

# Glassheart

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Ten page sample

Hope is the thing with feathers-  
That perches in the soul-  
And sings the song- without the words-  
And never stops *-at all-*

-Emily Dickinson

And while you're at it, leave the night-light on inside the birdhouse in your soul.

-They Might be Giants

## CAST

**Only:** Female, intermediate age, spry. A lamp.

**The Beast:** Male, intermediate age. A beast, you know?

**The Witch:** Female, older, smooth motherly air.

**Aiofe:** Female, mid-twenties.

## SETTING

The living room of a small, shabby apartment. Nowhere else.

### *Scene I: Ravenswood*

*In the empty living room of a shabby apartment, in the dark, a Beast is crying. There is just enough light to see that he is monstrous, and that he is clutching something precious to him. He sinks to the floor.*

*After a moment, a spry sort of feminine person enters, carrying suitcases. She wears an unusual hat, shaped basically like a lampshade. It will shortly become apparent that she is basically a lamp.*

*She sets the suitcases down, squints, and, with a decisive click, pulls a cord that dangles from her ear. Her hat lights up, illuminating the room, and the Beast. He is clutching a small potted rose-bush.*

ONLY

It's not so bad, boss. Bigger than I thought. Is this really only 800 square feet? Gosh.

*She walks over to the window and peers out.*

ONLY

It's near dawn. America. (*she turns back*) Looks the same as anywhere in the dark. (*She approaches the beast and crouches down.*) It's the right choice, sir, I know it. Out in that forest, a whole century could pass without so much as a footfall, but here- there'll be travelers at the door every hour, regular as a water clock. She'll come. (*Pause*). Let me-

*Only attempts to take the potted rose. The Beast snarls and Only jumps back. The Beast resumes sobbing.*

ONLY

Yes, sir, of course sir. Will we be doing that for some time, sir? (*pause.*) Right.

*She picks up the suitcases and looks around.*

ONLY

It goes it goes. It will be- what is that word? Oh. Kay. OK. It is an a-ok American apartment. You'll see. You'll be happy here. In a little bit, we'll read a story.

*She exits. The Beast raises his head, and addresses a single fedora on a lonely hatrack.*

BEAST

This is the story of a great house that became an ok apartment. (*he stops.*) This is not a story. Stories have shapes. They end.

*He gets up and looks around. There is a small mirror on one wall.*

This is no story. This is a nightmare. (*he gently turns the mirror to the wall.*) This face is a nightmare face.

*A bird starts to sing.*

BEAST

Of course, dawn comes in like it wants to prove me wrong. Each turn of the earth screws us closer to spring, have heart! I will give you music from the air.

*He goes to the window, opens it.*

Chondestes Grammacus. A common passerine, but melodious and large.

*He reaches out the window and, quick as a snake, he snatches the bird. The song cuts off with a squeak.*

BEAST

What? I *am* a beast.

*He turns, and bites off the head of the animal with a sickening crunch. He exits. After a moment, he comes back on again.*

BEAST

That was by way of being a dramatic exit, but there was nowhere else to go.

*The Beast lies down on the floor in a contemplative way.*

Despair! Despair! No. *(in a different tone of voice.)* Despair! *(in a whisper.)* Despair. I am not even achieving the ridiculous.

*He closes his eyes. Only enters.*

ONLY

Does master intend to lie on the floor all day?

BEAST

Possibly.

ONLY

Then, if it's all the same to you, you might get up and lie down on your bed. I want to put a rug where you are lying.  
Were you saying despair just now?

BEAST

If I was?

ONLY

There's no need. Things are better here. Nothing set against you. No witches.

BEAST

There will always be witches.

ONLY

Not here. Everyone in America has a name. Everyone is human. I mean, except us.  
Where are you going, Boss?

BEAST

Put out your rug. See if anyone can tell the difference.

*He exits, still clutching the rose.*

ONLY

Once upon a time, there was a prince who was under a curse. And there was only one way to break the curse in the whole wide world.

Love.

It's a good place. There is a grapevine on the back porch. With a bird's nest in it. And in the Beast's room, the ceiling is stuck all over with little stars. That glow. In the dark! He loves stars.

