

THE HOUSE OF ARDEN

PILOT

FIRST 27 PAGES FROM THE WEBSITE

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Based on 'The House of Arden' by Edith Nesbit

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1 **EXT. SEASIDE TOWN BEACH - DAY - FIVE YEARS AGO** 1

A seagull's screeching cry echoes as the sun glares down on a lazy afternoon at the beach.

People are stretched out on the sand, and shrieks of laughter come from children enjoying themselves in the sea.

On the wet sands is a little girl playing by herself. This is ELFRIDA ARDEN (10), but everybody knows her as ELF.

In a pool left by the receding tide, she spots a small crab and gasps, trying to scoop it into her bucket. She giggles as the crab scuttles frantically.

ELF

Don't be silly! I'm taking you home
- in you go.

She successfully sweeps it up.

CUT TO:

2 **EXT. SEASIDE TOWN BEACH BY THE ROCKY HEADLANDS - DAY** 2

Up to her waist amongst the waves, Elf speaks soothingly to the crab.

ELF

Now then, Mr. Crab, you can go and
find your children.

She gently empties the bucket close to the rocks.

ELF (CONT'D)

They'll be under the rocks waiting.

Elf watches the crab disappear with a satisfied smile on her face...

But, as she turns, a couple of boisterous teens BLAST by her, ignoring the little girl as they splash water at each other. Elf shrinks back from the spray, hands up to protect herself.

Once they have gone, she gazes back toward the beach.

Her face drops. She's gone too far.

A wake forms as she ploughs anxiously through the sea, back to shore.

CUT TO:

3 **EXT. SEASIDE TOWN BEACH - DAY**

3

Elf skitters along the shoreline as she searches for a familiar face.

A man strides towards her. He is shaven headed, muscular, and covered in tattoos. A stifled shriek, and she hurries to the safety of the crowded beach until he is gone.

Really worried now, she trots back to the water's edge. Her shoulders drop; her face crumples.

Then - faintly, coming across the wind, someone calling 'Elf'. She snaps around in the voice's direction.

There, in the distance, her dad ERIK ARDEN (40). Searching frantically along the beach, his commanding presence scattering beachgoers in his path.

 ELF
 (breathless)
 My daddy.

Pelting across the sand, she waves wildly.

 ELF (CONT'D)
 (shouting)
 DADDY!

Erik sees and strides towards her, his relief palpable. He holds his arms out, and Elf catapults herself into them as he spins her around, overjoyed at finding her.

CUT TO:

4 **EXT. SEASIDE TOWN BEACH - DAY**

4

A vivacious but agitated young woman paces impatiently. This is EDITH ARDEN (30), Elf's aunt and Erik's younger sister.

She barks into a mobile phone:

 EDITH
 Jim, she's still not back! Have you
 checked at the ice cream place?
 What about -

She stops babbling as the person on the other line reassures her.

At her feet is EDRED ARDEN(12) Elf's brother, oblivious to her panic, builds an elaborate sandcastle, taking minute care.

The sand castle is no kids bucket-and-spade affair. Edred carefully crafts the intricate walls, turrets and drawbridges.

EDITH (CONT'D)
Do we need to call the coastguard?
I'll call the coastguard.

She's interrupted by Elf running over, closely followed by Erik.

EDITH (CONT'D)
Elf Darling!
(into the phone)
She's back!

Edith buttons the call and throws it onto the towels, narrowly missing Edred's sand castle.

EDRED
Hey!

EDITH
(ignoring Edred, to Elf)
Where did you get to?

She holds out her arms and hugs Elf closely, who snuggles into her aunt.

ELF
(muffled from the hug)
I was helping a crab.

Edred looks up at this and rolls his eyes, then gets back to his masterpiece.

ERIK
(serious)
That's not good enough Elfrida -
you really scared us. I need you
think before you act.

Elf screws up her face in a look of contrition.

ERIK (CONT'D)
Otherwise, next time you could get
in a whole lot of trouble.
(softer)
I don't want anything to happen to
my mischievous little Elf. Ok?

Slightly resentful, she nods, suitably chagrined, as Erik drops down beside Edred and examines Edred's intricate sandcastle.

ERIK (CONT'D)
This is looking so good, I'm gonna
do this end.

