

*The
Hauntess
of
Moon Lake*

A Story for Ghosts

Written by

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List of Characters

Eleanor Thorburn (*Female, mid to late 30s, any ethnicity*)

Beatrice Walker (*Female, mid to late 30s, any ethnicity*)

Edward Thorburn (*Male, mid to late 30s, any ethnicity*)

The Mystic (*known initially as 'Old Woman,' Female or Non-binary, old presenting, any ethnicity*)

Henry (*Male, 50s – 60s, any ethnicity*)

Eli Hayes (*Male, 50s – 60s, any ethnicity*)

Evelyn Hayes (*Female, late 30s – early 40s, any ethnicity*)

Alise (*Pronounced “uh-leez,” Female, 20s, any ethnicity*)

Father McLaggen (*Male, 50s – 60s, any ethnicity*)

The Sentry of Death (*Female, ageless, any ethnicity*)

Dollie (*Female, any age, any ethnicity*)

Mrs. Walker (*Female, late 30s to 40s, any ethnicity*)

The script is written for a cast of nine, with Mrs. Walker, Dollie, The Sentry of Death, and any other ancillary characters being played by the actors playing Eli Hayes, Evelyn Hayes, and Alise.

On style or 'feel'

The Hauntess of Moon Lake is a pagan-fantasy ghost story. The time is the late 19th century. In writing, it was envisioned with an old Celtic feel, drawing on the music and pagan-myths of ancient ages. However, any culture worldwide could adapt this play using the ancient music, aesthetic, and myths of their distant ancestors.

For the Dead.

*The Dead we mourn, the Dead we don't,
the Dead we've long forgotten.*

Death changes us all.

Prologue

Darkness. And in that darkness, voices waft in from the distance...

VOICE 1

Welcome...

VOICE 2

Don't be afraid.

VOICE 3

I am here to help you.

VOICE 1

So that you may understand.

VOICE 2

You'll be alright.

VOICE 3

If you understand.

Dim lights glow in the surrounding forest, pulsing and whispering. The voices are soft and gentle; embracing. They repeat from everywhere, overlapping and clarifying.

VOICE 1

Welcome...

VOICE 2

Don't be afraid.

VOICE 3

I am here to help you.

VOICE 1

So that you may understand.

VOICE 2

You'll be alright.

VOICE 3

If you understand.

From the darkness, a figure approaches carrying a gas lantern before her. The voices fade with each repetition as she steps through the veils of clouded moonlight.

She settles and the voices drift away. She regards those before her, offering a comforting presence.

ELEANOR Welcome to my home.

She raises her hand and with the snap of her finger sends everything back into darkness and silence.

The faint lapping of water on a peaceful shore drifts into earshot. Something disturbs the still water on another part of the shore. A flock of birds taking off from a clump of reeds perhaps. Just then –

Act 1

The Shore

BLINDING LIGHT as Eleanor shoots up from the ground with a massive gasp for breath! Her eyes open briefly before she shuts and shields them from the punishing light.

ELEANOR Oh God...

She forces herself to catch her breath and groans as the hangover hits.

Oh God... Henry! *(desperately)* Henry!

Just then Henry, an old but still upright valet appears seemingly from nowhere.

HENRY Yes, ma'am?

Eleanor continues to shield her eyes from the punishing light.

ELEANOR Bring me my smelling salts, would you? And please, shut the blinds.

HENRY He's busy at the moment, ma'am.

ELEANOR What? No, the blinds. *(uncovering her eyes and pointing)* Shut the bl –

Eleanor stops, she's not in her room. Henry continues.

HENRY I'm afraid he'll be busy all afternoon until this evening.

ELEANOR What – Where are –

HENRY If you insist, madam.

Henry leaves.

ELEANOR *(calling after him)* Where are you going? *(noticing her wet clothes)* Oh God, not again... Henry!

Eleanor struggles to her feet and looks around, confused.

Where am I?

A low rumble of thunder rolls in from the distance. It startles Eleanor for a moment before she inspects where it came from.

Edward burst in from behind putting on his coat and gloves, frightening Eleanor.

EDWARD I'll return in a few days.

ELEANOR *(startled)* Oh God! Edward, what –

EDWARD The new mine in the north collapsed. I have to see to it's reopening as soon as possible.

ELEANOR Where are –

EDWARD I *have* to go. I won't know how many died until I arrive . *(He sighs, exasperated)*
Negligence...

ELEANOR No, not the damn mines. What is going on? Where are –

EDWARD We *need* this one to work.

Eleanor claps her hands before Edward but he doesn't react.

ELEANOR Hey! Hey!

EDWARD I have to go, whatever it is, it can wait until I return. We can't afford to lose another one to –

Edward cuts himself off.

ELEANOR Wait...

EDWARD What?

ELEANOR This is...

Edward falls into a sudden ecstatic smile.

EDWARD Are you sure?

ELEANOR No, it can't....

EDWARD What did he say?

ELEANOR *(testing)* He said it feels like a boy.

Edward wells up with joy but forces himself to simmer.

EDWARD And do you...?

Eleanor nods, unsure. Again Edward wells with joy and pride, grabbing her face and smashing his lips to hers. He gains control of himself.

Eleanor is taken aback as she remembers the moment but notices a strange lack of sensation on her lips and face, as if they'd never touched.

Alright, alright. We have to be careful this time. I'll get your tea, you should rest while I'm gone.

Edward shoots out of the room.

ELEANOR No, wait. Edward, what is going on? Why –

Just then, the day's swept away. Eleanor's surroundings are no longer blank as joyous music rolls in and a foyer unfolds around her. Her home, Moon Lake Manor.

The Wedding

Guests arrive with a burst of energy. Mr. and Mrs. Hayes enter with their young niece, Alise, new to town.

MR. H My God, I love a good wedding. Let's drink and eat all night.

MRS. H How is that different from any other night, dear?

Mr. Hayes glares at his wife and she returns a playful smile.

Besides, feasts are reserved for joyous occasions, not desperate transactions.

MR. H Don't be cynical.

ALISE It did feel like a rather *efficient* ceremony.

MRS. H *(to Alise)* Second ceremonies are not to be doted upon, dear. *(to Mr. H)* I suspect we'll be dining on boiled chicken and carrots with a single cup of cheap wine to wash it down.

ALISE They didn't look very happy.

MRS. H Have the weight of your entire family history thrust upon your shoulders dear, and you'll be as happy as –

Henry enters.

HENRY Ladies and Gentlemen! *(claps twice)*

Edward and Beatrice step into the room, her arm draped through his, waving to their guests as they all

clap.

Everyone goes silent as Edward and Beatrice take the center of the room.

ELEANOR Edward where did – Beatrice?..

Waltz music gently wafts through the room. Soft, formal, romantic. Edward and Beatrice embrace formally and step in threes, circling, not breaking one another's gaze.

The music darkens with the room, and their embrace grows tighter.

The pace quickens and their turns take on an aggression. They turn around and around, faster and faster, staring daggers into each other's eyes.

The guests look on, smiling and lost in a trance.

The music calms as light returns to the room, and Guests clap as if they've only witnessed a tender waltz.

HENRY Mr. and Mrs. Edward Thorburn, ladies and gentlemen!

ELEANOR WHAT?!

Edward and Beatrice bow and retreat to another room. Guests look on as they leave and then follow.

MR. H A smart match, indeed.

MRS. H She must be satisfied.

ALISE What do you mean?

MRS. H They should have been married years ago.

ALISE Really?

MR. H Oh, don't.

MRS. H *(to Mr. H)* What? *(to Alise)* They were “betrothed” as children. Supposed to be, at least. But he fell in love and married someone else instead – little Eleanor of the maid's quarters.

MR. H And it worked out for the best... Bless her heart.

MRS. H It was the lady's liver that was in need of blessing, dear. *(To Alise)* Woman could out drink a horse.

ELEANOR/ I beg your pardon?

MR. H Don't gossip.

ALISE But I heard The Lady of Moon Lake Manor was so – *elegant*.

MRS. H Was, dear. Til she drank herself to death.

MR. H Don't speak ill of the dead, it's not proper.

Eleanor freezes.

MRS. H It's been two months, dear. Move on.

Eleanor mouths to herself, "two months?"

HENRY Ladies and Gentlemen, if you'll please make your way to the dining room, dinner will be served.

Guests shuffle toward the exit.

ELEANOR Henry. Henry, you see me don't you? I'm not dead, right? (*Henry leaves*) Henry?!

Eleanor runs out of the house as the last of the guests retreat to the dining room.

ALISE What happened?

MRS. H She –

MR. H (*to MRS. H*) Don't gossip.

MRS. H It's not gossip if it's true, dear. (*to Alise*) "The Lady of Moon Lake Manor" stole Edward Thorburn of the great Throburn family from the bride you see today.

MR. H / That's not true.

ALISE No.

MRS. H Fine. She "wooded" him, however you'd like to say it. She was no one and he was to marry a proper lady of society, but he broke it off for her. A scandal for both families.

But she – and I'll give her this – she carried herself through the ordeal with such grace that not long after, society forgave her misstep.

Mr. Hayes scold his wife and stops them..

MR. H Enough. These types of conversations are not meant for a joyous day of celebration. May God rest her soul.

Eleanor enters the property cemetery and searches.

ALISE *(following)* May God rest her soul.

MRS. H *(obliging)* May God rest her soul.

Mr. Hayes marches the ladies to the dining room, stopping at the threshold with a groan. Mrs. Hayes looks at Alise and smirks

Eleanor finds her grave.

MRS. H Like I said, boiled chicken and carrots.

They leave.

Eleanor's Grave

Eleanor kneels at her grave, laying a hand on the grass that has begun to grow. Then both hands.

Nearby, an Old Woman pays her respects. Eleanor touches her tombstone.

ELEANOR “Here lies Eleanor Thorburn. Beloved wife and daughter.” That's it... 'Beloved wife and daughter...'

Faintly, the Old Woman snickers.

OLD W. *(under her breath)* Always the same...

Eleanor startles and notices her for the first time.

ELEANOR What did you just say?

The Old Woman stares at the tombstone a moment and bows her head to pray.

Of course. Poor old widow.

Eleanor watches her a moment. Then...

That grass beneath you is old and thick, and you're still here. *(looking down)* Mine is fresh with not a single lingering footprint. *(looking back to the old woman)* Could you pray for me too?

The Old Woman's clothes are tattered and though she leans with both hands on a wooden cane, she appears to be sturdy. Eleanor looks around, searching.

This has to be a dream. *(clapping her hands in the air)* Wake up! WAKE UP, YOU LUSH!

When it doesn't work...

Maybe I finally did drink the entire cellar.

The Old Woman snickers slightly and then stifles it. Eleanor watches her closely for a moment.

Did you just hear me? Hello?...

Eleanor cautiously moves her hands in front of the Old Woman's face and waves it. She doesn't react.

The Old Woman finishes her prayer, nods to the tombstone before her and then, ever-so-slightly, glances at Eleanor as she turns to leave.

I saw that!

The Old Woman shuffles away.

No wait wait.

OLD W. *(shuffling quicker)* Time to be on my way. Back home, alone.

ELEANOR *(chasing after her)* Please. What's going here? Why can you see me?

OLD W. Another quiet day.

Eleanor reaches to grab the Old Woman.

ELEANOR Hey!

Immediately the Old Woman lifts her cane and pushes Eleanor away.

OLD W. Stay back!

ELEANOR *(amazed)* You touched me.

OLD W. You stay away from me, spirit.

ELEANOR How did you...?

Eleanor attempts to step toward her but the Old Woman jabs forward with her cane; Eleanor stops.

Is this a dream? Why can't I wake up?

OLD W. This is no dream. This is your world now.

ELEANOR That can't be. I – There was no light, I'm just... here.

OLD W. It doesn't work like that.

ELEANOR I'm... ...

Eleanor is despondent. The Old Woman softens for a moment.

OLD W. I'm sorry, child. You have my condolences.

ELEANOR ... How?...

OLD W. I do not know. We never know at first.

ELEANOR 'We'. You're –

OLD W. No. I am not one of you.

ELEANOR I'm not supposed to be here...

The Old Woman tightens her lips and the grip on her cane.

Please. *(going to her)* You have to help –

The Old Woman pushes Eleanor back again with her cane.

OLD W. You stay back!

You listen to me, spirit. I will have no part in your transition. I am finished with this world. Living, spirit, all of it. You leave me be.

The Old Woman begins to back away. Eleanor pleads.

ELEANOR Please. I don't – Don't just leave here to watch my grave!

OLD W. You'll receive her message.

ELEANOR I don't –

OLD W. You will. Soon enough.

ELEANOR Help me. You want to help me, I can see it.

OLD W. I weep for you, deary. But I will not be compelled. I will no longer unburden the dead. You are not the only Being here who suffers.

Eleanor moves to the Old Woman and slowly extends a hand to her.

ELEANOR You're alone, like me. We don't have to be alone.

The Old Woman reaches toward Eleanor.

We can help each –

The Old Woman presses her hand against the air between she and Eleanor. Eleanor freezes in place; unable to move or speak.

The Old Woman tightens her grip on the air and Eleanor feels a squeeze as the Old Woman's gaze hardens from compassion to conviction.

OLD W. Here me, child. I will have no part in your transition. I will not play my part in this world until I know why. And you can tell *her* I said so.

The Old Woman steps back with caution, and then swiftly turns and shuffles away. Her ability to hold Eleanor fades as well. Eleanor regains control of her outstretched hand and crumples into it, cupping her face in her hands as she weeps.

It's only a brief moment before Eleanor realizes that she can't feel the touch of her own skin. She pulls her hands away from her face and tries again; nothing. She inspects her hands, moves them, entwines her fingers, but the familiar sensation of touch is absent.

Eleanor raises her hands into the air and notes a soft breeze. The air moves so gently that it would be almost unnoticeable in life but now Eleanor is acutely aware that the air never lands on her skin. It washes unceremoniously through her, ignoring her existence.

She reaches for the horizon and there, far off in the distance, the wavering sunset shines through the back of her hand like a hazy painting.

A crash of dinnerware shatters the silence. Eleanor startles. The sounds of the wedding celebration grow louder in the manor as the sun completely sets.

Eleanor sets off for the house and then stops. The stage goes dark except for a faint light resting on Eleanor. It grows brighter as it floats high into the night sky.

Beatrice's Nightmares

Standing there, in a brief moment, something inside Eleanor changes – she is no longer a cernuous ghost. A confident wisdom raises her as she speaks. turns

ELEANOR You likely don't know this, but ghosts don't sleep.

She looks directly at those before her.

We never even come close. Hello. I apologize for not introducing myself earlier. I am known as Eleanor. I'm here to help you. So that you may understand. You'll be alright, if you understand.

Eleanor looks up, checking for something. Above the audience, lights hover in the endless expanse.

Beatrice saunters into her bedroom. She brushes her hair and prepares for bed.

I'll return before you go. Don't worry.

Eleanor leaves. Edward appears at the door, unnoticed.

EDWARD I thought I'd find you here.

Beatrice quickly turns, frightened.

BEATRICE Oh!... *(quickly catching her breath)* Don't sneak up on me like that.

EDWARD Sorry.

You left the party unannounced.

BEATRICE Yes. I have a terrible headache.

EDWARD I understand. I just – thought my new wife would bid me 'good night' before retiring.

BEATRICE Sorry, of course.

Beatrice goes to Edward and kisses him on the cheek.

Good night, dear.

EDWARD Good night.

Edward starts to leave and then stops and turns back.

Did you enjoy yourself today?

BEATRICE ... It was perfectly suitable, dear. Thank you.

Enjoy the party. I really must rest.

EDWARD Of course. I hope you feel better in the morning.

Edward leaves.

Beatrice places her brush neatly on a table, dims the lights to darkness, and goes to bed.

After a time, the lights in the room begin to glow and pulse. Eleanor steps in from darkness and watches Beatrice sleep. After a while...

ELEANOR You bitch... This must be hell. This *has* to be hell.

(looking out into the void) Is this it? No punishment and reward, just perpetual semi-existence? Or I don't know, maybe heaven is different because this surely must be Hell!

Beatrice suddenly awakens, shooting up, momentarily shrieking and then immediately stifling it! She closes her eyes a moment while she catches her breath.

BEATRICE *(realizing, sighing relief)* Oh thank god...

She gets up and goes to the mirror. She stares at her reflection a moment, touching her face to make sure this is real.

Just a dream...

The clock strikes midnight with a ring, frightening a sudden yelp out of Beatrice and startling Eleanor.

Oh! God....

Beatrice looks back to the mirror and touches her face one more time.

Just a dream...

She goes back to bed. Eleanor watches her for a moment.

The forest illuminates in the distance as faint voices call. Flecks of light distinguish themselves from others, pulsing and drifting closer. They enchant Eleanor and she wanders off, allowing them consume her.

Absence

Edward's boots clack into the room.

EDWARD Henry said it was urgent, what is it? Eleanor?... I'm very busy today, I don't have time for distractions.

Eleanor drifts into the room, stroking an invisible belly.

ELEANOR Shhh, you'll scare him.

She inhales the vapors rising from a fresh hot tea; enjoying the butterflies and pinpricks inside her and

sipping occasionally.

EDWARD What's so urgent you demanded to see me?

ELEANOR *(kindly)* I didn't demand anything of you, love, I asked nicely. And if you're going to be in a rotten mood and scare him away then you can return to your work.

Edward catches himself.

EDWARD I'm sorry. I – *(sighing)* I have a lot on my mind.

ELEANOR Well, perhaps you could spare a corner for us.

Edward softens and goes to Eleanor.

He was just kicking, I thought maybe you two could meet finally.

