

HOLLYWOOD VODOO

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Artist's Statement

One dark and very stormy night I finally watched Disney's *The Princess and the Frog*. The film is set in 1920s New Orleans and follows a young woman who has a run in with a nasty voodoo witch doctor. Almost like some voodoo magic, I knew what the topic of my Honors thesis would be. As if cursed myself, I couldn't stop thinking about voodoo. I have always been fascinated by magic and the occult, and *The Princess and the Frog* reminded me of that, making voodoo the natural choice for the topic of my thesis and project.

As easy as it was to pick voodoo as a topic, it was surprisingly difficult to understand what it is. Voodoo, as understood by most, is a religion that can be found in Haiti and New Orleans. It can also be found in such varied places as New York, Houston, and Charleston, South Carolina (Guiley 341). Its roots lie in West Africa, specifically in the religions of the Yoruba people, the Ewe people of Togo, and the Fõn people of Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin) (Parrinder 5). The American word voodoo most likely came from the Togo word vudu, which came from the Fõn word vodũ. Vodũ is the Fõn word for god, which may have come from the Fõn word vo meaning apart, "like the original sense of the word sacred" (Parrinder 35).

Voodoo left West Africa and reached the United States because of the slave trade. Slaves from West Africa were brought to places in the Caribbean like Haiti, Jamaica, and Cuba (Parrinder 36). From there the slaves made their way to the United States. Once in the States, voodoo became more assimilated into the dominant religion of Christianity than it did in Haiti (Davis xvi). This mix of voodoo and Christianity can be seen in the Spiritual Church, which is most prevalent in the U.S. South. The Spiritual Church takes aspects of Protestantism and Catholicism and, arguably, voodoo (Davis 17-18). One way that voodoo survived in the U.S. is through syncretism, or connecting voodoo deities (known as orisha or loa) with Catholic saints

like St. Barbara (Davis 8). Except in remote occurrences like in the Cuban religion Santeria, there is almost nothing left of the original African voodoo religion in North America (Davis xi).

My thesis centers on the theme of voodoo, both in its original state in West Africa and in the versions found in the Caribbean and the United States. It is a collection of fictional work consisting of four short stories (each six pages minimum, double spaced), twenty poems, and one act of a screenplay. There are five illustrations in various mediums and will include my experimentation in different styles like Fauvism (a forerunner of Expressionism, characterized by artists like Henri Matisse and Andre Derain) ("Fauvism") and Abstract Expressionism (especially as seen in works by artists like Vasily Kandinski and Arshile Gorky) ("Abstract Expressionism"). The poems began as my experimentation in traditional forms like the blues stanza (derived from the African-American lamentation or complaint tradition) (Turco 133-135) or the official Welsh form Cyhydedd Hir (Turco 163-164). As I wrote them, however, I discovered a voice that I really enjoy and that expresses voodoo in a way that I appreciate. I rewrote them to match each other better and to be more cohesive.

The screenplay, which is not included in my senior project, is an important frame for my poems and short stories. The screenplay is set during the studio system era of Hollywood, specifically in the late 1930s/early 1940s and focuses on Morris Bryant, a young man in his mid to late 20s who is a writer at Warner Brothers (one of the Big Five production companies). He has grown tired of following the studio system's mass produced and restrictive way of creating movies. At an estate sale in New York, Morris finds a curious journal and is inspired to create a new film, one that is his from inspiration through production. He pitches his idea to his studio; they seem willing to produce the film, but with some changes. The film changes genre several times, from a western to a gangster film to a screwball comedy. While at first upset, Morris

resigns himself to the fate of his new film and the fact that his voodoo infused piece no longer contains much voodoo in it. This reflects the way that voodoo entered the United States and was subsequently destroyed and swallowed by Christianity. Morris gains some closure when he discovers that a topic like voodoo is much like the ancient Greek myths and that both “have no author, no origin, no core axis—they allow ‘free play’ in a variety of artistic forms” (Giannetti 90) and that by letting voodoo manifest however it will is the only way it will be able to survive.

The journal Morris finds is a traveler’s journal and the entries begin in West Africa and end in America, specifically in Louisiana. The journal entries are the short stories, poems, and illustrations. These entries will be slightly separate from the screenplay and will act similarly to dream sequences and cut scenes. Each short story, poem, and illustration was intended to stand alone but became very connected to other short stories, poems, or illustrations (like serials or companion pieces). The screenplay will begin and end the collection, and will be periodically placed between pieces in the collection. A short summary of my research notes is included at the end of my thesis. This summary consists of the facts that inspired the pieces in my thesis.

In rewriting the poems to be similar in form and voice, I feel that it makes them seem as though they are entries out of the journal Morris finds. I hope that the poems and short stories that make up my thesis reveal what Morris discovers about voodoo, that voodoo will manifest how it will. It is my hope that the collection, which is based off of research I did into the subject of voodoo, will show people more of a historically accurate portrayal of voodoo than what is commonly seen in American media.

The organization of my thesis is reminiscent of the film *Paris, Je t’aime*. The film is made up of 18 shorts whose plots may or may not diverge with one another but each short is always connected to Paris and the theme of love. My thesis has the same organization, and my senior

project will have a similar organization as some of the poems and short stories are connected to each other. I enjoyed the completeness the shorts in the film had as individual pieces but also how they added to the completeness of the film as a whole. This will be recreated in that each of the short stories, poems, and illustrations are separate pieces but will also tie together into the screenplay as a whole.

I have done a large amount of research into the subject of voodoo but my thesis is not a research paper. The research is used as inspiration though my works are more accurate than many films and other works found in American popular culture that deals with voodoo. Because of this, the title of my thesis, Hollywood Voodoo, and the plot of the screenplay is fitting. Just as Hollywood takes true or historical events and removes most of the basis in fact, so will many of the pieces in my thesis. None of my pieces will be completely fabricated, but they will not be completely accurate either. Like all great lies, my works will have their basis in fact.

The goal of my thesis and senior project is to give an entertaining, fictional account of voodoo and the changes it underwent in its journey from West Africa to America. There will be many true elements that tie into the research I did but also many fictional elements. Another reason for my thesis is to allow me to experiment with different styles of writing and drawing. I enjoyed seeing how all of these different styles mesh together to create a work of art. I want readers of my thesis to come away with something that they never knew about voodoo but to also gain an appreciation of different styles of writing and art.

I know that while researching for my thesis, I gained an immense appreciation for voodoo and how truly massive a belief system it is. The beliefs contained within voodoo are like the different religions that contain voodoo. There are so many parts to voodoo; they are interconnected and tie together but are sometimes so different as to seem unrelated. Voodoo is

something that is so unfamiliar to many Western audiences; making my thesis understandable while still holding onto much of the feel and influence of voodoo has been one of my greatest challenges. While writing my thesis, I have discovered a voice that I think is very suited for what I have attempted in my thesis. I use very descriptive language and write based on how the words sound together almost as much as how the words work together and what they portray. This can also be a downfall and I tried to be very careful while writing to not bog the story down with too many descriptions. I feel that keeping a balance between the visceral and the intelligent, or the descriptions and the storyline, was one of the hardest things I had to do. Thankfully, I feel that voodoo is a good blend of visceral and story and lends itself well to what I attempted to do.

Annotated Bibliography

"Abstract Expressionism." *Museum of Modern Art*. MoMA, 2009. Web. 21 Nov 2011.
<http://www.moma.org/collection/theme.php?theme_id=10051>.

This article defines what Abstract Expressionism is as well as giving examples of the movement and artists prominent in the movement. This will be useful in my research on Abstract Expressionism and to allow me to be better able to imitate the style.

Burton, Jean-Dominique. *Vaudou/Voodoo/Vudu*. Italy: 5 Continents Editions, 2007. Print.

This book is a bit of an enigma. Burton took pictures of Voodoo practitioners in Benin, and the book is translated into French, English, and Italian, all on the same page. The pictures also include each practitioner's shrines, which don't look like shrines in the traditional Christian/Western idea of shrines. This book was the inspiration for one of my illustrations.

Davis, Rod. *American Voudou*. Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1999. Print.

The story of journalist Rod Davis' through Southwest America as he searches for the descendents of African Voudou (an alternate spelling of voodoo). This will be helpful to see where voodoo went, and how it disappeared into the American setting. Since I intend for my thesis to follow the development of voodoo as it travels from Africa and into the Caribbean and Southern United States, the research that Davis has already had in digging out the remnants of voodoo will be helpful.

Davis, Wade. *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985. Print.

This book chronicled the author's search for the poison common in the potions used to turn people into zombies. Davis tried to discover if there was some neurotoxin that caused the zombi state or if it was a culturally induced state brought about by years of tradition.

"Fauvism." *Museum of Modern Art*. The Museum of Modern Art, 2009. Web. 21 Nov 2011.
<http://www.moma.org/collection/theme.php?theme_id=10081>.

This article defines what Fauvism is as well as giving some examples of works that are considered to be part of the movement. It will give me a starting point in my research into Fauvism.

Giannetti, Louis and Scott Eyman. *Flashback: A Brief History of Film*. 6th ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2010. Print.

This book provides a brief history of film, from its beginnings in the Zoetrope and Kinetoscope to its most recent incarnations. This will be useful as there is a chapter specifically dedicated to the Hollywood studio system. My screenplay is set during this

system and will deal with many of the issues of the studio system as well as many of its positives.

Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. "Vodoun (Voodoo)." *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. 2nd ed. New York: Facts on File, 1999. Print.

A brief introduction to some basic principles of the Haitian religion Vodoun (also Voodoo). This explains how the religion came to the Caribbean as well as giving some basic insights to the religion. This will be very helpful in finding further research on voodoo, as well as helping me make connections between the religions found in West Africa and the religions that appear in America and the Caribbean.

Paris, Je t'aime. Dir. Gus Van Sant et al. First Look Pictures, 2007. Film.

Paris, Je t'aime is a film that contains a number of vignettes. Each vignette may intertwine with the plot of another vignette, but not all of them do. They do, however, have a connecting theme. This is what inspired me in my organization of my thesis.

Parrinder, Geoffrey. *West African Religion*. London: The Epworth Press, 1961. Print.

West African Religion looks at a number of different West African religions. Voodoo's roots lie with some of the religions of this region. While most of the book describes the set up of each religion, there are certain tidbits that lead me in my research of voodoo (like how voodoo came from West Africa to the Caribbean and then into the United States). I have also found inspiration for some pieces within the book, like in one of the creation myths of the Ewe people.

The Princess and the Frog. Dir. Ron Clements and John Musker. Walt Disney Pictures, 2009. Film.

The Princess and the Frog is a film set in 1920's New Orleans and follows a girl who has a run in with a voodoo witch doctor. This film inspired me to use voodoo as the common theme to my work. It also gave me the idea to have the screenplay take place during the Hollywood studio system.

Turco, Lewis. *The Book of Forms*. 3rd ed. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2000. Print.

The Book of Forms is a collection and explanation of many of the different forms of poetry. This will be useful in creating the poems for my thesis.

Act 1-Scene 1

CHARACTERS

MORRIS BRYANT	American man in his mid 20s, writer at Warner Brothers. Bored of studio system's mass produced and restrictive style of creating movies but not bold enough to stand up for himself. Has a stutter that shows strongly when he is caught off balance/off guard.
BEULAH TUCKER	African American woman in her early 40s, daughter-in-law of the man who wrote the journal Morris buys in New York.
HAZEL MOLLOY	British woman in her late 20s, Morris' close friend. They've been friends for years since Hazel started dating James, Morris' best friend.
GERALDINE COOK	African American woman in her late teens, has red hair and a bit on the heavy side, works at Morris' office for one of Morris' bosses. Cecil's niece.
CECIL KING	African American man in his early 50s, Geraldine's uncle. Morris goes to him for advice on the notebook.
JAMES DENNIS III	American man in his mid 20s, Morris' best friend. Dating Hazel. A jokester, doesn't like to take anything seriously.
MR. SHANNON	American man in his late 50s. Balding, Morris' boss. Likes to tease Morris relentlessly, thinks he's funny.
YVONNE BROOKS	Eastern European woman in her mid 30s, Morris' girlfriend. Have only been dating for a few months. Met at an office party at Morris' work.

SETTING

New York in 1937.

SCENE 1

AT RISE:

(Exterior. An early spring day; the weather is drizzling rain. Wide camera angle showing an overgrown yard of an expansive, upper East Coast estate. There are tarps covering items being sold at an estate sale. Focus on a man wearing a dark grey American style drape suit walking among the tables.)

Act 1-Scene 1

BEULAH

Found everything you're looking for, sir?

MORRIS

(Fidgets as HE purchases a notebook).

Uh, yes. Yes. This is an, uh, i-interesting estate sale you've got.

BEULAH

Yes sir. My stepfather, he was a very *unusual* man. He did things, liked things that were not exactly what he should have been looking into. This book, do you know what it is?

MORRIS

It looks like some k-kind of a notebook. If it is p-personal, I do not need to purchase it.

BEULAH

No. It, it is personal but you are welcome to it if you want it. It was my stepfather's, a way for him to remember all he had seen and all.

MORRIS

Did he t-travel much?

BEULAH

More than he was home. Left my mama alone real often. Black lady alone in this big old house in this part of town, she didn't have too many friends she could have tea with, if you understand my meaning.

MORRIS

You didn't like your stepfather m-much?

BEULAH

No, well, you'll see if you read this journal. He was a good man, but his sight was a bit narrow when he had the scent of something. And he had a nose for anything that crossed his path. Look, I've got to be tending to this sale here so my mama can sell the place, be with her family and friends again.