Pleased, Edred hands Erik a spade.

EDRED
Yeah, I was planning a Barbican
there.

He looks up at Elf.

EDRED (CONT'D)
(to Elf)
You should've kept a lookout. I
would have. How can you lose
yourself?

Elf makes a face at him. She's about to retort when Edith
butts in hastily.

EDITH
When your dad and I lost something,
we used to do the 'Willing Game.'

ELF
What's the Willing Game?

EDITH
Part of my mystical powers.
(rolls eyes and ghostly
voice) Oo-oo-oo-

EDRED
(disbelieving)
What powers? You haven't got any
powers.

ELF
Tell us.

Erik grins, but shakes his head slowly as he remembers.

ERIK
I'd forgotten that.

EDITH
How could you forget your powers?
(to the children)
Your dad would blindfold me, and
spin me around. I'd focus on what
was lost and then -

EDRED
Go on then, Jim's still looking for
Elf.

(MORE)

EDRED (CONT'D)
(sarcastic)
Use your mystical powers. Find him.

EDITH
All right, I will.

She leaps up, grabbing at a towel and wraps it around her head.

EDITH (CONT'D)
(sonorous)
I want to find Jim.

Erik stands behind her and spins her around.

ERIK
The trick is to spin round and
round and round until -

He lets go suddenly and Edith sways.

EDITH
Then I POINT!

She THRUSTS out her finger at:

JIM (32), Edith's fiancée whooping as he bounds over.

EDRED
(scoffs)
Wow - it worked.

Jim steadies the still dizzy Edith as she scrabbles the towel off her head.

JIM
What's goin' on?
(notices Elf)
Where was she?

ELF
I wanna try it!

She grabs the towel and wraps it around her head, spinning wildly.

EDITH
You have to look for something -

As Elf stumbles and tramples over the sandcastle. Edred gives out an anguished yelp.

EDRED
(screams)
You idiot!

Elf whips the towel off and gasps at the carnage in stunned silence.

ERIK

Elf! We've been working hard!

EDRED

(overlapping)

I spent ages - you put your - stupid, great ploddy feet all over it.

ERIK

What do you say to your brother?

ELF

(unconvinced)

Sorry.

ERIK

That's not good enough. We're -

Erik's phone RINGS, interrupting his admonishments. His face drops.

ERIK (CONT'D)

(quietly to Jim)

It's work.

They watch curiously as he strides off, phone clamped to his ear.

EDITH

(tense)

Not another trip?

JIM

(soothing)

Probably, but it'll be fine this time... likely to be dull as ditch-water.

Out on Elf wide eyed, Edred unsure.

CUT TO:

5

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - ATTIC BEDROOM - NIGHT

5

The moonlight shafts through the gable window, outshining a child's unicorn night-light on the bedside table. The brightly painted bed has a unicorn print duvet.

Erik is lying on the bed with Elf tucked up. He is reading Moonfleet by Meade Falkner (out of copyright) to her.

ERIK

-- and thence most certainly saw a light moving to and fro about the church, where no honest man could be at two o'clock in the morning.

He closes the book.

ERIK (CONT'D)

And one honest girl is past her bedtime.

ELF

(yawning)

I'm not sleepy at all, I'm so excited 'bout being here at Auntie Edith's, and sad cos your going way for a month.

ERIK

So am I. Next time I read to you, I'll be back from our trip with uncle Jim.

No reply... Elf is already fast asleep.

Erik smiles and watches her for a moment, then switches off the night-light and quietly leaves the room.

CUT TO:

6 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - ATTIC BEDROOM - O/S LANDING - NIGHT 6

The bedroom door clicks open a crack, shedding a streak of moonlight onto the darkened landing.

The sound of distant talking floats up from the stairs.

Elf creeps out her room and down the stairs in the darkness.

CUT TO:

7 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN-DINER - NIGHT 7

Armchairs are spaced out and overlook a kitchen area. Jim, Edith and Erik are relaxing, with empty wine glasses on the table.

Jim cocks a leg up on the arm of the chair.

As he moves he reveals he is carrying a gun in a shoulder holster.

EDITH
You only got out by the skin of
your teeth.

JIM
It wasn't that bad.
(to Erik)
Tell her.

