

# *The Blue Castle*

En drama serie  
skrevet av  
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# The Blue Castle

DRAMA SERIES

4 X 50 MIN

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BASED ON A NOVEL BY L.M. MONTGOMERY



## PITCH

In a little house in a 20th century conservative town lives Valancy Stirling. A twenty-nine-year-old woman living a bland, oppressed life dominated by her mother and her narrow-minded extended family. The only colour seeping into her existence is her imaginary blue castle. A place where she can truly be herself – funny, creative, and colourful.

Something else has also been seeping into her life: regular, prickling pain in the chest. She sneaks away to a doctor behind her family's back and discovers the unthinkable: she is terminally ill, and she only has one year left to live. For the first time in her life, she stakes a claim for her own happiness, and breaks away from her family.

Moving into the house of her dying friend, she meets Barney – a mysterious man with a bad reputation. When her friend dies, Valancy does something unthinkable for a woman of her time – she proposes. Barney agrees to marry her on one condition: no questions about the past. Valancy accepts it and moves with Barney to his small, wooden island home, and suddenly her blue castle is no longer imaginary. However, questions about Barney's past start eating away at her happiness. She begins to wonder who the person she married actually is.







*About  
the series*



## ABOUT THE SERIES

I was just a teenager when I read *The Blue Castle* by L.M. Montgomery for the first time and I kept returning to it for years to come, each time discovering a new layer of the story. It is a moving tale of a woman who decides to go against all expectations of society to find true happiness in life. Despite being written nearly a hundred years ago, in 1926, it is still relatable on many levels. Who doesn't strive to feel liked, loved and accepted? Who can't relate to struggling with family's expectations? Who has never been overthinking people's judgements? And – finally – who is actually brave enough to abandon all those limitations? The main character's journey shows us what would happen if we dared to reach for what we truly want.

There is no doubt about that adaptations are taking the modern tv-world by storm. It seems also that the audience has a soft spot for period dramas. Examples of combining the two are countless. Let us begin with adaptations of Lucy Maud Montgomery's novels about *Anne of Green Gables*. The film industry has discovered the potential of that clever and charismatic girl very early and now we can count six film adaptations (first one already in 1919!) and nine tv series about Anne, including the latest Netflix success – *Anne with an e* (2017-2019). *Downton Abbey* is one of the most popular series in history of television, *Little Women* were nominated for Oscar in six categories in 2020 and *Bridgeton* is the most watched series in Netflix history (as of January 2021). There is another common feature of all above mentioned shows – a strong female character.

L.M. Montgomery has already proven to fit perfectly into the style of modern period dramas, being able to place a feminist ahead of her time in charming atmosphere of an early 1900's village, ruled by its own dynamic and laws. *The Blue Castle*, however, for some reason doesn't enjoy the same attention of a broader audience. I was surprised to discover that despite connecting many of popular features and the fact the book became free of royalties in 2012, no-one has decided to retell it in the most popular media format of these times – tv-series. By taking on this project I decided to face that task.

In my mind, *The Blue Castle* fits for the tv format perfectly. It is a straightforward and clean story supported by several strong plot twists which hold the readers on the edge of their seats. In many ways it is a sweet, heartwarming and accessible tale of a girl finding

love, but the strong feminist aspect shines brightly through and makes the story multidimensional.

The action of the novel takes place in a small town in Canada, but it is a story of global appeal. Personally I chose to place the action of my series in a fictional, English-speaking town, without specifying the exact location. However, I think it can be adapted to any culture or place in the world, as the human emotions are universal.

Out of many universal aspects of the novel which are worth attention, the first one must be the relatable main character. I put a lot of focus on letting the colourful personality of the main character – Valancy – shine through. I wanted the audience to fully experience the injustice of a smart and witty person being brought down, and to achieve that I let her fully manifest her character.

But Valancy's situation would not properly come to light without a clear set up of the town of Deerwood, where the action is taking place. It is a separate, living organism with its own opinions and feelings, centralised and expressed in the convenient store owned by Valancy's uncle. Using the store as the gossip centre helps in establishing the position of the Stirling family in the local society and effectively show the degree of consequences that touch them when Valancy acts out.

Finally, I could not leave out the classical bit of a love-story with obstacles. The increasing tension between Valancy and Barney puts even more weight into Valancy's decision to propose and makes for an exciting cliffhanger.

Sometimes good reputation of the book is responsible for the success of its adaptation. Other times it's the other way around – the adaptation elevates the original work and brings it to the attention of a broader audience. I hope this screenplay will cast some light on the screen potential of L.M. Montgomery's *The Blue Castle*.







## SYNOPSIS

We meet Valancy Stirling on her 29th birthday. She has spent her entire life living with her mother and her extended family, who are gossipy, agonizing, and belittling. Every rebellion against the poor treatment she receives make her family believe that Valancy is insane. Her only escape is her imaginary blue castle, a place where she can truly be herself. She also seeks comfort in the books of John Foster, her favorite author, whose books paint pictures of the great beauty of nature.

After a visit to the doctor, Valancy discovers that she has a terminal heart ailment, which she hides from her family. Valancy breaks away and starts working as a housekeeper for Cissy Gay, her gravely ill childhood friend. Cissy was cast away from society because she had a child outside of wedlock, and because of her reckless drunk of a father, Roaring Abel. Valancy also gets to know Barney Snaith, a frequently visiting friend of Cissy. He is also shunned from society because he is believed to be a criminal and potentially the father of Cissy's illegitimate child, who has died. Feelings begin to spark between them when Barney saves Valancy from an oppressive situation at a dancing. One night they find Cissy at her deathbed. She shares her life's story with Valancy and reveals that Barney isn't her child's father.

At Cissy's funeral Valancy is approached by her family. They explain that they, in their magnanimous approach to life, have decided to forgive her, and expect her to move back home. Their true motivation is to save her cousin Olivia's engagement, which might result in a status increase for the whole family. In line with their wishes, Valancy decides not to stay at Roaring Abel's. However, instead of moving home, she does the unthinkable: She proposes to Barney. She reveals to him that she is terminally ill and wishes to enjoy the little time she has left. Barney agrees to marry her.

Barney brings Valancy to his house on a wooded island, which she considers to be the real version of her imaginary blue castle. Valancy loves Barney deeply, but is constantly being reminded that he doesn't return the feeling. On top of that, Barney is leading a mysterious lifestyle, disappearing without an explanation, and forbidding her from entering one of the rooms in the house, which disturbs Valancy's newfound happiness.

As her last remaining year is about to expire, Valancy is almost killed when she gets her shoe stuck in a train track. At the risk of his own life, Barney saves her from an oncoming



train just in time. Despite being warned by her doctor that any sudden shock would kill her, Valancy is still alive. Barney is similarly shocked by the incident because he has come to love Valancy, who he believes is soon to die due to her heart ailment. Instead of confessing his feelings, Barney escapes to the woods to think. Valancy believes that he left because he only married her out of pity, and realized that he is now trapped in their marriage. She imagines Barney accusing her of laying and throwing her out of the house. Her fantasy is not an escape anymore – now her blue castle is a cold and scary place.

Valancy visits her doctor, who realizes that the letter that Valancy received was intended for a Miss *Sterling*, not *Stirling*. While the former had a fatal heart condition, Valancy's own medical condition was never terminal. Valancy decides to free Barney and leaves the house. While searching for a pencil to write Barney a farewell note, she enters his secret room. There she discovers that Barney is in fact John Foster, the author of her favorite books. She writes the note, explaining the doctor's mistake in informing her of her diagnosis. She also asks for a divorce and leaves the house.

On her way she finds a man introducing himself as Barney's father, Dr. Redfern, the inventor of Redfern's Hair Vigor and other patented medicines that made him a millionaire. Dr. Redfern explains that years ago, Barney left the town abruptly without informing him. He had no way of tracking Barney until he recently withdrew \$15,000 from his bank account to buy Valancy her pearl bead necklace, which alerted Dr. Redfern to Barney's whereabouts. Still of the belief that Barney thinks of their marriage as a prison, Valancy leaves the house and returns to her mother's house.

Upon returning home to her family, Valancy reveals that Barney is a millionaire, the son of the famous Dr. Redfern, and additionally that he is the celebrated writer John Foster. This information immediately changes her family's perception of Barney, and they become convinced that Barney and Valancy must stay married. Upon finding Valancy's note, Barney rushes to her mother's house to ask her to come back to him. He reveals how much he has grown to love her. Valancy refuses, because she is still convinced that he only wants to be in the marriage because he pities her. He becomes angry, thinking that she is refusing him because she is ashamed of his father's medical business. His reaction finally makes Valancy realize that he really does love her, and so, she agrees to come back to him and they set out on a beautiful journey to see the beauty of this world.

The image features a dreamlike, ethereal scene. The background is a blue-toned classical building facade with intricate carvings and three arched openings. A central framed picture shows a sunset over a sea of clouds. The word "Characters" is written in a dark blue, elegant cursive font across the center of the framed picture. Golden, leafy branches frame the top and bottom of the scene.

# *Characters*





## VALANCY STIRLING (29)

We meet Valancy on the day of her 29th birthday. Despite her age, she hasn't had many life experiences. Valancy lives with her mother and aunt, who, together with the rest of the Stirling clan, hold complete control over her life. She is an old maid, has never had any friends, never dared to say no to her overbearing mother and puts up with all the inappropriate jokes of her uncles. Her whole life has only been a second-hand existence in the shadow of her cousin Olivia.

However, Valancy has something truly unique. With her rich fantasy she has created an imaginary world she escapes to when the reality becomes too difficult to endure. It's her imaginary fortress, a wall behind which she hides from her oppressed existence, her blue castle. This is also the place where her real, witty and brave personality can shine through.

There is one more thing that has been bothering Valancy lately. Sudden, strong pains in chest motivate Valancy to go behind the family's back and go to a doctor in secret. The diagnose changes everything and sends Valancy on the first journey of her life. The serious heart disease she is suffering from gives her only one year left to live. That day Valancy decides to finally live before she dies.

During the series Valancy will embrace her real self against the family's expectations and will set out on a journey of discovering all beautiful sides of life she has been missing out on, like friendship and love. There is also great deal of difficult decisions waiting for her down the road, when she starts discovering the past of Barney, the man she proposed to in belief she has only a year left to live.



## BARNEY SNAITH (34)

Barney is a mysterious man in his thirties, who appeared in the town of Deerwood a couple of years before. There is a cloud of mystery surrounding his past – no-one knows where he came from, what he does, where he lives or who he actually is.



What's even worse for the conservative small town society, Barney doesn't really engage in the gossips and dramas the people live by. The town has made up its mind – an outcast like this can't have any good intentions. Everyone believes that he must have done something horrible and there are all kind of gossip about Barney running around the town – he's been suspected of being a money-washer, a spy, and even a wife-killer.



No-one expects the truth, which is that his real name is Bernard Snaith Redfern, and he is a son of a millionaire and an heir to a profitable medicine business. He is also the author of Valancy's favourite nature books, which he writes under the pseudonym John Foster.

When Valancy proposes to him, Barney, motivated by curiosity and interest in that out-of-ordinary girl, agrees to marry her. Despite still living a mysterious lifestyle and disappearing every now and then without an explanation, he grows fond of her and the feeling of love slowly starts to sneak up on that withdrawn man.



After meeting Valancy, his lonely and isolated way of life he chose for himself will be challenged. The truth about his past will come to light and in order not to lose Valancy, Barney will have to face the demons from his difficult past growing up as a son of a millionaire.



## THE STIRLINGS

The family of Stirlings, despite of consisting of six members of different age, gender and life situation, is actually a one unite organism. They play an active role in the gossip distribution in the society of Deerwood. They are not as rich as they would like to, but they see a chance of status increase in Olivia marrying her rich, respectable fiancé. There are no hopes of using Valancy for such purposes, so they disregard her completely.

During the series the Stirlings' opportunism will be punished, especially when they find out that Valancy, who they had been ignoring for years, is the one who married a millionaire.



### OLIVIA WELLINGTON (28)

Olivia is the Stirling clan wonder girl, the jewel and the pride of the whole family. She is beautiful, she has rosey cheeks, curly blond hair, and wears trendy dresses.

Despite being only one year younger than Valancy, no-one is considering Olivia to be old maid, especially since Olivia's admirer, William, placed a huge diamond ring on her finger.

Despite growing up in the feeling that she is this world's eighth wonder, there is something lacking in Olivia. She wears light, cloudy dresses but she moves heavily, despite her wonderful smile, there is no sparkle of wit in her eye.

Olivia herself measures her own worth with being desired. During the series she is forced to find motivation to search confirmation other places. After her engagement is broken, she decides to pursue education.





## **MOTHER (50)**

Valancy's mother is a strict and cold widow. Saying that she doesn't even love her own child wouldn't be an exaggeration. There is not a hint of joy left in her, in fact it is hard to believe that there ever has been *any* joy in her. She raised Valancy keeping her under strict control, not allowing her to experience life and, what's worse, cultivating the feeling of not being attention-worthy in her daughter.



## **COUSIN STICKLES (65)**

Valancy's aunt who lives with her and her mother. Being an old spinster, she too is under the mother's constant influence.

Cousin Stickles strongly believes that Dr. Redfern's medicaments will solve all her numerous health problems, which she enjoys elaborating on on family meetings.

When Valancy claims her freedom, Cousin Stickles takes Valancy's place in the Mother's eyes. Now she is the old maid in the house and is being pushed around by Mother.



## **UNCLE BENJAMIN (53)**

Uncle Benjamin is a loud and jovial owner of the Deerwood's convenient store, which, more importantly, serves as the town's gossip centre. He is up to date with all the small and big, dull and outrageous news and is more than happy to pass them on further.

He is respected by the family, mainly because he is a childless widower, which makes his convenient store fortune up for grabs. Every Stirling lives in fear of being removed from Uncle Benjamin's will.

During the series he finds a new respect for Valancy and ends up choosing her to be his only heir.



## **ABEL GAY “ROARING ABEL” (57)**

Abel is – to people’s collective discontentment – the only carpenter in town. The discontentment comes from the fact that Abel is an old alcoholic. Ever since his wife died, he finds comfort at the bottom of the bottle, which brings him into a whole range of different intoxication modes. He can become everything from a polite discussion partner, to the *Roaring* Abel himself.

He hires Valancy to keep his house and take care of his sick daughter, Cissy. He treats Valancy with respect and pays her a fair wage. They have a good chemistry and in times of crisis Roaring Abel’s is Valancy’s hideaway.



## **CISSY GAY (29)**

Cissy is an old childhood friend of Valancy, Roaring Abel’s daughter. After falling in love and getting pregnant with a young sailor, she has been harshly judged and excluded from the society.

Despite Cissy’s story being thoroughly depressing, she is the one who introduces Valancy to the feeling of friendship for the first time.

Cissy is forever grateful for Valancy’s company during her last days and dies with a smile on her delicate face, holding her friend’s hand. Her story ends with finally finding the peace and reuniting with her little beloved baby. After dying she becomes forever free from judgemental eyes and minds.



# EPISODE SUMMARY



## EPISODE 1: "WINTER"

We meet VALANCY STIRLING (29) in her imaginary world. It's a magical blue castle made of living trees, looking out on an enchanted lake. The fantasy is interrupted by loud knocking on the door and a cut to Valancy's reality. It's early 1900's, she lives in a small, ugly bedroom, wears a worn wool dress and an old-fashion hairstyle. She looks plain.

She eats breakfast with her MOTHER (50) and COUSIN STICKLES (65), who are cold, overbearing and treat her like a child. They are preoccupied with gossip and keeping up appearances. Valancy escapes from her plain reality into her imaginary world again, where we learn that it is the day of her 29th birthday. Mother and Cousin Stickles talk about a celebratory dinner planned for this evening.

While washing up after the breakfast, Valancy sees a car stopping in front of her house. Out of it steps ROARING ABEL (57), a reckless drunk, who – being the only carpenter in town – was hired to repair their porch roof. The driver, BARNEY SNAITH (34), is also an outcast from the society due to his mysterious past. Mother and Cousin Stickles observe them from the window too – they gossip about Abel's daughter and Valancy's childhood friend, CISSY (29), who had a child outside of marriage.

Abel and Valancy strike up a conversation and he tells her about Cissy's child's death and that Cissy herself is now very ill. He tries to convince Valancy to visit Cissy, but she doesn't dare to present that idea to her family. In order to interrupt Valancy's conversation with Roaring Abel, Cousin Stickles sends her to the store.

Walking down the street, Valancy is daydreaming about her blue castle again. The vision breaks abruptly when a car splashes water from a puddle on her. It was Barney. He apologises and offers her a ride home, when her cousin OLIVIA (28) and UNCLE WELLINGTON (59) come running down the street to rescue Valancy from the oppressor. They send Barney away in a rude manner and drive her to the store in their carriage.

The store belongs to Valancy's UNCLE BENJAMIN (53), a loud and jovial man who plays a major role in distributing gossip around the town. Everyone is delighted to hear a fresh piece of slander about the most wanted target in Deerwood: Barney Snaith. Uncle Wellington wants to become the town's hero by finally placing Barney behind the bars. He insists that Valancy testifies against Barney for attacking her on the street. She does not want to do it, but everyone pressures her to go to the police. The stress causes a sharp pain in Valancy's chest. She loses her breath and faints, falling back on a huge shelf full of spices and destroying it.

She wakes up a couple of hours later in her room, where she overhears the family deciding not to send her to a doctor in order not to create more gossip. Despite the



exhaustion caused by the pain attack, the family is still insisting on Valancy attending the celebration dinner.

When the whole family gathers, it appears that the feast was not arranged to celebrate Valancy's birthday, but Olivia's engagement to a rich young man. Valancy, in her anger and disappointment, chugs the champagne and stuffs her mouth with cake, destroying the veneer of elegance the family strives to keep up. When she shames them for forgetting her birthday, they accuse her of ruining the evening and being selfish for taking the attention away from Olivia's one-in-a-lifetime happy day. Valancy decides to celebrate in her blue castle instead, where the attention is fully on her. There is also her knight, whose face we can finally see – it is Barney.

The next morning, Mother forces Valancy to apologise to Uncle Benjamin for the scene she made at his store. He is a wealthy widower and behaviour like this might get Valancy's name crossed out of the list of his heirs. Valancy goes to the store, but overhearing people gossiping about her family, she turns around and walks away. She is upset and she suffers from another chest pain attack.

Valancy goes to a doctor behind her family's back. DR. TRENT's (60) thorough examination is interrupted by a ringing phone. The news on the phone frighten him and he rushes out, leaving Valancy confused and embarrassed. The nurse explains that Dr. Trent got the news about his son's car accident and asks Valancy to come another time.

Outside she meets Barney again. She asks him about Roaring Abel's address, as she wishes to visit Cissy. Barney offers to drive her. The house they arrive at is shabby and messy. Valancy lets Cissy rest and cleans the whole kitchen for her while they talk, catch up and have a great time together. After the visit, Roaring Abel drives Valancy home.

The mother is furious seeing them together. Her biggest worry is that they might have been seen. As a punishment, she grounds Valancy at home. Valancy spends several long days with an aunt boring her with gardening advice, and an offended mother who won't let her get her favourite author's – John Foster – book at the library.

One night Valancy experiences the worst of her pain attacks yet. She sneaks out to get some fresh air. There she meets a postman who came with a letter addressed to *Mrs. Sterling*. It's from Dr. Trent. It explains that due to her serious heart disease she has one year left to live. Valancy, seeing her life in a series of flashbacks, realises that she has only lived in the shadow of others. In agony, she completely destroys the rose bush in the garden with a big scissor. At the same time, in her imagination, she destroys her fantasy world, which, after receiving the bad news, has become a frightening, gloomy place.

## **EPISODE 2: “SPRING”**

The Stirlings are gathered for a family meeting. They talk about Valancy as if she was dead. Valancy is nowhere around and it's clear that something major has happened. Uncle Benjamin leaves to do a task the family assigned to him. As he walks down the street, people avoid him.

Uncle Benjamin arrives at Roaring Abel's house. Abel opens the door and shuts it again after identifying the visitor. After knocking again, the door is opened by Valancy. It appears that she had moved to Abel's to keep his house and nurse the ill Cissy without telling the family about her terminal heart illness. Uncle Benjamin urges Valancy to move back home. It's clear that he is not the first Stirling attempting to do so, but she doesn't want to go back. Roaring Abel throws Uncle Benjamin out of the house when he starts being too imposing.

Valancy and Cissy become close friends. They spend a lot of time together, talking, laughing, reading John Foster's books and enjoying life. Barney is also a frequent visitor – he keeps popping in with visits to Cissy, always bringing her small gifts or flowers. Even though Valancy's interest in Barney is growing, she ignores the arising feelings out of respect for Cissy.

