

synopsis & dialogue sample for

Drawing Monsters

a weird tale

by

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A MODERN GOTHIC ABOUT CLEAVAGE, CARNAGE, AND THE QUEEN OF THE PULPS.

From 1933 to 1938, Mrs. Margaret Brundage had a near-monopoly on drawing cover illustrations for WEIRD TALES magazine. Mrs. Brundage earned the title "Queen of the Pulps" with her naked heroines writhing in the lustful grip of fiends and monsters. In nearly 100 pictures of women being tortured, raped, and disemboweled, Mrs. Brundage used her own daughters as models...[☞]

Inspired by true events, ***Drawing Monsters*** unveils a family of women that survived the worst of the Depression by illustrating the nightmares of a nation.

What if a bookworm believed in horror stories so deeply that they sprang to life around her? Kerlyn Brundage knows her mother's drawings are dangerous; her sister has vanished and something evil prowls the Brundage house. Kerlyn feels it watching from the shadows... hears it crouched outside her door... but no one will believe her suspicions.

Is Kerlyn next? WEIRD TALES feeds her phobias while Margaret undresses her girls to pay the bills. What if a reclusive author of shudder pulps holds the key to real horror? Kerlyn may have to sacrifice everything to discover where the truth lies.

This five-character, unit-set, full-length psychodrama needs 3 females, 2 fellas, a shabby parlor, and 1930s threads to invoke a Lovecraftian thriller about dirty pictures, scary stories and being drawn to death.

***DRAWING MONSTERS*: A DIFFERENT KIND OF FAMILY PORTRAIT**

Characters

Kerlyn Byrd Brundage: A bookworm. A pale, serious girl who reads too much and dreams too deeply. Mid 20s.

Margaret Brundage: An artist. A compulsive exaggerator with all the answers. Mother of Kerlyn & Annis. Somewhere in her 40s.

Howard P. Lovecraft: An author. Racist, classist, agoraphobe with an unhealthy fear of females. Tall, gaunt, fair. Mid 40s.

Neck McIlwraith: A lugg. A working class ladykiller. Intensely handsome. Dark, slick, and thick as a plank. Late 20s. (aka *NICHOLAS*)

Annis Brundage: A looker. A no-nonsense girl with a hellish temper and a haunting form. Teens. (aka *ANNIE*)

Place: Chicago. Worn furniture, a tub in the kitchen, an evil-smelling staircase leading up, a large door to the outside, stacks of magazines and books. One space serving as two shabby apartments rented by the Brundage and Lovecraft families. The boundary between these apartments should not be clear.

Time: The Depression. Between 1932 and 1937.

SCENE 3. SCENE 3. January 1934. **MARGARET** curled up in a scatter of pages & charcoal sketches, reading. Again knocking at the Door.

MARGARET

I'm reading! It's open. Come in! Open! Open! Open!

NECK enters coated and muffled, shaking off snow, carrying a black doctor's bag.

NECK

Didn't know the door was unlocked. The hock is out! This close to the Lake the wind kills you.

MARGARET

Sorry about that. I didn't want to lose my place.

NECK

Not at all. Toasty in here. Is Annie home?

MARGARET

She's a fool if she isn't, isn't she? Look at you.

NECK

Right.

MARGARET

Say: you don't know any well-developed Negroes do you?

NECK

Ma'am?

MARGARET

Not socially. Just to come over and get undressed for me a couple of afternoons? There was a day when I knew every person in this burg, and they all knew me. Before the War, Walter Disney fed 2 nights a week at my Gran's house. I coulda had Mayor Cermak over here in his undershirt. So?

NECK

Uh, no. What are you reading?

MARGARET

Nothing. Some crummy **Satan** serial for **Weird Tales**. Awful! Why draw that when you got Conan in the same damn issue facherissakes? You like Bob Howard?

NECK

I don't believe I've ever met him.

MARGARET

Conan! Now there's a fella. Coal hair, ice eyes and a body like knotted rope. Some people would call him a lugg, but I tell you: that's living.

NECK

Annie's upstairs?

MARGARET

She'll make it down. You in a hurry?

NECK

We're going to the pictures. I'm Nicholas McIlwraith.

MARGARET

A Scot! My husband was a Scot. Is. And my mother. And I drink Scotch. Annis! (to Neck) I just called her. She'll be right down. She's been trying to hide from her Gamma all day.

NECK

How is your mother? On the mend, I hope.

MARGARET

Nah! On death's doorjam. Won't see doctors, cause of all her Christian Science. She has a hereditary whatsit. Allergy to light. Sit down with me, Mr. McIlwraith.

NECK

Friends call me Neck.

MARGARET

I bet they do.

NECK

Ma'am?

MARGARET

You should call me Mrs. Brundage. I'm Annis' mother. Margaret. Are you any kind of a reader?

ANNIS enters.

ANNIS

I didn't know. Are we ready, Neck? Am I late? I didn't mean for you to have to wait down here. Are you starving? I am.

MARGARET

We're fine. (to **NECK**) But this one could stand some grub and a couple beers. Big hungry brute. Huh? Do they have you burying bodies for that doctor?

NECK

What doctor?

MARGARET

Digging graves is honest work.

ANNIS

Medical supplies, Mama.

MARGARET

Excuse me?

ANNIS

He sells medical supplies. I met him buying Gamma's brace. And the cold packs. Her cane. We should go.