ERIK
It was pretty bad. But we don't do
that type of mission anymore - this
is a diplomatic trip. We'll be
fine.

EDITH
Then why the guns?

CUT TO:

8

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS - NIGHT

8

On the corner of the stairs there's a tall stand with a vase
on top.

Just as Elf gets to the bottom, she misjudges her step. She
tries to steady herself, but -- knocks the vase.

A strangled squeak as she grabs the vase, but the stand
crashes down.

Erik bursts through the living room door and comes face to
face with a guilty Elf as she clutches the vase. Edith and
Jim follow Erik out.

ERIK
What on earth?

Frowning, he takes the vase from her and picks up the stand,
setting it back upright.

Elf GASPS loudly, her mouth wide open. Erik spins around to
see what she's looking at.

CUT TO:

C.U. - The gun in Jim's holster

Jim sees Elf's reaction and twists away as Edith hurriedly
tries to cover him.

CUT TO:

9 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - ATTIC BEDROOM - NIGHT**9**

Erik helps Elf into the bed as she stares wide-eyed at him.

ERIK

There is absolutely - totally -
nothing to worry about.

ELF

Why has Jim got a gun?

ERIK

(thinking fast)

It's the snakes. Where we are going
has snakes, so we need to be
prepared.

Elf seems satisfied with this answer so Erik turns to go.

ELF

Stay a bit longer Daddy.

He kneels beside the bed.

She smiles sleepily and snuggles into her duvet. Erik leans
forward to kiss her on the forehead.

ERIK

Goodnight my little elf.

As the sleepy Elf starts to drift... and drift... asleep.

The camera pans to the gable window...

CUT TO:

10 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - ATTIC BEDROOM - DAY**10**

Still on the gable window, a slow transition from moonlight
to daylight.

SUPER: FIVE YEARS LATER.

Panning back to the room we see Elf's bed, now empty, the
slung back duvet no longer patterned with unicorns.

A LED light has replaced the unicorn lamp.

On the top of a chest-of-drawers big 3D plushy letters spells
ELF in spangly pink. In stark contrast, hanging behind the
letters are framed mediaeval manuscripts complete with a big
red seal.

A threadbare central carpet and dirty clothes covers the wooden boards, with LED lights draped around the mirror of an Ikea dressing table.

This is no princess bedroom.

A wooden slatted privacy screen stretches down the middle of the room, and on the other side we see a second bed, made and tucked in neatly. This side is spartan in its tidiness, with a neat shelf of alphabetised books bounded by bookends.

The door BANGS, and ELF (16) barges in, slinging her bookbag on the floor and pulling off her school tie.

CUT TO:

11 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - ATTIC BEDROOM - LATER

11

Now out of her uniform, Elf types on an old laptop covered in stickers. She closes a tab and pauses, looking at the screen intently.

It's a picture of her as a ten year old and Erik, her arms around his neck, his smile bursting with pride.

ELF

I know you're alive.

Lurching off the bed, Elf searches in a drawer and pulls out a scarf. After she blindfolds herself, she stands in the middle of the room and carefully begins to spin around.

ELF (CONT'D)

(pointing)

Show me where you are, dad!

Still pointing she tugs at the blindfold.

ELF (CONT'D)

East, again!

She slumps back on the bed, arms behind her head, staring into space.

ELF (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Dad. -- You're still alive.

A distant tinny squeak of an electronic doorbell chime interrupts her. Elf doesn't move.

ELF (CONT'D)

(bellows)

Edred, it's your turn!

The front door chimes again.

ELF (CONT'D)
 Oh for Gods sake.
 (screeches)
 Edred! Answer the door. It's YOUR
 turn!

Silence.

The doorbell starts to ring repeatedly.

Irritated, Elf sits up and storms out the room.

CUT TO:

12

EXT. EDITH'S HOUSE - O/S FRONT DOOR - DAY

12

There is now a 'Bed & Breakfast' sign by the door, a
 'Vacancies' sign on chains swinging underneath.

An older woman with two vintage travelling trunks waits
 outside, crossly looking at an old-fashioned fob watch.

She glances up as Elf opens the door to:

BETTY LOVELL (60s), wearing a tie-dye top and a long
 colourful sarong skirt. Lots of new age bangles and bracelets
 complete the effect.

