrs. Brooke...!

MRS. BROOKE

(Ignoring him; to LENORE) I've heard all about you. You've taken the Taylors' old place, the cottage on Mascuppic Lake.

LENORE

Yes.

MRS. BROOKE

You and your sister.

LENORE

My boarder. Miss Athena Mortimer. I spin and she weaves, and so she rents a room. We arrived but last week. How...pleasant to hear that we are already spoken of in town. Mrs. Brooke, Miss Mortimer and I are tradeswomen, like yourself.

(MRS. BROOKE makes a small, dismissive noise.)

LENORE (cont'd)

I wonder if I might interest you in some of our cloth.

(LENORE takes a fabric swatch from her basket.)

LENORE (cont'd)

We use only the finest flax, and our linen-

MRS. BROOKE

Linen doesn't sell, Miss Rookwood.

LENORE

Linen costs a bit more, it's true. But it's the finest quality. See this? It wears exceptionally well over the long term.

MRS. BROOKE

The ladies here prefer to wear cotton.

LENORE

Oh, Miss Mortimer and I gather all the flax that we work with ourselves. Locally. No slave cotton needed.

MRS. BROOKE

And an abolitionist, too! *(To GUY)* She must be a delightful dinner guest.

(GUY gives a nervous chuckle.)

MRS. BROOKE *(cont'd)*

The ladies of Lowell wear cotton because they are modern women. The cloth is made in our very own mill.

LENORE

Exactly so. Miss Mortimer and I make each length by hand, with care. No girls, gray with lint, asleep on their feet after twelve hours at their machines. No child yanking his fingers back from the loom, coughing black dust and praying for Sunday. Every warp and weft of this cloth is from our own hands, and not one soul suffered for it. Can the mills say the same?

MRS. BROOKE *(Overlapping)*

You don't know what you're talking about. Mr. De Vere owns that mill!--

LENORE *(Overlapping)*

Don't I? There are rumors about that mill in every town from here to Boston--

MRS. BROOKE hands GUY the new armband.

MRS. BROOKE

--and newly in mourning for his late mother, God rest her soul.

LENORE stops short and looks at GUY. His face is unreadable.

LENORE

(To him) I- I'm so sorry.

MRS. BROOKE

The De Vere family founded the Lowell hospital. They support the library society and the women's league. The mill girls live in a boarding house built just for them. It's clean and safe and provides them with two meals a day, which is a good deal more than most of those girls have at home on their farms. And never have I seen a single soul-mill girl or charity worker or otherwise- stop Mr. De Vere on the street without him emptying out his pockets to give all the pennies he has.

A beat of silence. LENORE crosses to GUY and bows her head.

LENORE

I spoke rashly. I beg your forgiveness.

GUY looks carefully at LENORE and makes a decision.

GUY

I shall buy your cloth myself.

LENORE

I beg your pardon?

GUY

The whole basket. I find four dollars in my pockets. Will that suffice?

LENORE

That's very generous, sir. I'm indebted to you.

MRS. BROOKE

Yes. You are.

LENORE takes the money from GUY. Their hands touch briefly; they have a moment. She sets the basket on the barrel next to him.

LENORE

Then...I wish you both a good afternoon.

GUY

I trust we will meet again, Miss Rookwood.

LENORE

Yes.

LENORE exits. The shopdoor bell rings. GUY puts on the new armband.

MRS. BROOKE

Mr. De Vere...

GUY

Speak your piece.

MRS. BROOKE

Don't lie down with dogs if you don't wish for fleas. Good afternoon.

GUY

Good afternoon.

MRS. BROOKE exits. GUY takes the cloth from the basket and examines it carefully. For the briefest of moments- did we imagine it?-- GUY's face turns ugly and he crumples the fabric in his fist. Then he straightens his face and his coat and exits, leaving the basket behind. The shopdoor bell rings. We hear the rustle of wings.

End of scene.

Scene 2.

LENORE enters.

LENORE

You may perhaps believe that Guy himself spread the news of our first meeting. But no. He had no need. Mrs. Brooke could spin a tale for a thousand and one nights. And she did. Lowell's very own shopkeep Scheherezade. Soon, every soul in town knew that I'd wounded the great Guy De Vere's pride- and that he'd graciously forgiven me.

Lights up on two TOWNSPEOPLE.

TOWNSPERSON 1

They say that he paid ten dollars for a yard of her linen.