Edward holds his hand out in the space before Eleanor and cradles her womb, steady and controlled but excitement welling up inside him.

EDWARD I don't feel it.

ELEANOR Just wait.

He drops on one knee, listening closely.

EDWARD Is there anyone in there?... It's rude to run from your father, you know.

Nothing...

I think we might have a shy son. Anything?...

ELEANOR No, I'm sorry, he's settled down.

Before Edward stands up.

EDWARD *(to his son)* I'll catch you one day.

ELEANOR Stay with us a moment, perhaps he's just resting.

EDWARD I have to see to the mine re-opening in the morning.

ELEANOR Then let it wait until morning.

EDWARD It's important that I be there.

ELEANOR It's important that you be *here* too.

Edward wants to stay. He grabs Eleanor's hand, just about to agree, but then stops with a sigh and shakes his head.

EDWARD I have to leave tonight. I have to be there first thing to ensure everything goes as planned this time.

Eleanor looks down but then nods her head.

And I promise, when he comes into this world and we finally meet, I will spend every moment I have with the both of you.

ELEANOR Edward what's wr –

Eleanor grasps at her stomach and steps away.

Oh, there he is... *(catching her breath)* Here, he's certainly up now. *(grabbing his hand)* He found a rib that time.

Edward quickly drops to one knee and then the other.

EDWARD Hey, hey. Settle down. Don't hurt her, she hears you. We're right here... *(he searches for movement)* Where are you?

The child kicks and Edward feels it, elated. He fills with joy at feeling his first kick. It causes less pain but still discomfort in Eleanor, she sips her tea to comfort herself.

Well, hello there young man. You *do* exist.

The baby kicks again. A sharp pain for Eleanor but Edward is alight.

You couldn't hide from me forever, lucky one...

The baby settles and Eleanor releases a breath. Then...

ELEANOR Edward...

EDWARD Hm?..

ELEANOR What's wrong?

EDWARD What do you mean?

ELEANOR You seem – worried.

Edward pauses, he strokes Eleanor's belly and then stands.

EDWARD Nothing. Genuinely nothing. Just a few debts to pay and I've had a bit of trouble keeping up, that's all.

ELEANOR We don't need all this. Sell it. It's killing you, I can feel it.

EDWARD No. This is my family's home. Our family. I'm not letting us fall into obscurity.

A look from Eleanor.

What?

ELEANOR I... Nothing...

EDWARD What?

ELEANOR Sometimes I still see your father in this house.

Edward deflates.

I'm sorry... I didn't mean –

EDWARD That's not –

ELEANOR I know, I know. I didn't –

EDWARD I'm not him.

ELEANOR I know.

EDWARD We just.... We won't be them. We can be something different, I don't want to be them. I just want to give you both the home you never had.

ELEANOR We don't need the house for that. I would happily raise him in a hut, with nothing but grain and stream water to sustain us. As long as we're with you.

Edward laughs and Eleanor smiles.

Stay with us. Ride out in the morning, the mine will keep for a night.

Eleanor gestures for Edward to embrace her.

We can even work on the next one.

A wry smile spread across Eleanor's face.

EDWARD I don't think it works like that.

ELEANOR We can practice then.

Eleanor begins to undo her dress; Edward relents. Moving toward her the light fades and Edward disappears into the wind.

The faintest glow hovers around Eleanor as she embraces an invisible figure, pressing him to her.

Voices whisper in unidentifiable languages. Some sound curious, others alluring, and some are nefarious.

A sliver of pale moonlight slices through the forest trees. Eleanor presses her forehead to an invisible Edward's, cradling his face with one hand and struggling to undress herself with the other.

The Spirits glimmer around Eleanor, floating like fireflies in the forest mist.

ELEANOR Can we name him?

The Spirits whisper to her.

Just say names. We don't have to decide anything. Just to see how they feel.

Whispers.

Too boring.

Whispers. Eleanor stops and holds the invisible Edward at a soft arm's distance.

Do not jinx your son with that name. You owe him nothing.

Whispers. Eleanor smiles and moves in closer.

That, I like.

She leans into Edward, releasing the top of her bodice.

That's a strong name.

We're going to meet him. I can feel it. We're finally going to meet one of our beautiful darlings.

Again, the Spirits whisper back, pulsing with life and moving to consume her as Eleanor leans in for a kiss.

The Mystic and the Sentry of Death

Through the darkness another voice chants. The Old Woman enters, her eyes intent. She chants in a mystic language, raising her staff. The Spirits' shimmer struggles.

OLD W. Back. Away. All of you. Or you'll be sent to a fate far darker than this.

The Spirits hiss.

Get back! Or I'll have Her collect each and every one of you.

They linger.

Back!

The Old Woman chants again, directing her voice to the ether. The Spirits relent and their light subdues.

Eleanor is left swaying in place, the trance lingering. The Old Woman approaches Eleanor and the Spirits retreat, hanging in the air around them.

You were all given time. She's only just arrived.

The Old Woman approaches Eleanor. She places a gentle hand on her shoulder.

Deary –

Eleanor awakens sharply and screams. She looks around, frightened, swatting at the twinkling Spirits.

ELEANOR What... What are y – Get away. Get away!

The Old Woman tries to grasp Eleanor's shoulder but Eleanor jumps back and slaps her hand away.

Get away from me!

She stops, recognizing the Old Woman.

You...

OLD W Sh, sh. You're safe, deary. It's alright.

ELEANOR What happened?

OLD W You wandered off.

ELEANOR Oh God... What's happening to me?

The Old Woman approaches Eleanor and reaches out, brushing the hair from her shoulder. Eleanor traces the slow movement of the Old Woman's hand as it rests on her shoulder. It lands. She sees it land, but still nothing on her skin. Not a single sensation of touch.

OLD W There's no God to hear you here, deary. So, best to let that go now.

The Old Woman moves to embrace her and Eleanor sags into her arms. She looks again at the lingering Spirits and tenses.

Don't worry, they won't take you.

Eleanor looks back to the Spirits.

ELEANOR What are they?

OLD W They're imperfect, like us. Come. You deserve to know where you are.

The Old Woman wanders off. Eleanor watches the Spirits drift away. She turns to follow the Old Woman but she's disappeared into the surrounding darkness.

ELEANOR Hello?... Where did you go? (*calling out*) You... Your name... I don't... Old woman who touches ghosts?

It's frigid and empty all around.

Hello? Hello?!! Come back... *Please!! Please...*

Nothing. Eleanor is lost in a vacuum of silence, infinity hanging in the air; her voice echoing around her.

CRACK! Eleanor jumps. Across from her a fire appears, crackling. Before the fire the Old Woman materializes. She lifts a thick, tattered cloak onto her shoulders, draping the large hood over her head. Only her long, coarse hair peaks through. Her limbs fortify as she places her hands on a table and her back straightens with the formidable strength and wisdom of a demigod.

In this realm she is a Mystic; tasked with assisting the remnants of the dead on their journeys.

The Mystic sits at the table, a deck of cards stacked to the side. The only thing that seems to age is her voice. She speaks in creaks and rasps, crackles and snarls, as if her throat were worn from a thousand years of thirst.

ELEANOR (*recovering*) Oh God...

MYSTIC Still can't hear you. I told you, let that go.

ELEANOR What – Who are ...?

Eleanor looks over the Mystic, searching for the strange old woman from before.

MYSTIC Don't bother searching, deary. you'll find nothing familiar here. I am who you found at your grave.

ELEANOR But you're – you don't –

MYSTIC Death changes us all. You, too, are not what you once were. Sit.

ELEANOR There's no chair.

MYSTIC Then sit where your feet lie.

Eleanor shivers and checks around her.

Don't worry. They're back in your world.

Eleanor doesn't sit.

ELEANOR It's so cold. Do you have another blanket?

MYSTIC One or a thousand would not help you, you'll be cold for some time, I'm afraid.

The Mystic grabs the deck of cards from the corner of the table, places the deck with purpose, and fans them before her.

Sit. We'll examine your place so that you can proceed.. But hear me, child. I will offer you no more. Do you understand?

Eleanor stares at the cards. The Mystic beckons her gaze with a gaunt finger.

Look at me, child. *(Eleanor looks)* This is *your* journey. I will not be compelled by you.

Eleanor nods.

ELEANOR Yes.

MYSTIC Draw.

Eleanor eyes the cards.

ELEANOR What will happen?

MYSTIC They will help you see.

Eleanor hesitates.

If you wish, you may return the way you came. The Spirits of your world would be delighted to occupy you again

ELEANOR ... I... It's a trick... I...

MYSTIC If you want my help, do as I say. I'll not offer it again.

ELEANOR I can't... I...

Eleanor is held by fear, unable to choose. The Mystic slams her palm on the table.

MYSTIC This is not a *trick*. This is beyond anything your mortal wits have ever dared to grasp. You are no longer mortal, so cease with your stubborn beliefs and *draw-your-first-card*.

Eleanor makes her decision and sits. She holds a finger briefly over a card before laying it down and drawing it toward her. The Mystic flips it. The Two of Cups, reversed.

MYSTIC Hm. Don't you all. Tell me about your lover, child.

ELEANOR My –

MYSTIC There's no point in hiding. The Two of Cups always comes with a lover.

ELEANOR My *husband*. Edward.

MYSTIC Absent footprints from your grave.

ELEANOR Two months dead and it's his wedding night.

MYSTIC All may not be as it seems. Many of your kind conceal themselves.

The Mystic taps the card.

Reversed. What went wrong, child?

ELEANOR I died.

MYSTIC Not that.

ELEANOR Where should I start then? From the beginning? Let me see, hm – Well he was born to one of the richest families for a thousand miles and I was –

MYSTIC Child –

ELEANOR – one step above dirty dishwater. Then there was his father who –

MYSTIC Stop child.

ELEANOR I'm a grown woman, stop calling me a child!

MYSTIC You *are* a child! Every living Being in this universe begins as a *child* –

ELEANOR I –

MYSTIC You humans live as a child in the universe until you're born into –

ELEANOR Just please stop saying “child”!

Eleanor stares sharply at the Mystic. After a moment...

MYSTIC I see...

ELEANOR Please.

MYSTIC Apologies, deary. They found peace, I promise you that. We between the Dead and Thereafter see to that without compromise.

Draw.

Eleanor chooses another card. The Three of Swords.

ELEANOR My death?

MYSTIC Sorrow and betrayal.

ELEANOR Of course.

MYSTIC There's more to your story than the Three of Swords can reveal. Again.

Eleanor draws another card and the Mystic flips it. The Tower.

MYSTIC A change.

ELEANOR A change?

MYSTIC The Tower was struck by a great force and never the same again.

ELEANOR Change, love, sorrow. Is there anything you're going to tell me that I don't already know?

MYSTIC Careful, deary. You know not the forces you mock.

These events occurred in your mortal life, true, but you do not know which cards are

your past and which are your future. The Tower tells you to abandon that which you hold true in order to find the change you seek. Draw two more.

Eleanor looks at the Mystic, beginning to doubt. She pulls two more cards forward, which The Mystic flips. The Queen of Swords and the Seven of Swords.

Hm. Just as I said, you carry a burden with you in death.

ELEANOR A burden?

MYSTIC “Unfinished business,” many of your kind say. Something earthly weighs on you. *(tapping the card)* Somewhere The Queen of Swords has lied to you. The Seven of Swords betrays her deceit.

Stunned, Eleanor looks up at her.

Someone you know?

The Mystic moves The Queen of Swords and the Seven of Swords together, underneath the Three of Swords.

Two more.

Eleanor carefully pulls two more cards forward. The Mystic flips the first one. The King of Cups.

(smiles) Your Edward, I presume. King of Cups. Master of his emotions.

ELEANOR Yes.

MYSTIC Hm.

The Mystic flips the last card; The Moon. She looks up at Eleanor.

ELEANOR What? What is it?

MYSTIC La Luna.

ELEANOR What does it mean?

MYSTIC The path before you is long. Something is not as it seems.

ELEANOR What?

MYSTIC I cannot say.

ELEANOR You cannot say? Tell me what it is.

MYSTIC There is nothing to say. There are only signs. I am a shepherd of wayward spirits. I guide, I do not undertake your journey for you. (*gesturing to the cards*) These are your signs.

ELEANOR I want another.

Eleanor reaches for the deck and the Mystic slaps her hand.

MYSTIC Do not touch the cards unless you are invited.

ELEANOR (*annoyed*) Why can you touch me?!

MYSTIC You touched my cards, why shouldn't I be able to touch *you*? It's the living you're separated from, and *I* am not the living.

ELEANOR I want another.

Again Eleanor reaches for the cards. When The Mystic goes to slap her hand again Eleanor draws it back and quickly reaches with her other hand, drawing and flipping a single card in one motion: Death.

Eleanor let's go of an astonished laugh that falls into menace.

ELEANOR ... Death? Seriously?! I already know that part! I'm dead!

Eleanor swipes a hand across the table, scattering the cards.

Is this just supposed to waste my time while I –

A loud KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK echos. It frightens Eleanor but The Mystic is still.

MYSTIC I told you, do not mock the cards, you'll anger her. And those who have yet to reach their destination are wise to not provoke her anger.

ELEANOR Who?

MYSTIC The Goddess herself.

ELEANOR Death... ?

MYSTIC Death is merely an action. *She* is the keeper between your world and what lies beyond. She is the *Sentry* of Death.

The Mystic holds up the card.

This is not meant as a part of your message, it's her seal.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

(smiles) She would speak with you.

Eleanor looks around.

ELEANOR Are – are you going to let her in?

MYSTIC If she wished to be seen, she'd be seen. There are no barriers for her here. Go.

Eleanor cautiously steps around.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

ELEANOR H – Hello?

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Can – Can you – Will you please tell me why I'm here?

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

I can hear you, I'm listening.

SLAM. Eleanor jumps and then shouts back in defense.

Why are you doing this to me?! Why won't you let me pass?!

The Mystic's head is hung, she groans and creaks. The Sentry of Death has taken her. The Mystic lifts her head, eyes gleaming hollow. Her voice fumes and burns as the Sentry of Death speaks through her.

MYSTIC *(as S.O.D.)* Vengeance...

ELEANOR I – I'm sorry.

MYSTIC *(as S.O.D.)* No...

ELEANOR What do you want me to do? Just tell me! Please!

MYSTIC *(as S.O.D.)* No... Vengeance... On... You...

ELEANOR What?

MYSTIC *Vengeance... For... You...*

The Mystics head falls limp.

ELEANOR What do you mean? ... *(silence)*... Vengeance for what? What do I have to do??

The Mystic shakes her head, the Sentry of Death is gone.

MYSTIC Oh. She likes you, deary, she rarely clarifies herself.

ELEANOR Why didn't she just tell me what I have to do?

MYSTIC It's never that simple, child. It's not her part.

ELEANOR Why won't she let me pass?!

The Mystic gives Eleanor a moment to calm down.

MYSTIC She would see you unburdened. Burdened souls do not cross into an existence of peace.

ELEANOR I'm sorry, I...

MYSTIC It could be far worse. Some only receive glimpses. Not all souls receive her favor. She's speaking to you, that is a gift. She does not wish for you to join the lost ones, left alone in the cold void until the world perishes.

ELEANOR The lost ones?

MYSTIC Whom you met them in the forest. Your memories are fresh, theirs are long forgotten. They have nothing left but to feed on the memories of the departed.

ELEANOR What happens if I don't... if I never unburden.

MYSTIC They will draw you back into the forest and feed until you join them.

Eleanor is despondent.

Do not lose hope, child. She will help you. You moved her.

ELEANOR Moved Her? Moved Death?

MYSTIC You think she doesn't feel? You think she was always as she is? I told you, every living Being in the universe begins as a child.

ELEANOR How do you know she'll help?

MYSTIC We've transitioned many souls together. I've known many of her counterparts. I interpret their messages.

ELEANOR Then help me.

MYSTIC I have helped you.

ELEANOR She spoke through you.

MYSTIC And she's unlikely to do it again.

ELEANOR How do you know?

MYSTIC Because she bears great pains to do so! You think her entirely omnipotent? She experiences pain, joy, suffering, sorrow, just as you.

She's making herself quite clear with you, you do not need me.

ELEANOR Why won't you help me?!

MYSTIC Because I cannot bear to pass another beyond while I remain! You have not seen the things I have! The deeds I've done, the death, the devastation I've wrought on the living in service of the dead. You cannot fathom what it is to exist for millennia without transition.

ELEANOR I'm sorry.

The Mystic releases a long held sigh.

MYSTIC I will offer you one last insight. Then please leave me.

ELEANOR Why did you help so many if it hurt?

MYSTIC It is my part. I'm compelled.

From her robe the Mystic produces a smooth innocuous stone and holds it in her palm.

Take this stone. We'll see what other gifts she offers you.

Eleanor moves to grab the stone from the Mystic's hand.

I did not say grasp it. I said take it. Reach out and surround it with your being until it finds you.

Eleanor slowly turns her palm to face The Mystic.

Lay your existence upon it. Cradle it.

The stone begins to quiver as Eleanor focuses all of her concentration on the stone.

BLINDING LIGHT. Eleanor's neck twists and jerks, her body seized by possession. Screeching chaos pierces through Eleanor as she writhes and the bright light persists.

The Seeds of Doubt

The screeching subsides and gives way to the sound of groans and whimpers. They pulse in from every direction as everything falls black. Amidst the groans, a delicate piano chimes. The sounds unify into a droning melody as Eleanor awakens in a dim pool of light. Edward strides toward her, drawn by the music and holding an undone wedding dress in his arms. He glides to Eleanor and intimately dresses her; kissing her as he ties the last string.