But despite her eccentric appearance, Betty's steely gaze
 pierces Elf from under a brown felt hat. This woman misses
 nothing.

ELF
 Can I help you?

BETTY
 (clipped accent)
 Not a good start young lady. I am
 early, but I do expect an answer.

ELF
 Really sorry 'bout that. My brother
 normally --

BETTY
 -- Apologies don't count for much
 if the door is not answered.

ELF
 (defensive)
 It was my brother's turn.

BETTY

Much better if the one that hears
it, answers it.

Just as she speaks, a smug looking couple with a smirking
child push past her. Elf steps aside and lets them in.

The kid turns around and puts his middle finger up at Elf.

BETTY (CONT'D)

How pleasant.

ELF

He's a little bast-
(stops herself just in
time)
beggar.

BETTY

Bast beggar indeed. I trust we
don't have anymore like that one?

ELF

They're the only people staying
here, apart from you.

BETTY

I see. And are you going to invite
me in or am I going to be kept on
the doorstep?

ELF

Sorry - come in, let me help you.

Elf reaches down for the smaller case, but Betty sweeps it up
and walks past her into the house. Taken aback, Elf goes to
grab the larger case and nearly drops it, not expecting it to
be so heavy.

BETTY (O.S.)

Careful!

CUT TO:

13

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - GUEST BEDROOM - DAY

13

Panting, a red faced Elf struggles with the huge case as she
gestures Betty into the guest bedroom.

Betty sniffs and examines the room, her bangles click
clacking together as she grandly swipes a finger across the
side table, checking for dust.

A scream erupts offscreen.

BETTY
Cheese and Rice! What's that?

CHILD (O.S.)
(shrieking)
There is a spider in the bath!

O.S. Banging as the child's mother goes to investigate.

CHILD'S MOTHER (O.S)
This place is such a dump.

The noise quiets down. Betty shakes her head.

ELF
(embarrassed)
It's just - They -

BETTY
Did you know, letting lodgings is one of the most unpleasant ways to earn your living.

ELF
(indignant)
I'm at school, not earning -

BETTY
People who stay in B&Bs are so much harder to please than normal people.

She takes the large case from Elf and heaves it onto the bed.

BETTY (CONT'D)
They want more waiting on. They want more for breakfast.

A sound of a man's raised, muffled, voice echoes up from below. A door bangs and cuts him off. Then bangs again.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Noisy too - always banging around.

As she speaks, she slams the smaller case on the bed.

BETTY (CONT'D)
A B&B is hard, especially when you live in one and you are poor.

ELF
(incensed)
We are not poor!

BETTY
(raises one eyebrow)
My dear, no one would want to live
with them...
(points downward)
Or me.

Elf starts to respond but Betty ignores her as she opens the large case to reveal it is filled with books and papers. Betty opens a folder and spreads it out on the small table. Inside the folder are some ancient texts.

She clamps some glasses on her nose and squints down.

BETTY (CONT'D)
This will never do. It's far too
dark in here.

Elf, in frustration, pulls a silly face and waves her arms in the air at the bent over Betty. She snaps down when Betty turns around to her.

ELF
(innocently)
What about over here by the window?

Elf goes to move the folder, but her attention is caught by a manuscript.

CUT TO:

C.U- manuscript written in gothic middle-English.

Elf hunches over to read it.

BETTY
You won't be able to understand
that, dear.

ELF
(reading haltingly)
Mandate to all sheriffs and others
to allow tenants of the village to
be quit of toll, pontage, picage,
and passage for their goods within
the realm, according to custom.

BETTY
Oh bravo! My goodness.

She claps her hands, Elf preens a little.

BETTY (CONT'D)
How can you read Ye Olde English?

ELF

My dad collected manuscripts like these, he taught me when I was little. He loved history - so do I.

BETTY

We must talk. Does father still enjoy history?

Elf hesitates, why should she tell Betty personal things?

ELF

(slowly)
He disappeared six years ago.

BETTY

I see.
(kindly)
That happens a lot these days.

ELF

No. No. He visited odd places, promoted trade or something for the government. He went missing.

BETTY

Oh, how deadly for you.

ELF

But, I still love it. I'm top in class for history.

BETTY

Good. Your mother must be very proud.

Elf looks uncomfortable, this is way too much information.

