

HAUNTED HEART

20 page excerpt by

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INT. FLORIST SHOP IN BROOKLYN - DAY

Several long-stemmed roses sit in a flower shop refrigerator.

BRENDA FISHBEIN (30) points to one. She's wearing a dark dress, dark glasses and a severe, spiky haircut.

BRENDA

Give me the tall, red one.

An exuberant Italian FLORIST (55) slides open the door.

FLORIST

Oh! She's very beautiful. Much too pretty to be all alone, yes?

BRENDA

No. I just want one.

FLORIST

I tell you what. I make you special price. Today only. A dozen for ten bucks. What d'ya say?

BRENDA

Just gimme the rose.

Deflated, the Florist moves with the rose to the counter.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

And no fancy paper. Okay?

She pulls a flask from her pocket and takes a hit off it.

EXT. FLORIST SHOP IN BROOKLYN - DAY

Brenda exits the shop looking very pissed. That's because the rose is smothered in brightly festive wrapping.

Waiting outside, EMILY BURKE (30s, lovely and ethereal) sees her come out with the bouquet.

EMILY

Awww. For me? That's so sweet.

(turning serious)

But you have to stop this, Bren. We both need to move on.

Ignoring her, Brenda moves to a trash can. She rips the wrapping off the mummified rose and tosses it.

EMILY (CONT'D)

You keep telling everybody you're over me, then you keep calling and calling. You have to let me go.

Finished, Brenda walks away.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Hey wait.

Emily follows her.

EXT. A STREET IN CARROLL GARDENS, BROOKLYN - DAY

Carrying the rose, Brenda moves down a street lined with Brownstones. Emily follows one step behind, still talking.

EMILY

You know what your trouble is? You want people to think you're tough but you're really a mush-pie. If I knew you were like this I never would've gotten mixed up with you.

She watches Brenda go up to a building and ring the bell.

EMILY (CONT'D)

That's not true. I wouldn't have missed a minute of what we had. It was fun, and surprising, and--

DANIEL LEE (30, fabulous but emotional) opens the door. Seeing Brenda, he bursts into tears and hugs her.

DANIEL

Oh muh God, oh muh God, oh muh God!

Brenda lamely pats his back. Emily cringes at the scene.

EMILY

Oh wow. I'm not ready for this.

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Having pulled himself together, Daniel leads Brenda in. The rest of his GUESTS are dressed in similar somber attire.

DANIEL

I'm so glad you came. I didn't see you at the service.

BRENDA
I came in late. I was in the back.
Behind the nuns.

DANIEL
Those were some big nuns. I think a
few of them used to be pro
wrestlers. You okay?

BRENDA
No. I probably shouldn't be here.

DANIEL
Don't be dramatic. It's not your
style. And it causes wrinkles.

Just then, STEVIE FRANKS (30, ever sneering) slides in.

STEVIE
Jesus! You brought a flower? What
do you think this is? A date?

DANIEL
Get away, Stevie. Now!

Stevie stalks off. Brenda hands Daniel her coat.

BRENDA
He's always so warm and welcoming.

DANIEL
Ignore that bitch. The rest of the
lipstick crew are here. Go say hi.

Brenda walks in, trying to avoid Stevie's hostile gaze.

She goes to a table covered with lit candles. They surround a
picture of Emily. She has dark, Scottish good looks and wears
a 'Mona Lisa' smirk. Looking at the picture, Brenda smiles.

Out of nowhere, Emily appears beside her.

EMILY
Ugh. I hate that picture.

BRENDA
(to herself)
She hated that picture.

Brenda can't see or hear Emily because, well, she's a ghost.
She puts down the rose. Ghost Emily sees Brenda tear up.

GHOST EMILY

Oh no. Please. No crying. And don't start rehashing stuff again.

Brenda touches the picture frame. The ghost sighs.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)

I guess there's no way I can stop you, is there?

Daniel's doorbell RINGS.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

Daniel whips open the door. He's much more jovial, as befits the mood of the noisy party raging inside. Brenda, wearing an overcoat and longer hair, enters holding a bottle of bourbon.

DANIEL

Finally! You're holding up the Manhattans. I thought you were bringing Brad?

BRENDA

Nope. We're kaput.

DANIEL

Good. I never liked him.

BRENDA

So you told me. Many times.

She takes off her overcoat and looks around.

DANIEL

Gimme, gimme, gimme.

She hands him her coat.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Not that. The bourbon. Throw your coat in the tub and give me a hand.