MORRIS

S-sorry, Miss?

BEULAH

Tucker. Beulah Tucker. Do you want me to wrap it for you?

MORRIS

No, it will be f-fine like this. Thank you, Miss Tucker. Sorry for taking so much of your t-time.

Act 1-Scene 1/Scene 2

BEULAH

Be wary of the shapes that hide in black, sir.

MORRIS

The shapes that h-hide in b-b-black?

BEULAH

Excuse me, sir. Can I help you with anything, ma'am? These plates right here go awful nice with that tea set. Good Japanese china, bought there on a journey Mr. Tucker made.

(The rain gets heavier. MORRIS looks at the sky briefly before walking briskly off the estate. Camera pans out to show the entire estate.)

END SCENE 1

SCENE 2

AT RISE:

(Interior taxi cab. MORRIS stares out the window stroking the notebook on his lap. Pulls his hand back as though burned. Opens the notebook randomly. Screen fades into dream sequence...)

The Witchdoctor

Stumbled down the hoodoo road—
Traveler journeyed his way across the road
Seeking to hide from the gathering cold.

Clothes were tatters. Once fine charcoal suit,
Nothing more than ribbons stitched into a suit,
Nothing 'round, nothing there to give nor to loot.

Streets are silent in the bloody dark.
Corpses give no breath in the bleeding dark.
Nothing lives around the bleeding bark.

Hidin' there, down buried deep
Two souls buried down deep
Beneath the bark where ivy creeps.

Thrice it passed, thrice each soul
Dead, dead, dying, thrice cursèd souls
Evil give to man of the suit of dark coal.

Giving ghouls of other's evils, other ghost
Wandering the land far from the land, another ghost
Making for a new land, new coast.

Bearing the weight of the old dying road,
Of the once dying soul, carried along the old dying road
Nevermore does he hide from the gathering cold.

Two Headed Man

And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer comes. Come now and let us slay him...and we shall see what will become of his dreams.--Genesis 37: 19-20

What you get is the mirror.

He was a strange man. He showed up one cold day a few months back. It was the coldest day we'd had in a long time. He came from the south road. Not many people take the south road. There's nothing that way but a few abandoned plantations. Each plantation is an empty hull of its former glory. Once fine, green, manicured lawns and shrubs were now dull and brown and overtaking each house. No one went that way anymore.

He showed up in tattered clothes; they were expensive, though nothing more than bare ribbons of fabric now. The entire suit was a dark charcoal fabric that blended nicely into the fading light. He was probably good looking but his looks were lost under the pressures of time. His eyes were silken black pools that enveloped all their gaze fell upon. It was like looking into a deep maw that the creatures of nightmares peer from. His eyes emptied his face of any beauty.

Few people were out in the street that afternoon. They dwindled to nothing as the sun graced the streets with its blood; only the man continued on his path. He could have been Death walking plagued streets of centuries past. The eyes of several houses peered out at him as their residents let their light slip into the falling, unprotected night.

I heard he slowed at several houses but never stopped. Each time he slowed, time froze in anticipation. The house lights flickered before disappearing with the flick of a switch. Streets popped out of existence like the eyes of a murderous creature as he disappears into his nocturnal

sanctuary. He never stopped at any house until he arrived at ours. Mother has a habit of taking in strays; he must have sensed that we offered refuge.

He knocked softly, so softly we almost couldn't hear it over the waltz Mother was enjoying. It was her favorite, Sibelius' Valse triste. He had arrived during the climax. The door squeaked in accompaniment to reveal the man with two heads.

He didn't introduce himself. I never did learn his name. We all called him Old Guv'nor, thinking he must have come from one of the abandoned cities farther south and was some big deal down there before they crumbled.

I froze, taking in his shambled appearance. Mother approached silently, under cover of the Valse. I knew she was there the moment her hand smacked the back of my skull. "You know better, Charlie. Where are your manners? It is freezing outside and the poor man has hardly a stitch of clothing on. Invite him in, get him some blankets, some food and drink, set him up by the fire." I stared at her blankly, not wanting to let this strange man into our house. Who knew what he would do? He could be a Jack the Ripper type, like in England. "Have you forgotten how to move? Let the man in!"

"Yes, Mother. Come in, sir. I apologize for my rudeness. I was surprised at your sudden appearance, and so late. Come in, please; come in."

He entered, nodding his head and mumbling thanks. When he was settled on the couch by the fire, with Mother and I sitting opposite, he started his explanation.

"I have been walking for a long, long time. It has been so long since I have been courteously invited into anyone's home, let alone one so elegant as this." Mother smiled her thanks, politely allowing him to continue uninterrupted. "Where I am from, people know those like me and avoid us. I am known as the man with two heads. Do you know what this means?"

"I have not heard it before. I cannot imagine what you mean, however, since I can clearly see that you are not endowed with two heads." Mother's laughter echoed sourly in the air. Her eyes widened and her laughter stopped abruptly. "I am sorry. I meant no offense."

"It is more than all right. You have given me shelter: for that, your laughter leaves no cruel mark. It is best that you have not heard of my kind. I would rather like to rest for a while, if I may."

"You may stay as long as you wish. When you are a guest of the Boyce household, you will remain welcome in town. If you are not, do not fail to inform me."

"That is kind, ma'am. I can only pray that the spirits will not harm you for your assistance. I have been traveling for many nights and the hour is late. May I ask to the likelihood of a bath and bed?"

"Certainly, how very rude of me. Charlie, show him to that guest suite in the left wing on the second floor. See to it that he has a bath and anything else he needs." With our dismissal, Mother returned to her stitching.

* * * * *

Flickering candlelight haunted the upstairs hallway. Mother refused to have electricity installed. She insisted that if her parents and their parents and their parents could live without electricity, so could she. Old Guv'nor followed silently. I felt as though a shadow were following me.

"Here we are, then, sir. Sir?" I was alone in the large hallway. My heart beat faster. Mother would be highly displeased if she knew I had lost our guest through the twists and turns

of the household. I backtracked quickly, hoping to find him before he stole or broke anything, or wandered into mine or Mothers' private quarters.

I found him in the previous hallway, standing in front of a large mirror that, during the day, reflects the outside tree beautifully into the hall. It was one of my favorite places to watch the sunrise. I never watched another sunrise there again.

"Sir? Is there something wrong, sir? Your room is this way. A bath can be prepared shortly. The bedding is clean, freshly laundered. Mother insists on having it done every week, even when no one is staying with us. Sir?" Standing next to him, the air felt warm, warmer than the surrounding hall. I reached out to touch his shoulder but recoiled as I touched something so cold it set my skin to tingling.

I could see figures moving in the reflection of his eyes. My body resisted as my eyes followed the path of his gaze. I needed to flee; every hair on my body was tense with panic. The mirror seemed to be made of mist. Figures swarmed and swirled in the background around the reflection of the man. He was set in sharp relief against the chaos surrounding him. An arm reached out to me; it would have touched me had I not stumbled back across the hall. It was his arm. No, it was his reflection's arm that reached for me. He had not moved a hair.

"Do you see where I am? Have you seen the Opposite?" His voice sounded husky, like it was accustomed to thick cigar smoke and strong liquor. It was stronger, different from before. "Are you also one of the two headed? Have you Seen?"

I stuttered as my tongue and mind fought to work together. "I don't know. I, please, just come with me and let me take you to your rooms. Mother will be waiting for me to return. It's taken too long already. Please, come?"

"The mirror shows the truth. You see how you look in there, and everything's flipped? Everything's backwards. It's the Truth. We have a saying; 'you always get the reverse of what you're wanting.' I will come with you. Soon, maybe you will be ready."

The rest of our trip went uneventfully. I saw to it that the man was comfortably settled for the night. I returned to the sitting room and watched the fire as Mother stitched away, humming softly to the tune that was playing.

* * * * *

The man had been in town for four days. The only time we saw him was at night, when he returned to eat whatever was left over from dinner before retiring. He was always polite, but before long we refrained from asking about his day. It got us no answers.

* * * * *

The two-headed man and I were walking past the butcher's when three children ran in front of us. Their giggles and cries increased when they saw who they had passed.

"Look, it's the Guv'nor! Old Guv'nor, are you gone predict somethin'? Tell us about the future? Isn't that daft, George? He thinks he can tell the future!"

"Right, Jack. What a daft old cod he is. Thinks he can tell the future! 'Magine that." The three children wandered away, continuing their string of mocking insults.

"I am terribly sorry about that, sir. Those children have no idea what they are talking about."

"I have become accustomed to it. I only hope there is someone who will believe me here, this time."

"This time? What do you mean?"

"I travel as compelled. The spirits draw me forth. I must speak what I See. Soon, you will be mounted by the spirits, too."

* * * * *

"And when your eyes burn red with vision and your horses fall from wood, your faith will change, your riches made, your death will be so true." Wicked laughter rose higher and higher into the air to attack the ears of the very birds themselves.

The crowd dispersed swiftly to get away from the crazy stranger and his retainer. This was his third "prediction" in as many days. He did not like to talk about them, but once he asked me what he had said. He seemed not to remember that time. With each prediction, his demeanor changed, as though he was someone else, a boozy stranger heavy with the odor and sound of a cigar smoker like his inevitable cloud of smoke. He was stronger, more dominate. Aggressive. I always stepped away when he changed, trying to put as much space between myself and the stranger as I could, to keep him from infecting me as well.

* * * * *

The more predictions the two-headed man gave, the more people saw them coming true. Mr. Lusat, when he was checking his horses, was blinded by an ember from the lantern he was

carrying. The sheriff was confused by the apparent cause as Mr. Lusat's lantern was not broken and the case was closed securely. As soon as he was blinded, his horses started to ram their heads into the walls of their stalls. Three of them died before they could be restrained. He tried to sell the house a few weeks later; this big company from the North, one of those Yankee deals, bought it almost as soon as it was on the market. As he was moving, one of his trunks slipped, taking him down the stairs and crushing him at the bottom.

* * * * *

"Your clothes will sway across the breeze like nettles in a storm. Your victims fade in stormy swills of your rancorous fluid."

* * * * *

"Beedle deedle dawdle doo. How far sees can you? Beedle deedle diddly dee. You should run away from he."

* * * * *

Mrs. Abbott and Mrs. Joyner always sat on Mrs. Abbott's porch for several hours each night, watching the sun set and time move ever on. They sat and watched the fields as they swayed with the slightest breeze or stood still when the wind was lacking. Sometimes, wild dogs would wander in through the fields, usually in twos or threes. Most would disappear as soon as

they'd spot the house; a few brave beasts would wander closer, curious. If they approached too close to the house, Mrs. Abbott would beat loudly on the porch railing with a large metal pole. The dogs would freeze and cock their heads before bolting immediately back into the cover of the tall sugarcane fields. But one day a solitary dog wandered into Mrs. Abbott's yard. He was large, a great brute. He had shaggy, matted grey hair. His coat was missing in patches; the bare skin was covered with scars. Some of his fur seemed a queer red black, like it had dried blood on it. Both women flinched when they saw his huge frame stalking the yard. He moved ever closer, slowly, like he was searching for something. He was scenting the ground, nose moving back and forth in front of him as he paced. Suddenly he stuck his nose in the air, smelling deeply. He looked at Mrs. Abbott and Mrs. Joyner and crouched low. He crept in a zig zag pattern closer and closer to the house. Mrs. Abbott frantically beat at her porch railing but the beast never flinched, he just prowled ever forward. Mrs. Joyner stood up, prepared to flee into the house but the dog froze when she moved and he settled back. Mrs. Joyner bolted for the door and the dog pounced. He clawed roughly at Mrs. Joyner as Mrs. Abbott sat still in her chair. Mrs. Joyner's screams woke the entire house. One of the servants saw what was happening; he saw the beast turn from Mrs. Joyner to attack Mrs. Abbott. He ran down to bolt the door. He needn't have bothered, though, as the dog wandered back into the fields as soon as he was finished ruining their bodies, large bloody footprints tracing his path back into the wilderness. Neither Mrs. Abbott nor Mrs. Joyner survived.

* * * * *

"And as it empties, empties more; reflecting change forever more. Your path is clear, set behind, forcing forwards up the shore."

* * * * *

I remember the last words the two-headed man said to me. It was just after the last prediction he said before he left town, heading forever north. He said that he hoped I would See someday and that I would not be afraid to step into the darkness. Then he thanked my mother and left; it was before the sun had risen and the moon relinquished its rule. I refuse to use a mirror now when I am preparing in the morning, but every once in a while I pass down a hallway I know contains a mirror and peek, ever so quickly. I am never able look too long into the mirror because I am too afraid for any shadows to focus and materialize into the hideous things I had seen that night many weeks ago.

* * * * *

People fled off the city streets. The houses emptied more and more rapidly like flowing water eats away at a sandy bank. Soon houses lay like empty insect skins, anything important ripped from them and carted away north, towards safety, refuge. It seemed as though a plague was spreading from the abandoned plantations and into our bubble of life.

People thought that the two headed man was the carrier and distributor of their terrifying fortunes. Everything that he had told them, all they had scoffed at, slowly came true. It happened to Mr. Lusat, to Mrs. Abbott and Mrs. Joyner, to so many. People tried to stop his words as

soon as he said them. They saw what they wanted in his predictions and did the exact opposite. If he said that one's worst friend would be the one your back is always to, people would spin in circles continuously to avoid having their back to anyone. Panic ran through the town and magic wards sprang like weeds in a garden. Mother insisted we stopped visiting those people unless expressly invited over; she would not associate freely with those who practiced magic to protect themselves from dangers she believed they brought upon themselves. However, the rules of good manners would dictate her actions when necessary. As the wards "failed," more and more left until, soon, the town consisted of no one more than Mother and I and a few brave souls or those too poor to leave their farms during harvest.