Roaring Abel informs about a planned dancing at Chidley's Corner the coming Saturday. Valancy confesses that she has never been to a dancing before and Cissy convinces her go to. Roaring Abel pays Valancy's wage up front, so that she can go to Uncle Benjamin's store to buy a dress.

The store is even more crowded than usual because of the launch of Dr. Redfern's new product – Redfern's Hair Vigor. Men in the store talk about the fortune the doctor has made on his specifics. In the clothes department Valancy overhears women gossiping about Barney. She hides behind dresses to listen – supposedly Barney is Cissy's dead child's father. Even though they couldn't figure it out and stay together after the child's death, they still have feelings for each other and Barney regularly reassures Cissy of his affection. Valancy, put off by the news, accidentally reveals herself to the women by dragging the dress she was hiding behind down from the hanger. She is forced to buy the dress. When Valancy gets back home she starts observing Cissy and Barney. Everything seems to confirm the gossip.

On the night of the dancing, Valancy puts the new dress on. At first she isn't convinced whether the daring style of the dress suits her, but with Cissy's encouragement she sets out to the dancing together with Roaring Abel.



The dancing is loud and crowded and Valancy feels uncomfortable. A group of young men surrounds her on the dance floor. They are insisting despite her polite rejections and soon they start touching her. Valancy is helpless, but Barney appears out of nowhere and knocks the oppressors down. With blood and bruises on his face, he walks her to his car.

Barney is angry at Valancy for taking the reckless decision of going to the dance and they end up arguing in the car as they drive away. The car suddenly stops in the middle of the road. Barney realises he forgot to fill the fuel. At first they sit in awkward silence, but finally they start talking and make up. Barney asks Valancy whether she enjoyed the dancing, to which she honestly replies that she hasn't. Barney asks her to dance. They dance close to each other, in the middle of the empty road, in the darkness and silence of the night. The sensual moment is interrupted by beams of strong light of an approaching car. It appears to belong to Olivia and her fiancé, WILLIAM (30). Barney asks them for fuel. William helps them in order to save his fiancé's family's reputation.

Barney and Valancy drive home. Valancy is ecstatic and in love, but the situation turns around within a second, when they approach Roaring Abel's house. Cissy is dying. Valancy spends Cissy's last night with her. Cissy tells her the true story of her romance and reveals that Barney isn't the father of her child. Valancy tells Cissy about her blue castle and confesses that she will die soon too. Before she closes her eyes forever, Cissy encourages Valancy to live her life to the fullest.

The next day the gossip of Valancy and Barney's night adventures and about Cissy's death has reached all the corners of the town. The Stirlings gather for another family meeting. They decide to go to the funeral and make Valancy appear like a thoughtful person who selflessly helped a dying girl. Their main motivation is to save Olivia's engagement with William, who is now hesitant to go through with the wedding, as he fears that craziness might run in Olivia's family. After a broken engagement, Olivia wouldn't have realistic chances for a marriage that would increase her and the family's social status.

During the funeral, Valancy is possessed by disturbing visions of her own funeral. After the service, an older gentleman, EDWARD BECK (59) approaches Valancy and asks her whether she is unmarried. She ignores him. The family announces that they have forgiven Valancy and ask her to come back home. She reassures them that she has no plans of staying with Roaring Abel and walks away to talk to Barney.

Valancy asks Barney to marry her and shows him the letter from Dr. Trent with the death diagnose.

### **EPISODE 3: "SUMMER"**

Barney – clean shaved, and Valancy – with a ring on her finger, walk out of the city hall as husband and wife. They arrive at Barney's island with a little canoe. The sunset paints the sky pink and blue and Valancy can't help but notice the resemblance of the place to her imaginary blue castle. They enter the little wooden house through the veranda overlooking the picturesque lake, to the kitchen with huge windows facing out on a forrest and the cosy living room with two cats sleeping on the couch. There is also only one bedroom with a big bed and one more door, that Barney doesn't open for her. He wants to keep it private and demands that Valancy never opens it. She calls the room his Bluebeard's chamber, referring to a tale of a man who kept murdering his wives and stacking their bodies in a special room, which the next wife was not allowed to open.

Triggered by the Bluebeard's chamber, during the supper on the porch Valancy engages a conversation in which they discuss rules of their marriage. Barney will disappear every now and then and is not to be asked questions. Valancy agrees on the condition that he will never mention her heart illness. Valancy stretches her hand out to Barney to shake the deal, but he puts his arm around her and kisses her on the lips instead. Their dark silhouettes join with a huge moon in the background and fantasy and the real world officially become one for Valancy. "Welcome home, dear", says Barney.

Valancy and Barney enjoy their life together on the island. They live close to the nature – they pick mushrooms, eat on the porch, swim in the lake and watch the stars. Valancy enjoys her new freedom and develops a connection that she has never dreamt of with Barney. She has finally found a soulmate and a discussion partner, who truly understands her. During one of their night forest adventures Valancy has sex with Barney for the first time.

Roaring Abel is also visiting them from time to time. He urges Valancy to see her family, as they are bothering him with frequent visits, wondering about Valancy's whereabouts. Valancy agrees to pay them a visit.

The Stirlings are gathered for a family meeting in Valancy's mother's house. There is one extra person by the table – EDWARD BECK (59), the gentleman who approached Valancy at the funeral. Valancy arrives at her family house too. The family is surprised, but excited to see her though, as Edward Beck, a known Deerwood widower and father to nine kids, wants to marry her. Valancy breaks out in laughter and explains that she is already married to Barney Snaith. The family is deeply shocked and decides to consider Valancy dead. Edward Beck rushes out to spread the outrageous news.



On her way back to the island, Valancy stops by a book store to buy John Foster's newest book. Unfortunately, it's not available until next week. As she walks out, we can see Barney, dressed for a journey, walking quickly down the street with his suitcase. Valancy doesn't notice him and gets back home, to an empty house. She finds a small package and a note on the table. He writes that he is going to be away in the forest for couple of days to explore the nature. He hopes the gift will make up for his absence and keep her company. In the package Valancy finds John Foster's newest book. We can see Barney on a train station, getting into a train.

As she goes to sleep alone, Valancy smells Barney's pillow and smiles. She starts reading book from Barney, when suddenly she gets a horrible chest pain attack. She starts to cry and moans "Why now?". She walks out to the living room to get some fresh air. The pain gets worse – she leans against a bookshelf and books start falling down around her as she falls on the floor. The next morning, the sun shining through the window wakes up Valancy lying on the floor among the books. As she picks them up, a letter falls out. It is addressed to Ethel Travers, but never sent. Valancy hesitates, but in the end she opens it and discovers it's a love letter from Barney to Ethel. Barney comes back the next day with a gift for Valancy – a pearl necklace. He has been missing her, but she is distant and cold, as she was reminded of that Barney has no true feelings for her.

Barney and Valancy continue enjoying their island together. Coming back from one of their adventures, Valancy's foot gets stuck in the railway road. A train is approaching in the distance. Barney tries untying her shoelaces. Valancy screams and tries to push him away. Finally he cuts through the laces with his knife and drags Valancy out from the coming train the last second. Valancy is shocked. She remembers Dr. Trent's letter, where he warned her that any sudden shock might be fatal for her. Barney becomes quiet. They go back home in silence. Barefoot Valancy carries only one shoe in her hand. They don't look at each other or talk. In the evening Barney doesn't come to bed. He spends the whole evening and night behind the closed door of his chamber.

The next day Valancy visits Dr. Trent to ask him why she didn't die having experienced such great shock. Dr. Trent can't believe the diagnose Valancy was given back then until Valancy shows the letter as a proof. It appears that Dr. Trent confused Valancy with Miss Sterling, an old lady, who was dead soon after. Valancy's heart problem, on the other hand, was minor – she just needed fresh air and joy. He points out the *e* instead of *i* in the name spelling, which Valancy always thought to be a mistake.

Valancy gets back home. Barney's car isn't there. There is no goodbye note either. In her fantasy Valancy can see Barney accusing her of tricking him into marriage.

## EPISODE 4: "FALL "

Days are passing and Barney isn't coming back. Valancy's fantasy is taking over, but the blue castle is a dark, creepy place now. She is imagining Barney accusing her of lying, telling her he never even liked her and that he married her only out of pity. He throws her out of the house as he hold his arms around a beautiful woman with blond curls. They laugh at Valancy and as she walks away they start kissing passionately.

Valancy packs her suitcase and wants to write Barney a farewell note. Searching for a pen she walks into the Bluebeard's chamber. Seeing the room for the first time wakes her up from her erratic state. It is a regular office with a big desk in the middle of the room. On the desk there is a manuscript of a book. The first page says "by John Foster". When Valancy reads the first paragraph, she can clearly remember Barney saying it to her not long ago. She realises that Barney is John Foster. Valancy writes her note. She explains Dr. Trent's mistake and apologises for making him marry her. Since divorces are expensive, she will work to earn the money to finance it. She thanks him for everything and says farewell. She hopes also that it's alright that she keeps the pearl necklace as a memory of the most beautiful year of her life. She leaves the house.

As she arrives at the opposite bank of the lake, she can see a shiny, luxurious car. A man with a very familiar, round face steps out of it, happy to see someone coming, as he wants to get to the house on the island. He asks Valancy if the house indeed belongs to Mr. Redfern, which makes Valancy realise where she knows the face from – it's the medication millionaire. She regrets to inform him that no, the house belongs to Mr. Snaith, who isn't there at the moment. Dr. Redfern explains that Snaith is Barney's middle name, and his full name is Bernard Snaith Redfern, which makes him the millionaire's son and heir. That comes as a shock to Valancy. Dr. Redfern is touched, but also disappointed that Barney didn't tell him he got married. He asks Valancy for a cup of tea after a long journey. They canoe back to the house and the doctor tells the story of Barney's past. Barney grew up rich, having everything a boy could dream of, but he never got along well with other kids. His mother died young and him and his father never managed to find a common language. As a young man, Barney fell in love with Ethel Travers and finally was truly happy. However, a horrible argument broke their engagement and Barney disappeared. The doctor haven't heard from him until a couple of moths ago, when he for the first time used his father's money. He cashed a check for fifteen thousand dollars to pay for a pearl necklace. Valancy touches her necklace, shocked. The doctor decides to try his luck again tomorrow and says goodbye.



Valancy walks into Barney's secret room again and writes a PS to her letter, telling him about his father's visit and that she is happy that financing the divorce will not be a problem after all. She puts the necklace carefully on the letter and leaves the house.

Valancy goes to Roaring Abel in hope of being hired by him again. It appears that a distant cousin is now keeping his house. She is bossy and despotic and Abel reminisces about the times when the house was filled with Valancy and Cissy's cheerful presence.

Valancy has no other choice but to go home and ask for permission to move in again. There she finds Olivia, crying her eyes out and the family gathered around her. It appears that William has broken up the engagement as a consequence of Valancy's behaviour. The family don't want to take Valancy back to punish her for ruining Olivia's and the family's future. Valancy explains everything, starting with her heart illness, ending on Barney being John Foster and Dr. Redfern's son. The family's approach to Valancy changes completely and they start treating Olivia just the way they have been treating Valancy so far. Olivia tries to gain the attention back with crying loudly, but everyone is now occupied with making Valancy comfortable.

The next day Barney storms into Valancy's house, looking for his wife. She doesn't want to see him, afraid that saying goodbye in person would be too hard. Barney convinces her to listen to his true version of his past. He was a lonely child with no friends, as everyone was mocking him for his father's medications. Even his closest friends were laughing at him in secret. He thought he finally found a kindred spirit in his fiancé Ethel, until he overheard her confessing that money is her only motivation for marrying Barney. Disappointed and hurt, Barney disappeared into the nature and found comfort in writing the books under John Foster pseudonym. Only after he met Valancy he started believing in honesty and friendship again and gradually grew to love her. Valancy doesn't believe Barney's story, still convinced that he only pities her. Barney gets mad and accuses Valancy of being ashamed of having relation to Dr. Redfern's pills, like everyone else. Only seeing Barney's furious face Valancy believes that he truly loves her.

The family is delighted with Valancy and Barney's reunion and suggests a big celebration, which the couple rejects. They set out on a long journey, as Barney wants to show Valancy all the wonders of this world that she hasn't experienced. Cousin Stickles takes Valancy's place in Mother's eyes and from now on she is the one being pushed around. Uncle Benjamin appreciates Valancy's character and persistence which led her to ending up with a millionaire for a husband and makes her his only heir. Olivia, abandoned by her fiancé and degraded by the family decides to pursue education, where she learns to find her worth elsewhere than in appearance and a rich husband.

place is <sup>very</sup> pretty - and  
the girls-ditto - there is  
plenty of boating & the  
weather is superb  
it only wants  
to make  
the



Miss Sterling



THE BLUE CASTLE

EPISODE 1  
"WINTER"

Written by  
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Based on  
The Blue Castle  
By  
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EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

FADE FROM BLACK.

We are in an unreal, fantasy forest.

Everything is kept in light pink and blue tones. Big round golden raindrops dingle down from gold puffy clouds. Gigantic SILVER TREES grow and expand their branches in an unbelievable tempo, producing more and more delightful flowers. The flowers immediately loose their petals making heaps on heaps of flower petals that lie around and fly in the air.

UPLIFTING ORCHESTRAL MUSIC THEME playing.

There is something shining through the trees. The camera follows along the trees which open up to a DREAMLIKE LAKE. Deep blue water transitions smoothly into the sky. It is not certain if the GRAND BLUE CASTLE in the horizon is built on an island or hanging in the air.

As we get closer we can see that the castle is constructed of the silver trees, the branches are constantly on the slight move, producing more flowers and leaves.

We enter the building through one of the round openings which serves for windows:

We are in a lavish bedroom. The bed frame is overgrown with moss.

By a window sits VALANCY (29), dressed in a gold nightgown, and brushes her hair. She is not a beauty, but there is something appealing about her.

CLOSE UP: her hand holding a big decoratively carved hair brush. The brush sinks down in her soft and shiny hair...

CUT TO:

INT. VALANCY'S BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE UP: The same hand holds a plain, wooden hairbrush, which sinks into dark, matte hair. The colors around are plain and moody. It's just a short FLASH...

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

...and we are back to the beautiful fantasy bedroom. Valancy looks out on the magical forest and the lake.



There is a small canoe on the lake. A MAN sits in it and rows towards the castle.

CLOSE UP on his hands on decorated roars, on his festive and elegant clothes, on his golden bowtie. We can't see his face.

Valancy smiles and waves to him. She gets up and walks towards a big wardrobe. It is also made of silver branches and grown into silver walls of the room. As she gets close, the branches unveil in front of her, revealing a beautiful dress.

CUT TO:

INT. VALANCY'S BEDROOM - DAY

A hand opens a massive, wooden wardrobe door and reaches for one of three dresses hanging there. It's brown and made of wool.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

The living branches help Valancy put on the dress. It is very light and flowy and makes Valancy look pretty.

CUT TO:

INT. VALANCY'S BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE UP on hands buttoning up the endless buttons of the dark woolen dress, going all the way up to her chin.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

Valancy looks out on the lake again. The empty canoe is docked and foot traces in the blue sand lead to the castle. She smiles.

She can hear KNOCKING ON A WOODEN DOOR.

She turns her head...

CUT TO:

INT. VALANCY'S BEDROOM - DAY

...and we can see Valancy's real face. She is neither pretty nor ugly, neither young nor old. She looks older and more tired than in the fantasy scene - no more rosy cheeks, more wrinkles instead. No more wavy hair, there is a strict, sleek updo.

COUSIN STICKLES (O.S.)  
Breakfast!

The walls in the room are of the ugliest imaginable shade of rotten green. On the walls there are a couple of pictures, which make the room feel even more depressing: a WET PUPPY waiting on a doorstep in rainy weather and strict face of Queen Victoria. There is also an old scratched mirror which barely reflects anything.

Valancy gets up and looks at her distorted reflection in the mirror. She places a stranded strand of hair back in the bun, smooths out her dress, SIGHS and walks out of the room.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

SHOT ON a small brick house. In one of the windows we can see Valancy's silhouette walking down the stairs.

ZOOM OUT. Long row of identical houses stretches along the street. The trees are naked. Snowflakes fall from the gray sky.

**TITLE: WINTER**

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The living room is an early 1900's victorian interior, rather gloomy, wallpapered and old-fashioned. It looks more presentable than Valancy's bedroom, but is still far from lavish.

TWO WOMEN sit by the round breakfast table and wait: thin and strict MOTHER (50) and short and chubby COUSIN STICKLES (65).

Valancy enters the room.

VALANCY  
Good morning, mother. Good morning,  
aunt.

Valancy sits down on the third, empty chair. Mother and Cousin Stickles start eating.

Valancy looks at almost empty table with THREE DRY TOASTS, an insufficient amount of butter and three tea cups filled with a grey-ish substance.

Her face expresses silent resignation.

MOTHER

Sit up straight, Buba.

Valancy sits up straight. She grabs a toast and a puts a tiny bit of butter on the knife.

She meets her mother's raised eyebrow across the table. Valancy puts back half of the butter she had taken.

SCRATCHING of the knife. She attempts to spread a thin layer of butter to all four corners of her toast. She is about to reach the third corner when suddenly...

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

...the burnt toast in her hand turned into a soft piece of white, soft bread! And the butter has turned into a thick layer of brown chocolate cream!

A CHEERFUL MUSIC THEME sneaks up in the background and when...

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cousin Stickle's OBNOXIOUS COUGHING interrupts Valancy's vision. The brown toast falls down on the plate with a CLUNK. The music stops.

She picks up the burnt toast up to her mouth...

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

...but what is it her teeth bite into?! It's the chocolate bread!

CUT TO:



INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

She picks up a gray tea cup...

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

...but her lips touch a delicate pink porcelain!

Valancy is in her fantasy world again, sitting by a table placed on a magical rooftop of the castle. From here there is a spectacular view of the otherworldly forest and miraculous lake sparkling in the sun. Flower petals flow around her.

The KNIGHT comes in, carrying something on a tray. We still can't see his face, only a CLOSE UP on his hands.

He carries a CAKE with candles and a number 29 made of cream. Valancy smiles.

KNIGHT (O.S.)  
Happy birthday, love.

Valancy notices her mother and Cousin Stickles sit around the table on the magical rooftop with her. They look at her in awe. Mother grabs her hand across the table and with a warm and loving smile says:

MOTHER  
Buba! Answer when you are asked a question!

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

VALANCY  
What?

COUSIN STICKLES  
What?! I asked you if you remembered to smear your chest with Redfern's Liniment yesterday. The weather is getting cold again and you are so prone to getting bronchitis.  
(to Mother)  
Amelia, we should start firing in the stoves soon, don't you think?

MOTHER

Not until 31st of October. You know my rules.

COUSIN STICKLES

But I saw FROST on the windows this morning! FROST!

(gets serious)

Besides, I can feel it in my bones. You will have to smear my back with Redfern's Liniment tonight too, Buba. When we are back from the dinner. This thing works wonders.

VALANCY

Dinner?

COUSIN STICKLES

We have an occasion to celebrate today! You cold not have forgotten!

Valancy smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC THEME starts playing again and we are back in the magical fantasy world.

Mother hands Valancy a huge bouquet of flowers.

MOTHER

We will celebrate your big day tonight, dear Valancy.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Valancy sits by the table, gazing into the horizon with an absent face.

Mother and Cousin Stickles look at her weirdly.

COUSIN STICKLES

(whispering to Mother)

Our Buba can be so bizarre.

MOTHER

No wonder she doesn't really have any friends.

I/E. KITCHEN / GARDEN - DAY

A clean, small kitchen. Valancy washes the three plates and tea cups after the breakfast in a sink by the window. It faces out on a tidy, meticulously trimmed garden. All the houses by the street have similar, tidy and meticulously trimmed gardens.

A car - an old Grey Slosson - parks in front of the house making A LOT OF NOISE.

Valancy looks closer as she dries her hands in a towel.

A middle-aged ROARING ABEL (57) steps out of the car on the passenger side. He is thin but muscular, has long grey hair and a beard, and wears working pants with an impressive amount of pockets. His face is damaged and full of wrinkles.

Mother and Cousin Stickles trot into the kitchen.

COUSIN STICKLES

What is this awful noise?

They stand behind Valancy to also observe the situation.

MOTHER

It's Abel. He was supposed to be here last week to repair the porch roof before the winter. And he comes now, when it begins to snow! You cannot trust that man with anything!

COUSIN STICKLES

It's horrible that there is not one decent carpenter left in town after Mr. Moore moved to Port Lawrence last year...

