

A Penny For the Ferry

A horror in ten pages

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
BLYTHE	Widow. Mother. Possessive.	38	Female
ELIZABETH	Blythe's daughter. Disabled.	19	Female

Time: 6:50 PM. October 31st.

Place: Blythe and Elizabeth's home.

Setting: The outskirts of Essex. 1539

A PENNY FOR THE FERRY

A poor home is illuminated by a single lantern in BLYTHE's hand. The dining table is decorated into neat chaos with an assortment of junk. Blythe keeps adding to it.

ELIZABETH stands at a window. A quilt blanket of mismatched colors covers most of her as she looks out.

ELIZABETH

Death comes tonight.

BLYTHE

Get away from there! You never know when or where it'll show!

ELIZABETH

I know. The sunset looks so pretty.

BLYTHE

Just make sure to get under that blanket when it's gone. And don't come out until I tell you. Ok?

ELIZABETH

But what if it sees you?

BLYTHE

If it sees me...it won't. I have everything it could possibly ask for here. Safety pins, candle holders, some yarn, a block and tackle-

ELIZABETH

Mother-

BLYTHE

A horseshoe, some bread-

ELIZABETH

Mother-

BLYTHE

Some glass, a bit of hay-

ELIZABETH

Mother! Please. What do I do if it sees you?

BLYTHE

It won't.

ELIZABETH

Just in case?

BLYTHE

...There is a box under my bed. Got a couple farthings from Mr. Harlow for fixing up his pants and shirts.

ELIZABETH

And then what?

BLYTHE

...I don't know...

ELIZABETH

Mother. We have to face this eventually-

BLYTHE

Listen. You are all I have left of your father. And I will be damned long before you are before I let that creature take you.

Elizabeth sinks down under the window. "That line again."

A note slips under the door.

BLYTHE

There it is. Right on time.

ELIZABETH

What does it say?

BLYTHE

...A penny! What? Does it think we are made of money? We can't afford that! No. It'll just have to take something else!

She opens the door and tosses several things outside.

ELIZABETH

Are you sure we should be doing that?

BLYTHE

All this stuff adds up to a penny I am sure! It will accept it.

ELIZABETH

But that's not what it asked for.

BLYTHE

No. It isn't. But we didn't ask for death to show up and take our stuff every year. Last year it was a bag of flour. The year before, it was a couple of nails-

ELIZABETH

Mother-

BLYTHE

The year before that, it was the door off our cupboard!

ELIZABETH

Mother-

BLYTHE

That first year, it wanted a bit of parchment-

ELIZABETH

Mother! I know. I was there for it all. That first year...

BLYTHE

Of course. You were so young, I sometimes...right! What I was trying to say is this. The world is not fair and we don't always get what we want. So death will just have to accept what it gets!

ELIZABETH

Father didn't give it what it wanted...

BLYTHE

I know. But your father gave it nothing. I'd be angry too.

ELIZABETH

You told him not to.

BLYTHE

We couldn't have known. I was looking out for the family. Now shut your mouth and hide. The sun is almost down.

Elizabeth does so. Blythe blows out the lantern as darkness overtakes the outside. She hides by the window.

BLYTHE

This is all Henry's fault. Not my king. To damn us all to this hell. The church protected the faithful from demons. Now he's too proud to go back to them. Too proud to see his people dying every year from his choice. He'll be the death of us all in due time.

ELIZABETH

But-

BLYTHE

Quiet! There it is! I see it on the horizon!

Blythe collapses to her knees in front of the door, clutching a cross in her hands.

BLYTHE

Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Let thy kingdom come. Thy will be fulfilled, as well in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation: but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

A silence as the outside shifts. A banging on the door.

BLYTHE

What? I gave you what you wanted! Now get out of here!

ELIZABETH

He wanted a penny mother. You know this! He only demands what he wants.

BLYTHE

Don't you talk back to me like that!

Death appears in the window over Elizabeth.

BLYTHE

Hide! Keep your head under that blanket. It can't take you if it can't see you. I'll be your eyes darling. Just don't move unless I tell you.