* * * * *

"Do you believe that this stranger you took in, this two headed man, the Old Guv'nor, do you believe he is the cause of everything that happened?" The prosecutor's lip was glistening in the heat of the courthouse. Three fans spun lazily on the ceiling but did nothing more than add an incessant creaking to the low buzz of worried voices from the crowd. Nearly every hand held a white round fan, hoping to stave off some of midday's heat. The rows were filled and a few people stood at the back of the courthouse.

I felt my lips freeze and tingle. They wouldn't move. I worked at them slowly, thinking. "Indirectly, maybe. Everything he said came true. But what he said wouldn't have come true if everyone..."

"Thank you." The prosecutor raised his hand to stop me. He turned to face the audience, his back to myself and the judge. "That's all we need to know."

"But you don't know everything. People mocked him and turned his words into truth. They caused it. He didn't force their actions, didn't move their hands. He just..."

"He just what? Put it into their heads to ruin their lives?" The prosecutor turned to face us again and adjusted his pale yellow suit jacket. "Your Honor, it is clear that the stranger has corrupted the good people of Carlisle with his evil thoughts and vile ways."

"No! He didn't do anything like that."

"Didn't you yourself fear the man when you saw his reflection that first night he stayed with you?"

"Yes..."

"There you have it." He turned to face the jury, pulling out a handkerchief to mop up his brow and upper lip.

"But I didn't understand then. I do, now. It's like looking in a mirror. Everything's funny and nothing seems right. To touch your own face is a struggle. It's not his fault!"

Silence filled the courthouse, broken only by the ceiling fans and the gentle swish of the handheld fans. The prosecutor turned slowly, his head tilted to the side. "What do you mean, you understand now?"

* * * * *

The two headed man was found guilty by the jury and by the judge, although the judge granted that there was nothing that could be done since the man had fled town. He said he would make the judges and police officials further to the north aware of the danger of the two headed man. Knowing Judge Waldrop, one knew that nothing would be said until after it was too late, in

which case the judge would inform the correct people that he had sent them a letter months ago, but that it must simply have gotten misplaced in transit.

It was decided that I would not be tried but that it would be wiser for me to leave town as soon as possible. Mother hated that we were to be separated, but she understood the haste in which I needed to leave. She said that we would meet up in a few months, once she would have the property and our assets taken care of. I told her I would write her a letter for each town I stayed in, letting her know where I was and that I was safe, and where she could find me or how she could reach me. I headed north, following the path of the two headed man, although I angled more for the coast. I wanted to see the ocean. Sometimes, during the fainting spells that I began experiencing recently, I could smell the salt water and taste the cruel lick of the ocean as it would try to suck me into its deathly embrace. As I walked where my feet chose along the road, I fingered the mirror in my pocket. It was cracked but I had to look into it every night, as the fire flickered low and the embers were beginning to cool. It didn't seem so hazy when I looked into it at night.



Drums

Ge-Rouge the Red Eyed and ill and deadly
Demons of rhythm and murder divine—
so difficult to control,
their power black and evil

Their syncopation moves freely, the
Cannibal drums
of Saturday's devil,
of Baron Cimetiere,
of Samedi the devious,
of Guede the lewd,
God of the graveyard and boneyards and death.

Act 1-Scene 2/Scene 3

SCENE 2 CONT'D.

TAXI DRIVER

It's here you wanted off, right sir? Sir?

MORRIS

Oh, uh, y-y-yes. Th-thank you.

(MORRIS closes the notebook. Shakes his head and gets out of the taxi. The taxi is parked in front of a drab line of row houses. He walks to a house with a red door and pushes the doorbell. It reads H. MOLLOY's apartment.)

END SCENE 2

SCENE 3

AT RISE:

(Interior. MORRIS sets his coat and bag on a chair but holds onto the notebook without realizing it. The apartment is nicely furnished in a navy blue and gray style. HAZEL is standing by the door pulling a curler out of her hair. SHE looks like SHE's getting ready for a night out.)

HAZEL

Why are you here, Morris? Shouldn't you be out with that girl of yours, stumbling around dragging James with you?

MORRIS

It was that one n-night and I didn't know you had...w-what does that even matter? I n-need to talk to you, or James. I...

HAZEL

It's fine, sweet pea. You and that stutter. I can never stay mad at you. I'm about to go out and meet James. He's taking me to that fancy new place, the, what is it? Oh, you know.

MORRIS

I-I don't. I want this to stay p-private, not b-broadcast across New York.

HAZEL

It's the, the, oh! That's it! The Black Lizard. Supposed to be the swingiest place in town. Oh, it's been so long since we've all been dancing! Why don't you ring...Yvonne...and come with us?

MORRIS

Well, I, y-you don't even like Yvonne and anyway I r-really need to talk about this...

Act 1-Scene 3

HAZEL

Oh! What's that? Here, let me see. Just, let me see it. Why won't you let me see it?

MORRIS

I, I bought it this aftern-noon. It's this thing. T-this is what I need to talk to you about.

HAZEL

Just give it here. Let me look at—

(MORRIS pushes HAZEL into a wing chair. Screen fades into dream sequence...)

You

Catch your tongue a crow
black as night and just as foul
as thoughts that leave you.

Leave your hair unwashed
like thoughts left within.

Brush teeth with an ax
to match sharpened tongue.

Make a hen speak truth
is as easy as making you.

Eat the notes in the margins—
you'll learn something

other than dribble they feed
from filthiest trough.

Breathe death
and life flocks to you.

This life no more yours
than that tail behind your back.

Tricksters

Wind plays and gambols,
tossing around words and bodies

Fire spins and taunts,
drawing close before thrusting away

Earth erupts in tunnels and mountains,
crushing the wind from out their bodies

Water flows rapid, pulling along,
drowning those under who can't stay afloat

Time spins faster, a top twirling tighter,
winding their lives faster

Tricking and taunting
the mortals yet under
the gods, messengers become
trusted to deliver
Fate's ever present desires

Family

Do not fear
any strangers for
rot from within
destroys the mightiest tree

To gain the power of others
one must become the other and
take them in through
any means necessary

A witch can be found
by watching her diet,
for only meat of her father or brother
or mother passes her lips

Why feast on your kin
when the world is your oyster?
It is hard to eat oyster
when you can't pry open the shell

So if your sister looks hungry
and she's looking at you,
count all your family, who's missing who
and check her for powers;
she may be a witch

Death Strikes Unfairly

In the afterlife
when the world has gone dark
a light must be found to the Island of Death.

The king's soul, so mighty,
would wander forever,
with no kind of guidance.

Like all kings of old, servants are needed
and since Death strikes unfairly
the living must do.

So the king's faithful dwarf
is summoned at once, given a light
and buried alive.

And so from the tomb,
faithful through life,
the dwarf guides his king to the
Island of Death.

The *Bokor*'s Guide

4 preparations to create *zombis*:

- Δ *Retiré Bon Ange*
- Δ *Tombé Levé*
- Δ *Tué*
- Δ *Levé*

1 kills instantly
the quicker for slave making

1 makes skin rot
and peel off in patches

1 makes the victim waste slowly
fading to death

the last 1, so horrible
is never mentioned
but from those in Death

Each recipe, all include one ingredient
which takes excellent skill
for *crapaud de mer*
is a delicacy quite deadly
and with a poison to match

Act 1-Scene 3/Scene 4

SCENE 3 CONT'D.

(HAZEL stumbles against the wing chair before sitting on its arm.)

HAZEL

I think you'd better leave now.

MORRIS

H-Hazel, I-I'm so sorry. I-I, I didn't mean to...

HAZEL

Sweetie, just...get out. Now.

(MORRIS clutches the notebook to his chest. HE backs slowly out the door and slips quickly out. The door shuts quietly. HAZEL crosses her arms and rubs her hands over her elbows.)

END SCENE 3

SCENE 4

AT RISE:

(Exterior. MORRIS is sitting on the edge of a park bench. Row houses can be seen over the bushes behind him. The notebook sits next to him, touching his leg. His head is in his hands. He glares through his arm at the notebook. Screen fades into dream sequence...)

Untitled

Little good angel—
what do you see
when I am mounted
and you are displaced?

*Big good angel,
while you sleep
the loa speak
and I drift away.*

Ti bon ange—
where do you fly
that you are safe
and no houngan steals you?

*Well, gros bon ange,
sometimes I wander,
sometimes I stay,
or visit the waters,
the Island Below the Sea,
the land of dead souls.*

You give me being,
cosmic life force
entwined with death
Neither one nor the other

existing alone.

To Speak

I have a dream in mind,
my body's weak
my words are on my tongue
but my tongue hits my cheek.

I can't stop speaking,
nothing's coming out,
I only wish my mind would give me thought.

When I find my mind
a thought I've made my own
can't believe it
I've found it,
fits to the tone

and if and when I speak
please listen to my sound
'cause I'll never speak again
if my mind's all gone.

Shadow Play

The shadow never disappears
never ceases to exist
so long as man has sight to see
and therefore does exist.

The smallest bit of light there is
gives birth to shadow black
for without a bit of light to see
all colors of the world are dark.

No man could truly live
if separate from his shadow
for his shadow's key and held, is key,
to trapping whole his body.

Act 1-Scene 4/Scene 5

SCENE 4 CONT'D.

(MORRIS slides away from the notebook. HE stares across the park and absently pulls the notebook into his lap. HE notices it and almost pushes it off his lap but holds it at stares at it. Abruptly HE stands and walks out of the park, notebook firmly clenched in his hand.)

END SCENE 4

SCENE 5

AT RISE: (Interior. Cramped, dimly lit office cubicle. MORRIS is sitting at a desk littered with papers and empty coffee cups. HE stares blankly at a typed page in front of him. The notebook leans against the wall to the side of him.)

GERALDINE

Mr. Bryant, Mr. Shannon wants to see you. Mr. Bryant? Are you okay? Mr. Bryant! Do you...is that?

MORRIS

(Looks at GERALDINE.)

You l-look strange. Have you e-eaten enough today?

GERALDINE

(Stares at the notebook.)

No, it's, I'm fine. Sorry to worry you, Mr. Bryant. I've got to run. Don't you forget that Mr. Shannon wants to see you.

MORRIS

Geraldine, wait. What are you looking at? This? Were you looking at this? Do you know what this is?

GERALDINE

No, Mr. Bryant. That's nothing a good respectable girl like me would be into. No sir.

MORRIS

You r-recognize it as something, though. What is it? T-tell me.

GERALDINE

No. That is, not here. I can't, not here. My uncle knows about that. I'll get you his number today before you leave. Now, I need to go.

Act 1-Scene 5

(GERALDINE slips out of MORRIS' cubicle. MORRIS strokes the notebook absently. HE clears a space for it and opens it. Screen fades into dream sequence...)

The Cure

Love, my donkey fair hath
sturdy strong and hooves of
iron oak, steady
so steady that
sickness washes away.

Cleanse thyself and rub rub
hooves across thy form from
tip to tail and
stem to stern
especially 'cross
specially weak spots
influenced black and dark
wicked cruel
by enemy far
sent to harm thy spirit soul.

So pick up your hooves
wrap them, buried deep
dark, pierced by
light, salted
spoiled from curses filched

from actions clean
held so close
and dear, removed
from our body
saving your soul.

Alouette

The lark flies swiftly through the trees

—searching

—disrupting

lovers at their games,
children in their dreams

in Anger and Rage

they capture the bird

and pluck pluck pluck

at its feathers

til its voice fades away.

The Gods don't stay and play.

Talking Bird

A large, silver wire cage stands in the shadowed portion of the room. The thin wires look too delicate and decorative to serve any tangible purpose. They are ephemeral, containing what should not be contained. The cage is large, taking up almost a quarter of the room.. When the sun shines through in the early morning, just before the dawn fades clearly into day, the wires seem to trap the dustlings against the wall. Nothing frees them but the growing shadows around the bird cage.

Motes of dust dance in the yellow shafts of light that flow through the dirty windowpanes. Crowded bookshelves line the walls above the countertops. Blank spaces on the bookshelves can find their missing partners scattered among puppets and scrap material sprawled haphazardly across the counters.

The countertops are full of scraps and remnants; stick dolls and puppets with sock heads lay over each other like teenagers the morning after a wild night. Books lay open amid the scattered dolls. Some of the books are full of penciled-in words and highlighted sections. Many of the books are propped open to faint, almost invisible illustrations. The same icon appears on almost every page; a U shape that looks like a bow and arrow, the sign of an archer. Of a hunter.

Shredded newspaper lines the bottom of the cage. It is nearly as yellow as the sunlight that flows through the window. The newspaper lies there, fluttering minutely in the slight breeze that tosses the dust specks through the room, pleading for a use. Its flutters cause no discernible sound. Occasionally, the walls echo with soft avian squawks, as though the walls held onto the sounds until they couldn't anymore and had to release them back into the room. The squawks, so distorted and distant, sound almost like human speech. The longer he hears them, the more he

can understand them. They call to him: *Darin, Darin. I need you Darin.* So many voices, but always with the same call, as though the same person is the voice for many puppets.

Darin inhales the familiar scent of his grandmother's workshop. He flits from counter to counter, jostling one doll here and another there, flipping through the pages of one book then the next before shutting each and returning them absently to empty spots on the bookshelves. He stares at the cage and hums a few bars of "Alouette" before whispering the first lines, "Little skylark, lovely little skylark. Little skylark, I'll pluck your feathers off."

