

LUNORA
AND THE
MONSTER KING

H.S. CROW

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Lunora and the Monster King The Flight of a Starless Garden (Short Story)

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To Jasmine, every child like her, and to all grown-ups—after all, we were once children too.

I still hear the echo of our laughter when we searched for crickets and rejoiced at how colorful they appeared in our small hands. I still see the faint silhouette of you dancing when The Beatles were on, and your beautiful smile when we held hands. I wrote this story in honor of you, sweet sister, and everyone with dreams like yours. I promised you that I would one day promote a better world, and through my writing I plan to do so.

Hate and discrimination is a horrible thing. We all feel it at some point, many of us fight against it, but it is rarely ever silenced. It is so easy for the heart to fall into darkness, but darkness cannot exist without light. I hold faith that this work may inspire people to look past each other's differences. Judge those by the content of their character, not by assumptions and stereotypes.

This book is also written for you, fellow reader, and for generations of children after you. You are not alone. We are all victims, heroes, dreamers, and builders of tomorrow. Thank you for choosing to walk this path and explore the fog. Without you, Caligo remains lost beneath the night. You are the light these stories need for our world to change.

I admire your heroism in joining me on this journey. Jasmine would have been proud.

—H.S. Crow



"The Monster King's searching for a human, and word on the wind is Mother Leaf knows where it is!"

A shadowed figure whispered. As if driven by hunger, ominous eyes glinted in the everlasting darkness. The shapeless forms circled near a floating glass door as scarlet eyes brimming with hate approached. They belonged to a masked boy with long white hair and a scarlet glare. "Devour this human, gain the power to rule over the fog" a voice echoed as the door opened, unveiling the bewitched Kingdom of Nevermore.

Beyond the hazy entrance a young girl lay beneath a single ray of light. Flowers sang around her as dark shadows roamed between the avenues of stars. The name Lunora filled the atmosphere as monsters drew closer.

"She is mine!" *A wooden creature with dark beady eyes howled threateningly as the land eclipsed beneath an Eldritch black sun.*
"I am Mother Leaf, and on my word, no harm shall come to this child!"

"She is human! Not one of us! Are you a traitor?" *a monster shouted amongst other exclamations of shock before the door closed and locked.*

The voice of the king then silenced every breath.

"Find her."



CHARACTERS

LUNORA, a Lost Young Girl.

NICHOLAS, Her Father.

IKO, a Charming Hyperion.

MOTHER LEAF,
Keeper of the First Door.

MONSTER KING,
Cruel Ruler of Caligo.

ORION, His Arbiter.

AZU, The King's Guard.

LAZUL, Priestess of Transcendence.

ILESS, a Spirit of Fear.

HASS, a Spirit of Hate.

CRY, a Spirit of Sorrow.

ALFON, a Distrusting Imp.

PETRA, a Ferocious Monster of Whisper Isle.

ARI, His Forgiving Sister.

FIDDLE, a Boater.

COBWEBS, a Troubled Eukarian Messenger

ZOLF, Keeper of the Second Door.

CANUS, a Wolf faced Prisoner

WHISPERING

WILLOWS, a collection of perplexed talking trees.

THE OLD ONE, an Ancient tree with many faces.

TATI, Leader of the Dancing Monster Gang

WEEDLEQUACK, a Dancing Monster.

BEEPER, a Dancing Monster.

DANCING

MONSTERS, a gang of monsters that takes joy in dancing.

BRIEF CHARACTER BIOS:

LUNORA: Is a young girl between the ages of 14-16. She is believed to have lost her memory during an air raid. She is known for her curious nature and for her need to help those around her. She dislikes violence and struggles to stay away from it. Through her struggles as a refugee she has learned to adapt quickly to severe situations. Her high resolve has kept her and her father alive. She is often treated as a naïve girl, but she is far from it. Her secret wish is to one day fly away from the cruel world she lives in and to explore a land of dreams.