MOTHER

Now decent people like us have to deal with...

(disgusted)

...him... when they need some work to be done around the house. He is always drunk!

COUSIN STICKLES

Drunk is one thing. But what they say about his daughter! She had a child - *unmarried!* And apparently, the child...

(whispers)

...died!



The DRIVER gets out of the car too. He is a handsome, but a bit rough looking man with messy reddish hair - BARNEY SNAITH (34). He opens the trunk and passes Roaring Abel his toolbox.

MOTHER

And he is acquainted with that Snaith!

COUSIN STICKLES

Outrageous that he dares to show himself with that criminal.

VALANCY

Criminal? What did he do?

Mother and Cousin Stickles look at her surprised.

MOTHER

Don't be so curious, Buba, it's a sin to be too curious. Finish what you are doing.

The women leave the kitchen. Roaring Abel prepares his tools on the porch. He KNOCKS on the entrance door.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Valancy opens the door. Roaring Abel gives her a wide smile. His eyes look much younger than the rest of his damaged face and shine with some kind of joy.

ROARING ABEL

G'day, miss!

Valancy can't help but smile to him too.

ROARING ABEL (CONT'D)

Do you happen to have a ladder lying around? I could use one.

VALANCY

Oh, there is one in the shed. I will get it for you.

ROARING ABEL

I would never let a lady carry a ladder for me! But you could show me where it is.

INT. SHED - DAY

Valancy and Abel stand in an extremely cluttered shed and look at the ladder peeking out from the bottom, covered with endless layers of things stacked on it.

VALANCY

I think we have a project, Mr. Gay.

ROARING ABEL

Ain't no need calling me a mister.

VALANCY

Ehm... Abel?

They start moving the objects around to get to the ladder.

ROARING ABEL

Roaring Abel is fine too, I know that's what they call me around the town, and I must say I quite like it!

VALANCY

You do?

ROARING ABEL

It's a funny thought - all the folks being scared of me.

VALANCY

I think they are only scared when you are drunk.

ROARING ABEL

One has to have some joy in life, you see. After my old wife passed, then the grandson, and now God is taking my poor thing Cissy away from me.

VALANCY

Cissy? Is she sick?

ROARING ABEL

Aye. And I can't find a decent woman to keep the house and take care of her. No-one wants to work at Roaring Abel's, you see.

They try to drag the ladder out, PANTING and GRUNTING. No success.

ROARING ABEL (CONT'D)

She needs some company.

Finally they drag the ladder out, causing a small avalanche of random objects falling down on them. They get quickly out of the shed.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Valancy quickly shuts the shed door, stopping the avalanche from pouring out on the yellowish grass. Valancy and Abel laugh and walk towards the porch with the ladder.

ROARING ABEL

You two went to school together, eh?

VALANCY

Yes. I remember her as a lovely person.

ROARING ABEL

She always talked nicely of you. You were kind to her.

Valancy sits down on a porch. Abel puts the ladder in place and works in silence for a while. We can hear HITTING OF THE HAMMER and SCREECHING OF THE LADDER.

ROARING ABEL (CONT'D)

Would be nice if you could visit her. Would sure cheer her up.

VALANCY

Oh... I...

KNOCKING ON THE KITCHEN WINDOW from the inside. Valancy turns around to see Mother and Cousin Stickles glued to the window from the inside, with disapproving faces.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

I don't think I can...

Roaring Able looks at the window too, then on Valancy. He nods.

ROARING ABEL

I sure understand, miss. I sure do.

The window opens. Cousin Stickle's chubby face sticks out onto the porch.



## COUSIN STICKLES

Buba! I need your help here in the kitchen with the... Store! You have to go to the store! Right now, hurry, come on!

The window shuts. Valancy looks apologetically at Roaring Able. He shrugs and goes back to his HAMMERING.

EXT. STREET - DAY

CLOSE UP on Valancy's feet in worn leather shoes stepping on the gray pavement.

Small heaps of snow lie on the side of the pavement. Suddenly snowflakes start following her feet.

ORCHESTRA MUSIC THEME sneaks on.

Soon the snowflakes flow around and land in front of Valancy, creating a soft white carpet for Valancy to step on.

Her worn shoes disappear and soon she steps on the white carpet with her bare feet...

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

Valancy walks in the magical forest again. Mystical elves wave and smile to her, showing her the way. She smiles and waves back.

At the end of her path, the knight is waiting. We still can't see his face. He stretches his hand out to her. They get closer to each other, while the elves dance around them. The knight grabs her chin and leans towards her for a kiss.

One of the elves runs towards them with a bucket full of water with ice cubes and throws it at Valancy.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Valancy is on the street in her ugly coat and extremely unflattering wool hat, DRIPPING WET. The car that had just splashed her with water from a big puddle stops in front of her. Barney walks out.

BARNEY

Miss, are you all right?

Barney approaches her, but she doesn't answer.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Miss, I am terribly sorry. I should have been more careful. No longer than a week ago we still had a wonderful golden fall weather, I am not used to watching out for puddles on the street quite yet!

Valancy's eyes follow every movement of his lips as he speaks.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Can I offer you a ride home?

Barney reaches his hand out to her. She stares at the hand.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

You can't walk home all wet. Miss?

Valancy looks at him as if she just realized that the "miss" he is referring to is no-one else but her.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Oh, how rude of me. Of course a young lady won't accept a ride from a stranger man. I should introduce myself. I'm...

VALANCY

(whispering)

...Barney Snaith...

UNCLE WELLINGTON (O.S.)

(yelling)

BARNEY SNAITH!!!

A mustached UNCLE WELLINGTON (67) and stunning OLIVIA (28) come running from the other side of the street, where their carriage with a horse is parked.

OLIVIA

Leave my cousin alone!

Olivia grabs Valancy and turns her away from Barney. She covers Valancy's eyes, as if she was a child looking at something inappropriate.

BARNEY

I was just helping young miss...

OLIVIA

Buba, you are all wet! You're going to catch bronchitis again!

Valancy tries to shut Olivia up with a look that could kill.

BARNEY

That's my fault, I'm afraid. I was just offering the young miss...

UNCLE WELLINGTON

Yes, thank you for your assistance, it won't be needed.

BARNEY

Are you shu...

UNCLE WELLINGTON

Yes, thank you. Good day to you.

BARNEY

Sir.

Barney nods and walks away. Valancy's gaze follows him to his car, and stays there long after he disappears.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

What did that criminal do to you? Tell me everything, we will go straight to the police station.

VALANCY

Oh, no, uncle...

UNCLE WELLINGTON

It's high time to show that the respectable society of Deerwood won't accept notorious types like him living among us!

VALANCY

Oh no, he didn't do anything...

UNCLE WELLINGTON

Did he splash water on you? Outrageous.

VALANCY

No, it's just the car and the puddle...

UNCLE WELLINGTON

I always say you must be a devil to drive one of those automobiles! A devil!

OLIVIA

But papa, William is thinking of buying one!

(MORE)

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Imagine a bride arriving at the church  
in a shiny car... Everyone would be  
jealous!

Olivia waves the HUGE DIAMOND RING on her finger in front of  
Valancy's face.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

William says he will do anything to  
make me shine when we go down the  
alley together.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

Well... I am sure William will drive it...  
responsibly. I will make sure of that!

OLIVIA

Buba, what are you doing out on the  
street anyways?

UNCLE WELLINGTON

We will give you a ride straight home.

VALANCY

No! I mean... I was on my way to uncle  
Benjamin's store. I need to get tea.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

Well then, I guess we can stop by  
there too. Come on, Olivia.

They walk towards the carriage.

EXT. CARRIAGE - DAY

Valancy sits in the carriage with a smirk on her face. Next to  
her, Olivia is staring into a tiny pocket mirror, rearranging  
flowers on her hat.

VALANCY

(whispers)

Young miss...

Olivia gives Valancy a disapproving look.

OLIVIA

Buba! Don't be vain!



INT. STORE - DAY

Big convenient store. Tall shelves full of various wares reach all the way up to the ceiling and are arranged into different departments: house, clothes, food.

The clients are spread around the store and divided into small groups of middle-aged ladies. They pretend to fill their baskets with groceries. In reality they are mostly gossiping.

The camera follows a fat and loud UNCLE BENJAMIN (53) wearing a white apron. He is walking around the store, placing some items on the shelves. In reality he is trying to spot the most giggly group of ladies.

He joins a group of four LADIES in the back of the store.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Mrs. Tremblay, I must tell you, the fabric of your new skirt flows so nicely!

The women GIGGLE and blush. They love Uncle Benjamin.

MRS. TREMBLAY

(blushing)

Oh, Mr. Stirling, you're too kind!

UNCLE BENJAMIN

And the color! Suits you just perfectly!

MRS. TREMBLAY

Well, you must know that the tailor wasn't the easiest to work with...

They exchange cheesy smirks and lean the heads to each other.

MRS. TREMBLAY (CONT'D)

He was rather too busy spending evenings with the butcher's daughter...

LADY 1

They say soon he will have to sew a new dress for her... with more room around the waist.

All the ladies GIGGLE like little girls. Uncle Benjamin giggles like a little girl too.

But he is still alert. Another GIGGLE WAVE comes from the front of the store. Within a second he is with a group of LADIES gathered around big flour bags.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Mrs. Smith! You are in some need of flour, I see? Let me assist you, how much will it be?

He grabs a flour shovel and a paper bag.

MRS. SMITH

So kind of you, Mrs. Stirling! I will need 2 kilos, thank you.

LADY 3

Careful, dear. You don't want to get too fleshy, like poor Mrs. Martin.

LADY 4

They say ever since her husband died, she has been eating for four!

MRS. SMITH

Well, I don't doubt it, from the looks of it.

Everyone LAUGHS. A CHUBBY WOMAN joins the group.

MRS. MARTIN

Good morning, ladies.

MRS. SMITH

Mrs. Martin! You look flourishing!

All the ladies nod agreeingly.

The door to the store opens with a loud DINGLE OF THE BELL. Uncle Wellington, Olivia and Valancy walk in.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

The Stirlings! Always nice to see family here! Olivia, you look blooming today! And you, Wellington!

The uncles shake hands.

Uncle Benjamin walks behind the counter, scares away a MOUSY APPRENTICE and takes his rightful place in his messy kingdom of a store.

From there he notices a GIFT BOX with ribbon standing on the counter. He glances nervously at the guests and hides the box under the counter.

CLOSE UP on Valancy looking at the uncle hiding a gift and smiling.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I just got in new dresses today,  
Olivia! Newest fashion, look at  
this one!

Uncle Benjamin shows a classy, puffy GREEN DRESS. Olivia makes an EXCITED SQUEAL, grabs the dress and runs to try it.

Then Uncle Benjamin finally notices Valancy, which he has been ignoring so far.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Buba! You are here too! Didn't see you  
there. You are always like that! A  
quiet mouse! What is a difference  
between Buba and a mouse?

Valancy stops smiling. She looks down, ashamed.

VALANCY

I don't know.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

A mouse wishes to harm the cheese and  
Buba wishes to charm the he's.

Uncle Benjamin breaks into a HORRIBLY LOUD, OBNOXIOUS LAUGHTER that makes the glass jars behind him shake. All the faces turn to look at Valancy and MUFFLED CHUCKLES can be heard.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

I hope she doesn't continue  
attracting the fishy types, like  
today!

All conversations in the store stop and faces turn to the Stirlings. Uncle Benjamin leans over the counter with an excited face, to listen.

UNCLE WELLINGTON (CONT'D)

That Barney Snaith!

A GASP spreads around the room.

MRS. SMITH

That criminal!

MRS. TREMBLAY

He can't have good intentions! No-  
one knows where he came from!

MRS. SMITH

And he keeps away from people!

LADY 1  
That can't mean that he has a clear  
conscience.

LADY 2  
When was that he came?

LADY 3  
Four...

LADY 4  
Five years ago!

UNCLE BENJAMIN  
Five years!

MRS. SMITH  
Has anyone here had a conversation  
with him?

Everyone shakes their heads no.

MRS. MARTIN  
No-one! Five years and he hasn't  
had a proper conversation!

UNCLE BENJAMIN  
That's probably because he is  
constantly drunk!

LADY 1  
Or worse... I heard he does... No,  
I can't say it...

UNCLE WELLINGTON  
Drugs!

GASP.

LADY 3  
If only that. I heard he escaped  
from prison!

LADY 4  
I heard that too!

MRS. SMITH  
What did he do time for?

MRS. TREMBLAY  
Money-washing!

MRS. MARTIN  
If only!



UNCLE BENJAMIN

For all we know he can be a wife-killer!

LOUD GASP.

MRS. SMITH

Lord, save us!

UNCLE WELLINGTON

The society like ours can tolerate that! A drunk wife-killer in our streets, walking around every day among decent people?

LADY 1

But what can we do?

UNCLE WELLINGTON

We can go to the police!

MRS. SMITH

But we have nothing!

Uncle Wellington smirks proudly.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

Yes, we do. Buba, tell them!

VALANCY

Oh, he didn't do anything wrong. He didn't mean to, it was an accident...

Everyone stares at her in silence.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

He attacked poor Buba on the street! He splashed water from a puddle on a young, innocent girl. She has such poor health. It is very likely she will catch a cold and from there it is a straight way to bronchitis. It might be fatal for her! And if we don't do anything with it, what will we say on her funeral? Will we be able to look each other in the eye? Will we be able to say "I, citizen of Deerwood, did everything to protect my society"?

MRS. TREMBLAY

We do have to go to the police!

UNCLE BENJAMIN

We have to protect ourselves!

LADY 1

It could have been anyone!

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Buba, don't worry! We will take you to the station and we will be there for you. Your family is always there for you. And the Stirling aren't just any family! We will save the city! It's all up to you now!

Everyone stares at Valancy. She is stressed. She starts sweating, her hands shake, she opens her mouth but no words come out.

Olivia comes in with the green dress in her hand and an offended face.

OLIVIA

It was too small!

No-one pays attention to her, all eyes are on Valancy.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

Buba!

VALANCY

I... I... But he...

Valancy GASPS and puts her hand on her HEART. Her face is twisted with a GRIMACE OF PAIN and a SHORT SCREAM escapes her mouth. She loses her breath, takes a step back and steps on the edge of her own dress.

She stumbles and FALLS BACK, straight into a tall shelf full glass containers with colorful spices in. Valancy can hear the SHUTTER OF BREAKING GLASS like from a distance.

SLOW MOTION: A colorful cloud of powdery spices falls around her. People SCREAM, but the faces are blurry and voices distant. MUFFLED CRIES mumble something about hospital, some strong hands grab and shake her little body, someone REPEATS HER NAME.

Valancy can hear a very LOUD BEATING OF HER OWN HEART. Everything gradually quiets down.

Valancy passes out.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. VALANCY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Mother, Cousin Stickles, Olivia and Uncle Wellington are gathered in Valancy's tiny room. They stand around the bed with Valancy's exhausted body in.

Cousin Stickles sits on the edge of her bed and smears something vigorously into her chest.

Camera slides to the bedside table. There is a brown glass jar full of a sticky substance. A picture of an old, balding man with a sympathetic face smiles from the jar. Under his face we can read a purple caption: "REDFERN'S LINIMENT".

No-one notices that Valancy is awake, they are too engaged in the lively conversation.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

We were so close to being heroes of the town! If only Buba weren't so sensitive!

MOTHER

I am going to talk to her when she wakes up!

COUSIN STICKLES

Shouldn't we take her to the hospital first?

UNCLE WELLINGTON

I don't know if we need any more of gossip around the town! She made quite a scene at the store today!

OLIVIA

I agree! It was enough that she sent the whole spice supply flying! That will live long on people's mouth!

MOTHER

Such a disgrace! In Benjamin's store!

COUSIN STICKLES

But it's about her health! What if it's something serious?

MOTHER

We are all horribly long lived. I doubt it's something serious.



UNCLE WELLINGTON  
We must consult it with James.

MOTHER  
Indeed. We will talk to him at the dinner.

UNCLE WELLINGTON  
(loudly)  
Buba, how are you feeling? Can you go to the dinner?

OLIVIA  
Oh, she must go! That's an important occasion, after all!

MOTHER  
She will.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Dining room is drowning in decorations. It looks like they were supposed to be classy, but missed the mark and the result is tacky.

The eight members of the Stirling family sit around the dinner table.

At the head of the table sits mustached and serious UNCLE JAMES (57). To his right Uncle Wellington, then AUNT WELLINGTON (45) with a tall hiardo, and then their stunning daughter Olivia.

On the other side of the table we have fat and balding Uncle Benjamin, Mother, Cousin Stickles, and pale and tired Valancy, cramped in the corner on a small uncomfortable stool. She is almost invisible between a big pudding bowl and a tower of muffins on a plate.

Uncle Wellington stands up and CLINGS HIS KNIFE AGAINST HIS GLASS.

UNCLE WELLINGTON  
If I may, I would like to say couple of words. I am so happy we could gather here today despite some... adventures.

Uncle Wellington gives Valancy a look.

UNCLE WELLINGTON (CONT'D)

After all, it is a special day and an occasion to celebrate! So let us forget all the bad...

Another look at Valancy. Valancy smiles.

UNCLE WELLINGTON (CONT'D)

The Stirlings are a family of truly great individuals and today I want to celebrate especially one of them.

Valancy blushes.

UNCLE WELLINGTON (CONT'D)

The person who stands out in our family as a real jewel and brings us joy and pride every day. My beautiful daughter, Olivia.

Valancy looks around confused. Uncle Benjamin pours champagne to everyone's glasses.

UNCLE WELLINGTON (CONT'D)

The events of the last couple of days were of great meaning not only for Olivia, but for our whole family. Finally the Stirlings are on the verge of getting the recognition we truly deserve! I would like to make a toast for Olivia, who, as you know, accepted the proposal of sir William Wilson! Our families will be connected!

Everyone CLAPS.

UNCLE WELLINGTON (CONT'D)

To Olivia!

EVERYONE

To Olivia!

People around the table raise their glasses and take a tiny, elegant sips of champagne.

Uncle Benjamin gives Olivia the GIFT BOX he hid at the store. She opens it and takes out a VEIL. Aunt Wellington helps Olivia to put it on.

In that chatter no-one pays attention to Valancy. Valancy grabs her champagne glass, CHUGS everything in one big gulp and puts the glass away with a loud THUD.

The chatter stops. Everyone looks at Valancy. No-one knows what to say. Finally...

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Buba! I forgot you were there! Stop romancing with the dessert!

Exaggerated LAUGHTER OF RELIEF around the table. Valancy blushes and hides behind the muffin tower again.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I think we have an answer to why our Buba still does not have a husband candidate.

OLIVIA

Why?

UNCLE BENJAMIN

He couldn't find her behind the muffins!

Everyone LAUGHS HORRIBLY. Valancy blushes embarrassed. She shuts her eyes and tries to calm down her heavy breathing.

MOTHER

Congratulations, Olivia, dear. Buba, congratulate your cousin. She is getting married!

COUSIN STICKLES

Congratulations!

Everyone joins the congratulations choir and Valancy becomes invisible again.

Valancy shuts her eyes. She is shaking of anger and disappointment. EXTREME CLOSE UP on Valancy's closed eyes. Inhale. Exhale.

COUSIN STICKLES (CONT'D)

Buba! Pass me the cake, please. I think I will indulge myself one more piece. It's a very special day after all!

VALANCY

You're right. It is a very special day. Let's indulge.

She grabs the cake tray and puts one piece on her plate, then a second one, and another one, and another one. A little tower of cake grows on her plate. She grabs a spoon and cuts through all the pieces at once and starts stuffing her face with cake.

The whole family around the table looks at her completely paralyzed.

MOTHER

What are you doing?!

VALANCY

(with her mouth full)

Happy birthday to me!

Silence around the table. People look at each other confused. The only sound we can hear is Valancy's SMACKING as she stuffs her face with the cake.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

Uncle James, please, would you fill my glass again?

Valancy stretched out her hand with her empty champagne glass.

UNCLE JAMES

Ekhm. If you waited a bit you would know that we have planned a separate toast especially for you.

VALANCY

(with her mouth full)

Oh, really?

MOTHER

Of course! No need to make a scene and behave selfishly!

AUNT WELLINGTON

You didn't want to take the whole attention away from Olivia, did you? You get engaged once! And birthday is every year.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

Exactly, Buba, your behaviour is unacceptable.

Cousin Stickles leans to Valancy and puts her chubby hand on her tiny childlike hand.

COUSIN STICKLES

Besides, I would be careful with spreading the word around, dear. Twenty nine year olds are even harder to marry away than twenty eight.