ELF

Mum died when I was little. We live here with my aunt.

Betty absorbs this information for a beat, then turns to rummage in her open case.

BETTY

Now then. I will need some help with the local libraries and museums... and I need a lamp.

She looks back at Elf pointedly.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Post haste.

CUT TO:

14

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - BASEMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY

14

The room is dingy due to high windows letting limited light in. The basement doubles as a living room and Edith's bedroom. There are books and clutter everywhere, as well as an opened out sofa-bed.

Slouched on an armchair is EDRED (18) squinting at a tattered copy of 'Driving Test Techniques'. The high windows in the basement makes it too dim to read so he flicks a lamp on beside him just as Elf hurtles into the room.

ELF
(breathless)
Lamp - lamp - need a lamp.
(sees Edred)
Why didn't you answer the door? I
had to come all the way down.

Edred ignores her.

ELF (CONT'D)
It was a guest. She wants our help
with museums and things.

He still doesn't stir, apparently deep in the book, so Elf gets on her knees and disappears behind the sofa.

EDRED
What you doing?!

ELF
Taking the lamp.

EDRED
No you're not.

Elf pops her head back up.

ELF
You don't need a light, just use
your phone. Everything is online.

EDRED
I prefer books.

ELF
You can be such a nerd sometimes,
you know.

She disappears again crawling behind the sofa.

EDRED
I need to pass my test, so I can
get a job.

Elf pings up from behind the sofa.

ELF

What do you need a job for? What about uni?

Silence.

ELF (CONT'D)

(alarmed)

You're not giving up?!

EDRED

(icily)

Will you grow up for once? We need the money - LEAVE THAT LAMP.

Elf goes down again and the lamp goes off.

EDRED (CONT'D)

I said leave it!

ELF

(from behind the sofa)

A guest needs it.

She pops up again with the lamp in hand, diving out of the way as Edred lunges for it.

ELF (CONT'D)

No!

He roars in frustration as he clips his ankle on the side of the open sofa bed.

EDRED

This place is such a effin' mess!

He rubs his ankle then wrests the lamp from his sister.

ELF

You're so selfish.

Ignoring her, Edred plugs it back in - but the lamp won't turn on.

EDRED

(snarling)

Now look what you've done!

ELF

You were the one who broke it, I'm telling Edith.

EDRED
(mimicing)
I'm tellin' Edith.
(back to normal voice)
What good do you think that will
do? She's lost the plot.

CUT TO:

15 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY 15

EDITH (36) lets herself in the front door. There's an air of defeat to her - no makeup, hair unkempt; a stark difference from the vivacious woman we saw on the beach.

She grabs a pile of letters from the mat and shuffles through them. Several are red bill reminders. Sighing, she dispiritedly stuffs them into the pocket of her sweatpants and goes to head downstairs.

The wide open door to the basement is marked as 'Private.'

EDITH
(irritated)
How many times do I need to tell
them to keep this door closed.

CUT TO:

16 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - BASEMENT STAIRS - DAY 16

Edith makes her way downstairs but stops when she hears raised voices.

EDRED (O.S.)
Edith is unreliable and there's not
enough money coming in. That woman
is not up to running a business.

ELF (O.S.)
You still don't need to work. We'll
be all right.

CUT TO:

17 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - BASEMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY 17

Back in the living room, the teens continue arguing.

EDRED
(spelling it out)
If I don't get a job, we'll lose
this place. She needs to get a
grip.

ELF
Don't be mean, it's not been easy
for her.

EDRED
Well it's not hard. Make a bed,
clean up, make breakfast. And she's
let herself go. If Jim came back
now, he'd have a fit.

Edith has had enough. Face grim, she stalks into the room.

They both stop, horrified.

A long and poignant beat.

EDITH
(gritted teeth)
Next time you want to criticise,
shut the bloody door!

Face like thunder, she storms out, and they hear a loud SLAM
upstairs.

FADE OUT.

19 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - BACK GARDEN - DAY

19

Edith battles to peg wet sheets on the line as the wind slaps
at them.

Elf and Edred bang open the back gate as they come in from
the street but a stony faced Edith carries on and ignores
them.

The door to the house opens and the smug mother of the
horrible child struts out.