Brenda pushes her way to the bathroom and tosses her coat.

She moves to the living room and sees a tall, striking woman; Emily. A GUY is talking her ear off. As he blathers on, Emily meets Brenda's eye and gives her a lingering look.

Brenda goes to the kitchen where Daniel pours the bourbon into a cocktail shaker.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Start poking cherries.

Brenda pokes skewers into cherries as she glances at Emily.

BRENDA
Who's that?

DANIEL
Who's who? Oh, the glamazon. That's Emily Burke. She just started proofreading with us.

BRENDA
She keeps looking at me. Is she gay?

DANIEL
Not sure. Maybe. Lots of guys ask her out but she always says 'no.'
(shaking the cocktails)
Anyway, stay away from her. She's Stevie's friend. He'll rip your tits off if you go near her.

Brenda puts the skewers in the glasses. She looks up and sees Emily still peeking at her as the guy chatters on.

BRENDA
Who's that with her? Edgar?

DANIEL
(glancing over)
Oh God. Yes! He's a horror. If he didn't have bad breath he'd have no personality at all.

Daniel pours the mix into the glasses.

BRENDA
You suppose she'd like a Manhattan?

DANIEL
(surprised)
Look at you, getting all flirty.

BRENDA
I'm not flirting. I'm trying to save the poor girl before Edgar's breath melts her face. What's her name again?

DANIEL

Emily.

Brenda picks up two drinks and moves into the living room. Daniel watches her while sipping one of his creations.

EDGAR (27) is pressing a point as Brenda moves in.

EDGAR

I just can't see why an intelligent woman like you would, would ever--

BRENDA

Emmy! Great seeing you.
(to the guy)
Excuse us, Edgar.

Before he can say a word, Brenda spirits her away.

EMILY

Thank you, whoever you are.

BRENDA

Brenda. Fishbein. Of the Coney Island Fishbeins. Cheers!

She hands Emily a Manhattan and clinks glasses with her.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

Daniel says you're working with the lipstick crew on the night shift.

EMILY

Yeah. Why do they call it the 'lipstick' crew?

BRENDA

It's because of the shape of the building. It looks like a giant lipstick. I've worked that shift. Don't the late hours kill you?

EMILY

No. I really like them.

BRENDA

Ha! You must be part vampire.

EMILY

Yes. But only a small part.

They share a smile as they both sip their drinks.

BRENDA
What was Edgar going on about?

EMILY
Smoking. He's against it.

BRENDA
And you're for it?

EMILY
No. I think it's horrible. But I can't quit. I've tried everything short of taping my mouth shut.

BRENDA
Don't do that. It's a good mouth. Perfect for sipping a Manhattan.

Stevie spots Brenda and plants himself next to her.

STEVIE
Brenda! I see you've met Emily. Where's your better half?

BRENDA
We broke up. Two weeks ago. Now I'm the better half.

STEVIE
Too bad. You and Brad were a cute couple. It's good you've moved on. But then you're good at that.

BRENDA
Speaking of 'moving on', you should try it sometime. Like right now.

STEVIE
Just don't start any trouble.

Stevie moves off. Brenda sighs and turns to Emily.

BRENDA
We have history. I got drunk one night and slept with Stevie's boyfriend. Then they broke up and Stevie blames me. He says I have a 'toxic vagina' that destroys anything it touches. Anyway, what were we talking about?

EMILY
Smoking. As in, I need a cigarette. Badly.

EXT. STREET IN BROOKLYN (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

Holding her drink, Brenda shivers in the frigid air. Emily smokes a cigarette and doesn't appear at all cold.

BRENDA

Shit! The last time I was this cold paramedics were involved. You're not freezing?

EMILY

I'm Canadian. This is like spring for me. Go in. I'll be fine.

BRENDA

I'll suffer. It's worth it to avoid Stevie. So...what do you do?

EMILY

What do you mean?

Brenda takes a bracing slug from her Manhattan.

BRENDA

All I know is that you're a tall, Canadian vampire. And Daniel says you don't date. Why is that?

EMILY

I just don't like to get serious.

BRENDA

I hear you. And I agree. I hate 'serious.' Fortunately everything I do is frivolous.

EMILY

Even your job?

BRENDA

Especially that. I write speeches for Jack Masters. Ever hear of him?

EMILY

Sure. The motivational guy. He doesn't write his own speeches?

BRENDA

Nobody can be that motivational all the time. So I punch up his stuff. It's ridiculous but it pays well. I also do spoken word. I used to do it a lot. When I had more time.