(MORE)



## COUSIN STICKLES (CONT'D)

And after thirty it's a lost cause,  
let me tell you, dear, I would go as  
far as to say that this year is your  
last chance!

## MOTHER

I would say it's a lost cause already.  
I was married by twenty.

## UNCLE BENJAMIN

(to Cousin Stickles)  
She will become just like you!

## AUNT WELLINGTON

I was married by seventeen!  
(to Uncle Wellington)  
Do you remember our wedding, dear?  
The flowers everywhere...

## OLIVIA

William said that for our wedding  
he will order the white lilies. He  
says the flowers have to be  
beautiful, but not more beautiful  
than me. But he also says it  
wouldn't be possible.

GIGGLES.

## COUSIN STICKLES

White lilies! Dear me, that will be so  
expensive!

## UNCLE WELLINGTON

Our Olivia deserves it. And when I see  
what kind of ring he was able to  
afford I am not worried about Olivia's  
future.

## MOTHER

Show the ring again, dear.

Olivia shows the caricaturally big ring on her finger. Everyone  
SIGHS IN AWE.

## VALANCY

It is bigger than your head.

Shot on Valancy. Pause.

DOLLY OUT:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - NIGHT

The same family sits around the table in the blue castle. There is no roof, big moon hangs down casting light on the lavish table. Stars hang down within reach of hand.

Everyone looks different here. Uncle Benjamin is even fatter, Aunt Wellington's hair is now ridiculously tall and she has to hold it every time she reaches for something on the table. Uncle James' mustache falls into the soup. Olivia is stuffing her face with the pudding enthusiastically. Mother's thin face is now so thin that her eyes look like two huge moons.

Everyone is looking at Valancy in awe.

FANTASY UNCLE BENJAMIN  
You are absolutely right, Valancy,  
it is bigger than her head!

Everybody, including Olivia, LAUGHS.

Olivia, trying to reach for another portion of pudding, spills the whole bowl straight onto her dress. Everyone LAUGHS at her.

Valancy gets up and leaves the room.

EXT. BLUE CASTLE BALLROOM - NIGHT

Valancy walks into a breathtaking, decorated ballroom, where many couples dance. Everyone starts CLAPPING when Valancy enters the room. Everyone smiles to her warmly and pats her back as she walks across the room.

Finally she stops in the middle, where her golden knight is waiting for her. We can finally see his face. IT'S BARNEY.

Barney asks her to dance and they dance together. Suddenly their feet loose touch with the ground and they start floating.

Without stopping the dance, the couple flies higher and higher up, among the golden stars. The camera follows.

Barney starts kissing her passionately on the lips, then on the neck, then on her chest. He starts unbuttoning her dress. Valancy moans with pleasure.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE FROM BLACK:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Cousin Stickles and Mother sit by the table with the three burnt toasts. Mother has an offended face.

Valancy walks in.

VALANCY

Good morning, mother. Good morning  
aunt.

No answer. She takes her place by the table. The women start eating in silence.

MOTHER

Sit up straight, Buba.

VALANCY

Mother... I was wondering if you could  
use my *name*?

Mother looks surprised.

MOTHER

What's wrong with "Buba"? You didn't  
mind it your whole life.

Vacancy's face shows she did.

VALANCY

Well... it's just so... childish.

MOTHER

Then it should sure suit *you*.

VALANCY

I am 29 years old.

MOTHER

Well, one would think that a  
certain wisdom follows with age.  
But what you did yesterday wasn't  
really thought-through.

Valancy is silent.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

We must be on everyone's lips after  
your little performance. And  
Benjamin was quite upset about what  
you did at the store, too! It will  
cost him a lot.

VALANCY  
I did not mean to.

MOTHER  
Why would you make such a scene  
then? On people's eyes!

VALANCY  
I...

Mother and Cousin Stickles look at her, demanding an explanation.

FLASHBACK: The pain attack at the store flashes in front of Valancy's eyes.

VALANCY (CONT'D)  
I do not know. It was nothing.

MOTHER  
Your foolishness can cost you a  
lot.

COUSIN STICKLES  
(terrified)  
He could remove you from his will!

MOTHER  
We have to do something about it.  
You will go to his store and  
apologize.

VALANCY  
But mother, I...

COUSIN STICKLES  
We have to make it look natural.  
You can say we need more tea.

MOTHER  
You will say that you are very  
sorry for you clumsiness and...

VALANCY  
But mother...

MOTHER  
(harshly)  
No time for more nonsense now! Go  
dress up.

COUSIN STICKLES  
Don't forget your wool petticoat!

EXT. STREET - DAY

Valancy walks down the street. Some heads turn around her and some WHISPER. With every little whisper her head hangs even lower down and she tries to hide her face even deeper in her scarf.

INT. STORE - DAY

Valancy walks into the Uncle Benjamin's store.

The mess she caused the day before is gone, but in the place of her accident, TWO APPRENTICES with a set of tools try to put together a new wooden shelf. She looks away, embarrassed, but can hear them talking:

APPRENTICE 1

Do you think she'll end up like her old man?

APPRENTICE 2

You mean freezing to death because his wife didn't let fire in the stoves on 30th of October?

APPRENTICE 1

Well, she fired one day later... But that was too late for the poor chap.

APPRENTICE 2

Those Stirligs... One weirder than another, I tell you...

Valancy turns around and walks out of the store. The little bell by the door RINGS FURIOUSLY when the door shut after her.

The apprentices exchange a look and burst out in LAUGHTER. Uncle Benjamin walks out of the room in the back and gives them a strict look. They stop laughing and get back to work.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Valancy walks energetically down the street, when suddenly she gets another pain attack. She finds a small street between buildings. She hides there, holding her hand on her chest. She leans against a building and slides down to the ground, BREATHING HEAVILY.

JUMPCUT TO:



EXT. STREET - DAY

The same narrow street, but some time has passed. The pain has passed too. Valancy sits on the ground, exhausted.

She gets up. Determination is painted all over her face. She starts walking with a clear destination in her mind.

She reaches a hidden away, shabby building with a pale wooden sign saying "DR. TRENT".

Valancy hesitates for a second, but finally she steps inside.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Valancy is in a small waiting room, alone.

A blasé NURSE (40) enters the room. She raises her eyebrow seeing Valancy.

VALANCY

I... Ekhm. I was wondering if I could see Dr. Trent?

NURSE

Today?

VALANCY

If it's possible, yes.

The nurse walks slowly over to a big desk covered with papers. She opens a huge book lying on the middle of the mess.

Nurse looks at Valancy suspiciously.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

Please.

NURSE

Name?

VALANCY

Stirling. Valancy Stirling.

The nurse grabs a pencil and notes her name down.

NURSE

Sit down and wait.

There are only two wooden, uncomfortable chairs. She sits.

JUMPCUT TO:

Valancy is still waiting. Nurse reads a magazine with her feet on the desk. The door to doctor's office open and a DR. TRENT (60) and a PATIENT walks out.

PATIENT  
Thank you, doctor.

The doctor walks up to the nurse's desk.

DR. TRENT  
Done for the day, darling!

The nurse waves her head in the Valancy's direction. Doctor notices her and SIGHS.

DR. TRENT (CONT'D)  
All right...

Dr. Trent turns around and walks into his office again. Valancy keeps sitting on her chair. Nurse rolls her eyes and gives her a sign to follow the doctor.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Trent sits behind his desk, also covered by a tower of papers. He finds a clean page in his book and without looking at Valancy says:

DR. TRENT  
Your name was...

Valancy clears her throat.

VALANCY  
(very quietly)  
Stirling.

DR. TRENT  
What?

VALANCY  
(louder)  
Stirling. Eehm. Valancy.

Dr. Trent notes something. Long silence. Valancy looks around the room. She looks like she regrets what she has done.

DR. TRENT  
And what is bothering you, Mrs. Stirling?

VALANCY  
Ehm... Miss. Miss Stirling.

Dr. Trent crosses sth out in his book.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

Well... I have been suffering from  
some pains in my chest.

Dr. Trent notes intensely, without looking at Valancy.  
Finally, he grabs his stethoscope.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Close up on Valancy's face. She is undressed and very  
uncomfortable. In the background, Dr. Trent is examining her  
with his stethoscope. He goes back to his desk.

DR. TRENT

You can get dressed.

Valancy starts getting dressed. She sits down on the chair.

DR. TRENT (CONT'D)

Miss Stirling.

For the first time Dr. Trent looks at her closely, with  
present and focused eyes. That makes her uncomfortable.

PHONE RINGS.

Valancy jumps on her chair. Unmoved Dr. Trent slowly picks up  
the phone.

DR. TRENT (CONT'D)

Dr. Trent. Yes? Yes.

Suddenly Dr. Trent also jumps on his chair. He stands up  
abruptly. The phone falls off the desk. The cord flies across  
the desk, hitting the paper tower, which collapses. Papers  
start falling on Valancy.

DR. TRENT (CONT'D)

Yes! Yes? Yes I will be there.

Dr. Trent drops the phone on the desk completely ignoring  
Valancy's presence. He grabs his coat and briefcase and runs  
out of the room.

Valancy keeps sitting on the chair for a long while,  
confused.

The nurse enters the room and swipes the scene with her  
sceptical gaze, making Valancy even more embarrassed.

VALANCY

The doctor forgot all about me.

NURSE

No wonder why. He got a phone call.  
His son ended up in a horrible  
accident.

VALANCY

Oh...

NURSE

His only child!

VALANCY

Oh, I'm sorry.

NURSE

And his wife is dead too. He has no-  
one!

VALANCY

I guess I will have to come back  
another day then.

NURSE

No point in waiting here.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Valancy in front of Dr. Trent's office looks around. She  
doesn't know what to do or where to go. She feels ignored and  
embarrassed.

A car stops in front of her. It's Barney again.

BARNEY

Funny I should see you again.

VALANCY

What's funny about that?

She comes across as annoyed when she speaks.

BARNEY

I see. I won't be bothering you,  
miss.

Barney hides inside of his car again and is about to drive  
away.

VALANCY

Wait!

Barney sticks his head out of the car, surprised.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

Do you happen to know when Roaring  
Abel lives?

BARNEY

Why would you be interested in  
that?

VALANCY

I... I want to visit his daughter.

BARNEY

As a matter of fact I am on my way  
this direction. I can give you a  
lift.

Valancy looks at the car with terrified eyes. Voices appear  
in her head.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (O.S.)

He is a criminal!

MRS SMITH (O.S.)

...probably a wife-killer!

Barney notices her hesitation.

BARNEY

Don't feel obliged to. It's  
probably not respectable enough for  
one like you.

Determined look on Valancy's face.

INT. CAR - DAY

Barney and Valancy sit together in a car in silence. The car  
makes a horrible amount of NOISE. Valancy looks curiously  
around and inspects the vehicle with huge eyes, trying not to  
show it too much.

Barney can see that and smirks to himself.

BARNEY

Ever driven a car before?

VALANCY

No.

Valancy stops looking around and looks firmly ahead instead.

BARNEY

I call her Lady Jane. Never let me down.

VALANCY

I give my objects of affection names too. But not human names. It seems too down to earth to me to give them human names.

Barney smiles surprised.

BARNEY

Really?

VALANCY

Yes. They deserve something more if they make you happy, don't you think?

BARNEY

What names do *you* give then?

VALANCY

Books, for example. I call them "enchanted mirrors of imagination".

BARNEY

What books do you like to read?

VALANCY

John Foster is my favorite author.

BARNEY

(scoffs)

Pff...

Valancy looks out the window, offended. The tight streets of Deerwood disappeared and now there are much fewer houses. People in the streets wear poorer clothes, there are more children playing in the streets. She gets nervous.

VALANCY

Is it still far?

BARNEY

(smirks)

Am I such a bad conversationalist that you wonder?

VALANCY

Oh... Not at all, in fact.



BARNEY  
 (teasingly)  
 The names I give my things are a  
 bit boring, though.

VALANCY  
 I wouldn't worry. You could read  
 some John Foster for inspiration.

BARNEY  
 I am not going to read that  
 fellow's nonsense.

VALANCY  
 You could learn a lot from him. But  
 fortunately it's not you I want to  
 converse with today.

BARNEY  
 If you and Cissy get along so well,  
 how come you never visited her  
 before?

Valancy looks down, ashamed.

VALANCY  
 I...

Barney regains control over the conversation. Valancy becomes  
 uncomfortable.

BARNEY  
 I guess it's not so easy to stand  
 up to your family, especially if  
 you're...  
 (glances at Valancy)  
 ...thirty years old and can decide  
 all about yourself, hm?

VALANCY  
 (angrily)  
 I am *not* thirty. But you are just  
 as they say in the town.

BARNEY  
 I take it as a compliment.

She turns her head away and sits with her arms crossed,  
 looking out on the disappearing houses by the road.

Barney smiles to himself, pleased with the won argument.

They remain silent for the rest of the way.

EXT. ROARING ABEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Barney stops his car in front of a lonely, isolated house. It looks like it might have been nice before, but now is neglected and falling apart. Wintery, barren landscape doesn't help it in looking cosy either.

Valancy tries to get out of the car, but she doesn't know how. She tries nervously to find the handle.

Barney isn't helping her, amused. Finally he leans across Valancy to reach the handle from the driver's seat. He gets very close to Valancy. She inhales sharply, holds her breath, and tries to become as tiny as possible.

When the door is open, Valancy rushes out of the car and can finally exhale.

BARNEY

You are welcome for the ride.

He gives her a sly, but not a vicious smile. Valancy smiles back.

VALANCY

I was being rude. Thank you.

Barney drives away.

Valancy shakes Barney off her mind and walks towards the house.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Valancy walks through a neglected garden and steps onto a porch with a cosy wooden swing with soft pillows on. Naked branches hang down over the roof. In the summer they must create a cosy, secluded shelter, but now they look just depressing.

A bleached sign on the door says "ABEL GAY. CARPENTER".

Valancy KNOCKS. No-one answers. Valancy walks carefully in.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is messy, to say the least. A solid, wooden table in the middle of the room is overflowing with dirty dishes.

VALANCY

Hello?

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Valancy walks into the disorganized living room. There she finds CISSY (29) sleeping on the couch in her nightgown. She is very thin and has a face of an innocent child, but visibly destroyed by illness. She looks like she was in the middle of doing something when she fell asleep.

VALANCY

Cissy?

Cissy opens her eyes slowly.

CISSY

(surprised)

Valancy?

Cissy tries to get up, but gets dizzy and has to sit back down on the couch.

VALANCY

Don't get up. Here.

Valancy helps her with arranging pillows she can lean her back on.

CISSY

How are you, Valancy? I haven't seen you since...

VALANCY

Since we finished school, yes. I'm sorry, I should have visited you a long time ago. Forgive me, Cissy.

Cissy smiles understandingly, as if she knew everything about Valancy's life. The wisdom and experience in her eyes indicates that she's been through much more than a girl her age should be.

CISSY

Don't worry. I am happy to see you now.

VALANCY

How are you?

CISSY

Oh good. Good. Father is out, working. I was about to make some lunch, but I got so tired... I had to rest a bit. Are you hungry?

Valancy nods. Cissy gets up.

CISSY (CONT'D)

Come.

The girls walk to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Cissy looks around the sloppy, dirty kitchen and MOANS.

CISSY

Dear me, what you must be thinking  
of me now, Valancy... Father is  
working all days. He doesn't have  
time to cook and clean. I do what I  
can, I really do...

Cissy is BABBLING to cover her embarrassment. She walks with  
a shaky step to the table and starts collecting the dirty tea  
cups.

CISSY (CONT'D)

I am so glad you came, if only I  
knew you were coming... Now you  
probably won't even think of  
visiting again.

She CHUCKLES nervously, as she tries to carry the cups to the  
bowl of warm water in the kitchen corner. Suddenly the cups  
fall out of her hands and break with SHUTTER. Cissy leans  
against the table, breathing heavily.

Valancy runs to her and catches Cissy before she falls.

VALANCY

Come on, Cissy, sit down.

Valancy helps Cissy walk over to a bench by the kitchen  
window. She covers Cissy with a blanket. Then she finds an  
apron on the floor, ties it around her waist and starts  
washing the dishes.

CISSY

Oh Valancy, but...

VALANCY

Shh, I don't want to hear anything!

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen has gone through a huge metamorphosis. There is no trace of dirty dishes. It's still not the fanciest of kitchens, but now its clean, organized and comfortable.

Valancy and Cissy sit on the bench by the window, sipping tea. Two empty plates suggest they just had a good lunch.

Valancy LAUGHS. It's the first time we see her openly laughing outside of the Blue Castle.

Roaring Abel's carriage parks outside of the window and after a while he walks into the kitchen. He glances on the clean table and then at Valancy.

ROARING ABEL

Sure haven't thought I would see you here, miss.

VALANCY

I should get going...

ROARING ABEL

I am on my way to your house. Gotta finish the porch roof. Just popped by to see if Cissy needed anything, but I see she is well taken care of.

CISSY

Oh, Valancy, will you visit me again?

Cissy looks at Valancy with huge begging eyes, as if she was a child asking her parents for candy.

VALANCY

I will do my best.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Valancy and Roaring Abel ride through the town's streets on Abel's carriage. Heads turn around them.

Finally they stop in front of Valancy's house.

Mother and Cousin Stickles's faces are in the window. They see Valancy hopping down from the carriage and LAUGHING with Roaring Abel.

Mother EXCLAIMS IN SHOCK, Cousin Stickles starts CRYING.

INT. HALL - DAY

Valancy walks into the living room, where Mother and Aunt are waiting for her already, with their arms crossed and offended faces.

MOTHER

What on earth do you think you are doing?!

COUSIN STICKLES

Did he force you to get on that carriage with him? This man is unpredictable, Buba, you could have died!

MOTHER

Or worse... someone could see you!

Cousin Stickles GASPS.

VALANCY

He offered to give me a ride and I agreed.

The women stare at Valancy for a while. They decide to ignore what she just said.

MOTHER

(to Cousin Stickles)

We will say Buba did it in her own defence. He was drunk and inestimable.

Cousin Stickles nods enthusiastically.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

And you will not leave the house for a week.

VALANCY

I'm not a child!

COUSIN STICKLES

How can you talk like this to your mother?

Cousin Stickles slides down on the couch and starts SOBBING.

MOTHER

You behave like one! You can't take responsibility for yourself. Clearly you can't be let out on your own.



Valancy turns around and runs upstairs to her room.

Cousin Stickles looks at Mother, terrified.

COUSIN STICKLES

(whispering)

Do you really think someone could  
see them?

MONTAGE:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Valancy walks into the living room, where Mother sits in her chair, knitting enthusiastically and ignoring Valancy's presence with an offended face expression.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Cousin Stickles and Valancy stand next to a sad looking, not blooming rose bush. Valancy looks bored.

COUSIN STICKLES

It didn't bloom this year either...  
You should water it more, Buba. Maybe  
then it will bloom next year. Or maybe  
you should water it less... Yes, in  
fact, I think you should shield it  
from rain. But I do not know if it  
will help, unfortunately, Buba, I do  
not think you have a hand to plants.  
Oh! Maybe you could try to fertilize  
it? That's a wonderful idea! Benjamin  
told me he just got a fertiliser at  
his store! Buba, you should..

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

SHOT ON Valancy looking down with a disgusted grimace on her face. We can't see what he is doing, but we can hear

Cousin Stickle's GRUNTS, SIGHS and HEAVY PANTING.

The camera slides down on Cousin Stickle lying in her bed on her stomach and Valancy's hands smearing something into her naked back.

There is a jar of Redfern's Liniment on the bedside table.

CUT TO:

INT. VALANCY'S ROOM - MORNING

Valancy gets up and looks at her distorted reflection in the mirror - just the same way as the previous morning. This time her eyes are more swollen and she looks even older.

KNOCKING ON THE DOOR.

COUSIN STICKLES  
Breakfast!

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

VALANCY  
I would like to go to the library  
today.

MOTHER  
It is out of question.

VALANCY  
I have been home for a week! I want to  
borrow the newest John Foster book.

MOTHER  
Not that nonsense again. You waste way  
too much time reading those books.

COUSIN STICKLES  
All those novels are just  
demoralising! Isn't that right,  
Amelia?

VALANCY  
They are not novels, they are nature  
books. About birds and plants.

MOTHER  
I said it's out of question.

Silence around the table again. The only hearable sound is  
Cousin Stickle's loud, obnoxious CRUNCHING of the toast.

END MONTAGE.

INT. VALANCY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Valancy is in her nightgown, ready for bed. She finds a book hidden under her pillow. She opens it on the page marked with a bookmark - one of the last pages - and begins to read.

A delicate smile appears on her face. She turns the page.

CLOSE UP on the page, with the words "THE END".