The music swells into a lively waltz and Eleanor jolts Edward into a passionate waltz that seems to begin with the crescendo. They spin in sync, sewn together at the heart as Eleanor leads him. She turns Edward around and around, slowing their pace with each turn until they relax in a gentle sway.

Eleanor lays her head down on Edwards chest before setting him down by the hand. She she folds her hands over her torso as she watches him; his gaze fixating on something in the distance. The music stops when Eleanor speaks.

ELEANOR I thought I might find you here.

Edward draws a sharp breath, turning to the sound that frightened him out of his thought. He lets a sigh relief, smiling at the sight of Eleanor.

EDWARD Ellie. God, you frightened me. I was just –

ELEANOR Thinking. I know. You always come here to think when something's troubling you.

A brief smile softens on Edward before he pulls his hand to block his gaze.

EDWARD We're not supposed to see each other yet. It's bad luck.

ELEANOR Is bad luck what's bothering you?

He lowers his hand.

EDWARD No.

ELEANOR What is?

Edwards thinks about how to say it. Eleanor sits at his side.

“The water freezes to the stillness of a mirror as the night settles into silence. One wonders if the lake is calm the entire way through, or if chaos ensues beneath its dark, crystal, shining cover.”

EDWARD I hate that.

ELEANOR Well he wasn't wrong.

EDWARD That's what you think of me? That's what you think of me? “Such is the case with the family that marshals the lake's surroundings. A stoic and secretive people. One wonders what lay beneath their dark covers; calm or chaos.”

Eleanor looks at him but says nothing.

Alright, fine.

They smile – laugh even.

My father's regretted hosting that man ever since, and he still hates writers. A woman asked him for a donation recently to help build a library in town and he replied he'd rather watch the money burn and roast a pig over the flames.

Eleanor chooses not to respond.

To be fair, the story wasn't very subtle about who it was talking about. He painting my family like some sort of quiet demons lurking in the mountains.

ELEANOR The townspeople have fun with it.

EDWARD I think he hates that the most.

ELEANOR That's not what I think of you. That's not what I think of you. That's not who you are - you just have trouble sharing what's beneath your cover.

Edward concedes.

EDWARD This will be difficult.

ELEANOR Whatever it is, just say it.

EDWARD No, I mean *this*. My family, society. They will never let it be easy for us. From this day forward everything will be hard.

Eleanor reaches over and lays her hand on Edward.

ELEANOR It's always been hard. Even when I was a child. But I'm still here.

EDWARD I'm sorry, I know it's –

ELEANOR It's okay, that's not what I'm saying. We'll deal with it together, no matter how hard they make it.

Eleanor stands and offers her hand to him, the other she doesn't notice resting on her stomach but

Edward does.

Dance with me.

EDWARD We're not supposed to do that either.

ELEANOR If no one wants us together then why should share our first dance with any of them? You and me – perfect.

Edward smiles and takes her hand. He stands and wraps his arm around her waist, cradling it as a newborn child. They embrace, swaying, smiling and enjoying their secret dance. Eleanor lays her head on Edwards chest.

ELEANOR Edward?

EDWARD Hm?

ELEANOR Tell me you'll still be here when it gets hard.

EDWARD Of course.

ELEANOR We may have news to share soon.

Edward continues dancing a moment but then stops and pulls back.

EDWARD What? What news?

Eleanor looks down.

Are you sure?

Eleanor shrugs. 'I think so. Maybe. Yes.'

ELEANOR Fortunate timing. A later wedding and they'd hate me even more.

Edward smiles and they laugh. He moves to kiss her but Eleanor backs away.

ELEANOR Ah ah. We've already broken enough traditions for today.

EDWARD You'd share “news” and then deny me?

ELEANOR When you say, “I do.” And tonight we can dream of names in our wedding bed. See you soon.

EDWARD You will.

Eleanor turns to leave and Edward sits. Before she can leave the stage, she comes out of her trance; a

ghost again . She turns to see Edward still sitting there.

Wait, that's it I – I left. There's nothing –

Suddenly Eleanor's voice is cut off. She tries to talk and shouts 'Hey. Hey!' into the ether but no sound escapes her. Methodic footsteps thump and she turns to find Beatrice approaching, finding exactly what she was looking for.

BEATRICE I knew I'd find you here.

EDWARD *(startled again)* God – I – What are you doing here?

BEATRICE You always come here when you're avoiding something.

EDWARD I'm not avoiding anything.

BEATRICE You think she's the only one that knows you?

When my mother used to bring me to your house, you'd run off to hide right here in this forest when you didn't want to see me.

EDWARD If you knew I was here then why didn't you come?

BEATRICE Why should I give my time to someone who doesn't want to give me theirs?

But, the question I have today is, why are you here now? Having second thoughts?

EDWARD I'm clearing my head.

BEATRICE That sounds like second thoughts.

EDWARD More a gentle request to be left alone.

Edward gets up and turns to walk away.

BEATRICE She won't last, you know that.

Marriage is not meant for love. Not for people like us. She's not like us, and this will break her.

EDWARD She's endured more than you'll ever know.

BEATRICE You truly believe I don't know what she's endured? She's a different breed. A mutt and I'm a purebred.

EDWARD You're right. She's not like you. And you're not like *us*.

Edward turns to leave.

BEATRICE I did, you know, once. Love you. For quite some time, in fact. Did you know that?

Edward doesn't answer.

Even as we grew up I had hoped that one day you would see it. See me like I saw you.

You were kind, at least I had that. All the other boys secretly spat at me for not being weak. At least you offered me the mercy of running away.

But, when you came to my home, and met her, I saw a very different little boy. The only time you'd run off was with her, and I knew. I knew before anyone else. My mother would say, "One day, he'll marry you. And you'll be by his side always." I held onto that for a long time. Hoping that someday you could learn to love me back. But in my heart I knew that you would only ever love her. If I prayed in earnest, I would pray that you never know what that feels like.

Beatrice moves to Edward. Eleanor mouths 'Stop. Stop, don't you –' and steps in to obstruct her. Before she can wedge herself between the two, Edward sweeps Eleanor away and spins her romantically in a firm embrace. The music plays again, faster, a deeper pulse resonating. Edward whirls Eleanor in circles, leading her this time. Beatrice huffs and storms off.

Edward suddenly stops and grabs Eleanor's face, kissing her passionately as he undresses her. With one swift pull, Edward removes Eleanor's dress and is gone.

Eleanor stands alone, surrounded by darkness and silence until the faint sounds of water lapping on the shore can be heard. The sun rises. She looks around to find Moon Lake appearing much the same as when she first awoke in the exact same spot. She sighs, and walks home, her head hung heavy with questions.

Edward and Beatrice

Henry enters.

HENRY Will there be anything else, sir?

Edward enters, mulling over a document. Eleanor follows not far behind, trying to read over his shoulder.

EDWARD No. Thank you, Henry. Good night.

HENRY Good night, sir.

EDWARD Actually, Henry?

HENRY Yes, sir?

EDWARD Would you send for my wife? Tell her to bring me a drink.

HENRY Yes, sir.

Henry leaves. Edward folds and places the document in his coat pocket. He stops, finding something already there. He removes another document; something he'd forgotten about. He considers it a brief moment and then opens it.

Beatrice enters; two whiskeys in her hand.

BEATRICE You sent for me, love?

Edward hastily refolds the document, shoving into back his coat pocket before Eleanor can see what it is.

EDWARD Yes I – (*seeing two glasses*) I wanted you to bring me a drink.

BEATRICE (*bringing him his drink*) Naturally, I assumed you wanted to have a drink with your wife after a long day.

He takes the glass and she clinks hers against his.

EDWARD Of course.

They sip. She laughs.

BEATRICE Don't be silly. You clearly want to be alone, I'll leave you be.

EDWARD No, it's okay. Stay. I have something I need to speak to you about.

BEATRICE Oh?

EDWARD Close the door.

BEATRICE (*going to the door*) Darling, are you going to try to seduce me?

ELEANOR God, I hope not...

EDWARD One of my foremen said he saw you at the processing plant yesterday.

BEATRICE Oh?

EDWARD He said you wished to be directed to my personal office.

Beatrice turns and charmingly strides back toward him.

BEATRICE I was looking for you, love. I wanted to see your handsome face.

She tries to reach for Edwards face but he grabs her wrist.

EDWARD You knew I'd be seeing to the development of the new mine yesterday.

BEATRICE I'd forgotten.

Suddenly Edward slaps her across the face. Eleanor yelps but Beatrice is only briefly shocked. Beatrice gathers herself and sips her drink.

BEATRICE Well, you're certainly not as feeble a boy as you once were.

EDWARD What is in my office is none of your concern.

BEATRICE Is that what you were looking over when I came in? Another lender come to collect?

Beatrice meanders around the room, like a predator toying with its prey.

I found where you plan to place my money.

EDWARD My money.

BEATRICE Yes, your money by law, now that we're married. Congratulations on your accomplishment.

I was curious to see how you planned to invest my wealth. Rather, I wanted to be sure I'd bought something worthwhile.

Edward steps in front of her.

EDWARD You're never to visit any of my places of business ever again.

BEATRICE To be honest, I wish I had been surprised but –

Again Edward swings his open palm at Beatrice's cheek, but this time she swiftly ducks.

You may be stronger, but you're no faster than before. I used beat you at foot races when we were children, and I wasn't in boots.

EDWARD You have no right –

BEATRICE I have every right to make sure you don't waste my fortune, like you did yours! Imagine my surprise at the letters I found packing your desk drawers. A mewling draft begging for time and a promise of payment soon after your wedding. Tell me, darling, how is the new mine coming?

Beatrice plants herself firm. Edward stares daggers at her.

That wasn't rhetorical. This marriage can be annulled and all can be returned to its rightful place.

EDWARD You're married old as it is. Who will want you once I throw you back?

BEATRICE I don't need a husband. I didn't marry for a husband, I married a partner. Without him, I'll still have my wealth, to use how I see fit. What will you have? A mountain of debt and another worthless hole in the ground.

EDWARD What sort of partnership are you bargaining for?

BEATRICE Use some of my money to pay down your debts, keep them at bay. And let us find an investor.

EDWARD *(scoffs)* You think I haven't searched for investors? No one will offer another penny until they see the mine produce.

BEATRICE I'm not talking about the mine.

EDWARD Then what?

BEATRICE *(scoffs)* Look around you. Generations of wealth surround us, all we have to do is cut it down.

Edward scoffs at the notion.

What? Are you more attached to a few trees than you are to your own survival?

EDWARD This land –

BEATRICE Has been the cradle of your family's power for generations. Are you too weak to seize its potential?

EDWARD Careful.

BEATRICE You know, perhaps there still is a little more of that mewling boy left than I thou–

Edward goes to Beatrice and grabs her by the throat with one hand, then the other when she fights. He shakes her into silence.

EDWARD Quiet. Quiet!... *(calmly)* I said enough... I'm not going to skin my family's home to relieve your ambition.

Beatrice stares straight at Edward, unwilling to let go of his hands and submit. Edward squeezes her

throat as he stares back.

Remember, dear. In spite of all your cleverness and scheming, I can still hurt you beyond repair.

A tense beat. Beatrice slowly peels his fingers from her throat; he lets her. She coughs and catches her breath.

BEATRICE You know... Perhaps you aren't that same as before. For a moment, I thought you actually had it in you.

Henry hurriedly enters and blurts.

HENRY Sir, the mines –

He stops himself, seeing Beatrice.

Apologies.

BEATRICE No apologies necessary, Henry. *(looking to Edward)* None at all.

(leaving) Do let me know your decision soon, dear. Time is finite in these matters.

Beatrice leaves.

EDWARD Never make that mistake again.

Henry nods.

Now what had you running in here like a madman?

Henry pauses.

EDWARD What?

HENRY The workers are planning to strike tomorrow, sir. The men we hired to watch them said they will not begin in the morning, nor resume until their demands are met.

Edwards takes this in and then hardens. He walks away from Henry and drinks.

Shall I –

EDWARD I'll have a solution by morning. Just... Tell our men to strike with the workers until they hear otherwise.

HENRY Yes, sir.

Henry exits.

ELEANOR What's happened to you?

Eleanor turns to the door.

And what are you up to? (*shouting to Beatrice*) Do you hear me?!

In another room Beatrice suddenly shrieks and glass shatters.

EDWARD (*calling out*) Is everything alright?

Nothing.

What happened?

Beatrice interjects. Shaken.

BEATRICE (*offstage*) Nothing. It was nothing. I just – knocked my glass off the table.

Eleanor's interest is piqued.

EDWARD Are you alright?

Eleanor leaves.

BEATRICE (*offstage*) Yes. I'm fine. Don't worry. I'll have it cleaned up. Go back to work.

Lights dim on Edward as he wanders off.

A Night of Souls

Beatrice marches into her room, tying a linen bandage around her hand.

BEATRICE (*muttering to herself*) You're so stupid. Stupid. It's nothing. You fear *nothing*. Pull yourself together.

Blood is already soaking through the palm of the bandage when Beatrice finishes tying it with her teeth and uncut hand. Eleanor follows her in, watching closely. Beatrice goes to her vanity and stares herself down.

Pull yourself together. Do not undue years of work, do you hear me? You straighten up, little girl.

Eleanor's mouth moves but she doesn't speak. "Years?"

Beatrice searches through her drawers, finding a small jar of pills. She opens it and quickly swallows one. She hastily removes her dress, down to her slip. She dims the lights, gets into bed, and closes her eyes with a curt breath.

Eleanor moves to her bedside, looking down at her.

ELEANOR What are you hiding?

Eleanor continues to watch her as time passes. The lights gently pulse with Eleanor's breathing as she watches. Out of the darkness, a whisper...

MYSTIC Deary...

Eleanor jumps. Beatrice stirs.

ELEANOR Oh, God!

The lights in the room briefly glow bright and Beatrice stirs in bed. Eleanor is completely still and silent. Beatrice rolls over and pushes her face deeper into her pillow.

MYSTIC *(hidden)* Still can't hear you.

ELEANOR Shhhh...

The Mystic shuffles in.

MYSTIC Don't worry, she can't hear you. Not clearly yet, anyway.

ELEANOR *(whispering)* But she can hear you!

The Mystic stops, then continues quietly, one silent step at a time. She wears a wry smile and holds an open bottle of wine.

Are you drunk?

The Mystic gestures. A little.

How is that possible? You're – mystic.

The Mystic gestures all around her.

MYSTIC Out there. *(gesturing to the ground)* Here...

The Mystic shrugs, taking a drink and snickering. She waves Eleanor toward her.

Come. Come with me.

ELEANOR I can't, I have to stay here.

MYSTIC For what? Watching her sleep isn't going to help you.

ELEANOR She has nightmares.

The Mystic doesn't follow.

The Goddess – Sentry. She... She showed me my wedding day. And *she* was there. She tried to convince my husband not to marry me. She's guilty of something, I know it.

MYSTIC The good thing about that is she'll still be guilty tomorrow. Come. She has a gift for you. Well, both of us, really. And due, if you ask me –

ELEANOR I thought you didn't want to help.

MYSTIC I said I no longer wish to see souls suffer.

ELEANOR I'm suffering now.

MYSTIC And so I am here to help, despite my protests. Come.

Eleanor begins to follow.

ELEANOR Where are we going?

MYSTIC To the forest.

ELEANOR (*stopping*) I'm not going to those *things* again.

MYSTIC They won't take you tonight, there'd be no point. We have something far better to look forward to. Come, come.

The Mystic turns to leave; Eleanor is hesitant. The Mystic turns back.

Deary, such a night will not occur again for a long time. I've been alive a great deal longer than you can fathom, so when I say a long time... Come...

Eleanor follows the Mystic, leaving Beatrice behind.

Soon the surroundings are dark and misty. Eleanor and the Mystic walk.

ELEANOR Why can't we go to your home (*gesturing*) out there?

MYSTIC This is a phenomenon of earth.

ELEANOR What is it?

MYSTIC A reprieve for the lost and forgotten.

ELEANOR The failed ones.

MYSTIC Indeed, deary. Tonight they will live again.

In the surrounding dark, sounds of water flowing, frogs croaking, insects wings buzzing by, owls hooting and coyotes yipping. Gradually, here and here, small lights glow in the distance, dancing in the air like fireflies.

ELEANOR How – How did they fail?

MYSTIC They couldn't recall if you asked them, and I prefer not to revisit those moments.

ELEANOR How do I – unburden myself?

The Mystic continues walking.

MYSTIC There's a moment where you may fully manifest into your earthly visage. It comes only once. You must learn to fill your living form as best you can before then. If you fail, there is nothing left I can offer you.

The Mystic arrives at the right place. Lights approach and flicker around them. The sounds earthly creatures in the forest fade into the distance. Occasionally, far off human-like yips and hollers ride through the air.

Seeing Eleanor's face.

Don't look so glum, deary! (*looking around*) This is a time of celebration!

ELEANOR It doesn't feel like a celebration.

MYSTIC (*sitting*) It will soon enough. Sit.

The Mystic produces another bottle of wine from her robes.

ELEANOR Where are you getting these?

MYSTIC (*opening and preparing to drink*) From your cellar.

Eleanor raises her eyebrows at the Mystic.

What? You've no use for it any longer. Also, your Edward has lovely taste.

ELEANOR My taste.

The Mystic stops.

MYSTIC Apologies, deary. (*raising the bottle*) Well done. I would offer you some but, well...

ELEANOR It's alright, I think I've had more than enough for one life

The Mystic gives Eleanor a long look. She stands, leans in towards Eleanor and speaks earnestly.

MYSTIC Find the light, deary. Be it abundant or sparse you must always seek it out. The universe has only just birthed you, there is still so much more; joy and pain alike. Find the light.