TOWNSPERSON 2

I heard it was twelve dollars.

TOWNSPERSON 1

They say she's in love with him now.

TOWNSPERSON 2

Do they?

TOWNSPERSON 1

They say that she's beautiful.

TOWNSPERSON 2

I saw her in the market. She is beautiful. But her smile is grim.

TOWNSPERSON 1

Mr. De Vere was so generous to her.

TOWNSPERSON 2

Well of course he was. If there's a better man in Massachusetts, I've yet to meet him.

LENORE

Meanwhile, as the people of Lowell sang his praises, Guy sat alone in his study, staring out a black-shuttered window in the turret high atop the De Vere estate.

Crossfade to GUY, sitting in a dim pool of light. A SERVANT enters.

SERVANT

Sir?

GUY

(Darkly.) What?

SERVANT

May I bring you a candle?

GUY

What do you want?

SERVANT

Sir, the household staff are worried. This unexpected holiday. May we still expect to earn our wages while we're away?

GUY

No.

SERVANT

Sir. This is most unusual. It's hard enough for a body to make ends meet, and-

GUY

And what concern of mine is that?

SERVANT

Sir, if I may-

GUY

Get out!

We hear the rustle of wings. The SERVANT exits.

Crossfade back to LENORE and the TOWNSPEOPLE.

LENORE

As Guy sat, the rumors continued to spread through town like a miasma of vapors. Rumors about me. About Miss Mortimer.

TOWNSPERSON 1

Of course, nobody has seen the other one. Her boarder. The weaver.

TOWNSPERSON 2

(Snickering.) She probably doesn't even exist.

TOWNSPERSON 1

Oh, she exists. They say she has...consumption.

TOWNSPERSON 2

No!

TOWNSPERSON 1

They say that consumption can be brought to a house by...a witch.

TOWNSPERSON 2

A witch?! *(Beat.)* I have heard tell that she...speaks to crows.

The TOWNSPEOPLE exit.

LENORE

So wagged the tongues of every town gossip. Ridiculous. Of course I cannot speak to crows. *(In a confidential tone)* ...it was a raven. And he spoke to me first.

(LENORE lifts her hand gracefully. An invisible raven alights upon it. We hear the rustle of wings.)

Hello, lovely. Ravens are wonderful mimics. Relentless. Give them a word to repeat and they'll clutch it, worry it,

like a housecat with a mouse. *(To the raven)* You never let go, do you? Never. Never...more.

(She tosses her hand and the raven flies off. We hear the rustle of wings. For a moment, Lenore watches it fly.)
 And all the while, Guy De Vere's selfishness bloomed and bled. Yet so carefully hidden was the secret rot at his core that no one in Lowell knew. At least...no one who would ever tell.

Lights up on a CHILD reaching their hand out towards the audience as if to pick up an unseen item. GUY appears. The CHILD startles.

GUY

What do you think you're doing?

CHILD

Mother said I could have a tart. Because it's a fancy party.

GUY

There are no more tarts left.

CHILD

Yes there are! There's one right-

GUY snatches the invisible tart and stuffs it, whole, into his mouth. He leers at the CHILD, whose face falls. We hear the rustle of wings. But this time, GUY also hears the wings. He looks, but cannot find the source of the sound. The sound bothers him. The CHILD exits. GUY exits in a different direction. End of scene.

Scene 3. *The main room of Lenore's cottage.*

LENORE

Taking from those who already have so little is the business of petty tyrants. And so it was that Guy insisted on taking from me. And from Miss Mortimer, whose poor health had already taken so much from her.

Lights up on ATHENA MORTIMER. She's "loading shuttles"-- that is, she's winding newly-spun yarn around flat sticks that are notched at either end to hold the yarn. Later, the shuttles will carry the weft yarns as she weaves at her loom. LENORE takes off her shawl. From a nearby hook or chair, she finds an apron with a pocket and puts it on.

ATHENA

It's late.

LENORE

I kept hoping I'd sell something. One length, at least.

ATHENA

And did you?

LENORE

No.

ATHENA

(After a beat.) It was a poor day for walking.

LENORE

It was. I can't remember the last time it was this cold by All Hallow's Eve. They'll have trouble lighting the bonfires in this damp.

(ATHENA is wracked with a bad cough. She covers her mouth with a fine handkerchief.)

LENORE (cont'd)

Are you worse tonight?

ATHENA

No worse than usual.