Valancy sighs and turns the pages all the way back to the first one. It says:

*"Thistle Harvest by John Foster. Chapter one: The forest".*

JOHN FOSTER (V.O.)

"The woods are so human that to know them one must live with them...."

FORREST SOUNDS in the background: WHISTLING OF THE LEAVES and TWIRLING OF THE BIRDS.

VOICEOVER

"...An occasional saunter through them, keeping to the well-trodden paths, will never admit us to their intimacy. If we wish to be friends we must seek them out and win them by frequent, reverent visits at all hours..."

Shot on Valancy, still in her room, but suddenly surrounded by branches full of green leaves. She looks around and smiles. A little sparrow sits on her shoulder.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

Valancy walks in the Blue Castle fairytale forest. Her bare feet step on soft green grass. Every time she touches the ground, the grass magically climbs on her foot and hugs her ankles, creating pretty shoes.

Valancy touches a cranberry bush, which magically comes alive, wraps around her body and turns into a stunning dress made thoroughly out of branches, leaves and pine cones.

Forest flowers form into a flower crown that lands on Valancy's head.

Cranberry fruit touch her face and make her cheeks and lips red. Valancy begins to dance.

Suddenly Valancy falls on the ground.

VALANCY

Au!

INT. VALANCY'S ROOM - NIGHT

The book slides from her lap and falls down on the floor with a LOUD SOUND. The forest disappears.

Valancy is on her bed, PANTING and holding her hand on her heart. The room becomes blurry and we can hear a FAST, INTENSE HEARTBEAT.

Valancy tries to open the window, but it's stuck. She sneaks out of the room.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

She tries to hear if there are any sounds in the living room downstairs. The only sound hearable is LOUD SNORING from a bedroom next door.

She sneaks out of the house.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

It is a quiet evening and the street lights are on. She sits down on the porch and wraps her sweater tightly around her. Her breath turns into steam in the cold air.

Valancy calms down gradually. The HEARTBEAT SOUND slows down.

She looks around on the empty street. A young POSTMAN (17) approaches the garden.

POSTMAN

G'day miss.

VALANCY

Day?

POSTMAN

It is a little late, I suppose.  
School by day, earning for a living  
at night, you see. A letter to  
Valancy Sterling.

VALANCY

Really?

Postman hands over the letter and walks away. She looks at the letter addressed to "MISS STERLING" in disbelief. Her name is misspelled, but it is a letter to her!

She turns around and listens to the sounds coming from the house. It's quiet. Valancy opens the letter. She reads it. Her face turns pale.

DR. TRENT (V.O.)

Dear Miss Sterling. I regret to inform you that you have a very dangerous and fatal heart disease - angina pectoris, complicated with an aneurism. I am afraid that the disease is in the last stages. There is unfortunately not much that can be done for you.

Shot on her unclear face. She gets up, the world is whirling.

DR. TRENT (V.O.)

Avoid all severe muscular efforts, never run, and take great care while walking uphill. And most importantly, at all cost avoid any excitement. Any sudden shock or jolt might be fatal.

She stumbles. The picture is blurry.

VALANCY

(whispers)

But I haven't lived yet.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

LITTLE OLIVIA (6) with two ponytails tied with pink ribbons, wearing a pink puffy dress, is surrounded by a group of girls. Among them is LITTLE VALANCY (7), a pale, thin child with thin dark hair.

LITTLE OLIVIA

Let's make dust piles! The biggest one wins!

The girls make dust piles with focused faces.

SMALL GIRL

Olivia has the biggest one! Let's put  
all our dust on Olivia's pile and make  
a tremendous one!

The girls CHEER and put all the dust on Olivias pile, except of  
Valancy, who is trying to cover her pile.

LITTLE VALANCY

Please, don't take it. I want my own  
dust pile.

The girls destroy Valancy's pile, LAUGHING.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Little Olivia, Little Valancy and Mother stand in the living  
room.

LITTLE OLIVIA

She pushed me into mud to destroy  
my new shoes on purpose!

LITTLE VALANCY

That's not true! It was an  
accident!

MOTHER

(To Valancy)

You were very selfish. Apologize to  
Olivia.

LITTLE VALANCY

NO!!!

Little Valancy SCREAMS and STUMPS her feet. Mother grabs her  
roughly.

MOTHER

It is not ladylike to show your  
emotions! You will spend a week in  
your room thinking about it!

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

VALANCY  
(louder)  
But I haven't lived yet.

FLASHBACK:

INT. DANCING ROOM - EVENING

The room is full of teenagers. Dance floor in the middle.

Some couples dance together awkwardly. A group of GIRLS in the corner WHISPER AND GIGGLE looking over at a group of BOYS. TEENAGE VALANCY (15) sits alone at one of the chairs.

A TEENAGE BOY (16) sits next to her and smiles. He grabs her hand delicately and leans for a kiss. Teenage Valancy's cheeks get red, she runs away.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

VALANCY  
(louder)  
But I haven't lived yet.

FLASHBACK:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Stirlings sit together around the dinner table.

COUSIN STICKLES  
Isn't it wonderful that Betty is getting married?

MOTHER  
Her fiancé is a very handsome young man.

UNCLE JAMES  
His heritage is quite handsome too, I hear.

COUSIN STICKLES  
Buba, dear, I talked to Betty and I got an impression that she wants to ask you to be her bridesmaid!



EXT. CHURCH STAIRS - DAY

COUSIN BETTY (23) in wedding dress and her FIANCE (26) walk out of the church followed by bridesmaids in pink dresses.

Valancy stands in her old brown dress, next to Cousin Stickles among the CHEERING and CLAPPING family.

COUSIN STICKLES  
(leaning to Valancy and  
whispering)  
Well, she just didn't want to... spoil  
the effect. You must understand, it is  
her wedding day!

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. GARDEN - EVENING

VALANCY  
(screaming)  
BUT I HAVE NOT LIVED YET!

Valancy SCREAMS and grabs garden scissor lying on the porch.

She starts to cut the rose bush. She cuts branch after branch and throws them up in the air.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - NIGHT

Blue Castle forest is a very different place now - eerie, disturbing and scary. There are no more magical branches around, only dirty roots twining around. Owls are HOWLING in the darkness.

Valancy hasn't changed to her Blue Castle version either. It is the real Valancy and she is out of control. She destroys the trees in her madness attack.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - EVENING

Valancy in the garden cuts and cuts. Loose branches fly around.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - NIGHT

She finds the little canoe covered with spider webs. She SCREAMS as she destroys it.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - EVENING

Suddenly she stops. She looks forward with empty eyes. The scissors fall out of her hand. She PUTS HER HAND ON THE HEART - she is having another pain attack.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - NIGHT

She falls down on the muddy beach. Her face is twisted with pain. Parts of destroyed scenery lie around her.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - EVENING

Valancy lies on the grass in the garden, surrounded by branches of the demolished rose bush. She slowly faints and her face becomes blurry.

The camera focuses on the letter lying in front of her. We can read the words:

DR. TRENT (V.O.)  
If you take great care of yourself,  
you might live another year.

FADE TO BLACK.

**END OF EPISODE 1**



THE BLUE CASTLE

EPISODE 2  
"SPRING"

Written by  
Magdalena Kuna

Based on  
The Blue Castle  
By  
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EXT. ALLEY - DAY

TWO SPARROWS sit and twirl on a branch of a tree.

One of the birds flies away. Camera follows the bird, showing different spring landscapes in the background:

- White SNOWDROPS popping up in snow patches on the grass
- A BUTTERFLY flying in the sun
- Fresh new leaves popping up on the branches
- BUMBLEBEES guzzling nectar on spring flowers

The bird lands on a window frame on the outside of a house. The curtains on the inside are drawn together, but the camera sneaks into the dark room through a narrow gap.

In the darkness appears a title...

**TITLE: SPRING**

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dark living room in Valancy's house. The curtains are drawn closed, which gives the room gloomy and depressing feel.

HEAVY SILENCE is hanging around the table, by which the whole Stirling clan is gathered.

It feels like someone had died. Cousin Stickles is CRYING QUIETLY, Mother's face expresses even bigger disapproval than usually.

COUSIN STICKLES  
(sobbing)  
We should have reacted differently.

UNCLE WELLINGTON  
We should have taken her to the  
doctor after all.

COUSIN STICKLES  
That's what I was saying all along!

Silence. Only quiet SNIFFLING can be heard.

UNCLE JAMES  
You should have been stricter with  
her in her childhood, Amelia.

MOTHER

I can't see how I could have been!

Everyone nods agreeingly.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

What are we going to do now?

UNCLE JAMES

Well, I think it's time, Benjamin.

CLOSE UP on Uncle Benjamin's serious face.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Uncle Benjamin walks down the street full of small, tightly placed houses. He has a determined look on his face.

A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN walks down the street towards him. Uncle Benjamin lifts his hat slightly.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Good day, Mrs. Wilson.

The woman barely nods, doesn't respond and increases her tempo.

A COUPLE comes down the street. Uncle Benjamin forces a smile on his face and starts lifting his hat.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Mr. and Mrs....

The couple walks over to the other side of the road, pretending they don't see Uncle Benjamin.

He pretends he was coughing.

Another TWO WOMEN approach.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Taylor. Mrs. Jones.

They smile to Uncle Benjamin. The second he passes them they lean their heads to each other and start whispering.

MRS. JONES

That he dares walking around like nothing has happened...

MRS. TAYLOR

I always thought that girl was just a bizarre old maid, but *this* is unthinkable.

MRS. JONES

Absolutely. An insult to our society, that's what.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Old wooden door. A chubby, hairy fist KNOCKS on the door.

No answer.

Knocking again. Long wait. Finally the door opens from the inside. It's Roaring Abel with a BOTTLE OF BEER in his hand. He looks at the visitor surprised, BURPS, and shuts the door.

SHOT ON the owner of the knocking hand - it's Uncle Benjamin. He is o u t r a g e d.

He KNOCKS again, harder and angrier. Another long wait. Finally the door opens again.

This time it's Valancy. She has red cheeks, apron tied around her waist, towels hanging over her shoulder and a bowl full of warm water in her hands.

VALANCY

(smiles)

Oh, so they sent *you* this time.

Valancy turns around and disappears in the dark hall, leaving the door open.

VALANCY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(from a distance)

Come on in!

Uncle's Benjamin makes a HIGH-PITCHED NOISE resembling the word "Buba!", looks around nervously, takes a reluctant step in and quickly shuts the door.

The camera stays outside. CLOSE UP on small roses that start to bloom on the branches over the porch roof.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Uncle Benjamin walks into a cluttered, but organized kitchen.



Valancy has her hands full. She has some flour on her nose and is busy kneading a dough. Water is cooking on the stove.

A SMALL KITTEN is playing with a ball of yarn in the corner.

Valancy looks different than before. No trace of the old-fashioned hairstyle - her dark curly hair is hanging freely down. She looks more full, prominent and almost... pretty?

On a bench in the corner of the kitchen sits Roaring Abel. He's a bit drunk, but alert.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Buba...

No reaction. The curious kitten climbs on the tabletop. Valancy wants to stop it, but her hands are dirty. She grabs the kitten between her elbows and puts it down on the chair.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Ekhm... Valancy.

Valancy looks at Uncle Benjamin.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

We are all very concerned for you.

VALANCY

Are you?

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Yes! You should come home. For your mother's sake.

VALANCY

(genuinely surprised)

Oh, she wants me to come back?

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Of course!

VALANCY

Why didn't she come, then?

Uncle Benjamin looks caught off-guard.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Well... You... You broke her heart! Leaving like this! Without a word of explanation!

VALANCY

Oh, I explained myself. I told her  
I am moving to Abel's to keep his  
house and nurse Cissy.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

But Buba....

Roaring Able gives Uncle Benjamin a threatening look from the corner. Uncle Benjamin tries a different strategy and changes his attitude.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

(gently)

But Valancy... dear... You can't  
keep house for this... man.

VALANCY

Oh don't worry, uncle Benjamin. He  
pays me a fair wage.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

He pays you!

ROARING ABEL

Of course. I reward good work as  
deserved.

Uncle Benjamin tries not to lose his temper. He inhales and exhales deeply.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

All right. All right. What's your  
plan? This has no future. You can't  
go on like this forever, keeping a  
house for an outcast until you get  
old.

Valancy glances on her coat hanging in the hall. CLOSE UP on the LETTER FROM DR. TRENT is sticking out of the pocket.

VALANCY

Oh, I'm not planning to.

Uncle Benjamin loses his temper after all and raises his voice again.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

What about Olivia? Have you no  
mercy for her?

VALANCY

What would she need my mercy? I think she is too occupied with being engaged to even notice.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

See? You are thinking only about yourself! How do you think your nonsense will influence her reputation? What will her fiancé say when he hears you are serving this old drunk?

Roaring Abel gets up. Uncle Benjamin takes a step back.

VALANCY

I truly hope it would not matter for him. For Olivia's sake. And if it does, then it is better to find out before the wedding. You would not want Olivia to marry someone who does not care for her, would you?

UNCLE BENJAMIN

BUT HE IS RICH!

Roaring Abel raises his eyebrow. Uncle Benjamin realizes he said too much in presence of a non-family member.

VALANCY

I wouldn't worry too much about it, uncle. I am sure William's family will think I am doing a honorable thing, helping someone in need.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

(whispering loudly)  
But his *daughter*...

Roaring Abel takes a few slow steps towards Uncle Benjamin. Uncle Benjamin hides strategically behind Valancy.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

You know what they say about her!

Valancy isn't focusing on what Uncle Benjamin is saying. The kitten walks straight to the bowl full of egg yolks standing on the table. She grabs the kitten last second.

VALANCY

Cissy is a wonderful friend.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

(looses his temper)

This is not a company for you! That girl is... shameless! And you are shameless for doing what you've done to your family!

Roaring Abel walks around Valancy to get to Uncle Benjamin. Uncle Benjamin walks around the table to move further away from Roaring Abel.

ROARING ABEL

(calmly)

I don't think it's smart of you to insult a man in his own house.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Buba, you pack your things and get back home at once! At once!!!

Roaring Abel starts walking faster. Uncle Benjamin starts to jog trot around the table on his short legs. They start a weird choreography of chasing each other around the kitchen table.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

We've had enough of your nonsense, Buba! Enough! We are a respectable family and you won't be one to destroy our name!

The kitten jumps out of Valancy's arms and joins the running around the table.

Valancy starts LAUGHING.

VALANCY

I don't mean to destroy the family name.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

But you do! Everyone talks about us! "The Stirlings are friendly with that drunk", they say, or "they are sabotaging our efforts to exclude him from our society"! I can't allow this! You pack your things at once!

ROARING ABEL

You bastard...

Roaring Abel stops abruptly and changes the direction. The trotting Uncle Benjamin BUMPS straight into the firm silhouette of Roaring Abel.

Roaring Abel, thin but strong, wraps his arms around Uncle Benjamin and LIFTS him with a loud GRUNT. Uncle's short legs dingle in the air.

The kitten jumps up and bites into Uncle Benjamin's dingling foot.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Auuu!!

Valancy LAUGHS so hard she has to sit down on a chair.

Roaring Abel starts to CARRY Uncle Benjamin out of the room.

Uncle Benjamin is red with fury and the few strands of hair he has left are sticking out different directions.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Put me down!!!

ROARING ABEL

(panting and grunting)

Dear lord, you should cut down on pie, Stirling.

Roaring Abel carries Uncle Benjamin out of the room.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (O.S.)

PUT ME DOWN NOW!!!

Valancy runs to the kitchen window, laughing.

I/E. KITCHEN/PORCH - DAY

Valancy looks out onto the porch from the kitchen window.

The entrance door open from a hard kick from the inside and Uncle Benjamin's round body rolls out on the grassy courtyard in front of the house.

He gets up quickly, looks around terrified, fixes his hair and his tie.

Roaring Abel gets back to the house, SHUTTING THE DOOR behind him.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Roaring Abel walks back into the kitchen, PANTING.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (O.S.)  
 (furiously)  
 You will regret it! You will regret  
 it!!!

ROARING ABEL  
 You let me know if he bothers you  
 again.

VALANCY  
 I will.

Valancy finishes packing some bread and milk into a cloth and gives it to Abel with a smile. He looks her in the eyes.

ROARING ABEL  
 Your little finger is worth more  
 than all those Stirlings together!  
 Remember that!

She smiles.

ROARING ABEL (CONT'D)  
 You girls don't wait up for me  
 tonight!

Roaring Abel leaves.

Valancy looks around the empty kitchen, SIGHS with a smile and LAUGHS.

The water on the stove starts cooking, and she makes two cups of tea, puts them on a tray and carries them out of the kitchen.

She passes the hall, but the camera stays and focuses on the LETTER in her coat.

INT. CISSY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Valancy walks into a small bedroom, where Cissy is lying in the bed in her night gown. Valancy puts the tea cups on the bedside table and helps Cissy sit up in her bed.

CISSY  
 Which one was it this time?

VALANCY

Uncle Benjamin. But your dad showed  
him...

Valancy sits on the side of Cissy's bed and starts telling  
the story inaudibly.

UPLIFTING MUSIC starts to play.

MONTAGE:

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

The girls walk in the garden. There are much more flower  
blooming now. Cissy is wearing a cardigan thrown over her  
long nightgown. Valancy holds her and helps her walk.

They pluck wild flowers from the garden. Cissy makes a FLOWER  
CROWN and puts it on Valancy's head.

CUT TO:

INT. ABEL'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Barney and Roaring Abel play cards on the living room table.  
Cissy knits and Valancy reads a book on the couch. She  
glances at Barney's profile.

CUT TO:

INT. CISSY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Valancy and Cissy lie squeezed together in Cissy's bed.  
Valancy reads out loud from a THICK BOOK. On the cover we can  
read "JOHN FOSTER". Both girls have excited faces.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN / HALL - DAY

Valancy cooks in the kitchen, Cissy looks out the window.  
Suddenly Valancy gets pain in her chest.

She walks quickly out of the kitchen, with her hand on her  
chest, and tries to catch her breath in the hall.

Cissy looks after her, worried.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Valancy and Cissy talk in the garden, which is now completely green and lively.

Barney comes in through the gate with a bag of groceries.

Cissy looks into the bag like a curious child and finds an ORANGE. She jumps joyfully and wraps her arms around Barney.

He laughs, gives back the hug and lifts the small Cissy up in the air.

Valancy looks away.

CUT TO:

INT. ABEL'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Roaring Abel plays a CHEERFUL SONG ON A HARMONICA.

Valancy, Cissy and Barney listen and CLAP TO THE RHYTHM. Barney glances at Valancy's profile.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Valancy packs second breakfast for Roaring Abel. He kisses Cissy on her forehead and leaves.

The girls wave goodbye to him through the kitchen window as he gets on his carriage and rides away.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. PORCH - EVENING

Roaring Abel and Cissy sit around a dinner table on the porch. The sun is setting.

The music fades out.

Valancy walks out of the house carrying a pot of a hot, steaming stew and puts it in the middle of the table.

Cissy CLAPS HER HANDS enthusiastically.

CISSY

Oh, that smells wonderful, Valancy!



ROARING ABEL  
You are quite a cook.

Valancy smiles and sits down.

BARNEY (O.S.)  
I hope there is some extra.

Barney walks in through the gate. Roaring Abel finds an extra chair and invites Barney to sit down.

Barney gives Cissy a small bouquet of wild flowers.

BARNEY (CONT'D)  
With compliments for the hostess.

Cissy GIGGLES, takes the flowers and hides her face in the bouquet to smell it.

Barney catches Valancy looking at that scene with jealous eyes. She breaks the eye contact and gets up quickly.

VALANCY  
I will find an extra plate.

Valancy walks out.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Valancy tries to reach up for a plate and a set of cutlery standing on a shelf. Someone walks into the kitchen. She turns around - it is Barney.

He walks towards the shelf, helps her reach for the plate. Then he to the bowl of warm water, rolls up his sleeves and starts washing his hands.

BARNEY  
I hope you don't mind me inviting myself to dinner.

VALANCY  
Not at all. It sure cheers Cissy up to have some company.

BARNEY  
I hope it's not the only reason you don't mind.

Valancy gets uncomfortable.

VALANCY  
The food is getting cold.

She walks out of the kitchen passing Barney without looking at him.

EXT. PORCH - EVENING

THE MUSIC comes on again.

TIMELAPSE: Valancy, Barney, Cissy and Abel eat dinner, talk and laugh. The sun is setting. After a while Cissy and Valancy leave. Abel and Barney stay up late til it's completely dark, drinking and talking enthusiastically.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. ABEL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Valancy cleans windows in the living room. Cissy lies on the couch in her pillows and strokes the kitten playing on her lap. Roaring Abel comes into the room.