NICHOLAS: Is a hopeful man between the ages of 40-50. He and his daughter, Lunora are refugees seeking a better life. They have been on the run for nearly five years. He and his family had a good life prior to a terrorist attack that led his people into public ruin. The terrorist group that committed the act had falsely used the faith of his people to spread hate, thus the world changed and became fearful of anyone associated with the religion that had been falsely misrepresented. Nicholas lost

his wife and eldest son to the government that had once protected them. Hate nearly consumed Nicholas, but his daughter gave him a reason to push the darkness away. He was known to base all of his decisions around his daughter. He wants her to have a future, and thus he is willing to do whatever it takes for her to have it.

IKO: Is a white haired young monster with piercing birdlike scarlet eyes. He is known to wear a strange tribal mask of unknown origin. No one really knows where he was born, but the trees rumor his bloodline to be connected to the Hyperions – a tribe that lives in the hottest deserts. He was found in Whispering Willow Forest where the Old One took him in as a son. These trees were the boy's only family next to the late Princess Aronul – a girl passionate about life and the worlds beyond Caligo. Iko is cunning and hotheaded as well as distrusting and cold. He believes he can save the crumbling world of Caligo, and is willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish it.

MOTHER LEAF: She is the Keeper of the First Door, and a mighty wooden monster with vines and leaves covering her body. She is highly respected by other monsters, even in her mutiny directed at the king. She is known to have a soft spot for humans, especially children. She is a maternal figure with a lot of patience and love. However, her heart has grown weak through the centuries. She has become a broken and lonely creature seeking to have the one thing she has never had the pleasure of enjoying – her own child.

MONSTER KING: The cruel tyrant and ruler of the Kingdom of Nevermore is a hateful horned monster filled with hostility towards humans. His birth name is Shin'olac; however, it is rarely used and almost forgotten by his kingdom. He is from the Qilin Tribe, a race of horned dragon-like creatures. The King believes that all humans are at fault for his daughter's murder. He was once a benevolent king, however those fleeting days are but a dream. He now governs Caligo with an obsidian fist, and any monster opposing him is often sentenced to

death. He is constantly worried about revolts against him and often makes rash decisions in order to diffuse the idea of it. He uses fear to subjugate the realm, and it has corrupted him.

ORION: This genderless monster is the King's Arbiter, and his most trusted follower. Orion is the only one that understands the King's inner turmoil, and overall struggle. This monster does not agree with the King's recent motive and killings, but an oath once made to Princess Aronul has twisted Orion's perspective. Orion truly believes that there is no choice but to serve, and it has driven the massive armored creature into a tragic and self destructive road.

AZU: A goat legged knight struggling with morality and his place in the crumbling kingdom. Azu is an example of the King's failing army that deems him unfit to rule anymore. As a King's Guard he has done a great deal of things, but never murder. The hate spreading in the kingdom is weighing him down. He has learned to play the system in order to survive, but he has grown tired of it. He is lighthearted, kind, and hopeful things will change again.



LAZUL: Deep in the citadel this priestess sits next to Monster King. She is often feared due to her powerful magick. Lazul is a woman cloaked in raven feathers once rumored to have banished the moon from Caligo in order to appease her king. She is a shrewd moon sprite frustrated with how things have become, however her service to the king remains absolute.

ILESS: Is the Spirit of Fear. This dimensional apparition rumored to manifest in the form of a hyena feeds on the fear of both worlds.

HASS: Is the Spirit of Hate. This dimensional apparition strolls at the edges of the Forgotten Ruins in the form of a reptilian monster. It feeds on the hateful energies of the worlds.

CRY: Is the Spirit of Sorrow, and the last dimensional apparition on Whisper Isle that feeds on the sadness of both worlds. This spirit has been rumored to cry quite a bit. It exists as a frightening twelve legged, nine eyed, four fanged monster.

ALFON: Is a distrusting imp with conflicted feelings towards Lunora. He does not

hate humans, but he does not wish to die. Alfon believes in order to survive one must obey the rules.