LENORE

I wish you'd let me send for the doctor.

ATHENA

And how do you propose to pay him?

LENORE

We have cloth to trade.

ATHENA

An unmarried man has little need of fine linen for ladies' dresses.

LENORE

Mr. De Vere was in the market today. He asked if he might call on me.

ATHENA

He's sweet on you.

LENORE

I begged his leave to wait until you are well.

ATHENA

You should allow him to call.

(LENORE gives ATHENA a look. ATHENA exits and returns with a small bowl and a spoon. She sets them in front of LENORE.)

ATHENA (cont'd)

I saved you some soup. And- a treat.

She pulls a small apple from her apron pocket and hands it to LENORE, who marvels at it.

LENORE

How?!

ATHENA

I found a tree. By the lake. The ravens have mostly picked it clean, but they missed this one.

LENORE

Have you eaten today?

ATHENA

I've not had much stomach for food.

LENORE

We'll share it.

From her apron, LENORE takes a handkerchief and unwraps a small knife. In between bites of soup, she carefully cuts away the apple peel in long strips and slices the apple. When she's done, she wraps the knife in the hankie and puts it back in her apron pocket. ATHENA resumes loading her shuttles.

ATHENA

Mr. De Vere's esteem for you is...valuable.

LENORE

Valuable?

ATHENA

Others in Lowell look to him, to his opinion. They do as he does.

LENORE

For all the good it does me. I still cannot sell a single bolt of cloth. I cannot reach the ladies of this town. If they could but meet me, see the quality of our work, I know I could persuade them to give us their custom.

ATHENA

Mr. De Vere knows all the ladies of town.

LENORE

What are you saying?

ATHENA

Perhaps if you were to...step out...with Mr. De Vere, his connections could prove profitable.

LENORE

Are you in jest?!

ATHENA

I am not.

LENORE

You've heard tell of the conditions inside his mill, same as I. Guy De Vere is a horrid man.

ATHENA

What does the mill have to do with it? Simply...spend some time with him. Smile. Men respond to that sort of thing.

LENORE

He already responds to me.

ATHENA

Then your work is all the easier. You learn some details about some of the ladies in town, who might like to buy some fine linen cloth. And then, perhaps, he happens to mention one of his charity parties and you happen to mention that you'd love to attend on his arm, and...

LENORE

And I sell my soul to the devil.

ATHENA has another coughing spell. This time, she sets her handkerchief down beside her after she finishes with it. LENORE looks at the handkerchief. There's blood on it. Then she draws ATHENA into her arms and hugs her desperately.

LENORE

All right. I'll do it.

ATHENA takes LENORE's hand and kisses her palm. It's a tender moment. Then ATHENA picks up the apple peel. She tries to lighten the mood.

ATHENA

It's All Hallow's Eve. Care to try a little divination?

LENORE

Athena-

ATHENA

Lenore. Life is short and bitter. We must snatch a bit of fun here and there, as we can. *(Teasing)* Or do you fear what the fates have in store for you?

LENORE considers, then takes the apple peel.

LENORE

Show us the first letter of the name of my one true love.

*She throws the apple peel backwards over her shoulder.
LENORE and ATHENA turn to peer at the peel on the ground.
Their faces fall.*

ATHENA

The letter "G."

Blackout. End of scene.

Scene 4.

Mascuppic Lake. LENORE sits, spinning yarn with a drop spindle. Her basket sits beside her. She's singing to herself.

LENORE (singing)

I WISH I WERE ON YONDER HILL
'TIS THERE I'D SIT AND CRY MY FILL
'TILL EVERY TEAR WOULD TURN A MILL
SIUIL, SIUIL A RUIN

I'LL DYE MY PETTICOATS, I'LL DYE THEM RED
AND 'ROUND THE WORLD I'LL BEG MY BREAD
AND I'LL FIND MY LOVER, ALIVE OR DEAD
IS GO DTE TU, MO MHUIRNIN SLAN ["Iss go chay too muh vorneen shlawn"]

(We hear the rustle of wings. LENORE looks to the sound as the invisible raven lands on her basket.)
Well, hello, lovely. Good evening to you. *(Beat.)* If you've come for a morsel, there's a bit of bread in the basket. You may help yourself. Not hungry, then? Very well. You may keep me company. You're restless this evening. I'm not surprised. I feel the winds changing. The coming of winter.