ROARING ABEL  
Good day, ladies.

He kisses Cissy on her forehead. Cissy twists her face.

CISSY  
Father! You are not supposed to  
drink at work!

ROARING ABEL  
Pardon me, it was after work.

Cissy gives him a sceptical look.

ROARING ABEL (CONT'D)  
I grabbed a glass with some old  
pals from Chidley's Corner. They  
asked me to fix the railing before  
the dancing on Saturday. It was  
torn to pieces last time.

CISSY  
Ehh, there wouldn't be a dancing  
without the boys fighting... Isn't  
it right, Valancy?

VALANCY  
I would not know. I have never been  
to a dancing.

Cissy and Roaring Abel look at each other surprised.

CISSY

Never?

VALANCY

No.

CISSY

Oh, Valancy, dear! You must go! Go now, this Saturday!

VALANCY

No, I don't think it's a good idea.

ROARING ABEL

Of course it is! I am going there too, I will escort you.

VALANCY

No, I'm not sure... I've never...

CISSY

Oh, Valancy, do it for me! Father will take care of you, you don't have to worry!

VALANCY

But...

Valancy doesn't manage to finish the sentence - Roaring Abel starts SINGING A FOLK SONG. He grabs her and starts DANCING with Valancy around the living room.

Valancy is still holding a wet towel and in one hand and a foamy sponge in the other. Abel sings and leads Valancy around the room.

They stop by Cissy on the couch. Abel LIFTS Cissy up on her legs and continues dancing around, holding around both girls. Everyone is LAUGHING.

Finally the song comes to an end and they stop. The three of them stand in the middle of the living room, embracing each other and trying to catch a breath.

Valancy looks at them seriously.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

There is one problem.

CISSY

What is it?

VALANCY

I have nothing to wear.

Cissy gives Roaring Abel a look. He nods and smirks.

INT. STORE - DAY

Valancy walks into Uncle Benjamin's store. The BELL RINGS above her head, drawing everyone's attention to her. Uncle Benjamin is nowhere to be seen.

A LARGE GROUP OF MEN is gathered around the spice wall Valancy once destroyed. Valancy walks over there, curious.

All the shelves are filled with BROWN GLASS JARS with Dr. Redfern's face smiling from them. There are hundreds of them, stretching from the floor all the way up to the ceiling.

A POSTER on the side shows the bigger version of Redfern's round face with his round glasses. The big, red slogan says:

"DR. REDFERN'S HAIR VIGOR

WHY BE BALD? WHY LOSE YOUR MANLY BEAUTY? TRY REDFERN'S HAIR VIGOR - IT KEEPS YOU YOUNG"

MAN 1

This is revolutionary!

MAN 2

I will take three jars!

A BALD MAN pushes through the crowd and stands next to Valancy.

BALD MAN

How many are you taking?

VALANCY

Oh, no I'm not taking any. I don't believe in this fraud.

BALD MAN

People around the whole country swear that it helped!

VALANCY

People around the whole country spend their money on dud, then.

BALD MAN

Dud or not, the truth is that the man has made a fortune on his specifics. There has to be something in it! They say his house looks like a castle! He has millions!

VALANCY

Do you think he has hair too?

Valancy LAUGHS and leaves the crowd and walks further in, straight into the clothes department.

She walks into the lane full of all kinds, shapes and colors of dresses hanging in long rows. She looks at them in awe.

She finds the GREEN DRESS Olivia tried the other day. She considers trying it, but then she smiles to herself and turns her head no.

Suddenly she can hear some WHISPERING behind the dress.

WHISPERING LADY 1

Yes, I also heard he is the father of her child!

Valancy shakes her head disapprovingly and rolls her eyes. She is about to walk away, when she hears more:

WHISPERING LADY 2

Is that true? Barney Snaith?

Valancy stops.

WHISPERING LADY 1

Absolutely. He came to town just around two months before she was visibly pregnant. I remember it as if it was today!

She moves the green dress slightly and looks through a buttonhole.

There are THREE WOMEN talking to each other among tall shelves full of hats. One of them is a SELLING LADY behind the hat counter. Two other lean to her and listen.

SELLING LADY

And they keep so close!  
Unbelievable!

WHISPERING LADY 1

It's true! I've seen him and Abel drive around in that awful car many times!

WHISPERING LADY 2

But what happened that they aren't together, then?

WHISPERING LADY 1

When the baby died they had a horrible argument. She said she didn't want to marry him and he got just furious.

SELLING LADY

And then the baby died and they couldn't even look at each other.

Valancy's hand clenches into a fist on the dress.

CLOSE UP: Above her head the dress is on the verge of slipping off the hanger. Valancy can't see it.

WHISPERING LADY 2

But they are friendly now?

SELLING LADY

Well, apparently when he heard she was sick, he realized he still loved her.

WHISPERING LADY 1

But she doesn't want to take him back! She loves him too and doesn't want him to hurt when she is dead.

The ladies nod understandingly.

Valancy starts breathing fast and THE DRESS SLIPS DOWN, falling on her and revealing Valancy to the ladies.

The ladies stare at Valancy, leaning towards them and holding the dress in her hand.

VALANCY

I... would... like to buy this dress, please.

SELLING LADY

(suspicious)

Don't you want to try it first?

VALANCY

No, this one will be just fine.  
Thank you.

SELLING LADY

Very well.

The selling lady packs the dress into a box and gives it to Valancy.

SELLING LADY (CONT'D)

You will have to pay by the counter  
in front of the store.

Valancy walks away. She can still hear whispering:

WHISPERING LADY 1

Was that not that Stirling girl?

Valancy walks to the front of the store with her big box and places it on the counter. She RINGS A LITTLE BELL standing on the counter.

Uncle Benjamin walks out of the back room with a smile on his face. The smile disappears the second he recognizes Valancy.

He looks down on the box and opens it.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

(outraged)

You are not going to get that from  
me!

VALANCY

Oh, I don't want to get it. I want  
to buy it.

Valancy puts some bills on the box.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

Abel was so kind to pay me up  
front. I need this dress for  
Saturday's dancing, you see.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Does your poor mother know about  
this?

VALANCY

No, but please, say hello to her  
from me if you see her. I am afraid  
I am too busy these days to visit.

Uncle Benjamin makes an OUTRAGED SOUND, stares at Valancy and doesn't move. Valancy stares back and waits. Finally she points at the dress.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

Would you mind? I have to get back home.

Uncle Benjamin grabs the Valancy's pointing hand and leans over the counter. His red face is just a few centimeters away from hers.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Yes. You need to get back home.  
Your poor mother cries her eyes out every day. You must have mercy for her.

Valancy dries her face of the drops of Uncle Benjamin's spit that landed on her nose.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Take the dress if you want to. Take it! I don't want any money for it! Take it and go straight home!

Valancy moves her face away from Uncle Benjamin and reveals a long line of people waiting to pay for their wares behind her.

Everyone is staring at the scene. Uncle Benjamin sends a fake smile that looks more like he wants to murder everyone.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Fine.

He grabs the bills and starts looking for change.

UNCLE BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Fine. Just wait. You will come back begging us for mercy. Just wait.

Uncle Benjamin throws some coins on the box.

Valancy walks out of the store, smiling to everyone. The bell above the door RINGS.

Uncle Benjamin starts serving the next clients with a murdering look on his outraged face.



EXT. GARDEN / PORCH - EVENING

Valancy is back near Roaring Abel's house with her big box. Barney's car is parked by the house.

Cissy and Barney are LAUGHING IN THE DISTANCE. Valancy walks around the corner of the house and leans against the fence where she can see the porch.

Barney and Cissy sit on the swing together. He is telling her a story and she is LAUGHING.

CLOSE UP in SLOW MOTION on Barney's laughing eyes looking at Cissy, Cissy's hand touching Barney's thigh when she laughs.

Cissy notices Valancy.

CISSY

Valancy!

Valancy waves to Cissy, opens the gate and walks into the garden. She steps onto the porch.

CISSY (CONT'D)

Ooh, look at that big box! Show us what you got!

VALANCY

Cissy...

Barney smiles politely to Valancy. She doesn't dare to look up at him. Her cheeks are red of embarrassment.

BARNEY

I would love to see, but I have to hurry. I have some errands to run.

Barney kisses Cissy on the cheek. Cissy wraps her arms around his neck and gives him a hug. Valancy tries to look away.

Barney walks away. We can hear the CAR ENGINE STARTING AND DRIVING AWAY.

JUMPCUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - EVENING

Cissy sits on the wooden swing, under a thick blanket, supported on pillows.

VALANCY (O.S.)

I'm coming out!

Cissy smiles and CLAPS HER HANDS together in anticipation. Nothing happens for a little while.

VALANCY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
No, I can't go like this. I'm staying. I'm going to change.

CISSY  
No, please! Please show me!

We can hear APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS and Valancy walks out of the house onto the porch.

CISSY (CONT'D)  
Ooohhh...

SHOT ON Valancy. She is wearing her green puffy dress and looks like a completely different person. She looks very pretty, but there is a huge discomfort painted all over her face.

VALANCY  
I can't possibly go anywhere like this!

CISSY  
You look out of this world, Valancy!

VALANCY  
I don't look like me!  
(disgusted)  
I look like my cousin Olivia!

CISSY  
Wait. I have an idea.

Cissy moves her blanket and stands up slowly. She takes a few steps into the garden and picks some red cranberry fruit and braids them together to create a NECKLACE. She puts the necklace on Valancy's neck and a little branch of it in her hair.

CISSY (CONT'D)  
Is that better?

Valancy looks at her reflection in the window. She smiles and nods. She wraps a SHAWL around her arms.

CISSY (CONT'D)  
Come on, show me how this dress moves in the dance! It's absolutely dreamy!

Cissy sits back down on her spot on the swing. Valancy dances. The girls LAUGH.

Roaring Abel parks his carriage with a horse outside of the house.

                          CISSY (CONT'D)  
Oh, look, father is here!

                          ROARING ABEL  
                          (from the carriage)  
Ready?

Valancy tries to climb up on the carriage, but the puffs of the dress aren't making it easy for her. Finally she takes the place next to Roaring Abel. She fixes her shawl that slid down.

Abel looks at her and whistles approvingly.

                          ROARING ABEL (CONT'D)  
I see you have something to wear  
now!

Valancy shakes her head feeling absolutely ridiculous.

EXT. CHIDLEY'S CORNER - EVENING

Valancy and Abel arrive in front of an OLD BARN. We can hear LOUD MUSIC coming from inside, CHATTER, LAUGHTER and GIRLS SQUEALING.

There are many people outside. Some couples are going out, groups of girls are coming in, groups of young men hang around outside and WHISTLE when GIGGLING GIRLS pass them.

CLOSE UPS:

- dresses with short sleeves and big cleavages,
- feet in frivolous shoes on high heels,
- flowers in girls' loose hair,
- men's arms wrapped tightly around the girls' waists,
- men's half exposed chests under half-unbuttoned shirts.

Roaring Abel helps Valancy to get off the carriage. She lets her shawl slide slightly down, exposing a bit more of her shoulders.

Roaring Abel offers Valancy his arm. They walk into the barn.

INT. OLD BARN - NIGHT

Valancy and Roaring Abel walk into the room stuffed with people dancing and talking. There is a lot of smoke in the air.

The band in the corner is playing UPBEAT COUNTRY MUSIC. The volume is deafening.

Roaring Abel and Valancy try to find their way through the crowd. Valancy turns around to say something to Abel. They had been separated. Valancy looks around trying to spot him, with no luck.

She walks further alone. She gets to the dance floor and starts watching the dancing couples.

Men are grabbing and lifting women, women laugh and shake their dresses, exposing their legs. Group of men APPLAUDS.

Valancy is intimidated, but also fascinated. She can't look away. She starts swaying to the rhythm of music and smiles.

The song comes to an end and EVERYONE CLAPS. The band starts playing next one. Everyone in the crowd knows that one - they CHEER and start dancing a group choreography, where partners change very often.

A YOUNG MAN (30), sweaty and in a half-unbuttoned shirt, stands next to Valancy and looks at her intensely.

YOUNG MAN  
(barely audible through  
the noise)  
Wanna dance?

VALANCY  
Sorry?

YOUNG MAN  
DANCE?

The man grabs her and drags her onto the dance floor. Valancy follows along and starts dancing to the choreography she doesn't know.

The partners change. Now there is another MAN in front of Valancy. They do couple of movements and the partners change again. That repeats couple of times.

Valancy is confused. In the next partner change, she sneaks out of the dance floor and sits down on a chair in the corner of the room trying to catch her breath.

JUMPCUT TO:

INT. OLD BARN - NIGHT

It's much later in the evening, there are fewer people inside, but everyone is visibly more drunk. A MAN asks Valancy to dance, but she refuses politely.

EXT. CHIDLEY'S CORNER - NIGHT

Valancy walks out to get some fresh air. She covers her shoulders with a shawl. The man she refused to dance with walks out after her and keeps looking at her intensely. She walks back in.

INT. OLD BARN - NIGHT

She finds Roaring Abel inside. He is completely drunk, SINGING A SONG with his DRUNK PALS.

She looks around scared. She notices the man following her. She tries to blend into the crowd.

She keeps looking behind to see if the man is following her. She finally feels she had lost him when...

HE GRABS HER into his arms.

MAN

Come on, won't you dance with me,  
pretty?

He lifts her and carries her to the dance floor. People surround them and CHEER, WHISTLE and SHOUT.

The man begins to dance with Valancy, moving one of his hands down her back and taking of her shawl with the other one.

Valancy tries to scream, but the band starts playing LOUD MUSIC and covers the sound.

Other man join the dance floor and they start sending Valancy around to each other as if she was a ball.

CLOSE UPS:

- men's hands touching her,

- ripping her shawl,
- destroying her necklace.

Valancy CRIES AND SCREAMS INAUDIBLY.

Suddenly the man who was holding Valancy releases her and disappears. She looks around confused.

Barney appears out of nowhere. His fist smashes the man's nose and knocks him down.

Group of men jumps on Barney. We can hear a LOUD CRACK OF BREAKING WOODEN RAILING behind Barney's back.

They start fighting in the middle of the dance floor. The crowd tightens around them and starts cheering.

Valancy slides out of the room.

EXT. CHIDLEY'S CORNER - NIGHT

Valancy falls down on the ground outside, she is CRYING and trying to catch her breath.

After a short while Barney runs out of the barn. He falls down to the ground next to Valancy.

BARNEY  
Are you all right?

His face is full of bruises and blood.

VALANCY  
Oh, Barney...

She wants to touch his face, but he looks at her with anger.

BARNEY  
(sharply)  
What on earth were you thinking  
coming here?!

Valancy jumps away, scared.

BARNEY (CONT'D)  
Can you walk?

Valancy nods.

Barney helps her get up, they go to the car and drive away.

INT. BARNEY'S CAR - NIGHT

Valancy and Barney sit next to each other in the car that drives through a dark night.

They don't look at each other, they don't talk.

Barney has an angry grimace on his face and drops of blood are running down his temples. He looks scary.

Valancy is confused and is still tries to catch her breath. Her hair and dress are messed up.

BARNEY

(cold)

It was completely reckless of you to go there. This is not a place for you.

Valancy is offended.

VALANCY

This is not for you to decide.

BARNEY

No? What do you think would have happened if I wasn't there?

VALANCY

Why were you there in the first place?

Pause. Barney is reluctant to answer the question, but he feels Valancy's eyes on him.

BARNEY

I forgot my scarf, so I went back to Roaring Abel's and Cissy was there all alone. She told me where you were, so... I came here.

VALANCY

You came all this way to *save me*?

Barney doesn't answer. He is still angry, even more now that his intentions were uncovered.

BARNEY

Well, if you can't take responsibility for yourself...

VALANCY

I never thought that *you* will be  
the one taking responsibility for  
*me* here.

Barney SCOFFS.

Valancy is still annoyed, but looks at Barney a bit softer  
now.

They look ahead and continue driving through the dark night.

Suddenly the car STOPS ABRUPTLY. Valancy looks at Barney  
surprised.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

What happened?

Barney doesn't answer. He tries to start the engine again,  
without success.

BARNEY

It can't be...

Barney leaves the car and opens the bonnet in front of the  
car. Valancy remains seated on the passenger seat, confused.

Barney shuts the bonnet angrily and goes back into the car.

VALANCY

What happened?

BARNEY

I'm afraid it's my fault. I forgot  
to fill the fuel.

VALANCY

Oh.

Silence.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

What will we do now?

BARNEY

It's too far to walk to the next  
village. I suppose we have to sit  
here and wait until another car  
comes.

VALANCY

And then what?



BARNEY

We will ask them for some fuel.

VALANCY

But... It's the middle of the night. We could wait all the way till the morning.

Barney nods.

Long silence. The only thing we can hear is owls howling. Barney and Valancy sit awkwardly in the car, both looking ahead.

Valancy tries to look at Barney but doesn't dare to look at him directly. She adjusts the mirror so that she can see Barney's reflection in it.

CLOSE UP on Barney's profile, bruises around his eyes, Barney's hands, Barney's messy hair.

When he starts speaking again Valancy jumps slightly up on her seat.

BARNEY

(quietly)

I'm sorry.

Valancy looks at him warmly. She points at his face.

VALANCY

Are you all right?

BARNEY

I am. But I guess Abel will have to fix the railing again.

They smile to each other.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Don't feel obliged to talk to me just because we are stuck here. We can sit in silence if you prefer.

VALANCY

John Foster says "If you can sit in silence with a person for half an hour and yet be entirely comfortable, you and that person can be friends. If you cannot, friends you'll never be and you need not waste time trying".

BARNEY

Good Lord, do you learn all that fellow's books by heart?

VALANCY

(playfully)

They keep me company when I forget to fill the fuel in my car and I am stranded in the middle of the night.

Barney smiles.

Very long silence.

BARNEY

I hope your first dancing wasn't a complete disaster.

VALANCY

To be honest, I think this is the most pleasant part of it.

BARNEY

(surprised)

This?

VALANCY

Yes. The moon is beautiful tonight.

Long silence again. This time Barney is looking at Valancy, whose head is turned towards the moon.

CLOSE UP on Valancy's lips, ripped shawl, her thin arms under her puffy sleeves.

BARNEY

Are you saying you didn't have a single pleasant dance the whole evening?

VALANCY

Not more pleasant than this.

Barney keeps looking at her with a thinking face.

He gets out of the car, walks around it and opens Valancy's door on the passenger side. Valancy looks at him surprised. Barney stretches his hand out to Valancy.

Valancy starts LAUGHING.

BARNEY

I am serious.

Valancy becomes serious too. She slowly places her hand on Barney's hand. He helps her get out of the car.

WIDE SHOT on the car, small couple standing in the middle of the road facing each other and a bright moon shining on them.

CLOSE UP on Barney placing his hand on Valancy's waist. Valancy inhales sharply, surprised but excited. Barney grabs her other hand and places it on his shoulder. They get closer to each other and slowly start to dance.

ORCHESTRA MUSIC starts playing.

Valancy's face gets closer to Barneys chest. Barneys face gets closer to Valancy's hair. Their feet get closer to each other and Barneys arm wraps tighter around Valancy's waist. They both breathe heavily as they dance tightly.

Valancy looks up at Barney's face. Barney looks at Valancy. Tension increases and they look at each other and it seems like in a second they might lean in for a kiss, when...

A BEAM OF LIGHT appears from around the corner, casting sharp light on the dancing couple. We can hear people SCREAMING and BRAKES SCREECHING.

Barney grabs Valancy and shields her with his own body. The car stops only couple of meters from him.

The ANGRY DRIVER gets out of the car. It's WILLIAM (30).

WILLIAM

What on earth is going on here?!

In the passenger seat in William's car sits Olivia, hiding her face in her palms, STILL SCREAMING.

OLIVIA

William, what is going on?

Olivia peaks out from her hands and notices Valancy in the middle of the street. She forgets about the fear and gets out of the car, walking straight to Valancy.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Buba!!!

WILLIAM

(confused)

Do you know them?

OLIVIA

*What are you wearing?!*

Valancy, still in shock, starts LAUGHING. The tension is leaving her body as she laughs and laughs.

Olivia, William and Barney look at her confused.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)  
(angrily)  
It's my cousin.

WILLIAM  
In the middle of the road? At night? With a... man?

OLIVIA  
What are you doing here? Why is his face all beaten up?  
(grabs Valancy)  
Buba, are you hurt?

Valancy sits down on the road, still laughing.

BARNEY  
We won't be bothering you. We've run out of fuel and we need some to get back to the town.

William doesn't react.

BARNEY (CONT'D)  
We will obviously pay.

OLIVIA  
Fuel? WE? You want us to give you fuel so you can drive her God knows where? Forget about it!