PETRA: Is a ravenous and deranged fish-eyed monster with a sickly complexion on Whisper Isle. He is blinded by the need to live forever with his sister. He devours everything, including his own kind to stall a horrific parasite inside him. He is a creature driven by hunger. His sister is the most important being in his life.

ARI: She is Petra's forgiving sister. She is a sweet sprite trapped inside a doll. Hope is her curse. She believes that Petra will change. She often sings to her brother, and tries to help him see the wrong he is doing, but she has grown tired of it. She blames herself for what happened to Petra.

ZOLF: A stern warrior, and Keeper of the Second Door. The dusky furred monster guards the entrance to the Kingdom of Nevermore. It is said that he enjoys a good fight when given the chance.

FIDDLE: The highly observant and somewhat dead boater of the Lake Rulia. He is

the link between the mainland, and the Whispering Isle.

TATI: She is a dancing four eared rabbit that often enjoys tea with Mother Leaf. She leads the Dancing Monster Gang that often hangs at Mother Leaf Village, named after the guardian that oversees it.

WEEDLEQUACK: She is a duck faced dancing monster that often repeats her last name. She is one of the members of the Dancing Monster Gang.

BEEPER: An adorable three horned dancing fur-ball that often repeats the words Beep, and follows the Dancing Monster Gang.

COBWEBS: The troubled Eukarian messenger of the King is a loyal citizen striving to rise up in Nevermore. In these parts of the Inverse Realm, Eukarians are rare to come by. He finds Lunora a nuisance and an obstacle stopping him from his true goals.

CANUS: The comical wolf faced prisoner that still holds Princess Aronul deep in his heart.

WHISPERING

WILLOWS: A collection of perplexed talking trees that often repeat things they have heard, or things lost in memory. They are known to drive listeners insane.

THE OLD ONE: Is an Ancient tree with many faces believed to be connected to Caligo, the first earth.

VOIDLINGS: They are monsters that have died with hate, fear, or sorrow in their heart. When dead the body remains trapped in an eternal dance. This phenomenon has sparked many strange beliefs.

SEVERAL MORE MONSTERS



› Lunora and the Monster King ‹

› H.S. Crow ‹

†ACT II†



SCENE I

In the cold darkness, strange pillars gleam beneath a single ray of light. Beneath the light, at the center of the pillars, a young girl dressed in soft blues sleeps in a bed of flowers. The girl, named LUNORA, is trapped in her dreams. In the distance, shadowed figures called VOIDLINGS spin harmoniously to the sound of a low hum. They are faceless, and trapped in black obscurity, but one figure appears to be different. Her mysterious gaze holds curious pity towards the young girl. Her name is MOTHER LEAF—one of the guardians and keepers of the first world.

MOTHER LEAF: Long ago, there was a dream within a dream that allowed joy to reign, but that youthful breath drifted away as swiftly as a summer rain. There was nothing left after the dawn, except for a world darkened by a King's broken heart. Now only Morpheus induced silhouettes dance in these lightless plains. They dance in sequence to the sound of time – unmoved by existence – trapped in a single thought I hope lies within you.

[MOTHER LEAF emerges from blackness with a rusty key in her hand. Her gaze is filled with sorrow as she carefully holds the key to the light. Her eyes glint like iridescent pearls as her leafy hair dangles

behind her. She is a creature covered in nature with branches and vines coursing down her head and shoulders.]

MOTHER LEAF: Every key belongs to a lock, and every lock contains a secret. My mind churns for the truth that you hold. Why are you here? I never desired this for you, yet I am curious to know. Is this idle gaud the answer I seek, or is it merely the old memory of a dream I thought I once lived?

[MOTHER LEAF tucks the rusty key inside a wooden pouch tied around her waist before redirecting her attention to the sleeping girl.]

MOTHER LEAF: Wake child. Open those woolgathered eyes. It is time for us to meet again.

[LUNORA wakes up, and slowly comes to her feet. She is in a daze as she starts to notice the pale flowers around her.]

MOTHER LEAF: Welcome little one.