I cannot say why, but I fear I shall not see another spring. Isn't that strange? Never spring. Nevermore.

(We hear the rustle of wings. LENORE watches the raven fly away. GUY enters. LENORE gets to her feet.)

Mr. De Vere!

GUY

Miss Rookwood! I've startled you.

LENORE

I startle easily of late.

GUY

Stay. I interrupted your work.

LENORE

It's not proper.

GUY

And who will see us, all the way out here?

(He sits.)

Please.

(LENORE sits and resumes her spinning. A beat passes)

GUY (cont'd)

It's peaceful here. The lake.

LENORE

It is. It's why we- why I- chose to let this cottage.

GUY

You and your boarder? Miss...?

LENORE

Mortimer. Yes. Your hands twitch, Mr. De Vere. Are you quite well?

GUY

You notice my hands? I'm flattered. I find I cannot keep still when my mind races.

LENORE

Why does your mind race? If I may be so bold.

GUY

You may be as bold as you like with me. Miss Rookwood.

LENORE

Lenore.

GUY

Guy.

LENORE

(Smiling.) Guy.

GUY

My mind spins in a hundred directions at once. Like a bird that cannot choose where to light. At present I am debating whether to donate an exceptionally large sum to the members of the Lowell library society.

LENORE

(Seizing her chance) I know so few people in Lowell. Who are the members of the library society?

GUY

Only the very best families. Isaiah Coolidge. Andrew Pryor. The elder Mister Bronson. And myself, of course.

LENORE

Are there any ladies among you?

GUY

Of course the wives are present.

LENORE

Are they? And what might the wives' names be?

GUY

(Suddenly hard) You take a keen interest in our membership roll. Lenore.

GUY levels a stare at LENORE. She meets his eyes. We see a flash of fear across her face. Beat.

LENORE

Would you like to try? Spinning, I mean.

GUY

Women's work?

LENORE

It's not really work. It's not an efficient way to spin, as I think you know. But it calms the mind. Here.

(LENORE moves closer to GUY. It's an offering, and he knows it.)

Let the spindle hang here. And pinch.

(She dangles the spindle over his right knee, then demonstrates how to use his right hand and forefinger to pinch the narrow end of the yarn, just to the left of the spindle. As she demonstrates, Guy enjoys the moments where her hands brush his.)

LENORE (cont'd)

The roving lies in your left hand. Hold it so, up and away. That's it. Now- this hand (*his left hand*) drafts while this one (*his right hand*) controls the thickness of the yarn. Pull. Pull! Yes. And now- we spin.

(While GUY drafts- that is, while he pulls apart the fibers of the roving- LENORE sets the spindle spinning clockwise. GUY watches as the roving spins into a ply of yarn. She helps him wind it around the spindle. They repeat the process. It's rhythmic, hypnotic. LENORE begins to sing softly as they work.)

LENORE (cont'd; singing)

I WISH I SAT UPON MY TRUE LOVE'S KNEE
MANY A FOND STORY TOLD TO ME
HE TOLD ME TALES THAT NE'ER SHALL BE
SIUIL, SIUIL A RUIN

GUY

Beautiful.

LENORE (singing)

HIS HAIR WAS BLACK, HIS EYE WAS BLUE
 HIS ARM WAS STRONG, HIS WORD WAS TRUE
 I WISH IN MY HEART I WAS WITH YOU
 SIUUL, SIUUL A-

*(Before she can finish the phrase, GUY drops the spindle
 and captures her hand in his.)*

GUY

You are the most bewitching creature.

LENORE

Mr. De Vere!

*GUY freezes, his eyes locked on LENORE, her hand still
 clutched tightly in his. For a moment, it looks as though
 GUY might continue. But then we hear the rustle of wings.
 GUY looks up, searching for the sound. The sound bothers
 him. He lets go of LENORE's hand.*

GUY

That bird...that sound. I've heard it before. At times I hear
 it when I am fast asleep. When visions haunt my dreams.

LENORE hastily gathers her things.

LENORE

I must go.

GUY

You will find me again. Lenore.

She exits. He watches her go.

End of scene.

Scene 5.

*ATHENA and LENORE's cottage. LENORE enters, her basket over
 her arm. It's noticeably heavier than it was when she left
 the stage.*

LENORE

I walked the long way home that evening. I didn't want Athena to know what had passed between Guy and me. Didn't want her to worry. So I walked until my heart stopped racing and my voice no longer shook. The raven found me along the path. I thanked him for helping me, for frightening Guy. The raven showed me Athena's apple tree. There was new-fallen

LENORE (cont'd)

fruit all around. Ripe beyond sweetness, nearly fermented. A gift from Mother Earth, so late in the year. I gathered as many as I could carry.