Death moves to the door again. It rattles the doorknob.

BLYTHE

Leave this home! I gave you what you want!

ELIZABETH

It wants a penny mother!

BLYTHE

I gave it-

ELIZABETH

Nothing! You gave it nothing.

BLYTHE

Don't give me that tone.

ELIZABETH

If you wanted a sack of flour, would you accept wheat?

BLYTHE

It's all the same.

ELIZABETH

If Mr. Harlow tried to pay you in leather, would you take it?

BLYTHE

Well of course not! But this is different. We don't have any pennies.

ELIZABETH

We have to. It's only ever asked for things we have. We have to have it somewhere.

More banging on the door.

BLYTHE

Calm yourself demon! Give me a moment!

Blythe runs around and searches through the drawers.

BLYTHE

Come now. Surely we have something it wants here.

She finds a small ornate box. Far more costly than anything else in the home. She opens it.

BLYTHE

...No.

ELIZABETH

Mother?

BLYTHE

I can't.

ELIZABETH

What did you find?

BLYTHE

It's your father's.

ELIZABETH

What is?

BLYTHE

His lucky hay pennies.

ELIZABETH

We have to-

BLYTHE

I won't! The demon took him from us and now it wants all we have left of him!

She searches around more.

BLYTHE

There has to be something else. Hiding under the table maybe.

Death appears in the window facing Blythe.

ELIZABETH

Hide!

BLYTHE

Elizabeth. I can't move. There's nowhere to go.

ELIZABETH

I can be your eyes.

BLYTHE

I need more than that! Go into my room and get the farthings. That must be what it wants.

ELIZABETH

Where are they?

BLYTHE

Under the bed. In a little box.

ELIZABETH

Is it safe?

BLYTHE

It's looking at me. Go!

Elizabeth struggles to her feet and moves. Slowly toward her mother's room. Death moves.

BLYTHE

Down!

Elizabeth drops to the ground with a cry and covers herself with her quilt.

BLYTHE

Are you ok?

ELIZABETH

I think I twisted my ankle.

BLYTHE

I don't know where it went.

ELIZABETH

Mother?

BLYTHE

Keep moving. I'll be your eyes.

ELIZABETH

I don't think this is a good idea.

BLYTHE

Move child! Everything will be ok.

Elizabeth stands back up with a waiver. She painfully moves toward the room again.

Exit. A search happens offstage.

ELIZABETH

Mother! I can't find it!

BLYTHE

Under the bed! I told you! Under the bed!

Searching.

ELIZABETH

...There's only two farthings in here!

BLYTHE

What? No there isn't! There was at least four!

ELIZABETH

I only count two!

BLYTHE

Then you're looking in the wrong place!

ELIZABETH

It's a little box. The one with the filigree.

BLYTHE

That's the one.

ELIZABETH

It only has two!

BLYTHE

Then you must have spilled the rest!

ELIZABETH

Where is it?

BLYTHE

I don't see it. It might be out back.

ELIZABETH

...Mother?

BLYTHE

Did you find them?

ELIZABETH

Did you forget to close the window?

Silence. Blythe stares off. Haunted.

ELIZABETH

Mother. It's...it's Inside.

BLYTHE

It's ok darling. Just hide! It can't see you.

ELIZABETH

I'm scared.

BLYTHE

Be brave. It's ok. Everything will be ok!

ELIZABETH

What should I do?

BLYTHE

Stop talking damn it!

Blythe desperately searches through everything.

BLYTHE

Lord! Please bless me with money.

She searches the last thing on stage.

ELIZABETH

(Haunting)

Mother!

BLYTHE

Alright! You want your money! You want the last thing my husband left me? You can have it!

Blythe throws the pennies out the door. The outside lights up. As though morning came early.

BLYTHE

...It's...it's over! Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Come out here! It's over.

She exits and is offstage only briefly before slowly walking back onstage. She sits in a chair. No smile. No emotion at all in fact. Just stares.

END OF PLAY