BARNEY  
I was going to drive her safely home.

OLIVIA  
I don't believe you! He is going to kill her in the forest! William, do something!

William thinks intently, weighing the situation.

WILLIAM  
(slowly, to Olivia)  
I think we should give them fuel.

OLIVIA  
What? You want to help him?!

WILLIAM  
 Otherwise people will see them  
 here.

OLIVIA  
 (angry)  
 Fine. Fine. Give them fuel.

William looks reluctantly at Barney helping Valancy get up from the ground and then suspiciously at Olivia.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)  
 Hurry.

William walks over to his car to get the fuel. Barney gets a tank from his car and joins him.

The girls stand alone in the middle of the road.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)  
 What on earth do you think you are  
 doing?

VALANCY  
 Oh, I was just dancing with Barney.

OLIVIA  
 You?! And him?!

VALANCY  
 Oh...

Valancy smiles to herself.

VALANCY (CONT'D)  
 I wish...

Olivia is offended by Valancy's brave confession. She turns around on her foot and crosses her arms like a small child.

Valancy looks closely at Barney getting fuel and giving money to William. A dreamy smile doesn't abandon her face.

Barney fills the fuel and comes to Valancy, grabs her hand and helps her get into the car. Valancy waves playfully to Olivia as they drive away.

INT. BARNEY'S CAR - NIGHT

They drive in silence. Valancy smiles and has red cheeks. She looks like she is on top of the world. Without looking at Barney, she says:

VALANCY

Thank you.

Barney doesn't look at her either.

BARNEY

Cissy wouldn't forgive me if your first dancing was completely ruined.

Valancy looks at him as if she was suddenly brought back from clouds to the harsh reality.

VALANCY

Oh. Yes. Cissy.

They continue driving in silence, but Valancy is far from being on top of the world now. She has fallen from her high horse of feeling in love.

EXT. IN FRONT OF ABEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

BIRD PERSPECTIVE:

A car is driving on a road towards a house with all lights on. A silhouette of a man runs out of the house onto the road and towards the car.

SHOT ON:

It's Roaring Abel running. His face is terrified.

ROARING ABEL

HURRY! HURRY!

INT. BARNEY'S CAR - NIGHT

Barney and Valancy notice Abel running towards them.

BARNEY

It's Abel.

Barney stops the car and opens the window. Abel's terrified face full of tears appears in the window.

ROARING ABEL

It's Cissy. It's my Cissy.

EXT. IN FRONT OF ABEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Barney and Valancy run out of the car and sprint into the house. Abel slides down on the ground by the car and cries loudly.

INT. CISSY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Valancy runs into the room. Cissy lies in the bed, sweaty, red and with absent eyes. Valancy kneels by the bed and grabs Cissy's hand.

VALANCY  
Cissy...

CISSY  
Valancy.

Valancy starts crying.

VALANCY  
Don't worry, Cissy, we will send  
for a doctor. Barney!

CISSY  
Valancy, don't.

VALANCY  
Barney!!! Go get a doctor!

CISSY  
Darling, don't. I don't mind. I  
just want to be with my baby  
already.

Valancy cries.

CISSY (CONT'D)  
Valancy, have you ever been in  
love?

Barney's face from the dancing scene flashes in front of Valancy's eyes.

VALANCY  
I... No.

CISSY  
I have. He had the most beautiful  
eyes.

Barney's blue eyes flash in front of Valancy's eyes.

EXTREME CLOSE UP on Valancy's eyes.

EXT. PARK ALLEY - DAY

FLASH: Cissy, but younger and healthy, holding hands with Barney. They look each other in the eyes and laugh walking together down a park alley.

                    CISSY (O.S.)  
We were so happy for a while. And I  
loved him so.

Valancy tries to shake off the picture of Barney and Cissy together. She shuts her eyes, but...

FLASH: Barney leaning down to Cissy to kiss her.

                    VALANCY  
Cissy, you don't have to...

                    CISSY  
But I want to. I don't want you to  
think badly of me.

                    VALANCY  
I don't.

                    CISSY  
Please, Valancy, let me share my  
story. I loved him so. But I was  
young, I didn't know some things. I  
discovered I was carrying his baby.  
It was the sweetest little baby,  
Valancy.

Cissy smiles to something far in the distance.

FLASH: Barney and Cissy smiling together to a tiny baby they are holding in their arms.

                    CISSY (CONT'D)  
But then he got sick. My little  
baby got sick and died and then I  
thought I was gonna die. I couldn't  
live without him. I didn't want to.  
I don't want to anymore.

                    VALANCY  
But what about Barney?

                    CISSY  
(surprised)  
Barney?



Cissy looks closely at Valancy.

CISSY (CONT'D)

Oh, dear, no.

(softly)

No, no. Barney is really sweet. He brings me flowers and fruit to cheer me up. And to show that he doesn't judge me. He is a good man.

VALANCY

So... it wasn't Barney?

CISSY

No, dear. He was a sailor. He was working on the same ship that Barney arrived with five years ago. And then... two months later he disappeared. I never saw him again... Except I was looking into his eyes every time I looked into my baby's eyes. And I never stopped loving him.

VALANCY

But he abandoned you! All alone, with a baby!

CISSY

No, dear, I told him to go. He was young and had his whole life ahead of him...

She smiles understandingly to Valancy. Both have tears in their eyes.

VALANCY

Cissy... I want to share something with you, too. Are you listening?

Valancy closes her eyes and nods.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

There is a place. It's the most beautiful place in the whole world. I go there when I am scared or happy or when I want to cry. I want you to go there now.

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

Valancy is in the blue castle forest. She reaches her hand to someone outside of the frame. After a while Cissy comes in and grabs Valancy's hand.

Cissy's pretty face isn't destroyed with illness here. She is beautiful and peaceful.

VALANCY (O.S.)

This is my blue castle. Look at the trees. They are shining and the branches are heavy with flowers. Can you see?

INT. CISSY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cissy nods with her eyes still closed.

VALANCY

Good. And if you look ahead you will see the castle itself, far on the lake. Do you want to go there?

Cissy nods with a delicate smile.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

Okay...

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

Valancy leads Cissy to the little canoe drifting on the lake. The girls get in and Valancy rows.

VALANCY (O.S.)

Look at the sparkling water. You can drink it too. It's the sweetest nectar you have ever tried. Just try it!

Cissy takes some of the blue water in her hand and drinks straight from her palm. A big smile appears on her face and her nightgown changes into a sparkly, blue dress.

VALANCY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Now you belong here. You are a part of the blue castle! Look, we are almost here.

The canoe hits the bank and the girls get out on the blue sand.

INT. CISSY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

VALANCY

Do you feel the warm sand on your feet, Cissy? Do you feel the breeze on your cheeks?

Cissy smiles and nods. She looks around with absent eyes.

CISSY

Tell me about the castle.

VALANCY

It's facade is made of silver trees. They are very wise trees and they always listen to your mood.

EXT. BLUE CASTLE - DAY

The girls enter the castle. There is a huge staircase built of the silver sparkling trees that move gently. Cissy looks fascinated around.

She steps on the first stair, but the trees form a comfortable chair, gently place Cissy in it and transport her to the top. Valancy follows in her own chair.

VALANCY (O.S.)

If you're scared, they close the castle making a safe shelter for you. If you're happy they dance and celebrate with you. And they always take you where you want to go.

Valancy starts walking towards the edge of the castle. I seems like she is going to step on the thin air and fall, but the silver trees follow her feet's movement and always manage to build a solid ground under Valancy's foot right before she steps down.

VALANCY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I will make you your own room here, Cissy. What do you want it to look like?

Valancy starts guiding the trees with her hands to form walls and a big, comfortable bed. Everything is colorful, sparkly, soft and magical.

In the corner of the room, the silver branches follow Valancy's hand movement and form a tiny crib.

INT. CISSY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

VALANCY

This is for your baby. I will leave the ceiling open for you, so you can always see they sky. You love watching the stars so. And it never rains in my blue castle.

CISSY

Thank you, Valancy. This is where I want to stay. Forever. It seems much better than this world.

VALANCY

You can stay, dear. I will join you there very soon. I won't leave you.

Cissy looks at her.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

I will be there soon.

Cissy's face shows that she slowly starts to understand everything.

CISSY

That's why you... And your heart...

Valancy nods. Cissy starts coughing. She can't speak anymore.

VALANCY

(through tears)

You, your baby and I, dear. We will be happy.

CISSY

You know what John Foster says, Valancy. "Who could endure life if..."

Cissy leans back and closes her eyes.

VALANCY

(whispers)

"...it were not for the hope of death."

Valancy squeezes Cissy's hand.

TIMELAPSE of the rest of the night. Valancy and Roaring Abel lying on the floor around Cissy's bed in different position. Valancy still holding Cissy's hand.

The sun rises. Cissy smiles to Valancy and dies. Valancy keeps squeezing her little hand.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE FROM BLACK:

EXT. TOWN STREETS - DAY

BIRDS PERSPECTIVE:

Empty, gloomy streets of a town slowly waking up after the night. Heavy fog is hanging down and covering the buildings.

A lonely carriage rides along the main street.

A woman opens heavy, wooden blinds of a bakery.

A milkman collects empty milk bottles and replaces them with full ones.

CHURCH BELLS RING and wake up a drunk man sleeping on the street.

SHOT ON a small, barely noticeable OBITUARY hanging on the board by the church saying:

"DIED.

IN DEERWOOD, ON FEB 13, AFTER A PAINFUL ILLNESS, MISS CISSY GAY, AGED 29, LEAVING A MOURNING FATHER AND A GROUP OF FRIENDS.

FUNERAL SERVICES WILL BE CONDUCTED AT THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH NEXT FRIDAY"

INT. STORE - DAY

The store is, as per usual, full of clients. A GROUP OF LADIES stands in front of the Dr. Redfern wall, that is half empty now.

LADY 1

Did you hear? That Stirling girl with Barney Snaith!

LADY 2

In the middle of the road!

LADY 3

And had so much blood on his face!  
He must have beaten up Roaring Abel  
and kidnapped her!

LADY 4

And that poor sick girl died!

LADY 1

Dear god! God only knows what  
happened there that night!

LADY 3

How do you know he had blood on his  
face?

LADY 2

Mrs. Smith told me! Her son saw  
them.

LADY 4

What was he doing there?

LADY 1

He got engaged to Olivia  
Wellington... A beauty, thats  
true... But Mrs. Willson told me  
she is not so convinced that  
marriage will happen after all.

LADY 4

Really?

LADY 1

Well in the light of recent  
events... Stirling girl moving out,  
working for Roaring Abel, driving  
around with that Snaith at night...

LADY 3

They are scared that madness might  
run in the family. Or what's  
worse... it might be genetic!

Uncle Benjamin appears out of nowhere.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

Ladies. Can I help you with  
anything?

He smiles to them. They smile back awkwardly.

LADY 2

Thank you, Mr. Stirling.

LADY 1

We were just on our way out.

The ladies walk out of the store, form a group there and continue gossiping. More and more people join the group and don't walk into the store.

Uncle Benjamin looks at them through the window, alone in his store, furious.

He looks at the NEWSPAPER lying on the counter, opened on the Cissy's obituary.

CLOSE UP. Uncle Benjamin's fat hand grabs the newspaper.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Uncle Benjamin's fat hand throws the newspaper on the table.

The whole Stirling clan sits around the round table in the living room. Everyone is dressed in black.

UNCLE JAMES

Listen now. We will go to the funeral and we will make Buba come home.

COUSIN STICKLES

But the whole town is talking! How will we defend ourselves?

UNCLE JAMES

We will make it look like she did a good deed helping a dying girl. And we will forgive her.

Cousin Stickles nods approvingly at the brilliant idea she hasn't thought about.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

What if she denies?

COUSIN STICKLES

She will not do that! She will not stay in the same house with an old man. That's unthinkable even for her recent behavior!

MOTHER

I don't want to even look at her. Not to mention letting her live under my roof again!

UNCLE WELLINGTON

(angrily)

You will have to! For Olivia's sake! This is our last chance to save her engagement!

MOTHER

What are you saying?

AUNT WELLINGTON

William postponed the wedding date again.

UNCLE WELLINGTON

What do you think are Olivia's chances for a successful husband after a broken proposal?

UNCLE JAMES

Amelia, you will welcome her back as if nothing ever happened.

MOTHER

Right.

INT. CHURCH, CISSY'S FUNERAL - DAY

Small, modest church. In the front there is a small, CLOSED COFFIN surrounded by flowers.

There are several rows of old wooden benches along the walls. Some of them are empty, some only half-full of people dressed in black.

At the first glance one can see that this isn't one of those *important person died*-funerals.

In the first row sits Valancy dressed in her old brown dress. She is serious and somber, much closer to the old Valancy from before she got the diagnose.

A large group of people enters the church, disturbing the quiet and peaceful atmosphere with WHISPERING AND CHATTER.

Valancy turns around to identify the noise - it's the Stirlings. They notice her and wave to her to get her attention. She turns away.

Barney walks into the church and takes place in the first row on the opposite side of Valancy.



The service begins. A PRIEST (40) comes forward and starts talking. Valancy can't focus on his words, the only thing she can hear is Cousin Stickle's LOUD SOBBING.

CISSY (O.S.)  
Do you think she will cry like this  
on your funeral?

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH, VALANCY'S FUNERAL - DAY

Valancy turns her head, shocked. Cissy - the Blue Castle version, sits next to her in the church bench.

PRIEST  
We are gathered here today to say  
our last farewell to *Valancy*...

She looks around. The season outside have changed - no more vibrant spring outside, the trees are naked and it rains heavily.

Her family sits in the front row now. There are more people in the church. Some of them look to be her age.

Two girls whisper behind her, with their heads close.

GIRL 1  
I haven't seen her for years. In  
fact I'm not sure I talked to her  
after we finished school.

GIRL 2  
She lived very isolated.

GIRL 1  
I guess she has always been a bit  
bizarre. It is a shame she died so  
young, though.

GIRL 2  
That is true. But better her than  
someone who actually had a purpose  
with their life.

GIRL 1  
I guess you are right. It would be  
a *real* tragedy if she left a  
husband and children mourning.

Valancy closes her eyes and tries to shake this vision off.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH, CISSY'S FUNERAL - DAY

For a second she is back on Cissy's funeral. She looks at Barney sitting opposite of her.

CISSY

Do you think he will come to your funeral?

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH, VALANCY'S FUNERAL - DAY

Valancy is back on her own funeral and Cissy still sits next to her. Valancy looks discretely around and tries to find Barney among the people. He is nowhere to be seen.

PRIEST

She left us much too early, without having experienced the beauty life has to offer...

CISSY

That's all right. Maybe I died young, but I lived my life to the fullest. You know why, Valancy?

Valancy shakes her head no.

CISSY (CONT'D)

Because I let myself love. I was so in love. And I was the happiest then. When were you happy, Valancy?

Valancy looks around. Her mother in the first row isn't crying, her face has the usual strict expression.

Olivia's face is bored and she is correcting the positioning of flowers on her dress. William puts his arm around Olivia and she looks at him with admiration.

Uncle Benjamin pulls a long, formally looking roll of paper out of his pocket. The headline says "UNCLE BENJAMIN'S WILL" with caricaturally big letters. Under it there is a list of names. Uncle Benjamin crosses out the name BUBA, LAUGHING.

Uncle James looks over Uncle Benjamin's shoulder and starts LAUGHING too.

The laughter spreads among the Stirlings, then through the rest of the church. The priest laughs the loudest.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH, CISSY'S FUNERAL - DAY

Valancy has a very disturbed look on her face. She tries to shake off the visions and covers her ears not to hear the laughter. She is on the verge of crying.

Someone touches her shoulder. She jumps on her seat and suddenly she is back in the reality. Cissy's coffin is being carried out. Barney's face is leaning close to her.

BARNEY

Are you all right?

VALANCY

I have to talk to you.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH - DAY

Valancy stands alone in front of the church. People dressed in black are pouring out of the church. Some greet Valancy by nodding or shaking her hand and she politely responds to all of that, but is very distracted. She looks intently at the church door trying to spot someone.

A middle-aged man comes up to her. It's EDVARD BECK (59). He grabs her hand and traps it between both of his big hands.

EDVARD BECK

Thank you for preparing everything so nicely, miss Stirling. It was a beautiful service, miss.

Valancy nods.

EDVARD BECK (CONT'D)

May she rest in peace, poor thing.

Valancy looks down, surprised at her hand being enthusiastically shaken up and down by the man. She tries to free it with no success.

EDVARD BECK (CONT'D)

I am not offending you by calling you a miss, am I?

Valancy looks at him with attention for the first time.

VALANCY

What?

EDVARD BECK

You are still a miss, as far as I know? Than means you are... pardon me... unmarried, am I right?

VALANCY

Oh. Yes. I am unmarried now. Excuse me.

Valancy finally manages to free her hand and walks away from Edvard Beck, who looks after her with a pleased smile.

The Stirlings walk out of the church and walk straight to Valancy. They surround her. She can't go any further.

COUSIN STICKLES

Buba!

Uncle Benjamin stomps on her foot.

COUSIN STICKLES (CONT'D)

I mean - Valancy! Will you...

UNCLE JAMES

(interrupts)

We think it was very honorable what you did to help that poor girl.

MOTHER

We are all very proud of you.

Valancy doesn't listen. She is trying to keep the overview of the church door behind Uncle James' head.

COUSIN STICKLES

Let's not bother her now, she has the right to be upset.

Uncle Wellington gives her a shushing look.

Valancy tries to stretch out her head to see the church door, which Olivia interprets as an invitation to a hug.

OLIVIA

Poor Buba, come here.

Olivia wraps her arms around Valancy. Valancy finally has a good overview of the church door now, so she doesn't protest. The Stirlings look at Olivia approvingly and say "aaaw".

VALANCY

Is there something you want to say?  
I have a lot to think about right  
now, so if you don't mind...

MOTHER

There is one thing, indeed. We hope  
you're not thinking of staying  
there now that the girl is de...

Uncle James gives her a warning look.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

...is no longer among us.

VALANCY

Oh, no. No, no. I wasn't thinking  
of staying.

A sigh of relief in the group.

Valancy spots Barney walking out of the church.

VALANCY (CONT'D)

Excuse me, mother.

Valancy leaves the group. The Stirlings are pleased.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

I knew she would bend!

UNCLE WELLINGTON

That went easier than I thought.

MOTHER

She listened to her mother's voice.  
Years of effort put in good  
upbringing weren't lost after all.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH - DAY

Valancy walks up to Barney.

BARNEY

Is there something I can do for  
you?

VALANCY

Yes.

She looks down. Long silence.

BARNEY

Yes?

VALANCY

Yes.

Valancy looks at Barney briefly but quickly looks down again.

BARNEY

What can I do for you, Valancy.

Valancy's heart is beating fast, she is trembling of stress and her cheeks are red.

VALANCY

Will you...

JOHN FOSTER (O.S.)

"...Fear is the cardinal sin..."

She finally dares to look him in the eyes.

VALANCY

Will you marry me?

CLOSE UP on Valancy's stressed face. SHOT ON Barney's confused face. He doesn't say anything.