[LUNORA is drawn to the sound of MOTHER LEAF's voice, but she is quickly frightened by the sight of her. The girl falls back on the meadow, and frantically begins to crawl away from the monster standing over her.]

LUNORA: Papa . . . Papa?

[LUNORA calls for her father once more out of fear before her voice cracks to the discovery of the pitch-black world before her. Her confused stare takes notice of stranger things roaming in the ebonized horizon. Her reaction worries MOTHER LEAF, and the leafy monster steps back in hopes to comfort her.]

MOTHER LEAF: I am sorry if they startled you. They are not a threat, nor am I. What is your name?

[LUNORA *hesitates.*]

MOTHER LEAF: Please speak. I would love to hear your voice.

[LUNORA *touches the black unearthly ground beyond the meadow, and its frigid touch forces her back.*]

LUNORA: Where am I?

MOTHER LEAF: Well, you sound as soft as a kiss. Have you ever considered singing?

[LUNORA *shakes her head.*]

MOTHER LEAF: No . . .? Well, that is perfectly acceptable too, but you should still consider it. It might just make someone smile.

[LUNORA *remains quiet for a moment as she analyzes MOTHER LEAF with scrutiny. The leafy monster accepts her distrusting eyes and smiles in return.*]

LUNORA: What are you?

[MOTHER LEAF *steps closer to her, but LUNORA moves away.*]

LUNORA: That's close enough. Please, stay away.

MOTHER LEAF: As you wish, little one. My name is Mother Leaf, and I am the Keeper of the First Door. I'm a monster like them.

[MOTHER LEAF *gestures towards the VOIDLINGS spinning in the shadows beyond the light.*]

LUNORA: Monsters? Do you expect me to believe that? Is this some elaborate government joke towards my people?

MOTHER LEAF: Government? What is that, little one?

LUNORA: My papa taught me not to be rude, but don't be coy with me. Is this the concentration camp everyone's been talking about? Is my papa here? Please take me to him. I want to be with him.

MOTHER LEAF: Darling, I am afraid that I cannot. I am not what you think. I am a creature of the fog drifting beneath the unending night.

LUNORA: [*Whisper.*] Lies.

MOTHER LEAF: [*Frowns.*] I promise you it is not.

[LUNORA *becomes frustrated. MOTHER LEAF reaches for her, but the girl pushes her hand away.*]

LUNORA: I don't believe you.

[LUNORA runs away from MOTHER LEAF with tears in her eyes.]

[Exit LUNORA.]

MOTHER LEAF: Little one, come back!

[Exit MOTHER LEAF.]

[Enter MONSTER KING and ORION]

ORION: My King, the information granted to us is not debatable. There seems to be a human roaming the outer rim of our sacred lands, and it has help.

[*The MONSTER KING appears distracted as he stares off into the distance. He wears a scarlet robe with gold trim, and a horned crown. ORION expresses discomfort as he waits for a response.*]

MONSTER KING: How long has it been?

ORION: How long has what been my King?

MONSTER KING: Since Aronul was taken from me.

[ORION *laments.*]

ORION: I dare not contemplate it. The moon still wanes to the memory of her smile.

MONSTER KING: A smile that lingers in us all.

ORION: It is what keeps me alive my King. I miss her.

MONSTER KING: You should. She was unlike any creature to ever roam this world. The night has yet to dream her away from me. I see her every moment my eyes fold, and I am reminded of the enemy that took her away from me.

[MONSTER KING *exudes anger.*]

ORION: Humans will pay for what they did. Neither the old Gods nor the new will hide them from the tempest that awaits their transient breaths.

MONSTER KING: Those unwished creatures do not deserve to exist.

[*Enter AZU, a King's Guard. He brings a restrained prisoner named CANUS, a furry monster bearing a canine mask. CANUS does not appear to be struggling as he is brought to the MONSTER KING.*]

AZU: Oh nightly rain, I did it! My daring King I have captured the traitor!

CANUS: Mercy my Kingliness!

