

# “The Johnston Town Canary”

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**Characters:**

GIOLLA JOHNSTON: A lively 13 year old hoping to gain some knowledge of her world, and how her role in the occult shapes her life.

DALIA JOHNSTON: Wife to leader of Johnston Town, “Father” John Paul Johnston, mother to all the women of the cult, “Mother” Dalia acts as a moderator for the group, interacting the most with the girls, making sure that they stay in line. Despite her concerns, Dalia is loyal to her husband, doing anything to show her love for him.

JOHN PAUL JOHNSTON: Leader of Johnston Town and avid believer in things such as the occult and other cultish themes, John has decided to be a menace to society, and starts his cult as a way to get women. That’s it. That is literally his one goal.

**SCENE 1: INT. BARN HOUSE, LATE AFTERNOON**

*A group of women sit in the shape of a circle, the dim light of the campfire they surround creates ghostly shadows on their face.*

*GIOLLA (13) sits at the fringes of the group, anxiously shaking her foot as she stares into space. Before her thoughts can become too deep, the loud clattering of the barn door echoing in the dense folds of the wooden room. DALIA, (53) strides in, wringing her hands nervously before addressing the group.*

DALIA

As many of you know, John Paul  
Johnston, my husband and father to all,  
has fallen ill.

*Whispers erupt amongst the women, each with their own blurbs of speculations.*

GIRL #1

(Whispers to the person next to  
her)

Father is ill? When I talked to Mother  
she said-

GIRL #2

(Whispering to herself)

I wonder if it was his food? Sam was  
the last to prepare it...

GIRL #3

What will we do?! W-without Father  
we're doomed!

*Dalia hushes the group, spit flying.*

DALIA

SHUSH! Good heavens. If I do recall,  
Father adamantly refuted against  
gossip. As he always said:

*At this line the group chants in an ominous tone.*

EVERYONE:

"Whispers are the devil's fruit."

DALIA

Precisely. H-however, as per my husband's request, we are to continue our duties. That means prayer at noon, and supper is to be on the table by 6. Understood?

*Once again, the group speaks in unison:*

EVERYONE:

Yes, Mother. Praise be!

DALIA

*(Under her breath)*

Praise be.

After the short meeting is adjourned, the heavy oak barn doors are opened, orange lights flooding into the room. Giolla rises from her place, gathering her long skirt as she begins to fight through the crowds to reach Dalia.

GIOLLA

M-mother?

*Dalia continues to exit the barn, ignoring her child as she whispers an incoherent prayer. Frustrate, Giolla speeds up, finally able to keep up with the older woman's pace.*

GIOLLA

MOTHER!

*Dalia doesn't turn around, simply cocking her head in acknowledgement.*

DALIA

*(Through gritted teeth)*

Yes, my child?

GIOLLA

I was wondering if you needed any help taking care of Father? You know how

good I am at medicine, and I- well I  
wanted to talk to him about the city..  
*Giolla begins to trail off as Dalia abruptly stops in  
her tracks.*

DALIA

No. No, absolutely not.

*Dalia fully turns around, and begins to speak to the  
child in a hushed tone.*

DALIA (CONT'D)

Giolla, you know first hand how poor  
Father's condition is. Under NO  
circumstances will you set foot in his  
room to spew these childish rumors  
that seem to always cloud your mind.  
Now, off to the field, there is much  
to do.

*Defeated and ashamed, Giolla timidly shakes her head, hands  
tightly clutching her fabric skirt. A frustrated and  
sleep-deprived Dalia hurries off, loud and wet coughs echoing out  
from the wooden house only a few paces from the tattered barn.  
Once she is gone, Giolla hurriedly runs towards the back of the  
large house, searching for a way in. She tries the creaky patio  
door, only to find it locked.*

GIOLLA

*(Under her breath)*

Shit.

*She then sprints towards a rickety ladder posted up against the  
rotting boards of the white, mud stained house. With a sharp  
inhale, she carefully ascends the danger hazard, clumsily  
throwing herself through the nearest window, landing with a  
thud. She sits up, looking around as she panics about the loud  
sound her land made. She exhales and goes through a maze of  
doors, until she finds one with a hard oak door, knocking on it.*

GIOLLA

*(Whispering through the door)*

F-father?

*She knocks once more, awaiting a response.*

GIOLLA (CONT'D)

Father, it's me Gio! We talked about kites last week, remember?

*Giolla waits for another moment before entering the room.*

**END OF SCENE 1**

**SCENE 2: INT. FATHER'S ROOM- EVENING**

Giolla enters Father's (John's) room, which is covered in medicine. Pill bottles, IV stands, sage, any healing technique you could imagine is there. Father, pale and sickly, practically on death's door, lays on a soiled bed, weakly breathing. Giolla slowly creeps towards Father's bed, fright enveloping her large eyes. She pulls up an old, creaky chair, playing with her hands before speaking.