CHILD'S MOTHER
(snooty)
Excuse me.

Edith stops, and peers around the washing to see who it is.

CHILD'S MOTHER (CONT'D)
We're leaving, and won't be coming
back. My house is spotless and I
expected this place to be too.

EDITH

I'm sorry, what was the problem?

CHILD'S MOTHER

A spider in the bath - my littlest was particularly disturbed. I am prepared to pay up to today only, as we shall be leaving.

Edith is speechless as the woman turns with an exaggerated grace and strolls back to the house, nose in the air.

ELF

You can't stop spiders!

Edith shushes her to be quiet.

CHILD'S MOTHER

Excuse me?

ELF

Doesn't matter.

CHILD'S MOTHER

I shall leave an appropriate review.

The woman leaves as Edith's face starts to crumple.

ELF

What a bitch.

Edith tries to carry on, but tears stream down and she is shaking as she reaches for the washing basket. Throwing it down, she collapses into choking sobs.

EDRED

Edith? What's the matter?

Edith sobs louder. Edred looks at Elf panicked, who takes over.

ELF

Don't take any notice of that horrible cow. Come in and sit down.
(to Edred)
Get the kettle on.

CUT TO:

20

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN-DINER - DAY

20

The kitchen diner now doubles as the guests breakfast room.

Edred bustles around making the tea whilst Elf leads Edith to sit down at the small table in the kitchen area.

Elf puts her arm around her as Edith dabs at her tears with her tabard.

ELF

I hope her little brat dreams of
huge, hairy spiders chewing off his
nasty fingers.

Edith laughs through her tears.

EDITH

That bathroom is spotless. It's
done daily.

ELF

I know. Stuck up cow.

A beat, then Elf embraces Edith.

ELF (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry we were horrible to
you.

Edith sighs, but hugs her back.

EDITH

I know I've let things slip, it's
just - we're down on bookings. I
feel so overwhelmed.

As Edred brings over the tea, Elf holds her arm out for him.

ELF

Come on Edred, group hug.

Despite Edred's embarrassment, he joins in the embrace.

ELF (CONT'D)

Something will turn up soon.

EDITH

(stronger after the hug)
Hopefully get some people over
Easter visiting.

ELF

That new lady is with us four
weeks.

EDITH

Unless she checks out early too.

ELF

I don't think she will. She's a bit of a battle-axe, but I like her.

EDITH

We really need Mrs Lovell to stay, so please look after her. No mistakes or backchat this time.

EDRED

Ok.

We will.

ELF

Edith smiles gratefully at them and sips her tea.

ELF (CONT'D)

(thoughtful)

Do we still have my old unicorn lamp?

Edred snorts with laughter.

CUT TO:

21

EXT. EDITH'S HOUSE - O/S FRONT DOOR - DAY

21

A well dressed man raps sharply on the door of the B&B. He waits for an answer, knocks again and peeps into the window.

He turns back up the path to see a frowning Elf in school uniform at the gate.

MAN

(posh accent)

I am looking for an Edred Arden. Does he live here?

ELF

(very suspicious)

Who wants to know? He hasn't done anything wrong.

MAN

So he does live here? I have sent several letters but unfortunately no reply.

Elf walks around him and carries on up the path glaring, irritated at giving Edred away.

MAN (CONT'D)

(to her back)

My name is Crabtree of Crabtree and Crabtree partners, the solicitors.

She half turns back at him, curious.

CRABTREE(MAN)

I need him to make an appointment
with me, where he may hear
something to his advantage.

ELF

To his advantage? I'm his sister.
You can tell me.

Crabtree, the perfect gentleman, smiles at her.

CRABTREE

I am afraid I am not at liberty to
say, but if he could make an
appointment for tomorrow, all will
be explained. My card.

Elf hesitantly accepted the offered card, and stares between
the retreating Crabtree and his crisp white card, a smile
creeping over her face.

CUT TO:

22

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN-DINER - DAY

22

Elf paces up and down the kitchen, she crams biscuits into
her mouth impatiently as she examines the card again.

Edred and Edith come in the back door.

ELF

(mouth full of biscuit)
Guess what?

She slurps from a big gaudy mug of tea and waves the card at
Edred.

ELF (CONT'D)

A solicitor came round. Said he has
something for Edred.