AZU: Kingliness? Did your tail get stepped on traitor? What kind of a badger's mouth do you have?

CANUS: I am a wolf, and I do not have a tail.

AZU: Ha, what kind of wolf has no tail?

CANUS: This one.

[*AZU smacks CANUS.*]

AZU: Dissident mutt, enough of you. From here on, you speak when spoken to.

[*CANUS nods in annoyance.*]

AZU: Forgive me my charming King. He's not the brightest fish scale.

[ORION *expresses embarrassment.*]

ORION: Azu . . .

AZU: Yes...?

ORION: He is not a fish.

AZU: [*Shocked.*] What, what? He's not?

ORION: No.

[AZU *awkwardly laughs.*]

AZU: Well, clearly not. Goodness boss, just look at those filthy paws. I've never seen any fish carry paws like those. Usually they are cleaner.

ORION: Azu . . .

AZU: Yes...?

ORION: Fish have no paws.

AZU: What kind of fish has no paws?

[*The MONSTER KING begins to get angry, but everyone else is oblivious to it.*]

ORION: None.

AZU: [*Shocked.*] What, what?

[AZU *glances at CANUS for reassurance, but the prisoner shakes his head in disagreement as well.*]

AZU: But, just the last week I caught a nice big one, and the paws on the thing were—

MONSTER KING: [*Interrupts*] Silence!

[*Everyone kneels in fear.*]

MONSTER KING: So this is the hob that dares disgrace the memory of my sweet Aronul. I find it amusing that you have the audacity to dally in my chamber like this. To play the fool is a predictable game the guilty tend to partake in. However, your words are diminutive and insipid with the flavor of falsehood. I know what you have done, and it is shameful. Nothing can hide forever, not even a fly. Sooner or later, the rouse of vibrating wings will create a buzz, heard only by those that care to listen. After all, we heard you.

CANUS: Your Kingliness, I did not want to at first, but my heart couldn't turn her in. I felt sad for the lass. When I saw her laying in that bed of flowers my heart told me to reach out to Mother Leaf. I knew she would care for her and I needed it to be so. Please forgive me.

MONSTER KING: Your heart? You have no heart nor soul cretin. This derelict brain of yours seems to reject rational thoughts. That alone makes you defective. You are no longer a monster in the eyes of the realm. You are a wisp of dust easily forgotten. You are nothing but a defector—a daft one at best.

CANUS: Your Kingliness, I meant no harm!

MONSTER KING: Evidently not, but you have done far worse than that cretin. You have betrayed us all. You, along with those that follow this mutiny against the kingdom are the acidity that corrodes my lands—cancerous blemishes that need to be contained. Soon, this ideology will wilt beneath the pressure of my wrath.

CANUS: I will try harder to change. Please don't hurt me. I don't want to die. I was only doing what Princess Aronul wanted. Your Kingliness, don't you remember her wish? She wanted to one day bring our worlds together by means of kindness. Shouldn't her memory live on by our actions? Please understand, but if you want me to I will stop. I promise!

MONSTER KING: Do not quote my late daughters wishes, cretin. You are an oath breaker seeking to get out of this mess. Yet, you do not understand that there are consequences to your actions. If you make a promise to your people, the idea is to keep it. You failed. You are untrustworthy, and nothing will change my opinion. Let me make you a promise instead. I promise that you will never see or feel our warm white mother again. I promise that no star shall humor you, but do not fret. There is some good in this. You see, I plan to make an example out of you and make you a model citizen. Your breath is done.

[MONSTER KING *motions* ORION *to execute* CANUS.]

ORION: As you wish my King.

[AZU *attempts to stop* ORION *from executing* CANUS, *but he is pushed aside as* CANUS *is killed.*]

AZU: He's dead . . . he's really dead . . .

[AZU is in shock, unwilling to accept that his actions led to a fellow monster's death. His composure breaks and ORION sees it. AZU's guilty eyes cross with ORION's and he becomes afraid. The guilty guard looks away in fear and attempts to hide his feelings from the MONSTER KING.]