*Music starts playing, very lovely..*

ONLY

And I will bring you music from the air. (*She listens more acutely, then gets down on her hands and knees.*) Or out of the ground! (*She presses her ear to the floor.*) There are musicians below us, in the floor below us!

*She raps on the floor. Someone raps back. She knocks again, this time with a more complicated rhythm. The rhythms grow until she is whirling around the floor, tap-dancing on her hands and feet. Finally, the drummer downstairs delivers a crashing percussion solo of terrifying velocity. She collapses laughing.*

*She looks up, smiles, and raps on the floor again- this time, just a slow, steady beat. After a moment, the drummer takes it over.*

ONLY

I KNOW AN HONEST HEART YIELDS A HAPPY END  
AS SURE AS A PALINDROME  
GOES FROM ITS START TO ITS START AGAIN  
AND IF YOU DON'T AGREE, YOU MIGHT AS WELL JUST GO HOME.

*She picks up a broom and starts to transform the apartment.*

SOULS COME IN PAIRS, AND WISHES IN THREES  
AND LOVE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH  
THE WISE MAN KNOWS, AND THE FOOL AGREES  
IF YOU'RE NOT EITHER ONE, THAN WHY DO I WASTE MY BREATH?

THE BEAUTY THAT'S REAL, AND WILL NOT DIE  
IS A BEAUTY THAT'S HIDDEN FROM SIGHT  
THE HEART IS MORE ACCURATE THAN THE EYE  
IF YOU DON'T THINK AS MUCH, THEN WHY'D YOU COME OUT TONIGHT?

WHY DID YOU COME OUT AT ALL?  
TO COME HERE AND CAST A PALL?

IF YOU WANT TO DISPUTE MY POEM  
YOU MIGHT AS WELL JUST GO HOME.

*She stops singing, but the band continues the melody, and she continues her work. As the days pass, she becomes more relaxed, and by the time the music stops, she is curled up on the couch, watching television, and taking notes.*

*A voice is heard, discoursing on relationships from the TV set.*

THE DOCTOR

The important thing is – to give yourself Realistic Expectations. And till you're gonna understand that...

ONLY

Boss! Boss!

BEAST

*(offstage)*  
What do you want?

ONLY

Think you'll come out of your room today?

BEAST

Not today, no.

ONLY

But are you busy with anything?

BEAST

I am attempting to slide a small knife between the bones of my throat.

ONLY

And?

BEAST

It won't go in.

ONLY

Ok. There's something you should see.

BEAST

If it is your lemon-custard colored drapes I have already told you I am not interested. Six times.

ONLY

Boss, on this television machine we got, there's a man who knows everything about love. He speaks all over America about it. He has a plan. And he has a book. I really think you should come out and give him a listen.

BEAST

Oh, my god.

ONLY

Boss, he knows how to find love. How. To find. Love.

BEAST

I thought I was coming to America, not hell.

ONLY

Boss-

*The Beast enters with a snarl, clutching the potted rose.*

BEAST

Must I roar till you amend your speech? I have you told you, that appellation you give me is not gracious. It smacks of gutters and shoe-shine boys.

ONLY

Boss is an American word. *(she drops to her knees)* Sir. *(she drops to the floor.)* Master.

*A pause, in which the voice is heard more distinctly.*

THE DOCTOR

What it all boils down to is getting off your rump. The women're not gonna come to you...

ONLY

But look! Now you're in the living room and the TV is right over there! You don't even have to move to see the doctor. Just turn your head.

*The Beast picks up the TV, yanks the cord out of the wall, opens the window and throws the set out.*

BEAST

I have a soul, you know. It may be hot and sooty as a lump of coal, but it's mine. I don't want it grappled by American charlatans. I don't want it covered with their sticky rainbow fingerprints in snake oil and hope.

ONLY

The doctor is not a charlatan. He has a doctorate and he has written a useful and practical guide to love which I'm thinking I should get for you.

BEAST

Ha!