MARGARET

Big strapping buck, aintcha? Hard paps! That, Annie, is a perfectly developed gentleman.

NECK

I keep active, ma'am.

MARGARET

Can I squeeze a feel?

ANNIS

The picture...

MARGARET

You do me a favor?

NECK

Sure thing. Mrs. Brundage?

ANNIS

It starts at seven, Mama. Fay Wray.

MARGARET

Bob Howard should get a gander at you. You're built so solid. Say! You could be a Negro.

NECK

Ma'am?

MARGARET

Not for real. I'd just change your skin. Hold my place for me. This will only take a second.

***MARGARET** hands pages to **NECK**.*

ANNIS

Mama. Don't you dare!

MARGARET

Where's he going? No, you just stand still. And keep your fat fingers on my spot, hear?

***MARGARET** rolls **NECK**'s sleeves to **HIS** biceps & unbuttons **HIS** shirt. Wheezing upstairs.*

ANNIS

Mama, he is a guest.

MARGARET

No undershirt! What will the neighbors say?

NECK

About what? I don't understand.

ANNIS

Of course you don't. He isn't like this, Mama.

MARGARET

Why be selfish? Mr. McIlwraith might could use the dosh.

ANNIS

Please don't. If you do this I'll leave.

MARGARET (to **NECK**)

That's what Happened One Night. Hee! Men stopped wearing underthings. Mr. Gable took care of you too, didn't he?

NECK

Excuse me?

ANNIS

Clark.

NECK

I am. I mean I wouldn't ma'am. I mean I do. Shorts.

ANNIS

Mama? I won't let you draw me any more.

MARGARET

Listen to Miss Prune-pit! Of course you will. Who else is gonna feed you? Mr. McIlwraith, you'd pose for me wouldn't you? Of course you would. I don't mean knee-knock naked. You could wear your scants. With Slim gone, I just need the muscles. Memory isn't good for everything and Mr. Wright is getting tired of my lasses floating off midair.

ANNIS

In midair.

MARGARET

I think it would help to have a fella to hold down my girls.

NECK

I used to wrestle.

MARGARET

Of course you did. You're a big fine monkey. What was your name?

ANNIS

Neck, Mama. He's taking me to the pictures.

MARGARET

Seems like you got plenty to look at right here. That is the real McCoy. Now, I was reading something.

ANNIS.

Put your shirt back on. Please.

NECK

I don't mind. Honest.

MARGARET

You aren't shy. I like that. She does too, but she'll pretend otherwise.

ANNIS

You're not going to, Neck. Tell her no.

NECK

I thought you drew fashions. Annis said. Like in the Tribune.

MARGARET

Not for almost two years. Haven't you heard? The whole country has been Depressed!

NECK

I ain't had a new suit in three years.

MARGARET

Clothes'd be a waste. Now: it takes me a week to do a figure. Free hooch and a fivespot if you're willing. And you like Annie. She'd be with you.

NECK

Doing what? I'm sorry.

ANNIS

Posing.

NECK

What for?

MARGARET

Bulgy bits. **Weird Tales**.

ANNIS

The pulps.

MARGARET

Covers. Stories.

NECK

I don't read.

MARGARET

You don't have to! I like this boy, Annie.

ANNIS

Good night, Mama.

MARGARET (*on stairs*)

Annis Isobel Brundage, you better break your curfew with this one or you'll catch hell. Now bub, if you will be so kind as to pass my **Satan's Garden**. I gotta submit sketches before they give the gig to some dope with a cow's arm. Toot sweet!

*Story in hand, MARGARET swoops out.
Muttering & creaks from floor above.*

ANNIS

I shouldn't have let you come here. It never occurred to me.

NECK

I don't mind. Honestly.

ANNIS

That's how it starts. You don't mind. But then you do.

NECK

Do you wanna scam? We can go in the middle and sit through 'til it starts again. You sure smell nice.

ANNIS

Fay Wray's halfway home by now.

NECK

That's just fine. Cause I got you. Your mama doesn't know we met at the Blue Oyster?

ANNIS

No! She doesn't know I work. Let's keep it that way.

NECK

Yes, ma'am. Feel like sitting outside under the stars? How 'bout Rosehill Cemetery? Just you and the angels and me.

***NECK** smells **HER** hair while **SHE** unrolls & rebuttons **HIS** shirt. Sound: a susurration of summer insects slowly builds. **KERLYN** enters Door with a stack of magazines & immediately starts cutting out lights.*

ANNIS

Kerlyn. (to **NECK**) This is my older sister.

NECK

Kerlyn. You're home early.

KERLYN

The lights are on.

ANNIS

We're leaving. This is Nicholas. Kerlyn?

KERLYN

If you say so. Did you open the shades?

NECK

But my friends call me Neck.

KERLYN

You mustn't ever. Not with the lights on. We can be seen from the Outside.

ANNIS

My sister takes care of all of us.

NECK

Nobody can be careful all the time.

KERLYN

I can. I never sleep.

NECK

I guess someone's givin' you a good reason to stay awake.

ANNIS

Neck? We should leave.

KERLYN

And I know to keep my eyes open.

ANNIS exits. **NECK** kisses **KERLYN's** knuckles, winks & exits. The insects fall silent. **KERLYN** bolts the Door.

*Rubbing **HER** knuckles, **SHE** pulls shades & turns out the last lamp, listening for something. Radiator hiss. A violet radiance flares behind the room's cracks & corners. Lights shift.*