* * * * *

The woods dim as though the sun is dying. It fades so slowly, imperceptibly, that he doesn't notice until the first raindrop strikes the side of his nose. He finishes the last knot on the edge of the net, weighing it in his hands. He looks at the sky, trying to judge the timing. He glances at his watch. The wind picks up, blowing the branches back and forth against the darkening clouds. He throws the netting into the trees, adjusting it so it is nearly invisible. Darin blends into the trees a few feet away, close but far enough away that he doesn't spook his prey. He adjusts the large flashlight on his belt, making sure it is ready and close to hand. He picks up the large hand net from its resting place against the tree.

Normally, he would not hunt with a storm overhead. But there was something...He knew he would have luck today, even with the weather. He could taste it, smell it. The air was thick with it. The trees seemed to vibrate as they waved in the wind. He had felt it a few times before, but he had never been prepared. Today, he's ready. His traps are set; he'll get some fine specimens today. Maybe he'll even keep one, or more, and fill up that old bird cage of his

grandmother's. It hasn't held a bird since he was little and hardly able to see up into the monstrosity. It would be nice to hear bird song from there again; it would remind him of his grandmother, and all the stories she used to tell him as her birds sang an accompaniment.

He remembers going into his grandmother's workshop every night before bed. He always waited by the door until she invited him in. He walked in on her once a long time ago without waiting for permission. No matter how hard he tried, he could not remember what exactly happened, except that he saw a blinding blue light that left his vision dark and blurry. He woke up on the couch later that night with a headache so painful any movement made him nauseous. His grandmother was sitting on the table next to the couch; she was quick to explain that the light was because he entered without asking and that he would be okay but he must never again come into her workshop while she was working without first getting permission.

So long as he entered respectfully, his grandmother was always pleased to see him. He would sit on her lap when he was small or would bring a stool in when he was bigger. She would tell him a story about the things she had seen when she was younger and still traveled the world, visiting exotic, magic places like Haiti where she learned magic and voodoo. She would always ask if he believed her with all his heart; he would always nod emphatically so that she would tell her stories. She would smile sadly as though she knew he was only humoring her before starting her tale.

Once, there was a woodsman, with one eye and one leg, who lived deep in these woods, so deep that he almost never saw the light of day and lived in a state of eternal gloom. The trees were so thick they let no light through their dense branches. However, his skin was as dark as a night with no stars as if he'd spent a lifetime basking in the burning rays of the sun. No one saw

him, unless they sought him out. Only the dying sought him to try to cure their sickness. There was a hunter in these woods, too.

The hunter was sometimes seen with the woodsman and sometimes not. He always wore black, though his skin was not as dark as the woodsman's. He was an archer; he could be seen in the woods closer to the city, nearer to people. Any who saw him always remarked that they remembered smelling lavender when they saw him and that it disappeared when he did. Most times, he was seen with a large, grey, wolf-like dog. Other times, he had another companion, a warrior, dressed in red and black with pale white skin and a large, worn-looking sword. This warrior must be respected to the utmost degree.

As he sits waiting, he tries to remember more of her story. All three, the woodsman, the hunter, and the warrior, had the strangest names; Darin remembers there were lots of O's but nothing else. The names slip away from him as he tries to remember them and they fade into the rustling trees like animals seen from the corner of his eye.

Darin is tempted to flip his flashlight on as he waits; his mind is trapped in the old stories his grandmother told him. They are simple, and mostly nice, but they always bother the back of his neck. His skin tingles and his hair rises. He shakes his head, trying to stay focused on his net and the coming hunt. But his memories of her stories come back even stronger, of Osanyin, the woodsman, a wizard of herbs and medicine, the spirit that inhabits all talking things. Ochosi, Osanyin's companion, who watches over jails and the wilds, armed with a bow and arrow. And...the third's name refuses to rise. Even now, his grandmother's wisdom guards his life.

With each story he remembers, the wind blows stronger and the rain pelts harder. He raises his arm to shield his face. He blinks and hears a loud, startled cry. He drops his arm and

stares into the deepening darkness. His trap is gone. Something glimmers and shakes with movement on the ground below where his trap was hanging. As the creature tries to break free, raindrops splash and sparkle on the grass around the trap. As the sunlight returns briefly through a break in the clouds, Darin leaps to his trap, ready to snatch his prize without harming it. He sees a small, brown, fat bird with speckles on its chest struggling against the fine netting. It stops wriggling and calls to Darin. The hairs on Darin's neck stiffen then fall. The storm is gone. He can no longer sense it. Darin watches the lark as it sits there, begging him. He releases it from the netting and steps back. This is not the hunt he had in mind.

The lark stands there, watching him. It takes a tottering step forward and cocks its head. It stops calling and waits. Darin stumbles back, falling against a tree. The lark follows him but stays a few feet away, giving him space. "Go," Darin cries, flapping his hands at the bird. "You can go, now. Get away!"

The bird opens its beak again but Darin hears the voices that haunt the birdcage. The voice. It is the same voice, the same person he had heard underneath all of his grandmother's stories. The same one that still echoes in his workshop. It never left the birdcage, even after she died and he had forgotten so many of her stories. Osanyin. Ochosi. The Warrior. Everything returns to him.

He extends his arm to the lark. The lark steps back and stares at him. They freeze, each waiting for the other to move. With a joyous cry, the lark launches itself at Darin's hand. He tries to pull back but the bird is already perched on his finger. It grips tightly. Darin notices that he is hyperventilating and slows his breathing. Birds don't act like this, yet here's this lark. This lark that sounds like the voice that has remained with him since he was a child. The bird coos encouragingly. Its coos remind him of his grandmother's song, the one she'd sing to calm him

after the monsters under his bed tried to claw out of his dreams and into real life. It was a wordless tune but each note struck a chord in him, slowing his heart, evening his breathing, and relaxing his muscles. He hears it now. He's humming it with the bird.

The bird cuts off abruptly and looks around. It squeaks a warning and looks at the path leading back to Darin's car. The woods are still and silent. Darin gathers his belongings quickly as the bird hovers around him, circling. They leave the woods; the silence follows them. A flash of black tracks them to the edge of the woods then fades away into the shadows.

* * * * *

The lark nuzzles comfortingly against his neck as he drives slowly along the narrow back roads. His rusty blue truck is faithful, but tired. It doesn't do to push it harder than it needs to go. He asks the bird, "Why are you here?"

The lark stops nuzzling and flaps gently to the passenger seat. It looks everywhere but at Darin. It seems to prefer looking out the window, watching the trees crawl by, even though all it can see from its perch on the seat is the very top of the trees.

"You heard me. Don't pretend you didn't," Darin says.

The lark looks at him briefly then fluffs itself and starts to preen.

"Come on now. You picked me. What do you want?"

The lark bounces around to face Darin and squeaks, "Darin. I need you."

Darin glances at the roof of his truck and briefly closes his eyes. He exhales deeply and looks back at the road. "Need me. For what?"

"You must help me, Darin. We need you."

"We? What we?"

"Your grandmother, we almost had her. She knew almost everything. She even knew Ogun. He accepted her. He rarely accepts anyone." The lark began preening.

"Ogun? My grandmother? What do you mean, you almost had her? What were you going to do to her, you dumb bird?" Darin stops his truck and shuts it off. It rattles too loudly when stopped to be able to carry a conversation, especially with a bird.

The bird ignores him and finishes preening. Satisfied with its appearance, it says, "You know of me and my brother spirit Ochosi and his brother spirit, Ogun."

"Ochosi? You must...you must be Osanyin. But you're just stories, things my grandmother had picked up in her travels. You aren't actually real."

The lark looks away. "You should keep driving, Darin. You need to get away before we lose you, too."

Darin swallows roughly and starts coughing. He scans the tree line. Black flits from shadow to shadow. The black shape circles them. He starts the truck, happy to hear its noisy rumble as the truck comes to life once more.

Darin asks, "What do you need me for?" It is more statement than question. His grandmother's stories are flashing through his head. All those tales she told about Haiti and the black magicians, the *bokor*, about following one to New Orleans and then north, here to Illinois. He couldn't remember how the story ended, if she was able to catch the *bokor* and stop him from creating more *zombi* slaves or if she had failed. A *bokor* with enough *zombis* could make a fortune. The *zombis* make the best sweat shop money doesn't need to pay for, with slaves that don't need to eat or sleep and will never speak until the *bokor* is dead. He remembers her telling him that, stressing how a *bokor* must never be allowed to live, not unless he swears to become a

houngan, a good magician. He must swear only to Ogun himself, for Ogun punishes all oath breakers with a vengeance worse than any can imagine.

"You already know," the lark says, breaking into Darin's thoughts. "Your grandmother's job was left incomplete. But she knew that, and trained you. We have been waiting. Do not disappoint us."

* * * * *

The lark, Osanyin, flutters around the workroom. It grabs an object here and a scrap of fabric there. It brings everything to Darin, who is bent over a counter, the bright light of a table lamp shining directly on his work. They speak very little, although the lark sings once in a while. The sound echoes dully around the room until it is picked up by the open birdcage. The thin wires reverberate the sound, making it crystalline and clear. The echoes seem to gather on Darin's work.

* * * * *

Light streaks through the filthy windowpane, making it all the more thin and weak. Darin lays sprawled half on the counter and half in his chair. The lark ruffles its feathers, tossing shredded newspaper around gently before tucking its head back under its beak. The light creeps across the countertop and illuminates the doll laying centimeters from Darin's fingertips. The doll seems to gather the light into itself and begins to glow from within. As the line of sunlight

moves past the doll, the doll's glow begins to fade. Osanyin shifts and flutters awake. He rushes around the room, stirring books and scraps as he flashes past them.

"It is done. Darin, it is done. All is ready. Darin, you must awaken. We need to find Ochosi."

Darin stirs, his hand reaching reflexively for the doll. He lifts his head and looks around blankly, his eyebrows scrunched over his half closed eyes. "Where are you? Osanyin, stop. Stop moving. You're giving me a headache."

Osanyin flutters to a stop in front of Darin and tilts his head. He pecks gently at Darin's nose. "You must find him, Darin. We need Ochosi to finish it."

"Well, you could always go and tell him where to find me. Hey!" Darin swats at the lark as it pecks harder at him, insistent. "There's no need for that, I'm getting up. I'm up, okay?"

Darin stands and stumbles on numb legs. He gathers a few things and shoves the doll into his shirt pocket.

"Gently, you fool. That is our chance," Osanyin squawks angrily.

"I know, I know. Stop the *bokor*. Prevent the *zombis*. I got it. I'll finish this, Osanyin. The LeClaire's finish what they've started, even if it takes a generation or two. It ends now, Osanyin. Now, where can we find Ochosi?"

* * * * *

"Back here? Why do we need to go back here?" Darin asks loudly over the rumbling of his truck. The woods are clear today, no storm blocks the sunlight from shining through the trees.

"Ochosi knows that this is where I found you. He will know to come here when he is summoned." Osanyin hops restlessly on the passenger seat. His nerves are affecting Darin's, making him even more jumpy.

"Could you just sit still, please? It's not like I've exactly done this before."

Osanyin looks at him and narrows his eyes. "You will be fine. You have the gods on your side."

"Then why are you so nervous?"

"Because the *bokor* also has gods on his side. The *Guedes*. They are Baron Samedi's servants; they work for the master of the graveyards. They deal only in death and dying. They are to be feared, no matter that they speak only in lewd jokes." Osanyin flew onto the dash so he could see out of the windshield. "Can't you drive any faster?"

"Not if you want us to get there in one piece." Darin checks his mirrors reflexively and thinks he sees a black shape behind them. It disappears when he tries to look at it better.

"Where's this *bokor* and how am I going to stop him with a little doll?"

"Your grandmother followed him here, tracing his tracks and the black spells he'd cast in every town he stopped in. She was able to reverse most of them, for the ones she couldn't she helped the families as much as she could. We think he finally caught notice of her just before she died. We lost track of her then. We were only able to find you because you answered our call." Osanyin paused to twitter nervously.

"Your call? I didn't answer your call," Darin glances quickly at Osanyin. He looks back at the road; it is too dangerous for him to keep his eyes off the road for too long. They are almost to the place where he caught Osanyin so many days ago.

“You did. That storm, we sent it to bring you to us. You sensed it, did you not?” Osanyin waits until he sees Darin nod before continuing. “Anyway, we assume the *bokor* is what killed your grandmother, not the heart attack that your doctors claim was the cause. The *bokor* disappeared after she died but Ochosi was able to catch his tracks again farther north, around the Michigan border. We must meet with Ochosi quickly so he can finish the doll and direct us to the *bokor*.”

Darin nods his head and clenches his jaw. He always thought he was just humoring an old woman’s crazy tales. He never thought that he would believe them, with all his heart, and go running away with the characters from her stories to destroy something from one of his nightmares.

* * * * *

The truck’s engine echoes in the still woods long after Darin shut the engine off. He holds the door open for Osanyin to fly out. “How are we supposed to find...” he asks as he turns around. He stops when he sees two strange men standing before him. Osanyin is sitting on the shoulders of the one in grey and black clothes. Next to him is a large grey wolf-dog. His skin is darker than either Darin’s or the other man’s. It is a rich sort of brown, but sometimes reflects soft and light like a deer’s. He has a bow in his left hand. The other man has pale white skin like the only light he has ever seen comes from the pale new moon. He is dressed in reds as dark as blood and blacks so dark they are hard to look at. Strapped to his back is a large, worn sword. The handle is frayed but looks like it has more than done its job. Osanyin and the man with the bow are talking quietly but their faces are alive with motion as each tries to get their point across

as quickly as possible. "Osanyin?" Darin calls hesitantly. The sight of the man with the sword makes him uneasy.