The Mystic sits and drinks again.

ELEANOR You still experience joy?

The Mystic laughs, nearly spitting out a mouthful.

What? You said you've been here for a thousand years dealing with death.

MYSTIC A thousand years of misery? Can you imagine what kind of Being you would've found if I'd been in pain all this time?

The Mystic continues to laugh.

ELEANOR I didn't –

MYSTIC It's alright, deary. It's alright. (*calming herself*) I haven't transitioned one of you in some time. I miss the strange questions you ask.

Death isn't only misery. Death carries many things. Come! Sit, sit.

Eleanor sits next to the Mystic as she takes a long drink. Finally refreshed, she sets down the bottle and claps her hands together.

Tonight you will see. No. You will *feel*. You will commune with the undeparted souls of this world – the ancestors of your humanity.

ELEANOR Will there be any souls from my life?

The Mystic shrugs.

MYSTIC Perhaps... Existence has shown me many surprises, you'll have them as well.

Eleanor lays her hand on the Mystic's.

ELEANOR Thank you.

MYSTIC For what, deary?

ELEANOR I don't know how to help you with your suffering, but thank you for helping me with mine.

MYSTIC I want to help you, child. I am compelled. As impossible to ignore as the livings need for air.

ELEANOR How to you keep going?

The Mystic is taken aback. Perhaps no soul has ever asked her this question.

MYSTIC I don't know what brought me here. Misdeeds in a former existence? To amuse another sentience? For all my wisdom, I am as ignorant of my future as you.

A voice calls to me; beckons me forth. I do not know how many of you I've transitioned. All I know for certain is that each time I anticipate that I, too, will be called to go on, and each time I am left behind.

ELEANOR Perhaps we're searching for the same place.

The Mystic softens and smiles.

MYSTIC I wish that were true, deary.

Close your eyes.

Eleanor closes her eyes. Then the Mystic. She takes a long, deep breath.

Reach out with your Being. Let the air fill you. Breath in the Beings that surround you. Let their voices hum through you.

Eleanor hums weakly and the Mystic hums with confidence.

Eleanor continues to breath deep and hum. She begins to sway. In the distance, the faint sounds of music whisper. Eleanor hums deeper, longer. The music wafts in like a warm breeze. The Mystic hums with strength and clarity. They sway together, like limp bodies being thrown through crashing waves.

Shouts and hollers roll in like a breaking surf on the shore. The music swells. Drums, woodwinds, sitars, drawn strings, flutes, squeeze boxes, a vast tsunami of revelry and joy.

Spirits glow bright around Eleanor until she rises to her feet, lifted by their presence. Her fingers, her arms, her whole Being is stretched to the night sky. She twists and turns, awash in glow of lost Spirits.

ELEANOR What's happening??? I can... I can feel them. I feel my skin.

MYSTIC Follow them, deary.

ELEANOR It hurts! It... It's amazing!... I...

Eleanor spins out of control, contorting to the rhythmic sounds of the reckless chant.

Abruptly, she stops. Shaking. Eleanor feels a rush of warmth crawl through her body. Her skin pricks and tingles. She lifts her shaking hands as they to materialize before her.

I can breathe...

MYSTIC Manifest with them. Let them show you the way!

Eleanor lifts her shaking hands before her and grasps them together. Her eyes glisten with pure bliss as she feels her fingers intertwine. The overwhelming sensation continues along her arms and through her chest. Eleanor melts into her body.

The Mystic raises to her feet and dances. Eleanor moves freely. She reels her hips, stomps her feet, and swings her hair in unbound euphoria.

*The music crashes and the Spirits that fill the forest **explode** in a blaze of light. Beings manifest from every direction; human beings. Each one a soul parted from heaven and earth for untold ages. They dance and revel with no regard for space, bending and stretching for one another in unnatural ways. Melding into each another from one partner to the next.*

In their folly they wash through Eleanor, whirling her in their tide. Eleanor touches every Soul she passes until she is flush with a synchronal sense longing and fulfillment she never felt in life. She breaks away and howls into the endless night sky like a lone wolf who's found her pack.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Everything freezes, the music stops. Even The Mystic is frozen. Silence.

ELEANOR Wha – No! What happened? Come back! Come back!

Another omnipotent KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK as The Sentry of Death appears. Adorned in an elegant black dress with a black laced bodice. She advances with a regal glide that encases all the power she wields. A long black hooded cloak drapes across the Sentry of Death's shoulders, hanging down her back. She holds only a lantern by her side to light the way.

ELEANOR Who... Who are... Are you... "Her"?...

The Sentry of Death lifts her lantern. KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK. The dim light casts across her face, revealing wild, coarse hair and eyes that bear no hint of light; only absolute darkness.

Eleanor tries to hide a shudder but the Sentry of Death misses nothing. A broad, toothy grin crawls across the her face, revealing rotten teeth. She beckons Eleanor to follow her, turns away, and leaves darkness in her wake. Eleanor follows.

Ellie & Bea Bea

The Sentry of Death enters alone, lighting the way. She looks back and waits patiently. After a moment Eleanor stumbles in, fighting with her dress and drinking from a bottle.

ELEANOR *(calling back)* Fine! If you're all afraid of a little swim then I'll just go by myself!
(drink) And tell Mrs. Hayes to stop sniveling! I'm hardly the first to notice the pinched face she makes when she gossips!

She wrestles her dress away and whips around to face Moon Lake. Becoming dizzy in the process, she plops on the shore, stifling the bile churning in her stomach. She lets go of a breath, perhaps a burp, and then breathes in deep, collecting herself.

Bores. All of you. *(Mocking)* “Well, I heard her husband has an eye for more than just the help.” “Yes well, an estate such as his could blind any lady.”

From out in the distance...

BEATRICE *(off stage)* Eleanor?.... Eleanor?...

ELEANOR Bunch of pecking hens pecking away at each other. Peck peck peck...

BEATRICE *(closer)* Eleanor?...

ELEANOR *(calling back)* Someone fun?

Eleanor sways herself upward to her feet.

BEATRICE Eleanor?... There you are.

Beatrice passes the Sentry of Death, holding a lamp before her as she steps toward Eleanor.

ELEANOR Oh...

BEATRICE I beg your pardon?

ELEANOR *(turning back to the lake and drinking)* May I help you, m'lady?

BEATRICE You stumbled past when you left, I wanted to make sure you're okay.

Eleanor wheels back around.

ELEANOR *(sarcastically)* Well thank you, m'lady, I'm quite fine. Feel free to return to your friends, I'm sure the group will miss your pecks and clucks.

Eleanor mockingly bows then turns and plops down again.

BEATRICE *(playing along)* Well surely The Lady of Moon Lake Manor is wise enough to know that none of us have any *true* friends. We've only society.

Eleanor laughs. Beatrice sits beside her.

Besides, I was alone. I needed a moment away from the empty chatter.

ELEANOR As if just having fun weren't enough. We have to pick each other apart for gossip fodder to feed on.

BEATRICE For the life of me, I can't decide if the world has always been this shallow and vapid or if it's just our time.

Eleanor smiles. Agreed.

ELEANOR *(not unkind)* I can't believe you're the one who followed me out here.

BEATRICE I just wanted to make sure you're okay.

ELEANOR I'm fine. I just – wanted to swim or... do something fun, for once.. They gawked at me like I was some sort of loon. I thought it might bring some entertainment to a dull evening. Now they'll all just gossip about *me*, so I suppose I got my wish.

BEATRICE They won't gossip about you.

ELEANOR Don't play dumb.

BEATRICE I'm not playing dumb.

ELEANOR I'm still unsure which one you started yourself.

BEATRICE I beg your pardon.

ELEANOR Was it the rumor that we're both having affairs? That seems to be everyone's favorite.... And the least truthful of them all. Or perhaps it's that I sleep away days and spend nights roaming through the cellar like some troll. Mindlessly drinking until I have to be carried to bed.

BEATRICE Ellie –

Eleanor leans in toward Beatrice and looks straight in her eyes, threatening.

ELEANOR Or was it you that first said I went mad and killed all my children in the womb...

A tense beat.

BEATRICE The affair is the least true of those?

ELEANOR *(drinks)* ... I don't know...

BEATRICE I would never say that about you, Ellie...

After a moment Beatrice takes the bottle from Eleanor. She drinks as she stands and then plunges the bottle into the sand next to Eleanor. Beatrice removes her dress.

ELEANOR What are you doing?

BEATRICE Going for a swim. Isn't that why you came out here?

Beatrice lays her dress neatly to the side.

ELEANOR No, I just –

BEATRICE Come on.

ELEANOR No –

BEATRICE You came all this way and drug me here with you, so –

ELEANOR No, forget it.

BEATRICE *(trying to grab her arm)* Come on, you'll feel better.

ELEANOR *(pulling her arm away)* No, Bea Bea just – It's too cold, sit down! We can our feet in.

Beatrice acquiesces and sits, delicately placing her feet in the water. Eleanor moves next to her and lays her feet in as well.

BEATRICE You haven't done that in a long time.

ELEANOR What?

BEATRICE Called me Bea Bea.

ELEANOR We haven't been children for a long time.

BEATRICE True. *(gesturing to the bottle)* May I?

ELEANOR *(handing it to her)* You didn't bother asking before.

Beatrice looks at Eleanor as she drinks. Something resolves by the time the bottle leaves her lips.

BEATRICE Do you remember Sweet Pea?

ELEANOR *(snickering)* Yes, why?

BEATRICE I just thought of her in that moment. Just popped in my head. That was the most *unfriendly* cat. She never wanted to play. I'd chase her around and around, trying to play with her but she always ran away... And God forbid I ever try to bring her into my room at night! She'd howl and howl until I let her out. And then I'd hear her somewhere in the house, crying for just a few moments and then nothing. As if she were searching for something and suddenly found it.

Eleanor chuckles.

What?

ELEANOR Nothing I – Nothing.

BEATRICE *(handing her back the bottle)* Your turn.

Eleanor takes it and drinks. After a moment.

Go on then.

ELEANOR I just drank.

BEATRICE No, a story.

ELEANOR A story?

BEATRICE Yes, from our childhood. I contributed Sweet Pea, now it's your turn.

ELEANOR *Our* childhood?

BEATRICE You know what I mean.

ELEANOR We grew up in the same house, we did not have the same childhood.

BEATRICE You're right, I'm sorry. You're right. Okay?

A pause. Eleanor drinks and Beatrice reaches back for the bottle.

We had some good year's though, right?

ELEANOR We had some good *days*.

BEATRICE Days. Fine... One of those then.

ELEANOR Why?

BEATRICE Because we're having fun.

ELEANOR Does it make you feel less guilty about the bad ones?

BEATRICE You know, believe it or not Eleanor, I was just trying to have a nice conversation with you.

Beatrice gets up to leave.

But clearly I'm too boring for you as well, so I'll just –

ELEANOR No. Stop. Bea Bea just – sit!

Eleanor drinks and Beatrice sits. Eleanor cycles through memories until she arrives at something specific.

Fine, a good day... Alright... It wasn't good, per se, I just – remember it... sometimes. I think about it sometimes. When my mother died. Obviously, that's not good but.. That night... When I was in bed, alone... And you snuck into my room after your mother tucked you in. You got in my bed and put your arm around me and when I asked what you were doing... Do you remember what you said?

BEATRICE Sisters take care of each other.

ELEANOR Sisters take care of each other. And you held me while I cried.

Beatrice forces a chuckle at the memory, recalling what happened next.

BEATRICE My mother found out about that. Did I ever tell you? She was waiting in my room when I returned the next morning... Didn't say a word, she just slapped me hard across the face. She checked on me every night after that. I can only imagine what she would've done if she'd heard what I said.

ELEANOR Is that why you stopped taking care of your sister?

Eleanor goes to take another drink but the bottles empty. She sighs and moves to get up.

BEATRICE Don't go trouncing back in there to grab another bottle, they'll gossip even more.

Out of a hidden pocket, Beatrice produces a flask and unscrews it.

Here.

Eleanor takes the flask and smells it, reacting to it's strength.

It's just whiskey. Far better than what your husband's pouring, I can tell you that.

Eleanor drinks and a cough escapes.

I told you.

Eleanor goes to hand the flask back to Beatrice but she waves it away.

Go ahead, I need a breath. My head is going to spin soon, I can feel it.

Eleanor drinks again.

Do you know what happened to her at night?

ELEANOR Who?

BEATRICE Sweet Pea; where she went. I got so curious about her night time adventures that one morning I woke up just before sunrise to find out. I searched the entire house – everywhere I thought she could be.. And just as the light started trickling in, I heard a door creak open and shut. I headed towards the sound and just as I'm crossing the kitchen I saw her outside the basement door, your room, stretching her paws out and yawning. She perched herself down in front of your door and just licked herself. Content as could be.

When I told my father he said, “Dear, Eleanor has so little and you have so much. Perhaps you can let Sweet Pea be hers. Be a good girl and let her have Sweet Pea, dear.” I said, “fine.” It's only a cat, right? And one that doesn't even like me, so... *(she shrugs)*

But neither of us knew that was just the beginning. A toy here, a dress I never wore there. I didn't care much. They're just things. But I never considered how far it could go. You just kept taking little bits of my life for your own. Until you took my future too. Ruined the legacy I was born for.

Eleanor sways, hanging and lifting her head. Struggling for consciousness.

ELEANOR I can't...

BEATRICE I tried to kill you once, you know that? Well, hurt you anyway – as much as possible. I was furious with you for years. I hated you. Our families were meant to command the wealth and power of this country for centuries, now the whole of society gossips about the waning light of the Thorburn family star. Edward's outrageous spending and the wife that drinks away his fortune. Generations of hard work undone.

ELEANOR Bea bea, I...

Eleanor tries to speak but anything that escapes gets lost in slurs.

BEATRICE Tansy, it's called. A dainty name for such a pernicious herb. (*referencing Eleanor's physical state*) Not this, you did most of this on your own, I only needed to offer.

Eleanor takes deep breaths and attempts to steady her swaying.

I didn't know what I was doing at the time really. Just a little in your herbal tea. I wasn't sure why at the time but soon after your wedding you began drinking herbal tea incessantly. It wasn't until the the second time that I realized you swapped booze for tea whenever you thought you were pregnant.

I noticed a change in Edward after that. Something felt different between the two of you. You hid it well, but I knew the two of you as well as you knew each other. That's when I realized I had everything wrong. I couldn't let hate drive me; that wouldn't return what you'd taken. Your death would leave nothing but a broken widower, clinging to your memory. What good would he be then? As long as the love between you lived, I would never get back what was mine. I knew what I had to kill.

Eleanor's head is slumped. Beatrice reaches over and lifts it.

Are you still here?

Eleanor waves her hands, trying to slap away Beatrice's grasp. Beatrice clutches her cheeks in one firm hand as Eleanor struggles to gain control of her body and fight.

Every time you were with child, booze became tea. And with each tea, a tragedy. And every tragedy, booze. And on and on into a dark hole where he could no longer love you. We're even now, Ellie. And you're no longer needed here.

Eleanor frees herself of Beatrice's grasp and clammers to her feet. Beatrice yanks Eleanor back down by the neck of her slip and plunges her face into the shallows of Moon Lake.

Eleanor fights, tearing at Beatrice's arms and face – anything she can grab hold of. She frees herself just enough to break the surface of the water and suck a single desperate gasp for breath.

Beatrice crawls onto Eleanor's back and forces her into the water, holding down a flailing arm with one hand and gripping the back of Eleanor's neck with the other. Eleanor kicks and screams beneath the surface but the strength of Beatrice's hate does not relent.

After a time, Eleanor's body quiets. A few tremors and then silence.

Beatrice stands. She brushes herself off, puts her dress back on, and checks her surroundings. No one. She leaves. Eleanor's body lays face down in Moon Lake.

The Sentry of Death approaches Eleanor and extends her rawboned hand. As if yanked up by a rope lashed to her torso, Eleanor rises onto all fours as she gulps a slow, steady, visceral breath.

ELEANOR (*Through her desperate breaths*) I knew... I knew it... (*looking up at The Sentry of*

Death) I knew it!!

Without a word The Sentry of Death turns to leave. Eleanor stands, calling after her.

Thank you. Goddess...

The Sentry of Death stops and looks at Eleanor, her black eyes betraying no hint of feeling.

I understand. Thank you.

The Sentry of Death turns and disappears into the void.

In the distance behind Eleanor, a pale candlelight comes to life, revealing Beatrice tossing in bed. She shoots up, a shriek escaping before she stifles it and closes her eyes.

BEATRICE Oh God... *(trying to rub the images from her eyes)* Oh God, get out, get out...

She opens her eyes again, unable to see anything but her vivid nightmares. Again she goes to her mirror and looks into it, desperate to regain control of her reality.

She's gone... *(hardening)* She. Is. Gone. You straighten up little girl!

Beatrice closes her eyes, trying to breath steady and calm herself. Eleanor turns and circles her like helpless prey. The glow of the lights in the room grow as Eleanor speaks.

ELEANOR And now I know what business I was sent to finish... *You.* You who thieved the lives of my children. Who called me friend – sister.

Hear me now. I am going to drive you into a whole so dark that Death herself will never find you. When you see me, I will rain down the torment that you and your wretched mother bestowed upon me! I will salt the earth where your heart grows and bleed you dry of every joy and hope that ever lived within your noxious soul!

And then I will *consume* you. I will *devour* you from your toes to your neck, and when none but your mortal head is left, I shall wear it through Heaven as my *holy veil*. Your blood will run fresh down my back as I walk through Heaven, and when wayfaring souls look to my *crown* and ask me, I will *smile* and tell them with forethought, 'This. Was. **MY BUSINESS!!!**'

The lights burst and Beatrice's eyes shoot open to find the visage of a spectre in the mirror; her eyes fuming with bloody fire.