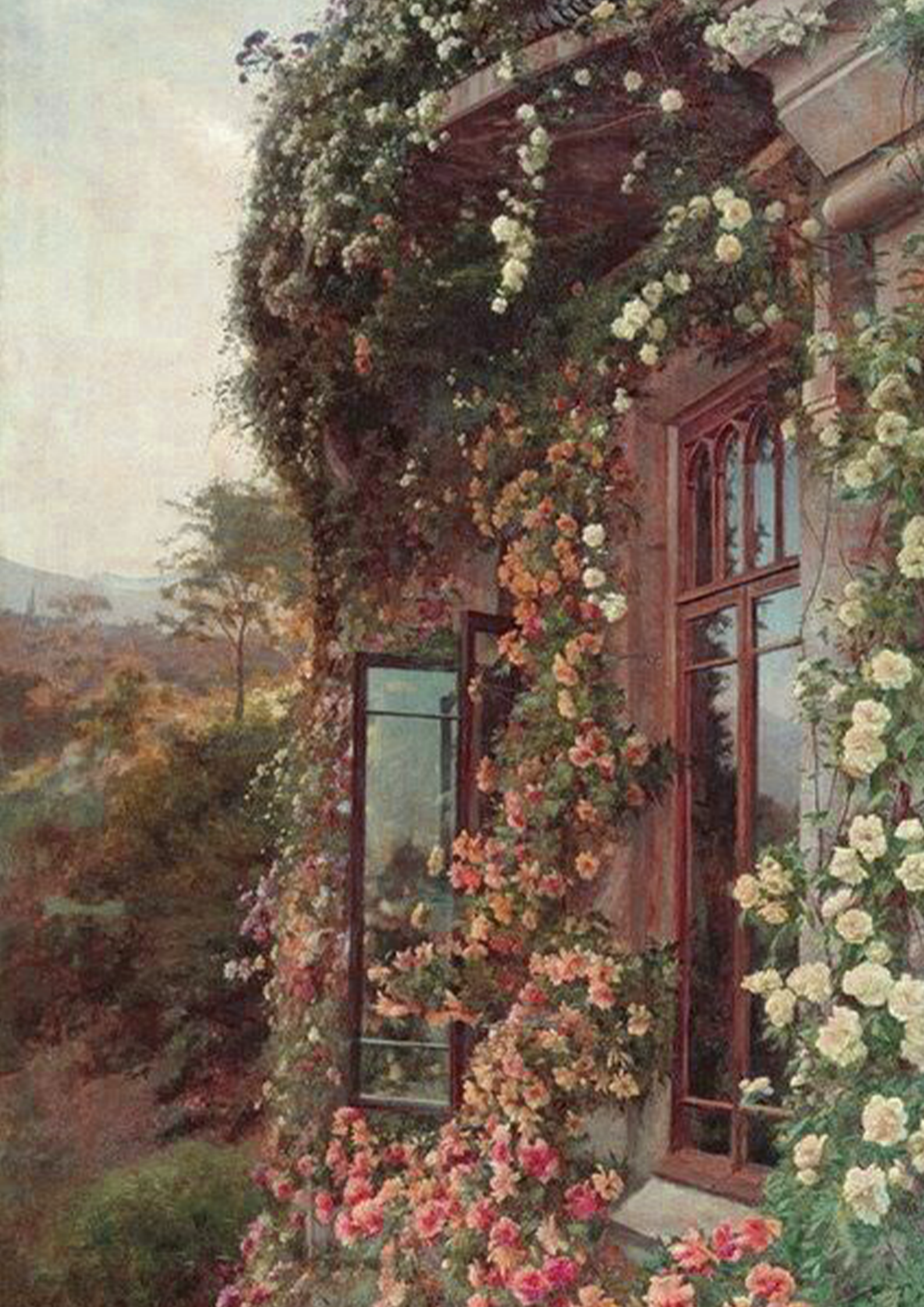
Valancy reaches to her coat pocket and finds the letter from Dr. Trent and gives it to Barney. He reads in silence. Finally he looks at her with serious eyes.

FADE TO BLACK.

**END OF EPISODE 2**









**REFLECTION ESSAY**  
**ON THE WORK WITH ADAPTATION OF**  
**L.M. MONTGOMERY'S *THE BLUE CASTLE***  
**by Magdalena Kuna**

My master thesis is an adaptation of a novel written in 1926 by Canadian author Lucy Maud Montgomery, *The Blue Castle*, into a TV series format. I chose to divide the story into four parts, where each part focuses on a different period in the main character's life and a different stage of evolving from an oppressed girl to an independent woman. In this essay I would like to reflect on the process I went through while adapting *The Blue Castle*, the challenges I encountered, and the solutions I came up with. Before I begin discussing the process, I would like to explain my choice of adapting *The Blue Castle* into a series as my master thesis.

**WHY *THE BLUE CASTLE*?**

When I started the work with my thesis, L.M. Montgomery's *The Blue Castle* was not new to me. I read the book for the first time as a teenager growing up in Poland and the story has stayed with me for all those years. I kept returning to the novel regularly and with the years passing I would always find new layers of the story resonating with me in new ways. One of the reasons for this was a relatable main character, but I remember being especially impressed with the clever plot twists that kept me on the edge of my seat. Looking for inspiration for the master thesis I decided to turn to that well-written story and submerge into the 18th century world of L.M. Montgomery.

Surprisingly enough, when I talked about the book to my Norwegian friends, no-one had heard about it before. All I could get were some hesitant nods after explaining that it is written by the same author as the series about *Anne of Green Gables*, which gained some popularity after its newest adaptation, *Anne with an E*, became a Netflix hit. However, no-one had really discovered any additional books in the authorship of L.M. Montgomery. I hadn't realised that it may have its origin in my cultural background until I discovered an article written by Barbara Wachowicz, a Polish film theoretician, where she elaborates on how it is especially the Polish audience who appreciates and relates to the Canadian author. Wachowicz looks for the reason for the infatuation with Montgomery's authorship in Polish history. According to her, the Polish readers like to return to it throughout difficult times of war, finding in it the warmth and comfort of a home (Wachowicz, 1987). In the light of that information, it seems that my stumbling across that book at young age was not a matter of a coincidence, but rather my cultural background, which made the book much more available for me in the first place. That book simply exists in the Polish culture and it is much

easier for a young girl like me to come across it than, for example, here in Norway. For a long while I was thinking that *The Blue Castle* has not been adapted to a screen before, not to mention a series format. As it appears, I should not have relied on google searches in English, as only Polish filmmakers have taken up that task. The biggest Polish adaptations of *The Blue Castle* were a TV theatre from 1976 and a stage musical from 1982 (Encyklopedia Teatru Polskiego, n.d.; Wachowicz, 1987, p. 7). However, there have been no adaptations to the screen, and in my searches, I found many readers wondering why there has been no film or series adaptation of the book yet.

Because of my fondness for *The Blue Castle* and the lack of adaptations of the novel, choosing to adapt it as my thesis topic was a natural choice for me. Before I dive into the challenges I encountered on my way, I would like to cast some light on the context of adaptation and its increasing popularity as a part of the reason why it seemed appealing for me to take on the task of adapting a novel to the small screen.

## **ADAPTATION AND ITS POPULARITY**

Adaptation continues to be one of the most popular formats on TV. New books are being adapted, and old series and films based on classic books are getting updated, modernized versions. More and more scriptwriters reach for books to base their stories on. No wonder why – both the audience and the critics seem to enjoy it. As one journalist puts it, “If you want a preview of next year’s Emmy Awards, just take a walk past your local bookstore” (Manshel et al., 2021). What is more, there seems to be a special connection between adaptations and the TV series format. TV adaptations of literature are emerging as a major segment of TV series (Manshel et al., 2021). In 2020, TV adaptations accounted for a larger proportion of all literary adaptations than film for the first time.

Dr. Sarah Cardwell, who specializes in adaptation studies, has also had many succinct observations of the suitability of TV series for adaptation: “It is this close [serial] “fit” between television and adaptation that partly explains the comparatively high rate of production of such programmes” (Cardwell, 2007, p. 182). As Cardwell point outs, one reason for the rise in TV adaptations may be that series have a longer lifespan than movies: Series adaptations can be extended, potentially adding seasons of material that were not present in the original and allowing the audience to follow their favourite characters longer.

While there is a huge variety in the type of literature that is adapted to series, there may also be some commonalities that determine whether a book will be adapted (Manshel et al., 2021). One crucial feature may be *world-building*, which comes to light in terms of science-fiction novels that develop completely new worlds. An example of an author unquestionably mastering the science-fiction world-building is J.K. Rowling. Because the constructed realm of *Harry Potter* has immensely detailed lore, it would be extremely difficult to adapt absolutely everything in the novels to the movies, so it shouldn't come as surprise to anyone that HBO is already in early stages of developing a Harry Potter TV-series (Dutta, 2021).

Another example of world-building popular among a broad audience is period dramas often based on historical books that describe how the world used to be. Books that were written at the turn of the century, for example, may have appeal partly because they describe a world which differs from our own, present one. L.M. Montgomery is one of the authors who successfully created a world like that in her series about *Anne of Green Gables*. J.K. Rowling and L.M. Montgomery have one thing in common – they both created a detailed, engaging world with teenagers as their target group. Both of those worlds are often carried by readers long into grown-up life through sentimental associations. They both might also seem as one time hit authors, but in my opinion that is not true in case of the latter. By adapting her *The Blue Castle* I want to cast some light on L.M. Montgomery's authorship.

The popularity of adaptations also means that TV series adaptations typically have a strong influence on the classic work that was adapted (Manshel et al., 2021). Statistically, best-sellers that are adapted into TV series receive about four times as many ratings as best-sellers that do not. More recently, the novel series *Bridgerton* was adapted into the Netflix show of the same name. The show quickly rose to become the most watched series on Netflix, which had a major impact on book sales (Milliot, 2021).

From a screenwriter's perspective, there are many advantages to writing an adaptation too. One of them is definitely being able to rely on already created and thought-through narratives and well-known and well-liked characters. Another benefit is that a large portion of classical literature is now in the public domain. This is probably an important cause of the popularity of adaptations. *The Blue Castle* was written in 1926, and the author died in 1942. Because of the number of years that have passed, this book is now in the public domain (Your Europe, 2021).

However, the list of challenges coming with that task is also sizeable. Looking back on my process, I can differentiate two main big challenges, which I describe in smaller aspects. The first general category is detaching from the original literary work and being able to use it as a help and a

guidance, not a limitation. There are many aspects to it, three of which I will especially elaborate on: language, dramaturgy and storytelling devices, and making it my own. The second big category that was challenging for me while adapting is how to establish relevance to the modern world in an adaptation of a book written almost a century ago.

## **BECOMING INDEPENDENT OF THE ORIGINAL**

There is no doubt that leaning on already worked-through stories can be a benefit, but it comes also with its own unique set of challenges. The underlying plot might quickly become a limitation instead of a help. The adaptation faces a difficult task of both keeping the essence of the work already loved by the audience and being an original piece of work at the same time. That is a tough compromise and since the audience often have a relation to the characters from before, adaptation authors have to expect voices that disagree with their own interpretations and even the smallest deviations from the original. That risk, not present in the process of writing new scripts, has to be taken to ensure high quality of an adaptation. There is a series of challenges connected to becoming independent of the original, and I too stumbled across some of them. In my case, it took time to become independent of the original and let my thoughts develop freely, as they were strongly influenced by the plot of the book. On top of that, I considered the dramaturgy of the book good to begin with and my main motivation was to adapt the story to the screen format, not necessarily change it a lot. However, the adaptation demanded some choices where the line between absolute faithfulness and independence from the original became clearer.

## **DRAMATURGY AND STORYTELLING DEVICES**

The first task of the adaptation was to define what I want to say with the series. I had to extract the main points and aspects of the book that I wanted to embrace and create my story around them. *The Blue Castle* for me is a story of a feminist ahead of her time, trapped in the conventions of a conservative town and narrow-minded people. This topic is still relevant, and the feelings the main character experiences are not limited to the specific time period the book was written in. I hoped to create a warm story full of inspiration and hope on the basis of this universal theme.

One of the key benefits of TV adaptations is the length in terms of screen time. Compared to film adaptations, TV adaptations may allow for more stretching of the original material, “enabling fuller, more slowly and complexly developed adaptations” (Cardwell, 2007, p. 186). However, this may also be one of the key challenges that screenwriters face. One example of not managing this

challenge can be seen in *Under the Dome*, a TV series based on Stephen King's novel of the same name. The series received negative reviews from critics, partly related to the monotony of the plot. Stephen King himself noted that "Under the Dome just kept Under the Dome" (Daniell, 2017). In other words, the screenwriters were unable to balance between stretching the format and retaining a clear dramaturgy. Thus, keeping up a dramatic progression can be a challenge when adapting a novel to a TV series.

The dramaturgy question was also very relevant for me. At first, I considered writing a series consisting of 6-8 episodes, but after a closer examination of the content of the book I realised that it will be natural to fit the classical three-act structure in four episodes. My original idea might have led to an unnecessary stretching of the content and potentially lowering the quality of my adaptation. In the end, the story fitted perfectly into the chosen structure, as Valancy's journey in the book can be divided into four different stages. When that was decided, I went on to attempt to identify the inciting incidents, midpoints, and cliffhangers for each episode, as well as for the whole series. This was the basis for the main structure of the series.

The first episode shows Valancy's existence as it has been so far: a threatened girl oppressed by her family, finding consolation in her imagination. At the end of the episode she gets the death message. The second episode takes place while she works and lives at Roaring Abel's, developing as a free person as well as developing friendship with Cissy and interest in Barney. The cliffhanger of the second episode is Valancy's proposal, which naturally leads us to the third episode, where Valancy lives her new life as Barney's wife and in her real-life version of the blue castle. During that episode the tension between those two increases and ends with Valancy finding out that she is not dying after all, which makes for an interesting plot twist, as we are both happy for Valancy and terrified with the potential consequences of what now seems like tricking Barney into marriage. The fourth and last episode resolves the conflicts that were arising and reveals the original, happy ending. Episode titles are names of the four seasons, which represent different periods in Valancy's life. Dark, barren winter represents Valancy's life so far, in the spring she starts blooming shyly for the first time, the summer of her life she spends on Barney's island and the first day of fall is when her new reality collapses.

In the book we are mainly in the head of the main character. A lot relies on the inner dialogue and fantasy, which cannot be directly translated to the screen the same way. As Chatman noted in his seminal article on adaptation, "the visual point of view of a film is *always there*" (Chatman, 1980, p. 132). This presents challenges with the storytelling devices, as the change in medium from novel to TV series also involves the consideration of series as a visual format. At first I considered using

a voice-over, but in the end I decided to *show not tell* and use the visual advantage of the screen format to my benefit.

## LANGUAGE

The language is one of the most relevant aspects of adaptation, especially if the novel is from a different time. The author has to decide whether he or she wants to keep the original, old-fashioned way of speaking or modernize the language. I faced the same dilemma, as, in my opinion, both choices have their advantages. The first alternative can seem most natural and contribute to the building of a cohesive universe, especially if one places emphasis on time-appropriate costumes and scenography. The other alternative can make for a truly unique feature, making the series stand out in a wide range of period dramas and be more relatable for the modern audience. Both choices can also backfire – old-fashioned ways of speaking can easily be boring, and it is difficult to keep completely true to the way that people spoke at the time. At the same time, modernized stylised dialogue may seem completely out of place.

The dilemma I faced can be connected to an ongoing change in what is considered being *faithful* to an original text when making an adaptation (Cardwell, 2007). Early adaptations emphasized quite strict fidelity, where an adaptation was supposed to retain the original words of a novel. However, an increase in stylistic development and opportunities for unique expression has changed the meaning of fidelity. Modern adaptations are often more oriented towards capturing the *spirit* of the source, which opens for more flexible writing. This may also be considered a shift from strict faithfulness to intertextual respect, which is also associated with a shift in audience perception where the audience is more willing to accept deviations from the original text (Cardwell, 2007).

After weighing the pros and cons carefully, I decided on keeping true to the original way of speaking, relying on the dialogue from the book. I also chose to use some direct quotes from the book, mainly the quotes from Valancy's favourite author, John Foster, which helped me keep the special spirit of the book. However, I decided to introduce some changes in names in order to give them more emotional charge. I am thinking mainly about the name Valancy's family use to refer to her – instead of the original *Doss*, I used *Buba*. This choice can also be traced back to the first time I read the book as a teenager. I fell in love with the book partially for its brilliant translation to Polish, which I was never able to find again. Only now have I realised that I was not the only one looking. In the earlier mentioned article, Barbara Wachowicz tells a touching story of the translator, who appeared to be a young Jewish girl, hiding under occupation and using a male name as a pseudonym. No-one knows her real name and whether she had made it through World War II.

All that is left is the beautiful translation of *The Blue Castle* (Wachowicz, 1987, p. 30). In my opinion, the brilliant name *Buba*, that she came up with, expresses the family's lack of respect to Valancy much better than the original.

I also decided to address the similarity of the names of Valancy's childhood friend Cissy and Olivia's fiancé, whose name in the book is Cecil. Since those characters have nothing to do with each other, I did not want them to be easily confusable. I kept the original Cissy, which, in my mind, made it easier to sympathise with the dying girl and I changed Cecil's name to William.

## **MAKING IT MY OWN**

My focus in adapting *The Blue Castle* was to define the role of the imaginary castle in my series. In the novel, the castle disappears from the plot quite quickly, despite it being the title. This may be justified by Valancy's transition. As the novel progresses, she starts her own life, and no longer needs her imaginary "crutches". However, I wanted to get more out of the potential of the blue castle. In the end, I decided to equate the blue castle with Valancy's subconsciousness. Instead of exclusively being a place she escapes to, it represents her subconscious processes. For example, if Valancy is scared, then her imaginary castle is a frightening, eerie place. I think this change was particularly effective for two scenes. In the first one, in which Valancy gets her death message, she destroys her imaginary place due to agony. In the second, when Barney disappears after Valancy is almost killed by a train, she imagines Barney accusing her of lying and throwing her out.

There were other changes I made in the adaptation, mainly to effectivize the story and make it more exciting. First of all, I wanted to give the main character, Valancy, more personality. In the book, her wittiness comes forward mainly in her imaginary world, and does not really come out in the real world before she learns that she is terminally ill. I decided to alter that and let her interesting personality shine through earlier. That made it more apparent that Valancy does not fit into her square family and therefore is an uncomfortable problem they have to deal with. That also let me intensify the feeling of injustice in the situation, by making it clearer that a smart and valuable person is constantly suppressed. I let Valancy show her real self to her family already in the first episode, to build some ground and justification for her future undertakings and to let the audience relate and root for her on her journey.

I decided also to give more space to the fictional town of Deerwood and increase its role in the local society. That helped me with creating a context for Valancy's adventures and build a world in which her actions, not at all outrageous today, could seem scandalous enough. Other than that I

chose to remove some characters from Valancy's large family, keeping the group to six members and transferring some features of the removed characters to the ones I kept. Another small change was introducing a bit of an inner conflict to the love line between Barney and Valancy, making her believe that she is getting in the way of her first real friend, Cissy.

## KEEPING IT RELEVANT

Another important part of adapting an old literary work is making sure that it will stay relevant. It is not an easy task to make the actions of a feminist from the past century seen equally groundbreaking, but it is necessary to keep the audience engaged. In this case, I think that despite of a difference in historical time, the main character's feelings and dilemmas are still very relatable. Valancy, the main character, is an early day feminist trapped in the conventions of a conservative little town and oppressing family. The series takes us through a journey of the young, intelligent woman abandoning the conventions one after the other and finally daring to live. We accompany her the first time she laughs, the first time she encounters friendship and the first time she feels love, and those are basic human emotions that do not change with time.

The reason for why the dilemmas are relatable are directly connected to characteristics of successful modernizations. They typically concern themes that are universal (Drummond, 2014). Examples include *Pride and Prejudice*, which, despite being written in 1813, has been successfully adapted into both TV series and movies. This may be due to the topic of norms and social pressures on women's choices, and the choices that smart women must make when these pressures do not line up with their desires. Other examples include *Great*, a modernization of *The Great Gatsby*, a novel published in 1925 that may be adaptable partly due to its themes of social class and the American Dream. It may be more difficult to modernize novels that are more dependent on specific time periods, such as the French Revolution or the American Civil War, or novels with a less universal theme. While these may still be readily adapted into period dramas or historical dramas, the focus on universal themes seems to be facilitate for quality adaptation.

The universal themes present in *The Blue Castle* made it easier to keep the adaptation relevant to today's society. Moreover, this series fits right into today's demand with the growing and overwhelming popularity of adaptations and period dramas. We have seen *Anne of The Green Gables* adapted multiple times in different countries, recently being a Netflix hit with *Anne with an E*. *The Blue Castle* is not as well-known of a book by this same author, but definitely worth the attention of a bigger audience.



## CONCLUSION

I am very happy that I could go through the process of adapting a novel to a TV series. It was an interesting experience to work with an underlying story, analyzing it and trying to identify its strong sides to use and weak ones to alter. It also made it apparent for me that those two media formats rely on different storytelling tools. Going from a novel, which makes use of its literary benefit of being able to conduct an inner dialogue, to a TV series with its strong visual side, was a journey with many challenges. I had to start from scratch by extracting the points of the book and contemplating on how I can underline their relevance in today's world. Only then could I proceed to reassembling the story with the characters, plot lines, and situations I could use to my benefit. It was important to remember that all tools should serve me and contribute to making the story better, and not hesitate to change, merge, reorder, or even remove things if they were standing in the way of creating a cohesive whole. Looking back on my process, I wish I started actual writing earlier, as writing out whole scenes in script format helped to solve some problems I was stuck on in earlier stages. If I could have used less time on trying to decide on the order of the scenes before writing them, and trust that it will be solved automatically when the flow in the scenes develop smoothly from one to another, the process may have been easier. If I had more time, I would also put more emphasis on highlighting the humour in the story – Valancy's family alone has a lot of comedic potential. All in all, it was an educational experience and it gave me a better foundation for working on more adaptations of literary works for big and small screens in the future.

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