EMILY

I write too. Songs. I came here hoping to be a singer slash songwriter. But so far I'm just a singer slash terrified.

BRENDA

What are you afraid of?

EMILY

The audience. I have horrible stage fright. Doesn't it scare you?

BRENDA

Never. I'll teach you a trick. Just look out and imagine everybody naked. Well, not everybody. Just the cute people.

(Emily laughs)

I can help you with that. I know some spots where you could go onstage and try stuff out.

Emily looks at Brenda between drags and almost weakens.

EMILY

No. I shouldn't.

BRENDA

Why not? You want to sing, don't you? Come on. We'll have fun.

EMILY

I really can't.

BRENDA

You're against fun? You just said you don't like serious.

EMILY

Yeah but-- Thanks anyway.

BRENDA

So that's a 'no?'

EMILY

Yes. That's a 'no.' Sorry.

BRENDA

I don't like 'no.' 'No' is so final. You should try 'maybe.'

EMILY

Is this you being motivational?

BRENDA

No. I'm being insistent. I'm also intrigued and delighted and freezing. So can we try 'maybe?'

EMILY

(smiling)
Okay. Maybe.

END FLASHBACK

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Still standing by Emily's picture, Brenda feels her silenced phone BUZZING in her pocket. She answers it.

BRENDA

Hello. This is Brenda.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Ms Fishbein, it's Acroda Capital.
We need to talk about your loan.

Upset, Brenda hurriedly hangs up. Ghost Emily sees this.

GHOST EMILY

You'd better talk to those people.
They're not going to go away.

Brenda tucks away the phone and moves to the kitchen.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)

And you can't keep running these memories over and over and drinking yourself to sleep every night.

Brenda grabs a glass and fills it with whiskey.

DANIEL

Everybody. Listen. I want you to hear something. Emily wrote this.

Daniel hits 'play' on his remote. The stereo plays the guitar intro to a song. Ghost Emily GROANS and sinks to the floor.

GHOST EMILY

(to Brenda)
I'm going to get you for this.

Brenda smiles, sipping her drink as the music plays.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. EAST VILLAGE CLUB (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

Brenda's waiting outside. Emily anxiously rushes toward her with a guitar. The intro to her song continues to play.

EMILY
(very nervous)
No audience, right? Just you and
me. You promised.

BRENDA
Just you and me.

INT. SMALL DOWNTOWN CLUB (TWO YEARS AGO)- DAY

The twenty or so cafe tables are empty except for Brenda. Emily sits onstage, tentatively playing and singing.

EMILY
(singing)
My heart is calling home
Though we said goodbye
I feel you with me
Tears fall from my eye

Her voice is horrible. So bad that Brenda has to pinch her leg hard to keep from laughing. Emily sings the chorus.

EMILY (CONT'D)
(singing)
I can feel your finger tips
I still taste your tender lips
The memory never slips
It's haunting me

Walking in, a BARTENDER (25) calls out to Brenda.

BARTENDER
Jesus! Somebody strangling a cat?
(noticing Emily)
Oh. Sorry.

Emily stops singing. She's crushed.

EXT. LIPSTICK BUILDING (TWO YEARS AGO) - NIGHT

Later that night, Emily smokes and cries as she carries the guitar to her job. Brenda awkwardly pats her back as they go.

EMILY

It's true. I stink. Totally.

BRENDA

You don't. Not totally.

EMILY

I have no business being on stage.
I'm horrible.

(reacting to Brenda)

Please. Stop hovering.

BRENDA

I'm not hovering. I was comforting.
Patting a sobbing person's back is
my signature comforting move.

EMILY

I can't do this. I'm going home. I
should never have come here.

BRENDA

Why do you say that?

EMILY

Because I have no talent!

BRENDA

Not for singing, no. But the song
was excellent. Personally I'm
relieved. Before I heard you sing I
thought you were perfect. I'm
thrilled to find out you're human.

Emily stabs out her smoke.

EMILY

Ugh. Look at me. I have to go to
work. And I'm a wreck.

BRENDA

You're stunning.

Unable to hear it, she picks up the guitar and moves off.

EMILY

Thanks for walking me. Good bye.

EXT. LIPSTICK BUILDING (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

The next morning, people arrive for work as the exhausted
night crew stumbles out. Daniel and Emily come out. She's
surprised to find Brenda there with a tray of coffees.

BRENDA

Morning. I didn't know how you like your coffee so I got an assortment. I have your basic black, milk no sugar, milk and sugar--

DANIEL

I'll take one. So long you two.