ONLY

It is a book. You like books. If you read it-

BEAST

I have read...10,872 books about love, in 24 languages, by wits, aesthetes, virgins, famed seducers, and 38 certifiable geni of the age. Poems, novels, plays, masterworks. Can your television prophet speak through his nose and best them all?

ONLY

He could tell you one thing! He's right about one thing, Monseieur stay-in-my-room and balls to your curtains!

BEAST

And what is that?

ONLY

The women aren't gonna come to you!

*There is a knock on the door. She dashes to the door, peers through the spyhole.*

ONLY

It's a lady.

*The Beast turns and stalks off again.*

ONLY

Boss! Master! This is your chance. She looks nice! She's not very old.

BEAST

I must go to my room. I need something to read.

ONLY

We have to open the door!

BEAST

I need something to read NOW.

*He roars terribly. She releases his ankles.*

BEAST

Just- tell me when she's gone.

*He exits, snatching a book from the shelf as he goes. The knock comes again.*

ONLY

Once upon a time... *(she breathes deeply.)* I can do this.

*She opens the door. Enter a woman with a smooth maternal air. She is carrying a box of gingerbread boys and girls.*

THE WITCH

Hello there.

ONLY

Oh, hello.

THE WITCH

What a day. Have you been out?

ONLY

Outside? No. I haven't been outside.

THE WITCH

Don't. March is very untrustworthy. Can't poke your nose outside without the wind trying to steal it. Mind if I come in? I'm the building manager. I live upstairs. And, you know, I like to make this a warm friendly place, so I had to come meet you and offer you a little gift. To welcome you to the Arms.

*She holds out the box and opens the lid.*

ONLY

They're little people!

THE WITCH

Gingerbread.

*Only nibbles on the boy's head.*

ONLY

They're delicious!

THE WITCH

Yes, little people are delicious... Now, look at me, I nearly forgot.

ONLY

Forgot what?

THE WITCH

To tell you my name, dear. I'm Mrs. Russe.

*She sticks out her hand. Pause.*

ONLY

Nice to meet you. I'm, um- (*she stuffs a cookie in her mouth and says something inaudible.*) Yes. Won't you please sit down? I have many chairs, some of which are covered with really attractive French brocades.

THE WITCH

Those antique hats! Do you collect them?

ONLY

They help me pretend I have friends. Oh- no- this chair is better. The seat has a good bounce and the lighting is very soft right in this spot.

THE WITCH

What an elegant apartment. Did you do the décor yourself?

ONLY

All by myself.

THE WITCH

Those drapes are really superb. I just want to lick them up.

ONLY

Thank you. I also think you are very talented. I could eat these gingerbread people for weeks.

THE WITCH

Take another. Take the box! I've got the oven up there running day and night.

*Only takes the box and cradles it.*

ONLY

You're kind.

THE WITCH

Not really. Do you live here all alone, dear?

ONLY

No. (*pause*). Yes. I'm not sure. Are you married?

THE WITCH

Not at present, dear. Who do you live with?

ONLY

My boss. My... mmmmm....My brother.

THE WITCH

You live with your boss, or your brother?

ONLY

My brother. Who is boss-like.

THE WITCH

Bossy.

ONLY

Very.

THE WITCH

How wonderful that you two are close. Fraternity is a succulent bond. Of all the things I like to see, there's nothing better than two children, hand in hand, brother and sister, small smooth heads lined up on their shoulders... What marvelous books. Yours?

ONLY

No, my boss. E. Brother. They're his books. He's very wise. Oh, you can read them if you like. See... this one is in Arabic, but the pictures are pretty enough for any language.

THE WITCH

I wouldn't want to smudge them.

ONLY

Don't worry about that. You can do anything you wish in this house. We want you to like us.

THE WITCH

Do you? Come a little closer, my dear. Closer than that. Give me your eyes.

*Mrs. Russe lays her hand on the girl's cheek.*

THE WITCH

Might I see your brother?

ONLY

Oh no. No, you can't just now. He-

*She tries to move away, but Mrs. Russe's hold on her face tightens almost imperceptibly, and she is jerked back. Only whimpers.*