Osanyin and the man with the bow stop talking. "Come here, Darin. We have no time to waste."

Darin walks slowly toward the pair of men. The wolf-dog grins at him; Darin can't tell if it grins from the heat or from aggression towards Darin. The man with the sword stands calmly and watches Darin approach. Osanyin and the man with the bow continue talking.

Osanyin introduces Darin to the men as soon as he is close enough. "Darin, this man here is Ochosi, my brother spirit." The man with the bow inclines his head. "And this man here is Ogun, the brother spirit of Ochosi. It is strange indeed that he feels the need to be here in person." The man with the sword steps forward and embraces Darin. As he embraces him, he whispers in Darin's ear, "Do not be afraid, my son. I will be with you. You have your grandmother's spirit. We will avenge her."

Darin shakes nervously and stumbles back a step when Ogun releases him. The wolf-dog growls in warning.

"We are more blessed than we can know to have Ogun helping us. Our hunt will be swift indeed," Osanyin chirps. "Now Darin, hand the doll to Ochosi so he can finish it while you, Ogun, and I discuss what we must do."

Darin pulls the doll gingerly from his pocket and hands it to Ochosi. As soon as Ochosi touches it, the doll seemed to shudder with life. Darin watches it carefully but does not see it move again. Ochosi and his wolf-dog separate themselves from the group and sit gracefully on the ground. Both bend their heads intently over the doll.

“Darin,” Ogun says gruffly. “Pay attention. We have much to do before we are able to leave.”

* * * * *

The truck rumbles steadily as its wheels move from the rough and uneven gravel to the more smooth tar of the main road. The three of them sit quietly in the truck, letting the noises of the road fill the silence. The doll feels heavy in Darin’s pocket. He swears he can feel it move now and again, independent of his own movements.

Osanyin sits on the dash between the two seats. Mostly he sits with his head under his wing but once in a while he looks around to survey how far they are getting. Ogun sits quietly in the passenger seat, running his hands absently over the sword laying in his lap.

“So, uh, Ogun,” Darin clears his throat roughly. “Did you want me to find some clothes for you or something or?”

Ogun looks at him and narrows his eyes. “Why would I need different clothes?”

“So people don’t, uh, notice how strangely you’re dressed. I mean, not strangely, they’re very nice clothes, but, uh, they are a little conspicuous.” Darin keeps his eyes glued to the road as he speaks, hoping that Ogun does not take offense.

“I do not need different clothes.” Ogun waves his hand dismissively. “No one will think anything of seeing my clothes. They will forget me as soon as they see me, anyway. There is nothing to worry about.”

“Oh. Okay, then. So, uh, once we find this *bokor*, I just use the doll?”

"You need something from him, something personal like his sweat or his hair, but yes. Once you have collected that, then you must simply use the doll."

Darin risks a glance at Ogun. Ogun is staring calmly out the window but looks at Darin and smiles when he feels Darin's gaze. Darin looks quickly back at the road. "Why are you hear again?"

"I am your protection from the *Guedes* and Baron Samedi. Without me, you would not succeed."

Darin gulps loudly and Osanyin twitters reproachingly. Darin clears his throat and asks, "And with you, I will succeed?"

"I do not see why you wouldn't. You have the doll, you know where the *bokor* is. All you need do is find something personal of his. He will be smart and keep them well hidden, but it should not be too difficult. At worst you will have to steal it from him while he sleeps."

"Yes, at worst. At worst all I have to do is steal from a man who could kill me with the blink of an eye and the toss of a pinch of powder. That's it. No problem," Darin squeaks. He swallows loudly again.

"Yes, 'no problem.' It should be done quickly and then we can let you return to your life." Ogun seems ignorant of the nervous energy Darin is filling the car with. Osanyin starts to hop from one foot to the other, responding to Darin's nerves.

"Darin, you must do this. If you do not, he will turn hundreds of people into *zombis*. You have never seen a *zombi* but it is much more terrifying than what you have seen in the movies. It is a person without his soul. A mindless drone with no goal or drive or purpose. It is a state worse than death," Osanyin says. He hops nervously, unable to remain still any longer.

They ride in silence for several miles. Darin is the first to speak. "I don't know how smart this *bokor* is, but if he is hiding his personal things like toe nail clippings or whatever than I think I have a plan. We can do this. We will stop the *bokor* and avenge my grandmother's death. Now, here's what we do..."

* * * * *

The doll comes to life in his hands. Darin can't believe it was as easy as waiting until the *bokor* left the gym and grabbing his towel from the laundry bin and ringing the *bokor*'s sweat onto the doll. Who knew that evil magicians use the neighborhood gym? The doll starts to wriggle and twitch as Osanyin's and Ochosi's magic infuses it with power. Darin looks at Ogun. "Is that it?"

Ogun's face is hard, his lips pressed tightly together. It is hard for him to speak so he nods his head. Osanyin taps on the window of the locker room. Darin opens the window and lets him into the room.

"The *Guedes* are fighting him too strongly for him to speak now, Darin. Let him conserve his strength. It is almost done. You must hold onto the doll for twenty-four hours and then you must bury it next to a crossroads. After that, the *bokor* will have no power for seven hours. You must make him swear to Ogun that he will be good, that he will become a *houngan*. Then, then it will be over." Osanyin is flying around Darin's head while he speaks. He lands on the bench in front of Darin.

"Alright. Let's go finish this, then. Nothing to it." Darin wraps the doll in a scarf and sticks it in a knit hat. He ties the hat closed with the decorative tassels on the hat. Keeping a firm grip on the doll, he heads for the door. "We'll meet you outside, Osanyin. Coming, Ogun?"

* * * * *

"I swear it, I swear it. Just let me go!" The *bokor* cries in pain. His sweaty black hair lays matted across his face. He lays on the floor pitifully, writhing like a worm with its tail cut off.

"You need to say it. You need to say 'I swear to Ogun that I will be a *houngan* and will never again be a *bokor*. I will never again harm anyone with my power.' Come on, now, you can do it." Darin taunts. He steps around the *bokor* so the *bokor* can see him. "Otherwise Ogun will be very angry with you and he won't stop what he's doing." Before they attacked the *bokor*, Osanyin told Darin that Ogun would take care of convincing the *bokor* to swear to become a *houngan*. Usually Ogun, or any of the other gods, would never step in so personally to stop a *bokor*, especially since a *bokor's* magic can harm a god. But this *bokor* had caused Ogun a lot of trouble. Enough that the *bokor* invoked the wrath of the very god himself.

"I swear. I swear to Ogun that I will be *houngan* and will never harm anyone with my power. I swear I will never be a *bokor* again. Now please, make him stop!" The *bokor's* sobs muffled the rest of his words. As soon as he swore, Ogun disappeared. Osanyin hovers around Darin's head, waiting.

Darin looks at Osanyin. "So, that's it? We just leave him here and I head back to Illinois?"

"That is it. The *bokor*, to prove his sincerity to his oath, must take care of himself. That is the first step in keeping his oath to Ogun. We will leave him here so he can start on the long road to becoming *houngan*," Osanyin says as he lands on Darin's shoulder.

Darin looks at the man. He begins to help him up but Osanyin pecks mercilessly at his ear. Darin flinches away from Osanyin's attack and stands up. Osanyin stops pecking. Darin

looks at the man one last time. "May the gods find you in their good graces. May you find the peace you took from me and countless other people," he whispers. The man moans loudly as he tries to move. Darin turns and walks out the door. As he shuts the door behind him, Osanyin lifts off his shoulder and starts to fly away.

"Osanyin!" Darin calls. "Will I ever see you again?"

Osanyin stops and turns to look at Darin. "You will see me if we have need. Hopefully we shall not see each other for a very long time. But fill that cage of your grandmother's with birds. It will be much easier for me to find you if we have need. Goodbye, Darin. May your feet ever find the path they need."

"Goodbye, Osanyin," Darin whispers. He fingers the hat and scarf shoved into his pocket. It was time to clean up that workshop. His grandmother would be ashamed to see it as filthy as he's let it get over the years.

Olorun

All-powerful
Olorun
rules above all

Neither gender nor features
constrains the greatest of all

So great is its power
the lesser orisha must buffer
between the prayers of all mortals
and Olorun, the orisha of gods

But even a lesser orisha's too strong
and must be kept gated
by the keeper of all

the keeper
Elegba, or Esu,
is the way to the way
to contact that power
that moves all each day

Terrible Burden

When power is placed
on the weaker of shoulders,
burdens too great
cause the mind to quite break.

A horse can't control
when he has been mounted;
the loa can break
the minds of their faithful.

The mounted can die
or go quite insane—
so mad none believe
the words from their lips.

And cursed to speak truth
while being ignored,
a Cassandra from lore,
the mounted do bear
the heaviest scorn
and die from the breaking
of their heart's fragile core

Act 1-Scene 5

SCENE 5 CONT'D.

JAMES

What in God's name did you do, Morris? You just about scare the pearls off Hazel. Were you drunk, you sonofa...Morris? I come in here ready to scare you right back and it looks like you've seen a ghost. Morris? You okay, buddy?

MORRIS

I, no. I-I'm really sorry about Hazel. I don't know w-what happened. I just reacted, almost like...I-like it wasn't me.

JAMES

You look a little out of it. Let's go get some air. Hazel said you wanted to talk about something before you clocked her one?

MORRIS

I-I didn't hit her!

JAMES

I know. I know, buddy. You've got some color back in your face, now. Come on, grab your coat. We can talk and walk. Well, you'll stutter but same principle, right? What are you waiting for?

MORRIS

I-I can't leave. I've got a m-meeting. Meetings. I'm going to be working late today. My next meeting's r-right n-now, so...

JAMES

C'mon. You can't take just one little break?

MORRIS

N-no, James. My first m-meeting's with Mr. Shannon.

JAMES

Oh, Mr. Shannon, eh? What did you do to deserve that?

MORRIS

I'm n-not sure. I haven't done a movie script in a while. He's probably just going to have me start a new c-comedy or something.

JAMES

Another comedy? They've give you a lot of comedies lately. Who have they given all your detective films to?

MORRIS

J-Jones, I think. Anyway, I really shouldn't keep Mr. Shannon waiting.

Act 1-Scene 5/Scene 6

JAMES

Come see me tonight; we'll get you all straightened out.

END SCENE 5

SCENE 6

AT RISE:

(Interior. Outside MR. SHANNON's office. The space is clean and expensive looking. There are lots of windows. MR. SHANNON's office walls are made of frosted glass; there is an organic design sprawling across them. MORRIS is sitting on a black metal bench. HE keeps touching his briefcase. Finally HE opens it, takes out the notebook, and reads a random page. Screen fades into dream sequence...)

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Building, lined with Death,
Our Lady holds.

in Ages past
when fever burned
yellow—
people
filled with disease—
the Old Mortuary Church
opened her doors
to embrace those living with death

Our Lady holds them in
the Building lined with Death.



Our Lady

The wind screams outside of the thin church walls. It conceals the creaks and rattles of the building settling and shifting in the storm. The thin moans of the infected are obscured for the night. It is a relief to not hear their souls breaking with pain for even a few hours. Candlelight flickers harshly and violently in three places around the nave. More glitters in the sanctuary where the walls are slightly thicker, protecting the holy spirits from the inclement weather. The pews were pushed against the walls to allow room for as many cots as could be found. Some of the pews were converted to beds to accommodate the number of sick that found their ways to the church. At the front of the church, near the sanctuary, were the best cots. These were the first to be brought in, with the thickest mattresses and the whitest sheets. They were the whitest, but now they are yellowed and stained with black vomit. The mattresses were as beat thin as the sick toss and turn from the pains in their backs and stomachs.

The priest and the nuns prowl relentlessly up and down the rows of cots; they avoid looking at the sanctuary. It was only out of utter desperation that they allowed the heathen priests up there. Too many had died, too many members of both of their congregations. The blacks, with their ties to that “devil magic,” as Mama used to call it, insisted on allowing their ministers access to the church and to the sick. It is disgusting, the nuns say, the things that happen in the sanctuary. The nuns whisper among themselves that they fear they will have to move once the sickness is cured. They fear that God will never allow them to worship in the church again. They try to hide it, their uncertainty about the voodoo priests, but the longer the disease ravishes the city the less there was to gossip about. I overheard them one night when I was laying next to my father’s pew bed. They must not have seen me and thought they were the only ones awake in their church, with only their prayers to their absent God for company. I have never been to see

one of the voodoo queens in town, but many of my friends have been. I was always curious, but was too busy taking care of my own problems to seek out someone else to take care of them for me. My parents would surely have locked me in the house forever if they found out I went to one of those “witches.” That was the way most of the town felt about the voodooers, but with this fever killing so many, people were willing to try anything. Especially since the voodooers didn’t charge anything, not like a doctor would.

I sit up and pull my knees to my chest. Nowhere is comfortable, but it’s time for the wooden pew to leave heavy marks in my back; the floor has had enough time to bruise my hips and shoulders. I stare around the church at all of the people hoping and praying, at the few nuns who still wander the rows, giving comfort where they can, prepared to wake the priest to give last rites to any who want them. One passes by me, her movements unheard over the screaming wind. She spots me at the last moment and inclines her head. I look at my hands. I clench them and knuckle my eyes. I pull my tattered, thin jacket tighter around me and push myself up to my feet. I stumble but catch myself before falling roughly onto my father. Last thing he needs is the burden of his daughter as well as the absence of his wife.