He snatches it off Elf and scans it, before crumpling it in
disinterest.

EDRED

Why didn't they just send a letter?

ELF

He did, but got no answer.

A moment of realisation from Edith - oh!

EDITH

Wait.

She rummages around in a drawer full of letters.

EDITH (CONT'D)
Here it is. I thought it was for
me, see? E. Arden.

But Edred's attention is on the stuffed drawer.

EDRED
(quietly)
What are those?

Shamefaced Edith SLAMS the drawer shut.

EDRED (CONT'D)
Are they bills? Let me have a look.

She attempts to stop him, but he yanks out a handful of red lettered envelopes.

Edred gasps as he sorts through them. They are all final-reminders and due-dates.

EDITH
I was going to pay them. I was
waiting... you know. When money
comes in...

Edith's shoulders heave.

EDITH (CONT'D)
I'm trying my best.

Edred looks away and shuffles through the bills -- endeavours to contain his dismay.

ELF
We know you do. Hey - maybe this
solicitor thing is some good news.

Elf put her arms around Edith, she struggles to disguise the fact she doesn't believe her own words.

CUT TO:

23 EXT. EDITH'S HOUSE - O/S FRONT DOOR - DAY

23

An expensive BMW pulls up outside of the house. Crabtree emerges looking immaculate as he glances at his watch, he carries an old fashioned leather briefcase.

He strolls up the front path and grimaces after he hears the sound of the tacky electronic doorbell.

CUT TO:

24 INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN-DINER - DAY

24

Edith shows Crabtree into the kitchen diner and seats him at the table. Elf and Edred gaze at him nervously. Crabtree smiles kindly at the trio to break the embarrassing silence.

CRABTREE

Won't you?

He points at the chairs around the table, and the teens along with Edith sit down.

Elf giggles awkwardly as she and Edred both go for the same chair.

CRABTREE (CONT'D)

Thank you... I'm sure you are aware of the castle you can see as you drive into town. Lord Arden, who used to live there, passed away last -

ELF

Our name is Arden.

EDRED

Shh.

ELF

I didn't know anyone lived there -

She peters out as the others glare at her.

CRABTREE

As I was saying, Lord Arden died intestate - which means he passed without a will, and has no heirs.

ELF

What does that have to do with us?

Crabtree suppresses a sigh. If he was less of a gentleman he'd roll his eyes.

CRABTREE

We have studied the lineages, and found that your line may be legitimate.

Edith frowns.

EDITH

Erik looked into our ancestry years ago. He said the name was just a coincidence.

Crabtree glances down at his papers.

CRABTREE

It appears not. The 7th Viscount Arden secretly married his mistress, and had another child.

ELF

Does that mean -

Edred elbows her.

CRABTREE

(speeding up)

The recently deceased Lord Arden was the only heir from the Viscount's first marriage. By following the lineage of the **second** wife we found the only legitimate offspring was your great-great-grandfather - hence, as you, Edred, are the last remaining male...

(beat)

This makes you the 10th Viscount. You will henceforth be known as Lord Arden, and will inherit the castle.

Elf pings up from her chair. Edith laughs. Edred's mouth has dropped open in shock.

CRABTREE (CONT'D)

It is yet to be made official, but here at Crabtree and Crabtree, we are convinced it is so.

EDRED

Is there any money?

ELF

Can we live in the castle?

EDITH

What else does Edred get?

CRABTREE

As well as the castle and lands, there is a small amount of money.

ELF

Will I be a Lady Viscount?

CRABTREE

No. Edred's wife will be a Viscountess. You may style yourself as the 'Right Honourable.'

ELF

Why does he get the title? I'm his sister.

CRABTREE

A male primogeniture has been so for thousands of years.

ELF

That is so unfair.

EDITH

How much is a 'small amount' of money?

CRABTREE

There is a small surplus in the current account. But the income from the land only just covers the outgoings of the castle, the Lord was, by no means, a rich man.

EDRED

Can we sell the castle?

CRABTREE

It is a listed monument. You can't improve it or remodel it, so no one will want to buy it.

EDITH

How are we better off?

A beat.

Crabtree is embarrassed.

CRABTREE

My advice - don't give up your day job.

[Please visit Website marcushowell.uk For further details and to make contact]