GIOLLA

Hello Father! I- hope I am not bothering you. Mother- she says we are not to bother you, b-because you need your rest. But, I'm not bothering you, right?

*Giolla waits for her father's answer, who obviously doesn't reply.*

GIOLLA (CONT'D)

I really do wish we could spend more time together. But... well, you're always busy in your study, doing God's work... But isn't spending time with your children God's work as well?

*Father lets out a heavy, gross cough, scaring Giolla.*

GIOLLA (CONT'D)

Father, are you alright? I swear, I-i  
didn't mean that I simply, well all I  
meant was..

*Giolla trails off, her head hung as she backs herself  
into an ideological corner.*

GIOLLA (CONT'D)

Anyways, I wanted to make sure you  
were well! Mother said you would have  
a speedy recovery...

*Giolla looks over at Father, utterly disgusted at the  
almost corpse in front of her.*

GIOLLA (CONT'D)

But you don't look so good. N-not that  
I don't want you to recover, I just-  
nevermind.

*Giolla lets out a deep sigh, looking out of the  
nearest window.*

GIOLLA (CONT'D)

I know you say we should keep to our  
wits, a-and stay true to the Lord...  
but I'm unsure that I'm really cut out  
for this. Don't get me wrong, I love  
Mother and my sisters, and of course I  
love you..

*We see a montage of Giolla's past memories, they start off fairly  
pure: family dinners, everyone laughing with Father at the head of  
the table, and goofing off while doing chores. Things get very dark  
very fast: Giolla witnessing a sacrifice, blood and guts spread  
around an altar filled with incense, girls in line to meet with  
Father about their behavior, yelling spewing out of closed doors,  
and other images that insinuate something is wrong with this home.*

GIOLLA

*(Voice shaking)*

Do you remember Sammuel, Father? He was the boy we... we k-killed. *(Beat)* Do you ever feel bad about that? Am I a bad person, Father? He was so sweet, he had dreams and aspirations, but he can't live them out now. I-i don't know, I just- I don't understand? From the books that I found in your- I mean the school library, it doesn't seem like the city folks do this sort of thing.

*Giolla is clearly panicked, re-thinking her whole world view. Father begins to move, placing his hand on the younger's, mustering the strength to tell her one last thing.*

JOHN/FATHER

*(Hoarsely)*

Y-you are next. R-repent, or s-suffer.

*With a final menacing clench of Giolla's hand, Father releases a heavy breath, his body failing and sinking into the soiled sheets of his bed. Panicked, Giolla jumps up, attempting to help Father.*

GIOLLA

FATHER?! Father, are you alright?

Father? FATHER?!

*Like a madman, Giolla shakes the corpse, attempting to wake him. She sits there in a pool of silence, before sprinting out of the room, not caring if anyone sees her. Jumping out of the window she entered, Giolla hits the ground with a hard thud, a large gash making a home in her leg. She holds back an anguished cry, continuing her escape. She only gets a few feet from the house before she hears Dalia's screams, dread filling her stomach as she realizes that it has begun.*

DALIA

GIOLLA!! GET BACK HERE, NOW!



*Giolla ignores Dalia and continues running, going until her legs go weak and she collapses near a tree. She shakes, full of panic and despair, clawing at her hair as a sort of release.*

GIOLLA

*(Whispering to herself)*

No, no, no, w-what have I done?  
F-father is.. dead! Who will protect  
us? Who will feed us? What will we do?  
Oh god, it's all my fault!

*Giolla begins to sob, bearing her soul to the muddy grass surrounding her. The screams of Dalia can be heard in the distance, the wails of her sisters send chills down her spin. Giolla looks up to the sky in horror, expecting to see the end of times. Instead, she sees the beauty of the universe at her fingertips- stars light up the sky, bringing her a sense of peace, and confusion.*

GIOLLA (CONT'D)

B-but Father said if he died... where  
are the cherubs? The fire raining  
down? God damn it, God himself should  
be coming down to kill us all? Where  
is all of it?

*Giolla continues to cry- but for different reasons. Her entire world has just crumbled and reshaped itself In front of her very eyes. A joker-esque smile plasters itself on her face as she clutches the cross on her chest, ripping it from the chain. With a shudder she gathers her strength, and begins to walk through the thick forest that surrounds her home, towards the lights of the city.*

**END OF SCENE 2**

**SCENE 3: INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT, NIGHT**

*Giolla enters the bright police station, illuminated by buzzing, fluorescent lights. She hobbles towards the front desk, covered in bruises and cuts.*

*Giolla makes eye contact with the weary receptionist, beginning her spiel that she practiced on the journey here. With a shudder, she begins.*

GIOLLA

M-my name is Giolla Johnston. I came from a ... farm? I'm not sure what to call it, but it's about 5 miles from the city. I... I would like to report a murder. M-multiple, actually. Oh, and our leader, our Father- he's dead. And now ... I'm free.

**END.**