BLACK OUT

Act 2

Eleanor's Lullaby

Dim lights glow above the forest; closer than they were before. Eleanor is heard before she is seen. She approaches, looking at the lights above and she speaking to those watching her. She settles in a pool of pale moonlight.

ELEANOR I remember only a few songs and nursery rhymes from my childhood. My mother only knew a few and she rarely ever sang. Beatrice's mother, on the other hand, sang to her every night before bed.

You'll find you recall everything, every little detail when you're in the in-between state.

The sound of heels clack, followed by the creak of a bedroom door and the heels gently stepping inside before the door shuts. Beatrice's mother, Mrs. Walker, can be heard humming a comforting lullaby.

Her mother had such a sweet voice. Not at all like the stern tone she normally used, and very different from the sounds of disdain she spat when talking to me. This voice was gentle and kind. When I felt lonely I imagined it was an angel singing to me. Telling me she'd always keep me safe. It felt like love.

Birds chirp outside in the afternoon sun.

One afternoon, when I was 9, I was playing with Beatrice's Dollie. Not the most imaginative child, she named her doll, Dollie.

The sounds of Beatrice singing scales as a little girl, reciting poetry, and laughing and playing freely echo in the distance from several vantage points.

She was away at her singing lessons, or literature classes, or whatever well-to-do young ladies did instead of washing dishes and scrubbing floors.

Beatrice had left Dollie sitting in the hallway near her room, all by herself – add 'spoiled' to her list of attributes. No one was interested in listening to the thoughts of an ill-born little girl so I thought it wouldn't hurt to say a few words to her.

I'd barely introduced myself before her mother found me and snatched Dollie out of my hand. "How dare you!", she said.

The words boom in the surrounding ether.

"How dare you, you – feral creature! Didn't that slut of a mother teach you any manners? I gave this to *my daughter*, not you, you – *mutt*." And she slapped me so hard that I saw lights blinking down the hallway as she stomped away.

Beatrice's mother's heels hastily retreat into the distance.

It was the first time she ever hit me, but it was far from the last. As I lay in my bed, my cheek still burning, my pillow wet with tears, I was sure I'd be thrown out on the street the next morning.

Mrs. Walker's heels methodically clack from down the hall until she arrives in a pool of light.

Instead, she came to my room that night. She sat beside me and –

MRS. W I'm sorry – dear child.

ELEANOR She sounded as if she might vomit. But she softened –

MRS. W I apologize for what happened earlier today. My temper gets away from me at times; I'm working on it. A lady should always mind her temper.

Let me make it up to you. Would you like me to sing you a song before you sleep? Like I do for Beatrice?

ELEANOR *(meekly)* “Yes please, ma'am.”

MRS. W You know, there are many many lullaby's for children. Each special little girl and boy, every type of child. But there is one that's rarely sung. In fact, so few have heard it that I think it can just be ours. Your very own lullaby to keep. Would you like that? “Eleanor's Lullaby.”

ELEANOR “Yes, ma'am.”

Beatrice's mother begins to hum a gentle lullaby.

She took my hand in hers and sang, in her angelic voice – a song that froze every glimmer of warmth in the air. Her sweet voice timbred with violence as the blood washed from my face, through my body, and drained from my toes. There was nothing but hate in her eyes.

She gently lifts Eleanor's hand and grasps her wrist.

She clutched my forearm and dug her nails so deep into my skin tat by the time she was finished, her nails were filthy with my blood.

For years I tried I tried to forget the melody of that song. But when you're in between one existence and the next, everything come flooding back.

Mrs. Walker sings a lullaby about Gryla, the Icelandic giantess.

MRS. W *Hush now, dear child, lay down your head.
And I'll sing you a lullaby of winter and dread.*

*Each year comes Christmas to spread winter cheer
to all of the children who've been so good all year.*

*But what of the children who forgot to be nice?
Who've not done as told and tell dirty lies.*

*She lives in the mountains, throughout most of the year
but Gryla the giant doesn't come to bring cheer.*

*She stalks through the forest searching to feast
On the flesh of the children behaving like beasts.*

*They beg and they wail with tears in their eyes
But Gryla she hears none of their cries.*

*Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy
Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy*

*Their limbs and their entrails, their eyes she will eat.
She crunches their bones with a snap of her teeth*

*She fills up her stuff sack with bad children at night
Then boils them living, her favorite delight.*

*Now children behave throughout all of the year
For fear Gryla's song will be the last that they hear.*

*Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy
Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy*

Good night. Dear child.

Mrs. Walker leaves, smirking to herself. Eleanor is alone. She inspects the slowly advancing lights overhead and leaves.

Beatrice's Madness

Edward bursts with pomp through the doors of the Moon Lake Manor dining room, leading Mr. Hayes and Alise, drinks in hand.

After a moment Eleanor retreats.

EDWARD No, no, honest to God, it's a circus that just pops up out of nowhere. Well, they call it a circus. A *magic* circus. Out of nowhere it shows up one day completely closed off, it's only open at night. And they employ the worlds foremost magicians I'm told. And then one day... Poof, it disappears. No one's ever seen it arrive or leave; some say it's a circus of ghosts. That, my dear, is where you must go if you adore magic.

ALISE That sounds incredible!

EDWARD Well, I assure you that I've been on the hunt for this spectacle for years, and when I find it I will take you. We'll all go.

Beatrice and Mrs. Hayes enter together, speaking in hushed tones. The guests make their way to their seats. Edward stands at the head of the table.

Friends, thank you for being here tonight to continue celebrating with us. A wedding is a very – consuming affair. And sometimes we don't get to enjoy the company of those closest to us as much as we'd like. But Mr. and Mrs. Hayes not only is it a pleasure to have you as one of my family's closest –

A knock at the door. Everyone turns. Edwards feigns a laugh and goes to the door.

Clearly my valet wasn't listening when I instructed him *not* to interrupt my speech.

Everyone chuckles. Edward opens the door, there's no one there.

A valet with a sense of humor. *(to Mr. Hayes)* Are you in the market? *(calling out the door)* Henry, get back here at once!

Henry enters from the other side of the room.

HENRY Yes, sir?

Everyone turns.

EDWARD Were you not just knocking on the other side of this door?

HENRY No sir, I was in the kitchen. Shall the first course be served?

EDWARD No. Return. *(a beat)* Apologies. Either one of my servants forgot the layout of the house or fancied themselves a trickster.

Where was I? Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Hayes, it's not only been a pleasure to have you as one of my family's closest and longest standing business partners, but also as cherished friends.

MR. H Here here.

They cheers and drink before sitting. Edward rings a bell and Henry enters, setting plates first before Mr. and Mrs. Hayes, then Alise and Beatrice, and finally Edward.

EDWARD Perhaps even one day we can find a suitable cousin of mine to match with the beautiful Alise here and officially call each other 'family'.

MR. H If only you had a younger brother, we could be even closer.

All laugh. Alise is embarrassed.

MRS. H Yes, it is so unfortunate that you're both only-children. Who will carry on the family name?

EDWARD Well, we're looking forward to starting a family and carrying on the Thorburn name.

BEATRICE The Thorburn and Walker names.

Edward looks at Beatrice. Beat.

MRS. H How – progressive.

Edward smiles.

BEATRICE We're hoping to progress in many ways, now that we're married. We're planning a new business venture.

MR. H Yes, Edward assures me the new mine is making considerable progress.

EDWARD Yes. Though, perhaps business can be saved for another occasion.

BEATRICE Not the mine. Something new. And is guaranteed to produce. In fact, you could look out a window and see the fruit right now.

EDWARD Well it's not officially set –

BEATRICE Of course not. We haven't decided who we'll approach to invest yet.

Mr. Haynes wipes his mouth, uncomfortable.

MR. H I see, well... I'm sure whoever Edward approaches, they'll count themselves among the fortunate.

BEATRICE We'd consider –

EDWARD But why we would discuss such things when we can talk about love and art, or the wonderful meal we're eating or – magic ghosts even?

Edward laughs and the others follow, eager to change the subject. Beatrice hides her irritation and recovers with a smile and forces out a brief laugh.

MR. H Stories of otherworldly things are not usually to my taste. A circus of trained magicians, ok, but the supernatural? (*shaking his head*) This young generations' fascination with the macabre toes the line of blasphemy, if you ask me.

ALISE But uncle, it's such delightful fun! The spooky unknown of another world.

Mr H laughs.

MR. H There, you see! You'd better tell that cousin of yours to get here soon or she'll likely run off with a fortune teller or circus clown.

Laughs. Alise is embarrassed.

EDWARD Well, whatever will make her happiest I'm sure will be for the best.

MRS. H Well, to a point. My dear niece does seem to forget her status in society at times. She neglects her social responsibilities.

ALISE Evie...

MRS. H Aunt Evelyn, dear. We're in company.

BEATRICE It's alright. We're all friends here.

EDWARD That's right. And marrying for love can reap all the benefits of smart matches, even more sometimes!

Edward laughs but the others do not. He clears his throat.

BEATRICE (*raising her glass*) To love.

Edward looks at her, surprised. He raises his glass.

EDWARD To love.

ALL To love.

A loud, thunderous SLAM rattles the door and echoes through the room. Guests yelp and drinks are spilt.

MRS. H My God, the servants here! –

SLAM! The room quakes and lights flicker. Everyone goes silent, frightened stiff, until Edward attempts to diffuse the tension...

EDWARD My God, that is some thunder.... Apparently these “meteorologists” aren't as smart as they claim when they say it will be a clear night.

The sound of massive, ragged nails grate across the door. SLAM! Dinnerware rattles on the table. Everyone screams, then stifles themselves.

Lights dim. A Voice whispers into the room; fang sharp and venomous. Beatrice's heart drops. The others don't seem to notice.

VOICE Bea Bea.... Bea Bea...

Silence. Lights illuminate then dim to almost black.

EDWARD These new inventions really aren't as reliable as they claim to be. I'm sure we have some candles around...

Edward searches for candles and matches.

MRS. H You know, that does sound like frightful weather. Perhaps we should call it a night and head home before the roads flood.

MR. H Yes, agreed.

They spring from the table in unison and prepare to leave just as Edward finds a candle and lights it.

VOICE Bea Bea...

EDWARD Here we are.

The door creaks open and the blood drains from Beatrice's face.

VOICE I see you...

EDWARD Oh Henry, our savior. Would you escort the Haynes to their carriage?

Beatrice SCREAMS VIOLENTLY! Everyone turns, Edward runs to her.

EDWARD What is it? What's wrong?

Beatrice points out the door, into the hall way.

BEATRICE It's her. I told you...

EDWARD It's wh –

BEATRICE Shh! Listen...

Silence again as everyone listens, but only Beatrice hears. The lights illuminate slowly.

VOICES I see where you go... I watch you sleep...

BEATRICE Are you all deaf?! Do you not hear her? It's her. They're *all* her! She thinks I don't know but I *know*. That hideous beast.

Show your face! Go on! Show everyone how you're still mewling about!

MRS. H Who on ear –

Beatrice locks eyes with Edward's.

BEATRICE I told you. That *whore* is in this house.

MR. H Edward! What on earth –

VOICE 1 You are so stupid...

BEATRICE Listen!...

Voices flood into the room, whispering around Beatrice. They approach and grow louder, ricocheting off every corner in the room as Beatrice speaks.

VOICE 1
Stupid.

VOICE 2
Dirty.

VOICE 3
Bea Bea... Get it.

VOICE 1
So stupid.

VOICE 2
Filthy.

VOICE 3
Grab the knife. There on the table.

VOICE 1
Stupid.

VOICE 2
Pointless.

VOICE 3
Get it. Grab it.

VOICE 6
*(singing
softly)*
Don't you ever

VOICE 1
Stupid. Stupid

VOICE 3
Stab yourself.

	VOICE 2 Disgusting.	VOICE 4 A lady performs her duties to her husband without question. None but the word of a husband matters to a wife.	VOICE 5 She knows!. VOICE 6 Ever...
VOICE 1 So stupid!			
VOICE 1 Stupid...		VOICE 3 No wait, don't!	VOICE 5 She knows! VOICE 6 <i>Ever trust my mercy.</i>

One by one the voices coalesce like oil droplets in water.

BEATRICE Don't you hear her? She talks and talks.

EDWARD Darling, calm yourself? You're frightening our guests –

BEATRICE And listen! Singing. Singing, no less. She never sang before.

The Voices unite as Eleanor steps through the door, an uncanny terror; her dark and bright with bruises, eyes bloodshot, skin pale, and her hair hanging wildly. She stares Beatrice in the eye, singing "Eleanor's Lullaby".

BEATRICE/ There you are.

ELEANOR *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...*

BEATRICE What is that you're singing, is that supposed to scare me? Is that all you can do, talk and sing and whine and bitch?

SLAM! Eleanor mimics striking her fist violently against the wall and the room shakes.

Everyone hears the slam and feels the house quiver, but only Beatrice has any sense of Eleanor's voice or presence.

ELEANOR *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...*

BEATRICE Get out! Get out, this is no longer your home! You don't belong here and you never did! You stole him by opening your legs, don't pout and whine that I took him back!

Guests recoil and gasp at Beatrice's vile behavior.

EDWARD Beatrice! Mr. and Mrs. Hayes I apologize – Henry! Get in here at once!

Eleanor takes control of Beatrice's mind and she crooks her neck and sings along; her voice coarse

and demonic.

BEATRICE *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy (turning to the Hayes)*

MR. H Edward! Stop this at once!

BEATRICE *(turning to the Hayes)* You foul creatures of money. How many of your servants have you fucked this year?! How many did you kill!

EDWARD I'm sorry! *(rushing to the Hayes)* Please, everyone, my deepest apologies, clearly my wife is not well. Henry!

Henry enters. Beatrice resumes singing, lost in a trance.

BEATRICE *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...*

HENRY Yes, sir –

Henry stops dead in his tracks at the sight of Beatrice.

EDWARD Take the Lady of the house to her room! Now! Gentleman and ladies please, I'll see you out!

Edward hurriedly rushes the Haynes out of the room.

Eleanor continues to sing, Beatrice snaps out of it and faces off with her.

ELEANOR *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...*

BEATRICE No. No! You will not shatter my life a second time!

Eleanor SLAMS the wall again, glassware falls and shatters.

I will live as my *status* intends. You're nothing but the bastard offspring of a servant, you will not take this from me again!

Henry stands in awe of the spectacle. Beatrice's strength falters and she fights to stay standing. She rips her necklace off and wields it before her.

Go back to your place in Hell!!

Edward runs back into the room. The lights blaze. Beatrice screams violently in desperation.

This is mine!! This is all MINE!

Beatrice falters and the strength drains from her body. Edward runs to catch her as she faints. The lights dim and slow, resetting to normal as Eleanor calms her haunting.

HENRY I'll go for the doctor.

Henry turns to leave.

EDWARD Henry. Fetch a priest as well...

Henry nods and goes. Edward picks up Beatrice and carries her out of the room.

Blackout.

Dollie's Prayer

Edward, Henry, and Father McLaggen wipe their faces and hands with damp rags blotched with blood, exhausted.

Beatrice lies asleep in bed, pale and damp with sweat.

F. Mc You've told no one of this?

EDWARD No. But we had guests tonight.

F. Mc They'll need to be dealt with.

EDWARD You think they'll be possessed as well? Will we?

F. Mc Your wife is not possessed, and rumors of this evenings' events cannot spread. *(to Henry)* Go back to the church –

EDWARD No possessed?!

F. Mc Quiet!

Beatrice stirs and the men freeze.

(to Henry) Go to the church, tell Sister Margaret what you've seen here tonight and the names of anyone who was here tonight. She'll see to their silence.

Henry leaves.

EDWARD Father, she spoke in a voice that was not her own. A demon's voice demon. You heard that singing, that violent song. I've never heard her sing that song in my life. You saw hurt rip at her own flesh! Something has her!

F. Mc Shh, shh! Do you want to see it again?

Something is manipulating her, yes. But I've seen the Devil's work and this is not it. She

sees something clearly, it speaks to her and she replies and, yes, it manipulated her voice. But it is only toying with her.

How long has this been happening?

EDWARD She started experiencing disturbances in her sleep a few months ago.

F. Mc And what was the nature of these disturbances?

EDWARD Nightmares. She said they were nothing. But then she started sleep walking, waking up in strange places... She heard voices...

F. Mc And the mysteriously moved items, the rapping on the walls of your house? The manipulation?

EDWARD Tonight was the first time I'd ever seen that. Heard that voice...

F. Mc Has she named this Being?

Edward thinks a moment before he decides to answer.

EDWARD She believes her to be my late wife...

F. Mc Can you think of any reason why your late wife would torment her?

EDWARD *(A small beat)* No.

Beatrice stirs in bed and then returns again to silence.

F. Mc We should rest while she sleeps. And I need to discover what this spirit is capable of before I can banish it.

Father McLaggen leaves and Edward follows. Beatrice sleeps for a moment. Then a whisper, kind and gentle.

VOICE Bea Bea...

Beatrice stirs in bed.

Bea Bea...

She shoots upright in bed, on guard.

BEATRICE No –

VOICE Shhh, shh...

BEATRICE No!

VOICE Shh, she'll hear us!

BEATRICE Get out!

VOICE I'm not her! Shh!

BEATRICE Get out!

VOICE Shhhh!... They'll hear you and come and I won't be able to protect you!

Pause.

BEATRICE ... Protect me?

VOICE Yes, child.

BEATRICE Protect me from what?

VOICE From *her*.