The smell in the church isn’t as strong in the cold of the storm as it is during the heat of day. The nuns try burning pleasant smelling candles and incense, but the musk of the voodoo priests’ magic spells overpowers the nuns’ candles and mix noxiously with the stench emanating from the sick. The floor feels rough and cold, even through the bottom of my shoes. Father moves in his sleep and I freeze, wondering if it would happen tonight. If I’d be left alone. I pull my arms closer to my chest, holding the horrible pinching in my chest and stomach. I move erratically up the nave towards the sanctuary; I keep my eyes lowered, watching only so I don’t run into any nuns. The bleakness is oppressive even without seeing the yellowed skin and dull,

bleary eyes of those infected with the fever. The bleakness feels more fitting at night in the church, when the grey stone floors and walls fade completely into the black shadows. I wander, thinking I'd turn and head back to Father as soon as I reach the sanctuary. I've never been to see a voodoo queen, after all.

There are three of them in the sanctuary. One is wearing a pale yellow button-up shirt, another a red and white checkered dress while the third is wearing a white ruffled blouse with a royal blue flowing skirt. They move with no sign of cold in their limbs and they walk as though they are kissed by the sun's rays on the most pleasant day of the year. The one in the yellow shirt has his sleeves rolled up and is plucking feathers off a brown speckled hen. It struggles in his strong hands but has no hope of escape. Its legs and beak are bound tight, and its head is covered in a tiny burlap bag. The woman in the blue skirt has dark brown hair streaked liberally with grey and white. She is dancing around the sanctuary with a large gourd strung with white and red dyed seashells. Her teeth flash in the candlelight as her mouth opens and closes. The girl in the dress is barely old enough to be called a woman; she is sitting cross-legged on the floor grinding a multitude of plants and flowers in a large mortar. They look mystical up there, so invested in what they are doing that neither the cold nor the surrounding sickness seems to bother them. I stop and watch them as they work, fascinated by how their bodies seem to move in time with each other. The man plucks as the girl grinds flowers; the dancing woman moves to the beat the two produce.

The man turns and looks at me. Our eyes connect and I feel a stirring in the air, a heat that emanates from him and fills the space around me. It makes my heart beat quicker and my face flush. He smiles before turning his piercing gaze to the hen he still holds firmly. The girl watches the exchange between us and smiles at me. Her smile extends to her eyes but I feel a

shock when I look at her. It is painful and hot. She gestures with her head that I should join them in the sanctuary. My throat clenches and my breath freezes in my mouth. I pull myself away from them and walk back to Father's pew. There is something in my stomach; it hurts the more I walk. I close my eyes, feel the chilling air enter my nose. A loud crash and crackle announce that this storm is becoming even more monstrous. I shake my head and look up at the ceiling. I can't see it through the shadows but I have stared at it often enough that I know I am standing under one of the biggest cracks the ceiling has. *God, if you don't want me going up there with those people, then let the ceiling cave in and the full force of your might descend upon me.* I smile slightly as I wait for His divine judgment. *No? Well.* One of the nuns passes me, her brow wrinkled and her eyes squinted. I nod at her and smile. I was never one to wait for prayers to happen. I turn and walk up to the sanctuary.

The woman stops dancing the moment my foot touches the sanctuary. Her skirt floats around her gracefully, the way a swan folds its wings when it lands on a lake. Her face seems to glow the way a full moon does when stared at long enough. She is the palest of the three; her skin looks like coffee after milk is mixed in. Her face has few wrinkles; she looks at me the way a mother looks at her first child as she holds it in her arms. She watches me. The man and the girl stop and watch the two of us as we stand facing each other. My foot feels prickly like when I've sat on it too long and try to stand. I take a few steps forward so I am standing completely in the sanctuary; briefly, my entire body feels prickly. It disappears when the woman extends her free hand to me, palm up. I take it and mumble quietly, "Can I help you?" I wrinkle my forehead. I had meant to ask if she could help Father.

She nods and smiles. "We could always use help." Her words reach me clearly. I see a few of the windows on the west side of the church light from lightning. I see the storm but I can

only hear the grind of the mortar and pestle and the rustling of the hen as its feathers are plucked. He has almost all the feathers off its belly. The woman says, "The loa guard the sanctuary so we can do what we need to uninterrupted. The storm will not enter here." I nod at her words and step closer. Her hand closes firmly around mine. Her hand is soft and warm; her grip feels safe.

She leads me to the man. I hear him cooing deeply to the hen. A shudder runs through me from the base of my spine to the rest of my body. "I am Iona and this is Emory. That girl there is Kittie," the woman explains, pointing to each of them in turn. The man stands and tucks the hen under his arm as he extends his hand. I shake it; his skin feels so warm, as though he'd held his hand in the middle of a large fire and his skin retains the heat. He stoops and picks up the bowl of feathers then carries them over to the altar. Almost spent candles drip wax across the top of the table. He tucks the hen into a wooden cage set beneath the altar and places the feathers beside it. He stays at the altar, moving things around and placing things into a large iron cooking pot. Iona leads me over to Kittie as Kittie dusts her hands free of flower and plant bits.

Kittie pulls me into a hard embrace but lets go quickly. I gasp. Emory's skin feels like skin warmed by a fire but Kittie's feels like the very fire was burning inside of her. "Hello. I heard you came to help us. Who are you?" Kittie asks. Her voice is rough and scratchy like she only breaths smoke. She is the darkest of the three; her skin is the deep charcoal of coals that have burned themselves out.

"My name is Josephine," I say.

Kittie smirks and glances quickly at Iona. "That was not quite what I meant. I..." She stops when she sees Iona shake her head slowly. "Could you help me bring these over to the altar? We'll need them for the ceremony." She handed me the mortar without waiting for my answer then bent to gather the remaining plants and flowers.

I look at Iona, waiting to see what she wants me to do. "Go ahead. Bring them over to Emory. We will be starting soon and everything must be ready by then." I walk slowly toward the altar but stop once to look back at Iona and Kittie. Kittie is gesturing wildly with her hands, her hair flipping as her head shakes roughly. Her mouth is wide when she talks, and frowning when she's not. Iona speaks to her calmly, her hands crossed over her arms. When she shakes her head, they are small and almost unnoticeable. They look at me. Kittie scowls and Iona smiles weakly. I turn and walk quickly to the altar.

"Hello...uhh...Kittie asked me to bring these..." I hold out the mortar. Without looking Emory gestures at the altar.

"Thank you. Just set it over there." I set the mortar down and wait. After a few minutes he turns and looks at me. His eyes narrow pleasingly and he grins. "Waiting for something else?" He winks and my stomach clenches and flips unnervingly.

I blush and shake my head. He smiles broadly and turns back to the altar. His shirt pulls temptingly across his back. I spin around quickly and look out at the nave. The cots and pews glow faintly white in the dark of the church. My heart falls as I realize how long I've been away from my father. Out of the corner of my eye I see Iona gesturing at me. I walk over, still looking out at the nave. "Iona, I would like to help but I should get back to my father. If something happens..."

"He is fine. You are more helpful to him here. Now, if you could sit here," she points at the center of a chalk drawing. There was just enough space for me to sit down, as though it was drawn with me in mind. The drawing contains many triangles and stars; the stars are formed by two crosses, one sitting over the other at an angle. "And try to not smudge the chalk."

I sit carefully; as soon as I am settled Iona hands a thick red scarf to me. "I'm sorry but the loa demand that the uninitiated, those without their own loa, must not watch how we perform our rituals. You will need to be blindfolded."

The cold of the floor is seeping into my legs. It feels as though I am sitting down in the nave next to my father again. I should be with him, not here playing at a cure with these people. "Iona, I need to...Iona? Iona!" Iona is dancing around the sanctuary again, her skirt flowing and whipping around her knees, the rattle spinning in her nimble hands. "Kittie? Emory?" I look around but none of them respond. I try to stand but can't feel my legs; they won't move. I look at the nave hoping to catch one of the nuns' attention when I see the nave lit almost entirely by a large lightning strike. The floor shakes with the impact of the strike. I heard it. I heard the lightning. I can feel the cold of the floor, of the night air. The floor feels different than when I had first stepped onto the sanctuary. I feel cold hands slipping over mine; they lift my hands and set the blindfold over my eyes. One of the cold hands moves and brushes a loose strand of hair behind my ear. The hand trails down to settle on my shoulder. My heart slows and steadies. The hands disappear as I finish tying the scarf over my eyes. *I love you, Father.*

* * * * *

"Josephine. Josephine, you can remove the blindfold now. The ritual is complete. The loa are pleased with you." I feel the cold hands at the back of my neck, tugging insistently at the scarf. I oblige and remove it. I scrunch my eyes closed as the bright daylight blinds me. The cold hands trail from my neck to my shoulders before disappearing. I feel two warm, powerful hands

grip my own. With one giant tug they lift me off the floor; I thud heavily against a broad, muscular chest. Emory chuckles. "You can open your eyes, Josephine," he says.

I can feel the warmth rising in my face before I even open my eyes. I step away quickly and look around. "What, what time is it?"

"It's almost noon, dear. Here. Give this to your father." Iona hands me a small, heavy satchel. "But do not look in it. Place it under his pillow. You will know when it is time to throw it away." Kittie is holding several other matching satchels in her arms. She smiles warmly at me.

"Th-thank you." I almost drop the scarf as I hand it to Iona.

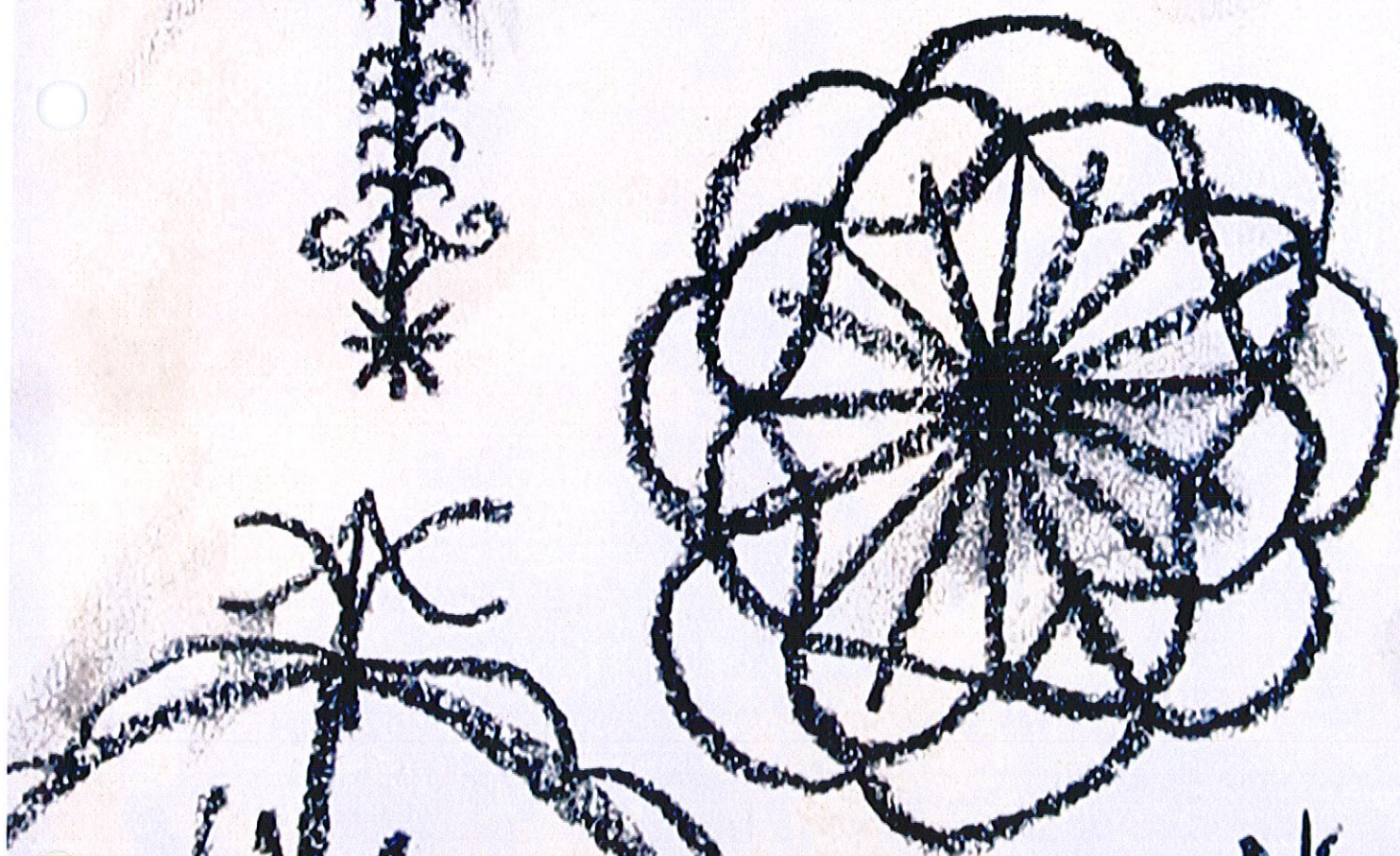
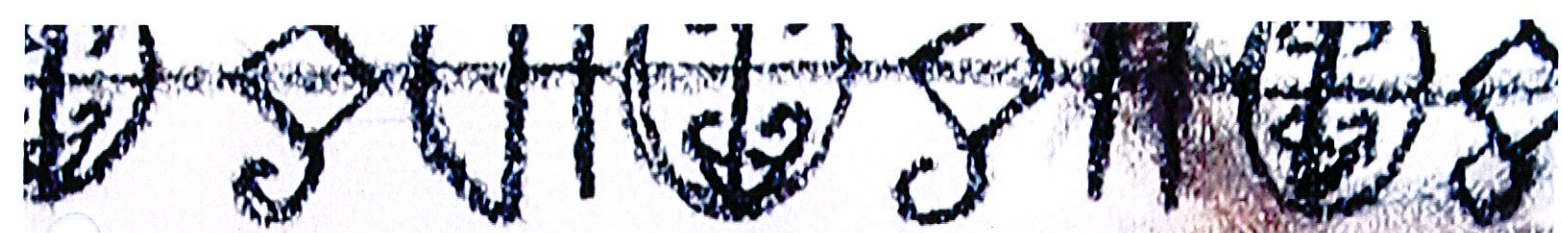
"If you ever have need of us again, we would very much like to see you." Iona embraces me smoothly; her hug reminds me of my mother's. Mama's hugs never lingered longer than necessary but they never lacked in comfort and security.