He grabs a coffee and scoots off as Emily turns to Brenda.

EMILY

What are you doing here?

BRENDA

I'm walking you home. How was work?

EMILY

Tedious, mindless and torturous.

BRENDA

Is that the name of the firm you work for?

She laughs as they walk off. Stevie Franks exits the building and, seeing them together, silently hisses disapproval.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

Emily and Brenda stroll up to Emily's place.

BRENDA

The point is there's no shame in just being a writer. I couldn't sell a calzone to a starving Italian. But I can write a great speech for somebody who can.

EMILY

I guess. I just always saw myself doing both.

Emily opens the gate to a three story Brownstone and moves inside. Brenda screws up the courage to follow her in.

BRENDA

Hey! I hope you don't mind, but I called a singer I know. I asked if she'd do your song at an open mic. She said 'sure.'

EMILY

What? For real? That's amazing.

Emily hugs her. Overwhelmed, Brenda pats her back.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Uh. You're patting again.

BRENDA
Sorry. It's a reflex.

EMILY
This is so wonderful. Thank you,
Brenda. You're an angel.

BRENDA
Hardly. I was raised to help out.
You should see me sort socks.

EMILY
Would you like to come up for a
bit?

BRENDA
Yeah. I would. But I'm late for
work. Some other time.

EMILY
Okay. Good night.

She impulsively kisses Brenda on the lips.

BRENDA
(smiling)
Good morning.

EXT. STREET IN BROOKLYN (INTERCUT WITH FLASHBACK) - DAY

Standing outside Emily's gate, watching this memory unfold,
is present-day Brenda. Ghost Emily is standing behind her.

They both watch as 'flashback Emily' walks up to her door.

GHOST EMILY
Yeah. That was nice. But you can't
live in the past. You have to--
(looking at her past self)
Oh wow. I miss that coat.

As the FLASHBACK FADES, Brenda walks inside the gate and
places the red rose on the steps, where they first kissed.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
Again, very sweet. So, are we done
now? 'Cause I'd really like to go.

Brenda begins to walk off.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
 Why can't you listen? Brenda!

She exhales her annoyance as she watches Brenda go.

EXT. QUEENSBORO PLAZA STATION - NIGHT

The N train comes up from underground into what's left of the afternoon light. It rattles forward into Queens.

INT. N TRAIN - NIGHT

Brenda sits in a mostly empty car, staring out at the setting sun. Ghost Emily sits opposite her, taking in the scene.

GHOST EMILY
 I remember the first time I saw you onstage. You were talking about love. How your grandmother, your 'bubbie', told you when you fell in love, you'd hear bells. How, after every date, she'd ask 'Any bells?' Don't you want to feel like that? About a person who's alive?
 (looking at her)
 I really wish you could hear me.
 Hey. Maybe I can call you.

Emily concentrates. Hard. Brenda's phone buzzes.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
 Nailed it!

Brenda checks her phone. The Caller I.D. says 'Potential Spam' so she clicks it off. Emily's outraged.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
 It's not 'Spam!' It's me!

Brenda sees she has a bunch of missed calls. Some from Acroda Capital and some from 'boss man.' She plays a message.

The voice of JACK MASTERS (55) bellows from the phone.

JACK (O.S.)
 Bren! Where are you? I've been texting you all day. Be at the office tomorrow. Eight o'clock. Sharp. And look sharp. Okay?

GHOST EMILY
Good idea. Do some work. That'll
get you back on track.

Brenda pulls out her flask and takes a drink.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
Or not! I give up.

EXT. MIDTOWN MANHATTAN - DAY

It's morning at the offices of Bascomb Publishing.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE AT BASCOMB - DAY

Wearing a wrinkled blazer, Brenda sits surrounded by posters of Jack Masters' beaming face, announcing his books; 'Master of Wealth', 'Master of Happiness', 'Master of Sex.'

The 'master' paces in front of her. Jack looks as polished as he does on the posters, only without the smile.

JACK
The Feds are after me! I bought
40,000 shares in a Hong Kong suit
company. Then I went on CNBC and
said how great they were. Next
morning the stock tripled in value.
Now they're saying I did something
like 'stock manipulation.'

BRENDA
Jack, that is stock manipulation.

JACK
But it's the truth. Their suits are
terrific. Look at this.

He holds out his sleeve and rubs it.

JACK (CONT'D)
It's made of rice. Amazing, right?
(looking at her)
I said look sharp. What happened?

BRENDA
My prom dress is at the cleaners.