Beatrice breaths, calming down.

BEATRICE Her.

VOICE Yes.

BEATRICE It is...

VOICE Yes. And she'll return if you don't stay quiet.

BEATRICE ... And you're not her?...

VOICE No, Bea bea. I'm here to protect you.

BEATRICE She calls me Bea bea.

VOICE And so did your mother and father. I've known you since you were a little girl.

I have watched over you ever since you were a baby. I care for you as a child.

Do you remember the prayer you and your mother said together each night before bed?
Do you remember speaking to me?

*Watch me now as I sleep,
the safety of my life you keep.*

*You hold my soul in your embrace,
and lead me to the safest place.*

BEATRICE/ *Watch me, oh watch me, my own little Guardian Angel*

VOICE *Grow with me, and keep me safe, my own little Guardian Angel*

Beatrice's mouth falls agape.

BEATRICE It can't...

VOICE It is.

BEATRICE You're not real. It was... just a prayer.

VOICE We are real, Bea bea. It may have been just a prayer to you but I was there every time you spoke to me.

BEATRICE Where were to wh –

VOICE When our children grow to adults we leave them on occasion, to help them to learn to care for themselves. As you grow, we care for others, returning rarely. But until you pass into our realm we watch. And sometimes, very rarely, we must reveal ourselves.

BEATRICE It can't...

VOICE It can. It is.. And I am so sorry she hurt you this long. I'm here. And I will not leave you until she's gone forever.

Beatrice welts up with tears.

BEATRICE Thank you... She won't leave me alone. She's...

VOICE Sh sh, it's okay. Nothing will hurt you while I'm here.

BEATRICE I knew you were there... I could feel you...

VOICE I was. Every night as you held me.

BEATRICE Held you?

VOICE We place ourselves in totems. A point of contact between you and the heavenly realm. Something our children love, to strengthen the bond between us and the protection we give you from the spirit world.

I heard that prayer every night because you held me as you said it.

BEATRICE Dollie?...

VOICE You need to find me again. We must be together for me to protect you.

Beatrice bolts out of bed, to her closet. She pulls out dresses, looking in the back. She pulls down shoes and storage from the shelves. Then finds a small wooden box.

Beatrice lays the box on the floor. From it she pulls a diary and lays it on the ground. Next a music box, which she opens and it plays a sweet lullaby. And finally, an old, ragged doll with long hair, bright eyes, and a white dress with a flower pin.

BEATRICE It's you...

DOLLIE It is... I'm here...

Beatrice hugs Dollie tightly.

BEATRICE It's you..

DOLLIE I have missed you, sweet child.

Beatrice sobs into Dollie.

Shh, shh... Before they come back. Listen.

Beatrice composes herself.

You must keep me with you at all times. I will have to leave to seek her out and drive her away, but our bond is strongest when you hold onto me. I'll be able to find you faster if she comes for you. Understand?

Beatrice nods.

Save your strength Bea Bea. Rest, eat, hold onto whatever you can. She is possessed with burning HATE and when she comes again, you will need everything to fight her.

Scared, Beatrice nods again and hugs her, gentle but firm.

BEATRICE *(whispers)* Thank you... I love you.

DOLLIE I love you, dear child.

Beatrice cradles Dollie as she gets up and walks to her bed.

BEATRICE Watch me now as I sleep,

the safety of my life you keep.

She curls her legs beneath the covers.

You hold my soul in your embrace,
and lead me to the safest place.

She embraces Dollie tightly between her knees and chest, pulling the covers over her body. The lights fade.

Watch me, oh watch me, my own little Guardian Angel
Grow with me, and keep me safe, my own little Guardian Angel

Black.

Edward

The sun rises through the curtains of Edwards library, revealing Father MaLaggen hunched over, asleep in Edwards reading chair. Edward is curled in a ball on his sofa, clutching a blanket over him. He twitches, at first almost unnoticeable, then more pronounced.

EDWARD *(in his sleep)* Shh.. Sh.. Shh..

As if he's trying to comfort an agitated animal...

Shh.. Shhhh.. Sh.....

Edward shoots up with a brief shout, eyes wide. Father McLaggen grumbles a "Mmm?" unintelligibly.

Edward's eyes dart around the room, searching for the wild creature. As he comes back to reality Henry shuffles on with a tray of coffee and toast.

HENRY Sir?

EDWARD *(startled)* What, what?? ... Apologies...

HENRY Are you alright?

EDWARD Yes. Yes, I'm fine. *(seeing the tray)* Sit down, Henry. You were up all night too.

HENRY *(sitting with a groan on the couch next to Edward)* I intend to sir, but old habits...

Henry pours coffee into three cups as Edward distances himself from his dreams. Father McLaggen awakens to the fresh smell. Henry hands Edward the first cup.

EDWARD Thank you.

HENRY Would you –

EDWARD *(interrupting)* No. Black is fine, thank you.

HENRY Do you drink coffee father?

F. Mc Hm?.. Yes, thank you...

HENRY How do you take it?

F. Mc Black is fine.

Henry hands the Priest his cup.

HENRY There's some toast and butter. Cheese and fruit if you like.

Father McLaggen just nods. For a brief moment the air is calm, peaceful, devoid of memory. The men sip their coffee as they search for thoughts of anything but the events of the previous night.

After a moment, Edward's ears prick up as if he suddenly heard a distance noise. Henry and Father McLaggen turn and listen. Nothing...

Edward releases a sigh and slumps back into the couch.

F. Mc Someone should check on her.

EDWARD I don't think I'm ready for that...

HENRY I've never seen –

EDWARD Don't Henry. Please. Not yet... Let us at least finish one cup...

Henry looks at Father McLaggen, who nods solemnly.

F. Mc Son, you –

EDWARD Father, please...

F. Mc I'm here to help you. You must find the strength to –

Edward slams the heel of his hand on the arm rest.

EDWARD I said 'please', Father!

Edward slouches back into his coffee. Father McLaggen clenches his jaw and rises before Edward.

F. Mc Edward Thorburn Jr., I have known you since you were a child. Your father came to me when he felt he'd failed you, and I know the strength he found to raise you right. You stand up and face what's before you, boy!

Edward stares up at Father McLaggen for a tense moment.

EDWARD This is no longer my father's house, and I'll remind you where the door is.

Knock. Knock. Knock. Sudden, but not violent.

Henry bolts up, grabbing the knife from the tray. Edward and Father McLaggen turn, on guard facing the door. After a moment...

(noticing the knife) Put that down, Henry.

Henry returns the knife to the tray. Knock. Knock. Knock.

Darling?

BEATRICE *(from offstage)* Hello?

Edward instinctively moves forward but Father McLaggen reaches an arm out to stop him.

Hello? It's me, dear. Are you all in there? I'd have thought you were all having breakfast in the dining room. I'm famished, may I join you? I'm feeling much better.

Father McLaggen relents and Edward creeps toward the door. He opens it to find Beatrice standing there, upright and smiling, clutching Dollie at her chest. Except for the bags under her eyes she seems rested and cheerful.

BEATRICE Good morning, gentlemen.

She gives Edward a joyful kiss and strolls into the room, light as air.

(almost singing) I hope you all rested well last night.

She sits with Dollie in her lap and starts buttering a piece of toast. The men regard her carefully for a moment.

EDWARD How are you feeling, dear?

BEATRICE Oh, much better, darling. Thank you.

She takes a big bite.

Mm.. I apologize, I'm simply famished.

F. Mc Are you sure you're alright, child?

BEATRICE Oh, wonderful, Father. I apologize for the mess last night, I wasn't feeling quite myself last night. I hope it wasn't too much trouble.

Beatrice continues to eat, finishing off the toast. She cuts some cheese, samples the fruit and begins buttering another piece of toast.

F. Mc Child, do you recall the actual events last night?

Beatrice stops, sighs, and sets down her toast and knife, and places her hands in her lap over Dollie.

BEATRICE *(not unkindly)* As I said, I wasn't feeling at all myself. I haven't had a fever that bad in – well I can't recall, I must've been a child. But I'm feeling much better now. God has seen fit to heal me.

F. Mc And – the nightmares?

Beatrice gently squeezes Dollie.

BEATRICE None, Father. Not a single vision. I was cradled by heavenly light.

EDWARD Father, you must be tired...

BEATRICE *(standing)* Oh, yes Father! I'm so sorry to have kept you so long. You must be exhausted.

PRIEST I go where God is needed.

Again Beatrice gives a subtle squeeze to Dollie.

BEATRICE God is here, Father. You needn't worry about me.

EDWARD Father please, let me see you out personally. And send you with a donation to the church.

Beatrice sits down and politely returns to her toast, buttering and finishing it off in barely more than a single motion. She washes it down with one of the men's coffees, Dollie seated upright in her lap and the knife still in her hand.

Father McLaggen stops Edward their way out.

PRIEST *(sotto voce)* Keep an eye on her state. When it worsens, you know where I'll be.

Father McLaggen leaves as Beatrice consumes heartily; fruit, cheese, toast, anything on the tray. Edward turns and watches her for a brief moment.

EDWARD Dear...

BEATRICE Mhm...?

Chews a large bite, followed by a gulp of coffee to wash it down.

EDWARD Are you sure you're alright?

BEATRICE Yes dear. I'm fine.

EDWARD And – *God* visited you last night?

Beatrice laughs.

BEATRICE Oh darling, you know better than that. That was for the Father; so he'd leave. Why did you invite him anyway? You know what this is. I told you she was here. And now I'm going to take care of it.

Suddenly Beatrice stands.

Henry, would you please have a full breakfast sent to my room? I have work to do and need my strength.

Beatrice goes to leave.

EDWARD Beatrice...

She turns back.

BEATRICE I assure you, I'm fine. I know what has to be done now. See to it that our plans are moving forward, dear. I don't intend to beat the Devil just to end up poor and titleless.

Beatrice leaves. After a moment.

HENRY Shall I run after the Father?

EDWARD No.

HENRY But you heard her, she –

EDWARD She what?

HENRY Have you gone deaf?

EDWARD She said she's fine.

HENRY She still sees your wife.

EDWARD *She is my wife.*

HENRY There's something in this house and we cannot deny what we saw last night.

EDWARD You heard her, we saw my wife with a terrible fever.

HENRY We saw your wife being *haunted!*

EDWARD Do you really believe in ghosts, Henry? Is that the kind of man I have serving me?

HENRY I believe what I see with my own eyes, do not insult me. Is that the kind of man you are? One who blinds himself to the truth for fear? Is that what your father beat into you? Blind submission to convenient lies!

Silence. Edward stares back at Henry.

You knew to fetch the Father last night, how can you deny it now?

Edward tries to remain silent as a stone, trying not to break. Henry goes to him.

I have known you since you were a glimmer in your mother's eyes. I've known both your wives since they were girls. I watched your parents raise you to be strong, you cannot run from this.

EDWARD ... If the truth is as you say... As Beatrice says...

HENRY You were raised a caring boy. Your father may have been firm, even cruel, but he did not kill the kindness in you. You cannot sit by while someone you love suffers.

EDWARD We all suffer, Henry...

HENRY She may suffer still. Can you leave her to that fate?

After a moment Edward draws a sharp breath with a sudden decision.

EDWARD Go to Father McLaggen again, tell him I'll prepare and send word when we're ready.

Then go to town. Out in the country, wherever you can, and send word to healers, mediums, anyone who knows anything... apparitions. We'll have Father McLaggen present, just in case.

Henry turns to leave.

And Henry. Check with the men, make sure they're loyal this time.

Henry nods and leaves.

Into the Darkness

Late that night. Beatrice lies in bed, peacefully sleeping with Dollie in her arms.

Suddenly her music box flips open and plays its tune. Beatrice shoots up, wide awake and clutching Dollie. She looks to the music box, watching it a moment, waiting to see what happens. Beatrice crawls out of bed, checking under the bed and searching the dark corners of the room as she goes to the music box and shuts it. She crawls back into bed, holding Dollie close.

BEATRICE *(whispering)* Dollie? Are you here?

No answer. Beatrice's countenance furrows and she glares into the distance.

I know you're out there. Lingerin'. Poisoning my sleep. I see you. Feel your cold hands. You listen to me. I am not alone in this world. Do you hear me? I will never feel your hands again.

The door knob rattles and Beatrice wields Dollie before her as a weapon. There is a gentle knock knock knock at the door.

Stay out.

SLAM on the door. Beatrice jumps out of bed and grabs the knife from her bedside table, extending it Dollie before her.

You stay out! Do you hear me?!

Laughter creeps into the room and surrounds Beatrice.

VOICE What can you do with that?...

DOLLIE Stay strong, Bea bea. I see her.

BEATRICE You keep your cold, dead hands, I'll have none of them. I will not be so easy to kill.

SLAM, one wall. SLAM, another. SLAM SLAM SLAM echoe from every corner in the room, threatening to crumble the walls around her.

You stay out! Get out of here!! I am not alone in here, do you hear me? You go back to your place in Hell!

The walls calm and the room slowly returns to silence.

Dollie?..

DOLLIE Don't open the door.

BEATRICE Watch me, oh watch me, my own little Guardian Angel...

Beatrice closes her eyes and squeezes Dollie in her arms, still holding the knife.

Send her away... Take my strength and throw her into oblivion.

Beatrice jolts to her bedside table and snatches out a small box from the back of the drawer. She considers it briefly before snapping it open and inhaling several pinches of snuff through her nose. She shuts the box, drops it on the table and sits on her bed, pointing her knife outward.

No more of your vicious nightmares.

A gentle knock on the door and Beatrice points Dollie and the knife at the door, ready to fight.

Get out!

Edward calls from the other side.

EDWARD Beatrice?

BEATRICE Yes?

The handle jiggles.

EDWARD Dear, the door's locked.

BEATRICE I'm resting.

EDWARD You were screaming.

BEATRICE I'm fine.

EDWARD You should keep the door open, in case –

BEATRICE I said, I'm fine.

The air between them is still, tense.

Please. Leave me to my work and attend to yours. I'll be out soon.

A silent moment, and then the sound of Edward's shoes clomping away. Beatrice releases a sigh when she hears Edward walking away down the hall. She retrieves the snuff box from her beside table and sniffs a pinch into each nostril, settling into bed and ready for a fight.

Your Father Would Be Proud

Edward enters the library followed by Mr. Haynes, their boots dirty, returning from an early morning ride.

EDWARD I don't know what you're going on about, Eli. You've certainly still got it.

MR. H *(chuckles)* Well I can still stay on the damn beast, Thank God for that. It's been ages since I've enjoyed a real ride. Evelyn always insists on a leisurely stroll. If I even approach so much as a trot she turns into my mother. "Be careful, darling!"

They laugh. Edward offers Mr. Hayes a seat and sits across from him.

EDWARD Well, shall we?

Mr. Haynes stops him.

MR. H Uh, before we begin I wanted to inquire about your wife.

EDWARD Oh, that's very kind of you, but nothing to worry about any longer. A severe fever it turns out. The doctor saw to her and she's resting now.

MR. H I see. It must have been some wretched demon that gave her that fever.

Edward feigns a laugh.

EDWARD No, no demon. Nothing modern medicine couldn't cure. And I do apologize for it ruining the evening. We'll plan something again soon, I promise.

MR. H One of the Sisters from Father McLaggen's parish came to see me that night.

EDWARD Oh?

MR. H She was concerned about some other-world –

EDWARD We had the Father over to comfort Beatrice. All of us, really. The comfort of God in troubling times. But, you know the Sisters and their bias for hyperbole. Conjuring up God in places where...

MR. H Of course. They can be hysterical. But, the events of that night were disturbing.

EDWARD I assure you Eli, Beatrice's condition is nothing more than an ailment. I promise you. And I apologize on her behalf for ruining the evening she feels mortified. But, rest assured, we will make it up to you.

In fact, I have something may do just that.

MR. H I see. News of discovery I hope.

EDWARD A new business venture. I've sealed the mine.

MR. H And this is meant to be good news? We put a substantial investment into that mine.

EDWARD Which is why I needed to stop the losses. There's nothing there. This new venture, however, is guaranteed.

MR. H That's what I thought about the mine. Given your fortunate family history I assumed you would have the same knack for success.

EDWARD I can't find what isn't there, Eli. But if you look outside the Thorburn family home you'll see I don't have to search to make us both fortunate.

MR. H And what is it I'm seeing?

EDWARD The forest. I'm going into logging, Eli. Construction of a mill is already under way.. After a few weeks with empty stomachs, the men at the mine were eager and grateful to work again.

You're the first I'm approaching. I wanted you to have the first opportunity.

MR. H Logging?

Mr. Haynes begins to laugh.

EDWARD Look around, we're sitting on a gold mine. All we have to do is chop it down and –

Edward stops when Mr. Haynes' laughing grow so robust he's almost snorting.

MR. H Forgive me, forgive me...

Mr. Haynes manages to subdue himself.

It's just...I approached your father about that years ago, and he said that if he cut down the forest, he would have to bury you in it's place. Son, I've known you since you were a little boy. He used to lose you to that forest for hours. You won't be able to watch cut down. Look, your father and I were close friends and you were an adorable little boy, but you were always sensitive.

EDWARD Eli, you know I could sell a fraction of this land and completely fund the new equipment for this venture. I came to you because you *were* a great friend to my father and thanks to him, you were able to build a big part of that wealth you have. And I can do just the same. We can continue our family's growth together, through generations. But let me be clear, I will do what it takes to keep my family's estate strong.

Mr. Haynes is listening now.

We're building the mill on the outskirts. The house property will remain the same, but beyond that lies a gold mine, Eli. My father taught me that a man's most important duty is to secure his estate. And eventually the little boy had to grow up.