I blearily make my way to my father's pew. The nuns try to avoid looking at me; the ones who were here last night must have told them what they had seen me do. One crossed herself as I pass.

Father looks at me weakly when I kneel next to him. I lift his head gingerly and place the satchel under his pillow. His eyes are feverish and cannot focus on my face. I smile half-heartedly and gently brush my lips against his forehead. His skin burns painfully. Blood oozes out of the corner of his mouth. I wipe it away gently with his sheet. I lay down on the floor next to him, pillowing my arms under my head. My eyelids fall shut and I dream about hen feathers and purple flowers and blood and whiskey.

* * * * *

I pull the satchel from under my father's pillow as he sits up and struggles to adjust his clothes. His face has only the slightest trace of yellow in it. I pocket the satchel quickly. I'm not sure why I hid it so quickly; I feel the slightest brush of a cold hand against mine as I pull my hand out of my pocket. At other pews and cots, people are sitting up and preparing to leave. Iona, Kittie, and Emory move around the nave, tucking satchels away as they congratulate people on their recovery. Emory smiles lasciviously when he catches my eye. Kittie grins and curtsies flamboyantly. Iona inclines her head and mouths something. She is across the nave by the sanctuary; my father and I are close to the door, but I hear her as though she is standing next to me. "Remember the touch of the loa. If you wish to find us, follow them."



Act 1-Scene 6

SCENE 6 CONT'D.

MR. SHANNON

Come in, boy. Don't just sit there day dreaming. What do I pay you for, creativity?

MORRIS

Sorry, Mr. Shannon. I just, I got distracted. It won't happen again, I promise, sir.

MR. SHANNON

You're good, boy. I'd hate to have to lose you. Ha! Smile boy, that was a joke. And you don't need to call me sir. This isn't the Army.

MORRIS

Yes, si-Mr. Shannon. What did you want to see me for?

(MORRIS sits down in a rich mahogany chair in front of a large desk. The office is decorated with only the best, a Persian rug, expensive vases, exotic plants. MR. SHANNON leans against his desk.)

MR. SHANNON

Well, we're going to switch you on over to westerns for a while. Tod's whining about how he's done them for the past three years, so he'll be taking over your detective films. We're going to start filming a western for Henry Stewart, so you best get to it.

(MR. SHANNON sits down behind his desk and starts moving papers.)

MORRIS

Y-Yes sir. Thank you, sir.

MR. SHANNON

It's Mr. Shannon, boy. Now get to work before I have to fire you. Ha!

(MORRIS closes the door to MR. SHANNON's office. On the way to the stairwell he runs into GERALDINE. SHE can't stop looking around.)

GERALDINE

There you are. Here. Cecil will be able to tell you more about it than I can. Take it.

(SHE hands him a folded piece of paper.)

MORRIS

Th-thank you. But I, uh...

GERALDINE

Give him a call. But I can't be around that thing no—anymore. I've got work to do. He'll answer your questions. Goodbye, Mr. Bryant. Take care.

(SHE leaves. MORRIS watches her leave and looks at the paper in his hand. He walks to the stairwell and goes in.)

Act 1-Scene 7

END SCENE 6

SCENE 7

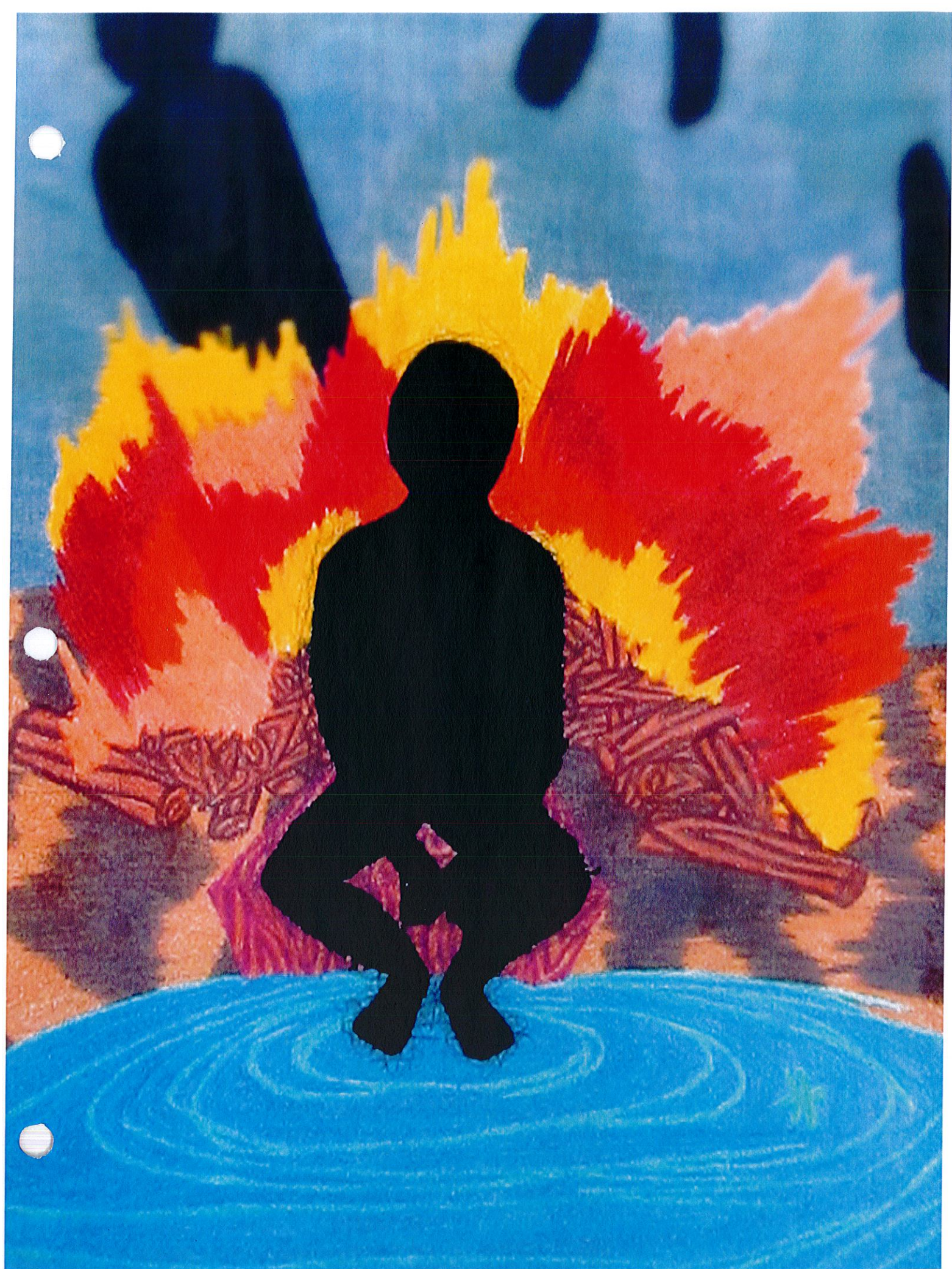
AT RISE:

(Interior. MORRIS is sitting at his desk brainstorming. The papers in front of him are covered in doodles. He looks at the phone, scribbles something, then finally picks up the phone.)

MORRIS

Uh, h-hello. Is this a Mr. King? It is? G-good. Uh, your niece Geraldine Cook gave me your number, said you could help. Yes, h-help me, that's right. Well, I-I found this journal at an estate sale and—yes, yes it—h-how did you k-know tha—yes, I can see you tomorrow. Four o'clock? At—yes, I can m-meet you there. Okay, I will see you tomor—th-thank—goodby—
(HE hangs up the phone and stares at it. He pushes all the sheets off his desk and into the garbage. HE gets out some clean sheets of paper and pulls the notebook open in front of him. HE starts scribbling madly at the paper. Screen fades to dream sequence...)

END SCENE 7



Drowning

The song plays sweet and haunting.

The fly buzzes past lazily,
half frozen and one beat closer.

Down the street, couple dances in warmth.

Out of the box fly crows and ravens.

For someone, the water carries her breathless.
For someone, the snow falls on his still cap.

The song plays on.
The fly twitches slowly before turning back.
The couple burns to nothing.
The box lays empty.
The water floats another.
The snow piles up

A melody sweet and haunting.

Voodoo List

- seven Teeth
- Jawbone
- Hair
- seven Coins
to pay the Dead
for his
Contribution
- Rooster eyes
& Parrot tongue
- heads and hearts and Turtle lung
- fill up the
Vessel,
young hollow gourd
- splash thrice with rum
once for the Deed
and once for the Doer
and once through the earth
to fill up the waters
that Feed all the spirits
Called of the dead
by *Bokor* yet *Houngan*
- Bury in moonlight
by Gateway to spirits
from holy day to holy next
- So filled with Portent
drag across Doorway
to Seep through the feet
of my enemy

Ritual Possession

Bodies press flesh to flesh
dance in twitching spasms
a slow press worms from back to
front to pass around the altar

Frenzy builds in sodden air
worshippers call and open
to the surrounding presence
and pass around the altar

And three to the earth, pass through
the waters, soul deadly waters
drunk by the dead to fill,
warmth once known by them

One fills its belly and yearns
more and follows the stream
and crashes blind through
and captures her body, his to ride.

The Island Below the Sea

The cool night air oozing in the window reminds him of home, the mountains. His Iowan neighbors don't consider this weather "cool"; they blame his Haitian blood for thinking it's cool. But his mountains can get cold and rival an Iowan's fall night.

"Little one, I have told you of *les Invisibles* so many times, you must know the story better than I do."

"Please, Grampa? Please tell it one more time? I love hearing it."

"Alright, one more time. Until tomorrow, of course." He laughs deeply, the air coming out scratchy as it is forced from his throat. "Well, across the lagoon and far, far across the water, into the crossroads and through the mirror is the land of *les Invisibles*. So dark a place, it is kept secret from all. Only those honored by the *loa* have seen it. And they return from there telling marvelous stories, marvelous tales of the Island and its mystical features and magical beings." He strokes his right leg absently, on the outside just above the knee. The scar hurts him constantly. His grandson likes to trace its outline; it looks like a giant moth.

"It is a land, the Island Below the Sea, a land much like this one, but full of insects and sea creatures and no one and nothing else. There is no sky; a ceiling arcs high over the water and above the Island. The water is dreadful fatal, though it is the brother water of the Sea. It is drinkable and delicious, so delicious, but dangerous to encounter for it is infested. In the darkness they flash, lit by glowing grey mushrooms and flickering fireflies. Thick glowing lichen coats the high domed ceiling. It glows a pleasant yellow-green color, so pale that it is almost impossible to see by. The ceiling under the lichen is silver-black rock speckled with holes that

lead to tunnels that stretch from that world through the mirror and into the natural world, the real world.

“In the very center of the cave, far from any sides, lies the Island. Its soft sandy beaches surround the lush inner land in silver-white rings. There are seven of them, those rings. Some are so thin that one step takes you from one end to the other. Others are so wide it would take you an hour to walk half way across it. The inner land, protected by the sand rings, is where the insects find peace and rest. They hide there among tall, fat green palms and short black-green ferns and all manner of other nice, lush vegetation. Between the sand rings and beyond to the very edges of the cavern walls are hidden stretches of rock and beautiful, colorful coral; the great reef guards from any human entering and reaching the Island.

“The real danger of the place, the one no one expects, is its inhabitants, the insects and sea creatures. They are no usual creatures, these things. They vary in all sizes, from incredibly small to monstrously large and all have a place to stay in *les Invisibles*. Dragonflies flit and hover, spectacular blues and greens flash radiantly against the luminescent plants. One larger than a cow floats past one smaller than a pin. Nothing goes hungry but no creature eats. No fish jump out to snatch an unsuspecting bug. Instead, they jump for the pure joy of it. No one needs anything in the land of the dead.

“Each speckled trout and bottle nosed dolphin, each lady bug and each cicada is the soul of a person, trapped until the time will come for them to be called back to life. It is dangerous to see them before the time has come for their return. Any who see a whale in the water there or a mosquito in that starless sky becomes one of them. Their life is stolen until they, too, are called to return.

“High above the Island flash spirits of incredible darkness. They guard the gateways between the worlds. If all people had access to *les Invisibles*, everyone would die, leaving no one to feed the hungry *loa* with ritual sacrifice. The spirits of the grave guard the cavern. But, any guard can be convinced to let someone through. With the right knowledge and the right fee, the living may enter the land of the dead.