Shaking his head, Jack heads for the door. Brenda follows.

INT. BASCOMB PUBLISHING - DAY

Jack exits his office and runs into ENID (20), an intern.

ENID
Good morning, Jack.

JACK
Good morning, Enid. Are we going to
'Master the World' today?

ENID
You bet we are.

When Brenda catches up to him, Jack drops the cheery tone.

JACK
I'm totally screwed. When I told
Bascomb I'm being investigated he
cancelled the roll out of the new
book. That means no tour for me and
no speeches for you.

BRENDA
Shit! What are we going to do?

JACK
I'm gonna fight this thing. Hire a
bunch of lawyers. Some real sharks.

BRENDA
But what about me? I need money.

JACK
You'll keep doing what you've been
doing. Just not for me. Bascomb is
teaming you with another speaker.

BRENDA
Who?

JACK
Her!

He points to a poster on the wall of SHARON STEEL. It's for
her radio show 'Carin' With Sharon.' Brenda is horrified.

BRENDA
No Jack! Not that. I can't--

JACK
Look. It's the best I could do. It
was her or Baktu, the pet psychic.

BRENDA

I don't want to work with 'Carin' fucking Sharon.'

JACK

You like eating food and sleeping indoors? Then work with her.

Jack moves down the hall followed by Brenda.

BRENDA

Look, I appreciate what you're trying to do--

JACK

There's no 'trying.' It's done.

BRENDA

Don't I get to say anything?

JACK

Sure. Start with 'hello.'

Jack knocks on a door and pushes her in ahead of him.

INT. SHARON STEEL'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda stumbles in. Startled, SHARON STEEL (49) stands with her skirt hiked up and her sneakered foot up on her desk.

SHARON

Hey! I didn't say 'Come in.'

She modestly pulls her skirt down.

JACK

Sorry, Sharon. You said eight o'clock. And I know how punctual you are. So I thought we'd just--

SHARON

Barge right in? How thoughtful.

JACK

Everything okay?

SHARON

No. Nothing's okay. My son wants to quit grad school, my radio show was replaced in three markets by Howard Stern re-runs and I have a knot in my God damned laces.

BRENDA
I can help you with that.

SHARON
Which one?

BRENDA
Let's start with the laces.

She extends her foot. Brenda crouches and digs into the knot.

SHARON
Thanks. I'd do it myself but I have
a book signing today. And I--

BRENDA
You can't chip a nail 'cause folks
will be looking at your hands. I
get it. Hold still.

Brenda roughly grabs Sharon's leg as she works on the knot.
Sharon shoots Jack an alarmed look.

JACK
This is Brenda. She's the ghost
writer I've been using. What she
lacks in manners she makes up for
in unfiltered genius.

Brenda pulls out the knot with a flourish.

BRENDA
As the Hungarians say, 'Voila!'

SHARON
Well, thank you. You seem...handy.
I guess this might work out.

Sharon pulls off her sneaker.

BRENDA
If you're unhappy about it--

SHARON
No no. I'm thrilled. Anybody who
can make that empty suit sound
intelligent gets my vote.

She grabs a book off the shelf.

SHARON (CONT'D)
Tell me. Do you know about 'The
Greatest Love?'

BRENDA

You mean 'getting paid?'

SHARON

No. My book. It's all about self love. How you can't love someone else until you love yourself.

(handing it to her)

I sold twenty million copies of that baby. Take it home, give it a look and we'll talk tomorrow.

(scowling)

Now get out.

EXT. FIRST DRAFT BAR - DAY

Brenda walks up to her favorite neighborhood bar in Queens.

INT. FIRST DRAFT BAR - DAY

She enters the literary themed bar. It has books everywhere, a large performance space in back and a sympathetic bartender named ARTIE (35) out front.

ARTIE

Hey Bren. How's it going?

Brenda grunts. Plopping on her usual stool, she opens 'The Greatest Love.'

Artie reaches behind the bar to a shelf of hammered, copper goblets inscribed with names. Brenda's mug sits next to one marked 'Emily.' Artie pours her a whiskey.

ARTIE (CONT'D)

What's that you're reading?

(glancing at the cover)

Sweet. What's next? You gonna sit in a circle of candles and start listening to Adele?

BRENDA

It's for work. And it's crap. 100% certified crap.

Brenda takes a drink from her goblet. The light above where she's seated flickers on and off. Artie looks up at it.

ARTIE

I better change that bulb.

Just then, LARRY (30, ever energetic) enters carrying a box.