

THE STRANGE UNTRIED

Written by  
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OVER BLACK:

O.S. the calm, rhythmic CLUCKING of a Barred Rock Hen.

FADE IN:

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. EBBE'S APARTMENT - UNKNOWN

Antique oil lamps dimly light this dusty retreat cluttered by old books and antique furniture. Every clock here ticks with life, yet all are without hands.

Every window is sealed against the light of day, the light of the moon. Inside the front door lies a tall pile of unopened mail delivered through the old brass slot.

MOVING along a dim hall to a closed door rimmed in a halo of unbelievably bright light. The door slowly opens revealing the sole occupants of this time capsule: a lonely old man and his chicken.

And they keep erratic hours.

END MONTAGE

INT. EBBE'S STUDIO - UNKNOWN

The white room is lit by many candelabras on the floor.

On the floor kneels time-ravaged EBBE ÆTHELFRITH, clad only in white boxer shorts. He holds forth ISABEL, a black-and-white Barred Rock Hen. [pronounced "eeb ee-thul-frith"]

Isabel's feet drip black paint. Ebbe whispers into her ear before letting her loose on an otherwise immaculate six-foot-square of canvas.

EBBE

(frustrated whisper)

If I could do this, I would.

She just stands there, black paint dripping onto the canvas.

EBBE (cont'd)

Speak to me.

Isabel takes a few steps, leaving black chicken tracks.

Ebbe watches her every move with intensity. He's looking for something. Answers? High art? Sign from God?

EBBE (cont'd)

Attagirl.

When Isabel's feet run dry, Ebbe gently them into the paint can and lets her go on the canvas once more.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE BATHROOM - UNKNOWN

LATER.

O.S., water RUNS, SQUEAK of the faucet being turned off, water being SPLASHED.

INT. BATHROOM - UNKNOWN

By the light of an old lantern, through thick fog, a naked Ebbe—stained in black paint, except where his boxer shorts were—eases his sore old body into the hot bath.

He laves water over his sore muscles, over his head.

Isabel perches on the toilet and CLUCKS.

EBBE

We've painted before. We'll paint again.

INT. KITCHEN - UNKNOWN

Freshly bathed and dressed like a destitute 19th Century librarian, Ebbe enters with his lantern lighting the way. He has Isabel under one arm.

The room is rundown but clean.

He puts the lamp and Isabel on the table. Takes a single large potato from a burlap sack and puts it in a pot of water to boil.

KITCHEN TABLE - LATER

Ebbe sits with cloth napkin tucked into his collar, dining on the potato with knife and fork.

Across from him, and pecking cornmeal from a saucer, is Isabel the chicken. She has a matching teacup full of water.

OVER BLACK:

MUSIC UP: "*The Ghost of the Violin*" (1912) by Walter Van Brunt and Maurice Burkhart.

INT. ÆBBE'S LIBRARY - UNKNOWN

The place is wall to wall books. There's a large jar half-full of jellybeans on a side table.

Æbbe sits before the fireplace. Fingers and toes sway happily to the music from the old windup record player.

He pours a whiskey and lights his pipe.

END MUSIC

INT. ÆBBE'S BEDCHAMBER - UNKNOWN

Isabel sleeps on a pillow next to Æbbe.

A KNOCK O.S. comes at the front door. It's the five rapid knocks of "*Shave and A Haircut*."

INT. ÆBBE'S BEDCHAMBER - UNKNOWN

The sound awakens Æbbe. He knows this knock. Quietly and with glee, taking care not to wake Isabel, Æbbe puts on a dressing gown.

INT. ENTRYWAY - FRONT DOOR - UNKNOWN

The "*Shave and A Haircut*" knock happens again.

This time, Æbbe is on the other side of the door and he performs the two-knock ending of the little ditty.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE ÆBBE'S APARTMENT - UNKNOWN

A young man leaves a wooden crate of supplies at the door.

INT. ÆBBE'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR - UNKNOWN

Æbbe watches through the peephole as the man leaves.

Wincing at the bright artificial light in the hallway, Æbbe cautiously opens the door, which shoves his stack of unread mail across the floor, and drags the crate in.

He digs around his supplies: coffee, bourbon, black paint, pouch of tobacco. He looks up with disdain and calls after the long-gone delivery man.

EBBE  
Forgot the potatoes!

INT. LONG HALLWAY - UNKNOWN

LATER.

Outside the studio room. Bright light halos the closed door.

INT. EBBE'S STUDIO - UNKNOWN

Ebbe dunks Isabel's feet into the black paint can and releases her onto a fresh canvas. She just stands there.

EBBE  
Please?

Isabel won't budge. Ebbe sighs with frustration.

INT. BATHROOM - UNKNOWN

By lamplight, frowning Ebbe washes himself in the bathtub.

INT. KITCHEN - UNKNOWN

Dressed in his day clothes, Ebbe takes a large potato from the nearly empty burlap sack and puts it in a pot of water.

KITCHEN TABLE - LATER.

Ebbe sits with napkin tucked into his shirt, knife and fork poised above a big steaming potato.

EBBE  
I don't blame you. I'm just saying—

IRREGULAR KNOCKING O.S. on the front door.

Not expecting anyone, he glances up curiously at Isabel, who lets out a single ominous CLUCK.

EBBE (cont'd)  
Shh.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE EBBE'S APARTMENT - UNKNOWN

A fist hammers on the door.

INT. KITCHEN - UNKNOWN

A look of shock paralyzes Æbbe. He drops his knife and fork with a CLANK onto his plate. Takes a deep shaky breath. Holds. Listens. Exhales.

ÆBBE  
(whispers)  
Go away.

INT. ENTRYWAY - FRONT DOOR - UNKNOWN

Through the peephole, the distorted face of Æbbe's manager NIALL JOYCE. Dapper, friendly—very Irish.

NIALL (O.S.)  
Mr. Æthelfrith!? It's Niall Joyce,  
sir! Mr. Æthelfrith!?

INT. LONG HALLWAY - UNKNOWN

Æbbe peeps around the corner at the front door.

INT. FRONT DOOR - UNKNOWN

KNOCKING O.S. continues.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE ÆBBE'S APARTMENT - UNKNOWN

Electronic BUZZING O.S. prompts Niall to pull a late model cell phone from his suit coat pocket. He reads a text, responds, and puts the phone in his pocket.

Niall pauses, ear to the door, before knocking again.

NIALL  
I'm not leaving until you—

INT. ENTRYWAY - FRONT DOOR - UNKNOWN

Æbbe looks in the peephole. Steels himself with a breath.

ÆBBE (O.S.)  
I've. Ahem. Just sat down to supper.  
Come back at a more reasonable hour.