“In *les Invisibles* there is knowledge to be had, untold knowledge of all the lands and of all of time. Only the brave dare attempt the trip, for at any moment the fickle spirits may forget their bribes and leave on to the darkness of death. Only the dark and bloodthirsty dare delve through the earth and into the mirror, where they are challenged and tested each and every time until they break through the barrier and the spirits. There they learn the secrets of the *bokor*, of life and death. That is the trick of the *Cochon Gris*, the Grey Pigs.

“And that is all the story you will get tonight. Now, tuck you in and get to sleep right quick.” Grampa stands up from his chair and tucks the fuzzy brown blanket tight around his grandson’s neck.

The boy pretends to choke. Grampa smiles and readjusts the blanket to rest comfortably under his grandson’s arms. “Goodnight. Sleep tight. Don’t drift down to the Island tonight.”

“Grampa?” The boy calls. Grampa stops at the door and turned to face him. “Grampa, have you ever been to see the Island?”

Grampa smiles, small and sad. “Goodnight, Toby. That is a story for another night.”

* * * * *

The mountains are cold today. The sun cannot get through the clouds that lie thick over the sky the way people coat the earth. Through the woods, sounds of celebration and drums, frantic drums, can be heard pounding out a powerful rhythm. In a clearing, masked figures leap and dance across blazing fires. Their chanting stretches through the gloom as they call on the Baron to bring them power. Their knotted ropes strung with small bones and shells and bright feathers shake and crackle as their dance spins them faster and faster around the clearing.

A young man sits naked in the center of the clearing, in the middle of all of the fires. It is his turn to bribe the spirits and try his luck in *les Invisibles*. He is covered liberally in a foul smelling concoction of rooster blood and rum soaked mud, turtle eggs and powdered berries. There are many things that went into the mixture the young man does not know; the *loa* have yet to allow him that knowledge. He has been a Gray Pig for several years, but this is the first they have seen fit to allow him some important duty. Most of his work is keeping the people from the Pigs' mountain hideouts where they perform that which should not be seen by uninitiated eyes.

The smoke curls around the man, obscuring him from those outside the circle of fire. It dances wickedly over his face, carving strange patterns on his sunburned skin. At first he has an overly curled mustache, dark and twirled. Then, his cheeks have black swirling scars carved into their sides. The smoke plays with the eye, some magic fingers twist and twirl the smoke through the cloudy air.

The masked figures retreat to the edge of the clearing. They are almost obscured by the smoke billowing throughout the clearing. The smoke grows thicker and thicker like a sponge as it absorbs more and more water. They become shadow creatures, dancing at the edge of vision and vanish when looked at directly. Sound fades into the smoke, becoming thick and nothing

more than vibrations torturing the ear drum. The young man breathes quicker; his pulse fills the empty gap caused by the silence of the clearing.

His pulse beats relentlessly; the beat grows louder and stronger. The shadow creatures spin faster around the young man; they float and dance impossibly high at the edges of his vision. The fire burns hotter like it is trying to melt his skin from his bones. He feels every grain of dirt sawing into his skin as he begins to rock. Back and forth he rocks, swaying to the frantic drums. His skin crawls as the dirt shifts under his skin and moves up into his skull. He lifts his hand to touch his face. His hand moves slowly and his muscles strain as they force his hand through the heavy air. It's like digging through marble, inch by torturous inch.

His skin is sand. His bones are slowly shifting, crystallizing into quartz. They seem to pull out of him, into the ground and out. He's melting, turning into the dirt at his feet as he evaporates into the air. A sudden break in the clouds lights the clearing. The sun reflects gem colors around the man. They disappear quickly. Hands pull slowly at him, drawing him out. Cold, clammy hands, clenching at his very muscles, pulling under his skin. They draw him fluidly forth, like mercury sliding down a plane. They pull faster and faster, drawing him like taffy in a pull. Then pop! He's out. Not him, he can still feel his body, sitting firm against the painful earth. Something else. His *ti bon ange*, like the older Pigs talk about.

The hands whip him up impossibly high into the air. He can see the clearing below him like the period on a page. The tug recedes and he feels weightless, frozen in the stars. At the peak of his weightlessness, he plummets, faster and faster. He sees nothing but light, white and unsullied. Then, like pushing a hand into a still pond, he bursts into blackness.

He is pulled slowly through the darkness like a needle through thick leather. He feels he has stopped moving. There is heavy pressure across every inch of his skin. His eyes burn and his

nose feels blocked. On the edges of his vision curious glowing specks appear. They move and tremble like dust motes in a shaft of sunlight. He can't see them clearly but can't bring them to focus. He thinks they'd just disappear even if he could turn his head, like stars during the day. His lungs burn, longing to expand and contract in their natural rhythm. The specks grow larger and take shape, the more adventurous ones dance across his vision. His throat is raw and swallowing forces a metallic vibration into his ears, a metallic taste lingering in his mouth.

The specks grow larger and flit across his vision like lightning bugs on the darkest night. The pressure lightens, but he feels it like a second skin, laying just above his gooseflesh. He inhales sharply, painfully, and folds in half, choking. His coughs sound muffled; puffs of air hit him gently each time he exhales. The air he inhales feels cool and tastes salty.

He stays folded around his stomach as his lungs readjust to their job. His joints burn as they are unused to their new positions. He feels something nudge against him gently, like a dog bumping his nose against a stranger to smell him out.

Do not move. Move and you will join them.

He froze. The voice permeated through his brain, through his bones, through every muscle and bone of his being.

Do as I say and you will survive this.

The voice hurt his eardrums even though he knew he didn't actually hear any sound. The voice sounded male, but like three hundred male voices, tenors and baritones and basses, melded so tight together that there is no way to identify a single vocal chords' contribution.

You must not speak. I am creating a space for you to exist safely. If any of them touch you, you will die. You will never leave this place. Now, open your eyes, slowly.

He opened his eyes slowly, the dark burning his eyes like the sun on a bright, cloudless day. Hundreds of lights moved around in his vision, silver and blue and green, all glowing. He resisted the urge to shake his head or even blink. His heart beat so hard against his skin he knew those things the voice told him about can hear him and he could die.

You may stand but do not walk. I shall take you where you will go. You cannot predict their actions and I cannot lose you.

He stood slowly, unfurling himself, reaching for something solid to stand on. He felt no ground at his feet, nothing solid around him. His balance threatened to topple him, out of the space the voice has created and into one of the lights. He clenched his stomach muscles and stopped breathing, hoping to remain standing. After some fight, while the lights danced whimsically in his sight, his body shook but seemed as though it would remain standing.

Good. You learned faster than the others. Now, watch and you shall see the Island where all are destined to go. It is the beginning. The end. It never existed but never stops existing. An Island in a cavern deep within the earth, outside the universe, full of insects and sea creatures forgotten and yet to be seen. Go ahead. Look.

His eyes adjust to the dim lighting, but a little too strongly, as if the darkness lifted a few levels to something more tolerable for human eyes. A vast expanse of water lies before him, with a large island in the center, filled with lush and exotic foliage. Above him is a cavern wall dotted with holes. Each hole is surrounded by shapes that can only be seen in when in front of something. The lightness of the background allows the shapes to be seen. The walls of the cavern extend from above the cave and out, so far out he cannot see where the water touches the walls. Around the island, just visible under the water, is an immense coral structure. The depth of the water is hidden by the darkness of the cave even though the water looks as clear as glass.

He slips toward the island suddenly, as smooth as quicksilver. The specks closest to him become more visible. He sees that they are animals, dragonflies and hornets dash through the air while dolphins and trout swim haphazardly in the water. They seem to see him; their eyes follow him as he approaches the island. He feels pain in his back. The pain pulses through his body sharply, like something's tugging at his spine.

I'm sorry. This is all you may see. You must leave now. If you can return, for I believe you can, you shall see things no mortal has seen for centuries. Prepare yourself. Prepare.

As quickly as he entered the cavern, he is pulled out, back through the dark and into the light. Just before he leaves the cavern, a giant yellow moth with two large blue eye spots approaches him. It dances in front of him, studying. It feels familiar, like someone he has known for much of his life. It moves to land on him, and brushes his leg with one of its wings. His vision burns into a searing white nothing. He feels the push of ground under his legs, the hard pieces of dirt pressing against his naked skin. His skin is hard, caked with the dried concoction the *bokor* had made. He is one of them, now. But his leg burns furiously as though the flames of the fire are coming from his leg itself. His vision is blurry, full of tears that obscure what is occurring. He can hear people shouting, scared voices, and people move around in front of him. He feels hands on him again and thinks, 'Not again. I can't go there yet.'

* * * * *

He sits reading the newspaper, his coffee releasing its heat in small twists of steam into the chilly air of the room. He rubs at his scar. A sudden force knocks him into the table slightly, his hand lifts to brace himself against the onslaught.

"Grampa!" A small but insistent voice accompanies the two arms hugging his chest into submission. He pats Toby's hands. "Grampa? Are you going to tell me tonight?" His little face, eyes still edged with sleep dust, peeks at him from just above the table.

"Tell you the story again? Don't you ever tire of it?"

"Not that story. Not unless you want to, I love that story. I want to know if you went to the *Island*."

"There may be time for that. But not tonight. Everything in its place." He pats Toby on the head gently. "Go get breakfast."

Grampa watches Toby as the boy runs to the counter and struggles to get his plate without using a stool. His hand traces the moth's imprint on his leg.



Les Invisibles

In darkened cave
of silvers and blues
shining greens and blacks
flash in luminescent bubbles

Air crinkles with beginnings—
charged with time
and Earth's great power,
focused on the Island
alone in the Sea
where the Invisible lie

Cold bodies stumble and fall
on the lifeless Island shores
and there shed their skin
and emerge glossy and wet
with wings and scales that glisten
in the perpetual midnight

any who see their new changes
will quickly join them on the
Island Below the Sea

Cochon Gris

And the Gray Pigs—
who in mountains hide
and in secrets sleep—
the Cochon Gris,
like the Sect Rouge
and Vrinbrindingue
 (of Blood, Pain, Excrement)
who in Jesus,
Voodoo Jesus—
Legba—
trust.

He who died on the cross
to serve as human sacrifice,
for as is said
the bread is His body,
the wine His blood
and we eat to remember,
like ancient cannibals,
the Cochon Gris.

Act 1-Scene 8

SCENE 8

AT RISE:

(Interior. MORRIS' apartment is fairly bland, a bachelor kind of place. Clean, though. YVONNE is sitting on the couch. MORRIS is laying with his head in her lap. SHE's stroking his hair and humming softly.)

MORRIS

Yvonne. I d-don't know what to do. I've never n-not been able to write what they w-want. It's always been e-easy, once you know the f-formula. E-especially a western. I can't e-even write a w-western!

YVONNE

Sh, sh. I am sure it will be okay. You are a great writer. It will come to you. The muse, she will give you inspiration yet. Do not worry.

MORRIS

That's j-just it, she already has. I c-can't stop thinking about this s-story and these th-things...B-but the studio won't l-like it. It's like n-nothing they've done before. They w-won't producer it. Why c-can't I just write a western, p-plain and si-simple?

YVONNE

That is not the way the muse works. You have been given a gift. You must not waste it.

MORRIS

Then th-there's Geraldine and her u-uncle Cecil. He t-told me not to t-touch the journal anymore, to j-just lock it aw-away. But I c-couldn't...what does h-he know? He's probably just s-some loon. What does G-geraldine know about anything, she's j-just some secretary.

YVONNE

(SHE slaps MORRIS lightly.)

I am just some secretary.

MORRIS

Th-that's not what I m-meant. Just, this whole thing, and w-what happened with H-hazel, maybe I sh-should just lock it away...

YVONNE

It is your muse, you must not lock up your muse. And Hazel, that woman, she can be hard to live with, yes? I do not know how you and James tolerate her so. I say just write the story. Maybe the studio will surprise you.

Gros Bon Ange/Ti Bon Ange

The basic components of man are the z'étoile, gros bon ange, ti bon ange, nâme, and corps cadavre. The corps cadavre is the physical body, the flesh and blood. The rest are sort of like different parts of the spirit. The ti bon ange (little good angel) and the gros bon ange (big good angel) can be seen in a person's shadow. When a person casts two shadows, the dark core is the gros bon ange and the ti bon ange is the lighter penumbra. The gros bon ange is the life force all sentient beings share; at death it returns to God. It's undifferentiated energy, like a cosmic life force. The ti bon ange is the part of the soul directly associated with the individual; it is the person's personality, his will power, his aura. The ti bon ange travels when a person sleeps, which explains dreams. The ti bon ange can be extracted from the body and placed in a clay jar for protection. The ti bon ange lives in the world of les Invisibles after the body dies. It can come back from the world of les Invisibles to live again (like reincarnation). The bokor takes a person's ti bon ange to make the person a zombi (Davis Wade 181-186).

Cochon Gris

The Cochon Gris (Grey Pigs) ate people and ran around in red gowns and hoods. The Cochon Gris is a secret society. They are also known as the Sect Rouge and Vrinbrindingue. It is uncertain if they are all the same society or if they are different societies (Davis Wade 209-211). The Cochon Gris have frenzied dances dedicated to Baron Samedi. They use human sacrifices and believe that Legba (Vodoun Jesus) died on the cross to serve as edible human sacrifices. This is seen as a variation of the sacraments ("This is My Body... This is My Blood. Take and eat in remembrance of Me.") (Guiley 344).

Vevers/Veves

Vevers are sacred symbols drawn during ceremonies. They are frequently designed with mirror symmetry on both sides of the horizon (Deren 34). Veves are elaborate colored designs that symbolize gods; they decorate the walls and floors of the temple (Deren 343).