Lights up on ATHENA. LENORE hands her the basket and removes her shawl.

ATHENA

Apples! There's enough for a pie.

LENORE

Can we spare the sugar and the lard?

ATHENA

Life is short and bitter. Gather ye rosebuds! And ye apple pies!

LENORE

I was hoping you'd say that.

ATHENA

I'll make it for you tomorrow.

LENORE

I was hoping you'd say that, too.

(ATHENA kisses LENORE. LENORE catches ATHENA in her arms. Their embrace becomes a buoyant, joyful waltz around the room-until ATHENA begins to cough. LENORE and ATHENA step apart from each other. ATHENA gasps for air. LENORE stares at her. Beat. ATHENA exits.)

LENORE (cont'd)

Meanwhile, my standing among the people of Lowell continued to fray along the edges.

Lights up on the TOWNSPEOPLE

TOWNSPERSON 1

I heard that she's cursed the mill. Enchanted the machines. That's why there have been so many near-misses on the floor lately. So many almost-accidents. And that's why no one ever sees Mr. De Vere anymore. He locks himself away in his office at the mill all day and then locks himself in his study every night. They say he hears things. Unearthly things. Poor man.

TOWNSPERSON 2

I heard that she can hypnotize animals. That she casts spells to make them do her bidding.

The TOWNSPEOPLE exit.

LENORE

As the days grew shorter, Athena and I worked harder at our wheel and our loom. I sought every opportunity to peddle our wares, but the bolts of unsold cloth continued to stack up along the cottage walls. The little food that we had left dwindled, and Athena's health worsened. She would not say the words aloud, but I saw her weakening. Saw the threads tethering her to this world unraveling before my eyes.

(ATHENA enters just as she's gripped by another coughing fit. LENORE helps her to a chair.)

LENORE (cont'd)

Here. Rest now.

ATHENA sits. LENORE brings her a mug of water.

ATHENA

Lenore. I need to tell you something. I went to see Mr. De Vere this morning. At the mill.

LENORE

What?

ATHENA

I asked him to take me on. He offered me a position on the spot.

LENORE

I don't understand.

ATHENA

Three dollars a week. I can live at the boarding house with the other women. Two meals a day provided.

LENORE

The boarding house! Have you gone quite mad?

ATHENA

It's just for a little while. To bring in a little money. To get us through the winter.

LENORE

Absolutely not. We'll sell the loom.

ATHENA

To whom? We cannot sell our wares as it is. And even if we could persuade someone to buy it, who would know how to use it? Better that I use my skill now to work for a steady wage.

LENORE

Then we'll go elsewhere. Move to Boston. Someone there will buy a loom.

ATHENA

We have no train fare. No money to hire a carriage. With no money, our only choice is to stay in Lowell.

LENORE kneels in front of ATHENA.

LENORE

Listen to me. You cannot work at the mill. That dust in your lungs, it will kill you.

ATHENA

Do you believe that I make this choice lightly? I took to our bed all afternoon after spending but a quarter of an hour on the mill floor. And yet I daresay that that quarter of an hour was more useful than your weeks spent in the market. Our cupboard is empty.

LENORE

You cannot live in a boarding house. That will kill me.

ATHENA

My love. One of us must work, or we shall starve.

LENORE stares at her a moment, then makes a decision.

LENORE

Indeed.

LENORE snatches up her shawl and wraps it around her shoulders. She crosses downstage.

ATHENA

Where are you going? Lenore!

End of scene.

Scene 6.

GUY enters.

LENORE

I ran all the way to town and found Guy outside, in the millyard. I could only imagine the fiery rumors that my sudden appearance would spark among the townspeople.

GUY

Miss Rookwood. I told you you'd find me again.

LENORE

I must beg a favor.

GUY

Name it.

LENORE

Miss Mortimer's position at your looms. Give it to me instead.

GUY

As I recall, you condemn the work we do here.

LENORE

I have no choice. Our circumstances are dire. If we are to survive the winter, I must find work— and quickly.

GUY

Miss Mortimer said the same. But you would take her place? Why?

LENORE

She cannot work. She's unwell.