Mr. Hayes thinks for a moment.

MR. H I see. I assume you'll give me some time to consider this... venture.

EDWARD Of course.

Edward stands and offers his hand. Mr. Haynes stands and shakes it.

MR. H Your father would be proud.

Edward responds with a stoic nod and Mr. Hayes leaves. Edward sits, a tension overflowing from his body as he slumps in his chair and presses his eyes into a hand.

Judgment Comes

In the foyer, the sun sets through the windows, Henry rushes in. As he removes his hat, gloves and coat –

HENRY *(calling out)* Sir?... Edward?!...

Edward startles, waking from having fallen asleep.

EDWARD *(from his library)* Yes? Coming!

Edward collects himself and rushes to the foyer.

(entering) Is the Father here?

HENRY He's on his way.

EDWARD Did you find anyone else?

HENRY No one would come.

EDWARD Didn't you offer money?

HENRY They refused. The fortune teller who reads cards said there was only one price to be paid, and we couldn't pay it.

Outside, the sounds of horse hooves arriving.

EDWARD What did she mean by that?

HENRY I don't know.

Father McLaggen knocks. Edward gestures for Henry to open the door.

HENRY Thank you for coming, Father.

Father McLaggen enters, followed by Mr. Haynes storming in.

MR. H Edward, what is the meaning of this?

EDWARD Father, what are they –

MR. H You assured me everything was fine and the Father speaks of *demon* possession!

EDWARD It, it's not, it's – Father, you said yourself this was not a demon!

F. Mc CalM yourselves, both of you!

They do and Father McLaggen gestures for Mrs. Hanyes and Alise.

Ladies, please. I apologize for any fright you feeling. There's no need to worry, God will protect you.

EDWARD Father, why did you involve them? They're innocent.

F. Mc *(to Henry)* Where is she?

HENRY In her room.

F. Mc Come.

Henry leave and Father McLaggen leave.

MR. H Edward, we are finished, you hear me? Your father would've never aloud such insanity in this house if he had lived longer. You and your late wife cursed this estate when you married! No one will ever set foot in this house again!

Father McLaggen drags Beatrice in by the arm as she fights.

BEATRICE No, no, you don't understand. I have to stay in my room. I'm safe there! She can't – Dollie's protecting me.

Father McLaggen goes to grab Beatrice's other arm.

F. Mc Shh Sh, be calm, child. God –

BEATRICE (*pushing Father McLaggen off*) Let go of me! You don't understand. I have to stay in my room, she's looking for me. (*to the Haynes*) Don't look at me like that, none of you understand!

F. Mc You don't understand, dear. God has shown me what torments you. This Hellspawn has no earthly name. (*to all*) It roams free, requiring no host, only seeking to terrorize God-fearing beings for evil delight. It knows you all now – it will come looking for every one of you when it's finished with her. We must banish it. God –

MYSTIC (*offstage*) Sorry I'm late!

This Mystic's voice cuts through. Everyone stops. Outside, the sound of shoes thumping on the front porch. The Mystic opens the door and shuffles in.

Sorry, old feet and mud. A terrible combination.

For a moment no one knows what to say. Then...

MRS. H Are you lost?

MYSTIC Is this the house in need of cleansing?

F. Mc Get out, you hag, this house has no use for your blasphemy!

MYSTIC I heard a spirit occupies this house. One who's overstayed her welcome.

F. Mc You know nothing of the other world. Go back to your Devil worship, God will see to you soon enough!

MYSTIC (*to Edward*) You don't seek help with an apparition, then?

EDWARD I...

F. Mc Son, this is the Devil's work, I will not have paganry in this house!

EDWARD It's not your house, Father.

F. Mc I've seen this witch speaking to spirits in the forest that do not exist.

MYSTIC I've seen this man speak for an ethos he does not know.

Father McLaggen lunges for the Mystic but Edward stops him.

EDWARD Father, Father! Stop. You said yourself you have never seen this. That you don't know what it is. Who's to say it's God?

F. Mc All things are God.

MYSTIC How convenient for those in the business of “God.”

Again, Father McLaggen lunges for the Mystic but Edward holds him back while Mr. Haynes tries to pull back Edward.

EDWARD/ No, Father, stop –

MR. H Edward! Get your hands –

BEATRICE Wait, wait!

Everyone stops. Beatrice stares across the room at the Mystic.

You said, “her.” You know who she is.

MYSTIC I do.

BEATRICE You've seen her.

MYSTIC I have.

BEATRICE And you're here to send her away?

MYSTIC I am here to help a suffering soul. *(pointing to Dollie)* That's a lovely totem you have there.

BEATRICE *(lifting Dollie to her chest)* She's here to protect me.

MYSTIC I know.

Beatrice goes to the Mystic and looks deep into her eyes.

BEATRICE I want her. I want her.

Father McLaggen moves toward Beatrice.

F. Mc Child, you –

BEATRICE Stay back. I will fight and kick and scream, and I will hurt you. Unless she's there. If she does work for the Devil, isn't that what you came for? Maybe she is what you have to face. Are you afraid, Father?

Father McLaggen turns in a huff into the other room. After a moment, Beatrice straightens her shoulders, grips Dollie, and follows.

The Mystic looks at the Haynes.

MYSTIC Who's next? (*no one moves*) I suppose whoever follows would have the chance to sit next to the dear Father instead of me.

Suddenly, Mrs. Haynes steps forward, followed swiftly by Alise and Mr. Haynes. Edward starts to follow them when –

Wait! Not so fast.

Edward stops.

Not you. You must wait here.

EDWARD No, that's my wife, I'm not going to –

MYSTIC Trust me, young man. If ever you truly loved your wife, you must not witness what happens in this room. She wouldn't want you to see it.

The Mystic goes to leave and Henry turns to follow behind her. She stops and points at him.

Not you either.

The Mystic enters the other room and shuts the door, leaving Edward and Henry behind.

Departure

Beatrice enters the room first, followed by Father McLaggen, Mrs. Hayes, Alise, and Mr. Hayes. In the center of the room is a generous dining table. The door shuts behind them and locks. The Mystic enters.

MRS. H Where are the other two?

MYSTIC They are no help here, they've been too close to the Spirit for too long. They'll only strengthen her.

As everyone finds a seat.

F. Mc Will we chant in tongues and drink cats blood before we begin?

MYSTIC Many who claim to follow your faith speak in tongues. And personally, I enjoy cats; (*to Alise*) not for their blood.

Everyone sits around the table. Beatrice sits directly across from The Mystic, flanked by the others.

The Mystic removes a small glass goblet and a skin of water from her livery. She pours into the goblet and sets it at the center of the table.

F Mc Are you going to turn it into blood and claim drinking it will heal her?

MYSTIC Again. Your people.

Join hands.

They do.

F Mc (*grumbling*) This is an abomination...

MYSTIC This is the way of this world.

F Mc This is the way of the –

The Mystic snaps her finger and immediately Father McLaggen is silent, sitting upright and rigid, his eyes wide, face expressionless, and hands folded neatly in his lap.

MYSTIC Close your eyes.

Father McLaggen obeys.

Place your scripture on the table.

He obeys.

Turn to your favorite verse.

He obeys.

Speak.

F Mc “Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

The Mystic smiles at Alise and the Hayes.

MYSTIC Sleep.

Their eyes roll back in their heads as they all lay their faces and hands on the table. Beatrice moves to close her eyes and lay her face on the table as well.

Not you, deary. This is *your* fight.

Beatrice nods.

Are you certain you wish to undertake this? Many learn to live with their ghosts.

BEATRICE I will never live with her.

The Mystic fans out her Tarot on the table.

MYSTIC Then draw one, deary. Only one.

Beatrice reaches out and pauses for a brief moment before choosing her card. She draws and flips it.

BEATRICE *(reading)* La Morte...

MYSTIC Are you ready to face what torments you, child?

BEATRICE I am ready to be free of her.

The Mystic smirks.

MYSTIC You may very well get your wish. And come tomorrow I may find you knocking at my door.

(gesturing toward the goblet) Make your offering.

BEATRICE ... Offering?

MYSTIC Prick your finger and offer yourself.

Beatrice nods and pricks her finger. Gently she drops blood into the glass goblet. The Mystic hums.

Spirit who afflicts this woman, come to us.

Silence. And then a distant noise. They listen closely.

We're here, spirit. Follow my voice and tell us why you haunt this poor woman.

Whispers...

BEATRICE I hear her.

MYSTIC Spirit! Speak! Make us understand! What do you wish to say?

The whispers grow louder but unclear.

Why do you torment this child? What must she do for you to leave her?

Mrs. H grumbles, twitching, and then cranes her neck toward Beatrice, her eyes sharp and hollow. Possessed.

MRS. H No matter what you do...

Mr. H cranes his neck. Possessed.

MR. H No matter who protects you...

Alise cranes her neck. Possessed.

ALISE No matter where you hide...

Father McLaggen cranes his neck. Possessed.

F. Mc I will find you....

They lay their faces back on the table. Beatrice clutches Dollie to her chest.

MYSTIC Spirit. Let this child be. Give her leave of your presence.

Mrs. H cranes her neck, slithering like a serpent and twitching.

MRS. H No matter what you do...

They each slither and hiss, overlapping one another.

MR. H No matter who protects you...

ALISE No matter where you hide...

F. Mc I will find you...

They spew a vicious chanting at Beatrice as they bend unnaturally in their seats.

ALL I will find you... I will find you... I will find you...

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK. They go silent and lay back down on the table.

MYSTIC She seeks to enter...

Beatrice looks up and around. KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

Make no mistake child, once you let her in there is no going back.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK. Beatrice clutches Dollie and hardens her resolve.

BEATRICE Let her come.

Suddenly, Father McLaggen, Alise, and the Hayes pound their fists on the table. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. Out of sync.

They methodically rise in their seats, eyes rolled back in their heads, and their fists pounding. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

As their pounding finds one another, their fists and palms slam in rhythm on the table – BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM, BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM, BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM...

Beatrice wields Dollie before her. They hiss...

BEATRICE Stay back!!

The Mystic chants in demonic tongues. They cease their hissing and pound on the table harder, faster, tightening their beat into a thunderous chant.

Edward raps on the door.

EDWARD What's going on in there?

Whispers... First indistinct, then...

VOICE 1

No matter where you hide...

VOICE 2

No matter where you hide..

VOICE 3

No matter where you hide...

Overlapping...

VOICE 1

I will find you...

VOICE 2

I will find you...

VOICE 3

I will find you...

BEATRICE Stop your whining and go back to Hell.

The group simultaneously SLAMS a hard fist on the table. Beatrice frightens but fights back quick, wielding Dollie before her. Edward bangs on the door again.

EDWARD Are you alright?

The Voices return. Overlapping...

VOICE 1
You bitch...

VOICE 2
You demon...

VOICE 3
You beast...

VOICE 1
How could you?

VOICE 2
How do you live with yourself?

VOICE 3
You called me sister...

The voices overlap, swirling and echoing from every direction, closing in on Beatrice.

VOICE 1
Look at you.

VOICE 2
So weak.

VOICE 3
Pathetic.

VOICE 1
Die now.

VOICE 2
Die now.

VOICE 3
Die now.

GROUP (*chanting*) Die now! Die now! Die now! Die now! Die now! Die now!...

The pounding resounds through the room. The group at the table, Edward at the door.

BEATRICE (*over them*) Dollie!! Dollie where are you?!

DOLLIE They have me. They have me Bea Bea! Fight them!

BEATRICE How?!

The group bares their teeth, oozing blood from their mouths. Beatrice shakes Dollie at them.

BEATRICE RELEASE HER!! RELEASE HER OR I WILL TEAR YOU ALL APART!!

RELEASE US!!!!

One by one Mrs. Hayes, Alise, Mr. Hayes, and Father McLaggen spit a mouthful of blood at Beatrice and Dollie, spattering them both as they cease their drumming. The doors shakes as Edward rams his shoulder into it.

EDWARD Beatrice!

BEATRICE Dollie.... Dollie.....?

DOLLIE Bea Bea... I'm sorry...

BEATRICE *(broken)* Dollie?.....

No answer.

EDWARD *(off stage)* Get a pick hammer, anything. Go. We're coming in!

Edward continue to ram the door as the group stands from the table, blocking the way between Beatrice and the door. Beatrice leaps out of her seat and backs away, crippled in fear but ready to fight as they stalk toward her.

BEATRICE Stay back!

She rips a knife from Dollie's body and clutches it before her.

Stay back or I will cut you all down!!

They close in on Beatrice until...

DOLLIE *(mocking)* Ow Beatrice I'm dead... I'm dying... They spit their blood at me and I'm dead... I'm dying... I'm dead... I'm dying...

From across the room Eleanor appears, speaking in Dollie's voice. Beatrice's heart falls through the floor.

ELEANOR I'm dead... I'm dying....

The group stops.

BEATRICE No... no...

ELEANOR A Guardian Angel come to life in your Dollie to protect you...You always had a weak imagination. (*gesturing to the room*) I, on the other hand...

There is nothing that will save you from me. I am your fate. And you are nothing more than a sacrifice; a little lamb to slaughter.

The Mystic digs into the ground beneath her, fortifying her position at the table.

MYSTIC Focus, deary...

Eleanor gestures with her hand and the group obediently returns to their seated positions, hands on the table. Eleanor slams a fist on the air beside her and they resume pounding the table in rhythm. BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM, BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM, BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM...

Edward slams on the door.

EDWARD Beatrice! Eli! What's going on in there? Open the door!

The Mystic prays in guttural, demonic tongues. Eleanor stalks Beatrice as she sings, savoring the moment.

ELEANOR *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...*

The lights in the room glow.

Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...

Brighter. Brighter. The rhythmic pounding vibrates in every corner as Eleanor approaches. The Mystic chants into the Ether.

BEATRICE You stay back.

Beatrice backs away, holding the knife up. The lights waver briefly. The Mystic takes note immediately.

MYSTIC Focus deary.

Eleanor raises her hands and reaches out into the beyond, drawing the surrounding matter into her being as she approaches Beatrice.

ELEANOR Spirits. Help me!

The pounding thumps through the floor and up the walls. The lights radiate with Eleanor's strength and Beatrice throws herself against the back wall. BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM, BOOM BOOM BOOM

BOOM, BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM...

BEATRICE You stay back!

Brighter. Brighter. Eleanor clenches her eyes closed as she stretches beyond her reach.

ELEANOR Goddess!

BEATRICE Your hands will have no vengeance on me!

MYSTIC Focus now! And take this woman's life!!!

*BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM, BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM, BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM.
Eleanor fills every fragment of her being she can muster. Edward hammers at the door latch.*

EDWARD Beatrice! Get out of there!

BEATRICE Do you hear me?!!!

ELEANOR Help me!

BEATRICE I will depart at my own will.

Eleanor screams out through the heavens and beyond with every ounce of life she can summon! The lights flare and quake!

AND YOU CAN ROT FOREVER IN HELL!!!

Beatrice turns the knife on herself and in one hateful motion rips open her own throat, her last words spewing from from her in a violent eruption of blood and she falls stone dead to the floor.

ELEANOR No!!!

The lights fall to a dim glow and the group falls to the floor. Eleanor rushes to Beatrice and tries to catch her but fails. She tries to grab Beatrice's neck but cannot touch her. She desperately searches for a sense of touch anywhere on Beatrice's body and, in one last effort, attempts to squeeze her neck but makes no connection with her skin. She has failed.

ELEANOR No, no, no. You were supposed to die by my hands. By my hands!!

Eleanor slumps in defeat, swaying like dead leaf caught in a breeze. The Haynes, Alise, and Father McLaggen writhe on the floor, still unconscious, as if their souls were trying to squeeze back into their bodies.

Eleanor's eyes dart around and she shoots up, searching.

She's dead. She's dead, I've had my vengeance. Take me. Take me, please. Take me!

She closes her eyes and raises her hands, desperately reaching for the Beyond to take her.

Please... Goddess?... Please let me go...

Edward breaks the door handle and runs into the room, bolting for Beatrice's body on the floor. He picks her up and holds her, in shock as her blood soaks his shirt. Mr. and Mrs. Hayes, Father McLaggen, and Alise slowly awake as if from a long night of heavy drinking. Edward looks to them as they barely become aware of what they're seeing.

EDWARD What happened?

Eleanor opens her eyes and finds the Mystic.

MYSTIC I have nothing left to offer you... I am so sorry, child...

Lights fade to black....

Betrayal

Edward wanders into his library, Beatrice's blood still smeared on his shirt. He sits and drinks. Lost.

Eleanor appears. She goes to Edward and attempts to lay her hand on his shoulder. Nothing. She lays her head on his but it never lands.

ELEANOR I remember the first time we ever touched. Even now, I still remember. It was the first kind touch I'd felt in so long. You stood before that vial woman and held my hand. Stopped her from hitting me. Your hand was soft but held mine firm until she walked stomped away.

I'm so sorry I ever let go. I'm so sorry to leave you here alone. Lost like me...

The lights flicker and a cold wind blows through the room. Edward freezes.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

ELEANOR *(softly)* Knock, knock, knock...

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK *from the other side of the room.*

Knock, knock, knock...

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK. *The Sentry of Death enters.*

Knock, knock, knock... What business do you have here?

No answer. Eleanor bursts.

She said you wanted me to succeed!

The Sentry of Death gestures for Eleanor to follow her.

No.

The Sentry of Death stops and turns. She gestures again.

No. I am no longer yours to torment.

The Sentry of Death regards Eleanor a moment and then speaks for the first time. Her voice burns and crackles like charcoal embers.