GUY

A girl who can work at your loom can just as easily stand and work at mine.

LENORE

Her lungs are filled with consumption. Do you want to face the scandal of a woman dying on her feet on the factory floor? Do you want her blood on your hands? What would the people of Lowell say to that?

GUY

I am a De Vere. My name is unassailable in Lowell. One girl's death would be a pity, but not a scandal.

LENORE

One worker is as good as another to you. Take me instead. Please. I will do anything-

GUY

Anything?

LENORE

Yes.

GUY

Marry me.

LENORE

What?

GUY

Marry me. And you shall never want for a meal again.

LENORE

I- I cannot.

GUY

But it is the perfect solution to your dilemma. The De Vere fortune is vast.

(GUY takes money from his pocket and counts it with mock nonchalance as he continues:)

GUY (cont'd)

I would even find it in my heart to provide for Miss Mortimer, if you like. Perhaps a place at a sanatorium. For her own good. Surely this much would be enough?

He holds the money out towards her. LENORE doesn't move.

LENORE

No.

Suddenly, GUY catches LENORE around the waist and pulls her roughly to him.

GUY

Lenore De Vere. Beautiful.

(LENORE struggles against him. We hear the rustle of wings.)

GUY (cont'd)

What was that? That sound?!

LENORE

Let me go.

GUY

This is what you want.

LENORE

This is what you want.

GUY

Oh, but you need me. You need my money. Or you need my position at the mill for yourself and not for Miss Mortimer. Either way, you need me. Come, my love.

(GUY releases LENORE to cup her face in his hands and goes in for a kiss. She stomps on his foot. He grabs a fistful of her hair or her dress and twists, hard.)

GUY (cont'd)

You'll pay for that.

LENORE

Stop it!

They struggle. We hear the rustle of wings.

GUY

That sound- no-!

(GUY is distracted. LENORE manages to pull the knife from her apron pocket and brandishes it at GUY. They struggle.

He overpowers her, takes the knife, and holds it to her throat. LENORE suddenly goes very still. She closes her eyes and proudly lifts her head. A slow smile spreads across her face. We hear the rustle of wings. We hear the rustle of wings. Over and over again, growing louder and louder. GUY freezes, then clutches his head.

GUY (cont'd)

Oh, God. Make it stop. Oh, God. That sound-!

LENORE wrenches herself free from GUY. He is frozen, the knife forgotten. LENORE is triumphant. She speaks above the rising noise.

LENORE

I curse you, Guy De Vere. I curse your name. You will never marry. You will sire no children. You will die anguished and alone. And you will never, never tell a soul the truth of what happened here today. Never. More.

(Instantly, the noisy chaos of the tussle goes silent and still. LENORE opens her hand and realizes that in the struggle, she's come away with the money that GUY was holding. Her eyes go wide. Lights out on GUY. LENORE moves downstage and addresses the audience.)

LENORE (cont'd)

And so it was. Guy spun a tale, townsperson by townsperson, about my tragic death. They believed him.

The TOWNSPEOPLE appear.

TOWNSPERSON 1

(In verse; rhythmically) Come! let the burial rite be read-
the funeral song be sung!

TOWNSPERSON 2

(In verse; rhythmically) An anthem for the queenliest dead
that ever died so young.

LENORE

The same folk who spoke ill of me while I lived suddenly
mourned me when they believed me dead.

(ATHENA enters and takes LENORE's hand.)

LENORE (cont'd)

Athena and I took Guy's money and left Lowell.

ATHENA

Winter turned to spring, and to sheep-shearing season. We
found an estate that needed our services. We began again.

LENORE

Life is short, but it need not be bitter.

*(LENORE gracefully lifts her other hand. We hear the rustle
of wings. She addresses the invisible raven perched on her
hand.)*

LENORE (cont'd)

Before we left, I found my raven one last time, to give him
my thanks.

*She nods to the raven, then tosses her hand gently and
watches the bird fly away. We hear the rustle of wings.
Lights up on GUY. He is lost in his madness.*

ATHENA

As for Guy- he still sits in his study, staring out a
black-shuttered window in the turret high atop the De Vere
estate, his mind spinning and spinning.

LENORE

(In verse; rhythmically) And the raven, never flitting,
still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above his chamber door.
And his soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the
floor

Shall be lifted-

LENORE and ATHENA

-nevermore.

Blackout. We hear the rustle of wings. End of play.