S.O.D. *Come with meeee child of Earth. You willl not sssee me againnn...*

The Sentry of Death wanders off, leaving darkness behind her. She guides Eleanor to find Beatrice, once again brushing off and checking her surroundings before she leaves.

ELEANOR We've seen this part. Is this my punishment for failing? Reliving her triumph forever?

The Sentry of Death turns her lantern to find Edward looking around, slowly creeping toward Eleanor's lifeless body. He checks to ensure Beatrice is gone.

Edward? What are –

The Sentry of Death silences Eleanor's voice. Edward kneels and turns over Eleanor's body, wincing, then covering her face and closing her eyes. She closes her eyes with Edward's movement and is silent.

EDWARD I didn't know you'd be here too. I assumed you were still at the party. I came to – I always imagined we would go together. We'd been attached to one another as long as I can remember, how could either of us go on without the other?...

I'm sorry to say that I wished to be free. Of us... Of our pain...I couldn't bring myself to be free of you so... I came here to free you from me... Thinking perhaps without me you might be able to go on...

Edward pulls a letter from his pocket.

I meant to leave this in your room before I left. When I got here I found I'd forgotten. And then – on my way back...

Edward looks in the direction Beatrice went, and then to Eleanor. He opens the envelope and unfolds the letter.

You weren't meant to find this until tomorrow...

“My Dearest Ellie. No words that surround you at this moment will bring you comfort, I imagine. I hope my words are the exception. I am sorry that it has come to this.

It's clear that our marriage has rotted to the core, and with it, our love for one another. We have endured pain enough at the hands of life and each other, how could we ever continue? I know I cannot.

I wish for you to go on and live a happy life. Whatever joy you may find, however you may find it. Leave everything that shattered us behind, take what money we have left, and go. Leave me behind. Leave our home of sorrow, release this pain, and let me rest. Painless.

I will always love you.

Edward”

You were meant to live, not me.

(looking around for an answer) Perhaps they were right. Perhaps weren't meant to be. All those years disappointing my family. Loving you. And this is what it's become.

I wish I could mourn you in the way you deserve. I have nothing left... *(breathes deeply looking out)* I feel... relief.

Edward rests his hand on Eleanor's chest, and closes his eyes.

Rest, love...

He goes to press his forehead to hers when suddenly Eleanor's eyes shoot open and she GASPS, desperate for breath, barely clinging to life.! Edward jumps back.

ELEANOR Edward... Help...

Edward is frozen.

I can't – *(she chokes)*

Eleanor reaches but is too weak to grasp him. Edward goes to Eleanor and kneels before her. He grabs her hand and strokes her cheek, wiping the lake water from her face.

EDWARD Shhh sh sh... It's okay, I'm here.

ELEANOR *(still gasping for breath)* I can't...

EDWARD I know, I know. Sh, it's alright I'm here.

ELEANOR Help –

EDWARD It's ok. Go to sleep. Everything will be fine.

Edward lays his hands on Eleanor's cheeks, cradling her head as she fights to keep it off the ground. His hands follow the water trickling down Eleanor's face to her neck

Everything will be fine. Just close your eyes. We'll be alright.

Every muscle in Edward's body tenses before he finally squeezes his hands.

ELEANOR Edwa... *(choking)* Ed – ...

EDWARD Shhhh shh... Shh...

Tighter. Tighter. Eleanor struggles until her eyes go blank, her breath leaves, her head collapses, and she stands limp beside the Sentry of Death.

Rest. Painless...

Edward opens his eyes to the lifeless Eleanor before him, eyes open, gazing out into nothing. He quickly closes them. For a moment he stares blankly through Eleanor's body; an empty shell. He lays a hand on Eleanor's chest and closes his in a brief moment of silence.

Edward's eyes open he snaps back into the present, finds the letter on the ground and stuffs it in his coat pocket. Forcing himself to look away, he stands, adjusts himself, and hurries off into the distance.

Vengeance

Consciousness snaps back into Eleanor as she sucks in a deep breath, returning with the Sentry of Death to Edward's library.

ELEANOR Why?! Why did you have to show me this?

(sobbing) Why?.....

Are you so envious of the living that you must tear apart our lives before we die! Why couldn't you just leave me in peace!

Eleanor's head falls in defeat as she sobs. The Sentry of Death lifts Eleanor's head with a ragged hand.

SOD Nooo peeeaaace...

Edward returns to the library and pours another drink.

Claiim. Yourrr. Peeaacce...

The Sentry of Death turns and disappears into the shadows. Eleanor calls after her.

ELEANOR No! No, you can't! Don't make me. You can't!

The lights flicker in the library and Edward pivots, listening again for the voice he just heard. The lights quiver with Eleanor as she sobs with her face in her hands.

Eleanor lifts her head to find a transparent flicker of light manifesting before her.

Do you remember Rose?

The light materializes into a warm apparition of candlelight. The lights in the room breath with Eleanor as she looks to Edward.

'Our first little Rosebud' we would call her... The first, and then – a garden!.. She would have curly, burnt umber hair. You would teach to ride a horse, and I would teach her how to fish. None of those traditionally girly things for our first little Rosebud. The first of our children would flower *strong*. She would flourish in the sun. She would stand tall among the trees and look up at no one... But our first flower never blossomed. Not even a leaf... A sprout, frozen in time... Her life vanished into the soil... and poisoned the whole garden...

Luke. I called him 'Luke,' you didn't want to name him. I was certain he'd be a boy. A cheerful little boy, like you were. To bring the joy we'd lost back into our lives...

Adelia. Who would have bright, diamond-blue eyes, I'd decided. And a very mischievous yet fun and playful personality...

Then came Ben. Our strapping young Benjamin. He would stand strong and proud, the perfect counterpart to his eldest sister... He would be kind, like you. Not like the men of his time. A compassionate young man, with a steady hand.

I remember the flood of joy that washed over me as I held him; his eyes barely glimpsing us before he fell asleep. I stroked his soft, umber hair and I pled to him: "Stay with me. Stay with your mother. She will be kind to you, and gentle. She will sing you sweet songs. She will cherish you as you grow, and you will never want for love."... But for all our strength, life refused to reside in his body...

I felt it when it happened. I never told you that. I felt him *leave*. I *knew* because I could feel a part of my own flesh and soul leave with him... Shrouding him as he crossed.

I never saw you cry again after that.... Nor smile... And that was the last time you ever touched me... I thought.....

How could you? How could you steal my life in favor of your own? If you cannot bear your life then go on and take it, you had no right to mine! I could have lived! *We* could

have lived...

Henry runs in.

HENRY Sir, the –

EDWARD Sh! Do you hear that?

HENRY The men have set fire to the mill, everything is burning!

EDWARD *(snapping out of it)* Get every body we can down there! Now!

Edward storms out, Henry following. Thunder rolls as Eleanor adjusts her gaze to those watching her; Ghosts in waiting.

ELEANOR Not all stories have a happy ending, you need to understand that. Not every dream is born into this world. Not everything truly lives. But sooner or later, everything dies.

Eleanor looks above those who are watching her, where the once distant lights hover nearby.

We shoulder burdens from our lives. Great stones mounted atop our backs. That's why we're here.

Looking directly at those watching.

Who among you can stand when the distant call comes? When the burdens of your life lie heavy on your soul and the Ether beckons you to make your final vow, put your feet before you, and go on.

Thunder echoes off the mountains and Eleanor turns her attention to the Ether.

Are you still there? Can you still hear me?...

She listens for an answer – only a small rumble in the distance responds.

Let there be no witness but *you* and *me*... If you led me here to torment me... If you offer no recompense for this pain... I will **haunt** you. I will find a way, and I will spend my existence to bring you pain.

A beat of silence. Thunder.

Help me. Please. Make me empty. Bleed my love and let me unburden myself from this world forever. Fill me with the the darkness that bore you and let me rise a mighty vessel of Death crying, 'Vengeance!!!'

Thunder cracks and rolls.

Do you hear me? Do you hear me?! Tonight I rage with you!!

Crack, CRACK! Eleanor turns and faces down the departed Edward.

And tonight I will claim my vengeance. And then I will rest.

She follows him out.

The Hauntess of Moon Lake

Edward stumbles in, coughing into his handkerchief, Henry follows. Their eyes are red and dripping, their faces and clothes blotched with ash. In the distance a great fire grows. They fall onto the shore of Moon Lake and wash the smoke out of their eyes. Edward blinks as he regains his vision. He stops when he realizes, and then rests his hand on the ground.

Henry stands and pulls at the back of Edward's shirt.

HENRY Come on. We have to –

Edward slaps his hands away.

EDWARD Go.

HENRY We've got to –

Henry goes to grab him and again Edward slaps away his hands.

EDWARD Go back to the house and get everyone out before it spreads!

HENRY No –

Edward stands and goes to Henry.

EDWARD Get everything you need. Take the horses and don't look back. I'll be right behind you.

HENRY Edw –

EDWARD (*pushing him away*) Go Henry! People will die. I'll be right behind you. Go!

Henry runs off.

... Thank you...

Edward turns back to the lake and kneels at the shore; on the ground where Eleanor died. He rests his hand on the ground, closes his eyes, and breathes a deep breath. Thunder rolls.

I didn't know you'd be here too... Is it my time?

Thunder rumbles.

No apology could ever grant forgiveness. Call me coward, call me murderer. You deserved better. You haunted me before your death – each day I saw you decay alive. I could not mend you and my heart broke each time I looked into your eyes and saw another piece had fallen away.

Lightning flashes and the sound of thunder rumbles closer.

(closing his eyes) I'm here. Take me where you will.

Thunder rolls and Edward stands, calling out.

Go on! Strike me down! Seize my heart and collect my soul!

Whispers. Faint and distant. A sudden CRACK of thunder and lighting overhead. And then whispers again. Faint. Friendly, joyous. Children's laughter. Edward opens his eyes and searches.

Rose?... Ben?... Go to your Mother... Your father's path leads elsewhere I'm afraid...

Another set of Voices overtakes the others. More aggressive. They grow closer and clearer.

VOICE 1

Bretrayer...

VOICE 2

Coward...

VOICE 3

What kind of
man are you?

VOICE 1

You betrayed me...

VOICE 2

Gutless coward..

VOICE 3

How could you?!

VOICE 4

A young man aught not
to show any signs of
weakness, lest he betray
the very essence of manhood.

VOICE 5

You weakling!

VOICE 2

Murderer...

VOICE 3

You coward!

VOICE 4

What are you doing, boy?
Stand up for yourself!

VOICE 5

Look at little
Edward. Like
a little girl.

VOICE 1
 Betrayer...

VOICE 2
 You filthy snake...

The Voices swell and repeat, surrounding him in deafening chaos as the surrounding storm swirls. Edward paces as he calls out. The Voices poke and prod violently in the chaos.

EDWARD (over the voices) I'm sorry!! Forgive me!! Please!! Take my life and forgive me!!

The Voices repeat, loudly until everything falls black and silent. Behind Edward the forest glows with mystic light and fire.

VOICE 1
 Why?...

VOICE 2
 I loved you so much...

VOICE 3
 I don't want it
 to end like this...

VOICE 2
 And you loved me...

VOICE 3
 But it must...

The trees and moon glow bright, blinding, as Eleanor fully manifests behind Edward. He turns to see her, agape at the glory of her resurrection.

EDWARD (whispers) Ellie... Good bye...

Eleanor and The Voices whisper together.

ELEANOR
 Goodbye...

VOICE 1
 Goodbye...

VOICE 2
 Goodbye...

VOICE 3
 Goodbye...

Eleanor lunges onto Edward, gripping his neck, forcing him to the ground, and choking him violently. She cries out in agony as lightning flashes and thunder rolls. Edward is dead.

Eleanor lifts her face from his lifeless body as the storm breaks. Darkness consumes everything, except for a beam of light from the full moon, shining only on her: The Hauntess of Moon Lake.

Epilogue

To the Dead who have been watching.

ELEANOR I'm here now. In that place beyond all life as we know it... *(smiling to herself)* Well, as you know it... Don't ask me to explain, I couldn't possibly... It's not something that can be understood through language.... It's a feeling. A "Being" state. *(she finds it)* A profoundly joyous understanding. Existing. But not. *(she looks down at Edward)* I don't know where he is... We've drifted far from one another.

Eleanor closes Edwards eyes and, for a moment, rests her palm on his chest and bids him a loving farewell.

The forest illuminates around Eleanor with the cool glow of new growth. Eleanor rises as she absorbs the memories of a life she once knew, changing with time before her eyes.

The forest returned. Moon Lake remained. Eventually, death gives way to life.

In many of your books of faith it says, "No one will know the hour or day of their death." When we die... after... we don't get to know why, we don't get to know how, and we don't get to know when. But, before we leave, some of us get to know a little more than others...

Soon you will wake up. You may wake to dark times, but now that you understand... Should you prevail...

A dim light shines through a distant threshold. Eleanor notices it, but does not look. In the vast surrounding, both nearby and in the distance, spirits and stars whisper and pulse; calling to the Dead.

I imagine where I am is not where all who have transcended mortal life end up. But, neither am I alone... You'll be there. In your own place, in your own time... I don't know how you'll get there. We never know. That's not my part.

Faint sounds of children's laughter peak through the threshold. It catches Eleanor's attention and she smiles as she looks to it. She returns her attention to the Dead watching her.

Dying once was enough for me.

Eleanor turns and glides to the light. She halts before the threshold a moment and then, with a single unburdened breath, steps through and disappears into the void.

BLACK OUT

END OF PLAY

Lore of the Dark Matter World (for informational and production purposes)

The *Hauntess of Moon Lake* is ultimately a fantasy story that distorts the rules of the physical universe as we know them. As such, though many of the rules we know do apply, there are additional ways in which this world — the Dark Matter World — functions to consider when bringing this story to life.

The state of being that Eleanor inhabits in the play is an in-between world – a purgatory of sorts. Living beings are born into the greater universe when they die on earth and transition to another plane of existence. No one knows what omnipotent deities determine the path for each being's transition. However, once they know this change exists, they never forget it and on the other side of each transition; they are aware that they once existed as something else.

In *The Hauntess of Moon Lake*, the audience themselves are members of this world. Having just left the living world, they're in waiting to wake up in the in-between state and begin their journey toward unburdening themselves for transition. Eleanor acts as an introductory guide for these beings. Not a guide like The Mystic. Eleanor's part is to tell her story as an introduction to what is to come when the audience awakes.

The Light Spirits

The spirits that inhabit the forest around Moon Lake Manor are trapped in the in-between state. They exist as eternal ghosts on the Earth, represent of former humans who have traveled a path similar to Eleanor's but failed to unburden themselves when their moment to manifest came. As a result, they are left on the Earth, unable to feel physical touch and left with the memory of their lives slowly fading with time. As this happens, they deteriorate from specters to formless lights; the only evidence that they once lived.

The Light Spirits have only two sources for recalling what it's like to live. The first, is that they can 'feed' on the memories of the recently departed. As a human being is paused in their transition between life and Thereafter, they still recall their living memories. As was seen in the scene 'Absence' the Light Spirits have the ability to cause Eleanor to relive her memories, as if in a trance. In this, they experience what it's like to live again. Though Eleanor's other flashbacks were not initiated by the Light Spirits but by the Sentry of Death. Recently departed ghosts are often protected against the Light Spirits' feeding by the Mystic until they either succeed or fail at their mission to unburden themselves and cross over.

The second, and most desired way to escape their empty existence is during a rare evening — a Night of Souls. With no perceivable calendar for measuring when this celebration happens, the Night of Souls seems to be dictated entirely by the whims of the Sentry of Death. It's a celebration where a Sentry of Death grants the Light Spirits their full physical form again for a single night. They experience touch, emotional feeling, and everything they've lost through the endless eras of their purgatorial existence.

The Sentry of Death

The Sentry of Death is not a single entity that shepherds the dead to the underworld; there have been

countless Sentries of Death and there will be countless more. A Sentry of Death is appointed when a soul on Earth has done something to justify a period of this specific atonement. It's not known how long this period is, as a Sentry of Death performs its duties until it is released and allowed to pass on to their next form of existence.

The Sentry of Death's duties are to guard the threshold of transition from those who left the world with burdens. The Sentry of Death can grant any otherworldly powers they possess to the ghosts working to unburden themselves; though the choice of what to grant varies by situation and the temperament of the current Sentry of Death. The Sentry of Death can choose, or not, to help ghosts understand what they're going through, like with Eleanor's flashbacks that give her clues as to what she has to eventually do to unburden herself. She's also the reason Eleanor possesses the powers she does in Act Two. A Sentry of Death is a guardian and, when they choose to be, an omnipotent guide.

Though no one in *The Hauntess of Moon Lake* would know, the current Sentry of Death was once known as Abigail Parris, a girl born with 'special abilities' that seemed to manipulate life. While living, Abigail was convicted of being a witch and sentenced to burn at the stake. No one ever knew what happened, but the remains of her town, along with all its residents and Abigail's family, were found burnt to ash and bone. Her remains, however, were never found at the site of execution or anywhere else.

The Mystic

It's said that the Mother of Earth is nature; it's not. Nature is the bedrock upon which the pillars of conscious existence are built. The Mystic is the mother. Her children are born when they pass from the living and she births them into universal existence by helping them pass on; to transition into an existence that travels beyond any living grasp of time and space. The world is where her children gestate, waiting for birth.

Able to recall that she has existed consciously in the universe through multiple forms and millennia, she cannot recall when she awoke on Earth or why. She holds only the driving force to help the dead reach their destination. She has seen countless successes and failures, and still, she does not know her purpose. She only holds the compulsion to keep going forward.

The Mystic does not know from where or why she is compelled to assist the Dead, but, like hearing a Siren's song, once the compulsion is felt it will not be denied.