ORION: Azu, return to your post and take this thing with you. The law needs to be respected. Those that support humankind will be treated accordingly. Do you understand?

[AZU frightfully agrees and pulls CANUS away.]

[Exit AZU and CANUS.]

MONSTER KING: Over the obsidian hills and the sunken yellow dale, through the vast oceans of fog and the fires of nevermore, sits the fickle doors of the land of twilight. I will traverse it all, and execute righteous judgment on all that oppose me.

ORION: And so shall I my King.

MONSTER KING: It is time for the Priestess to send her crow.

[Exit MONSTER KING.]

ORION: Darkness is spreading like bacteria in a festering wound tinged in rot. The evanescent splendor of this world was ruined by their violence—violence that we now mirror. How I long for it to be as it was. To be a place where fields drown in a calico sea of flowers and frolicking birds bask beneath the whistling winds—where hymn of monsters even calm gods.

[ORION *reaches for the starless yonder.*]

ORION: Oh, rueful world. What have we become? Pale in anger we stand; sucked in a vengeful maelstrom due to a single mortal's mistake. Is this the rheumatic disease of hate? Every move we make brings forth more pain. My bones anguish in my sins, yet I cannot steer away. I am too far gone—lost in the glacial sea my king forged. How I wish to be beached once more and start anew in an unfamiliar land where odorous leis of sweet summer buds soothe old wounds.

[*Exit* ORION.]

[*Enter* LUNORA and several VOIDLINGS]

LUNORA: Why is it so dark? All I can see is that creepy ball of plasma hovering over the meadow I woke up in. It's as if those pillars are supporting it. I need to wake up. I need to get out of here. Help! Anyone, please help!

[LUNORA *searches aimlessly for a way out, but every direction looks the same. No matter how much she runs, nothing seems to change. She fears the underlying truth—this world is real. She screams.*]

LUNORA: Is anyone out there! Papa, where are you? I don't want to be here. It's cold.

[LUNORA *falls to the ground as the world becomes foggier. She cries in frustration as her body shakes from the frost.*]

LUNORA: [*Whispers slowly.*] It's cold. Why am I here? Why?

[LUNORA *gazes towards the only light fixture in the world of twilight, and her eyes begin to tear up as a dark figure appears behind her.*]

MOTHER LEAF: There you are. I grew worried little one.

[*Enter* MOTHER LEAF]

LUNORA: [*Frightened.*] Get away!

[LUNORA *crawls away as* MOTHER LEAF *comes to sight beneath the distant glow.*]

MOTHER LEAF: [*Kindly.*] Little one, I mean you no harm. I promise. You may ask anything of me and I will do my best to answer. I only want to help. I mean that.

[LUNORA *turns around and stares into* MOTHER LEAF's *eyes. After a moment or two, the girl sums up the courage to speak.*]

LUNORA: Who are you, and what's with this place? Why does everything look the same? It doesn't make sense. None of it does.

[MOTHER LEAF *nears* LUNORA, *but she pushes away.*]

MOTHER LEAF: You poor thing, you're shivering.

LUNORA: I'm fine.

MOTHER LEAF: Stop being stubborn. I'm not here to hurt you. Let me care for you.

[LUNORA *cringes* as MOTHER LEAF *puts her hand on her shoulder. Suddenly the girl's body feels a rush of warmth.*]

LUNORA: [*Surprised.*] What did you do? I feel warmer.

[MOTHER LEAF *frowns.*]

MOTHER LEAF: You ask many questions, and I have failed to answer them. I want to express my regret for not helping you sooner. Iron rusts slower than I, and it has been centuries since I last spoke to a child—especially not a human one.

LUNORA: It's fine. I'm sorry for acting the way I did. I'm not used to meeting a lady with branches coming out of her head.

[MOTHER LEAF *giggles.*]

LUNORA: Honestly though, I still feel like I'm in some kind dream—a weird one. I don't know anymore.

MOTHER LEAF: Many call me Mother Leaf and you are in the Land of Twilight. This is a place of limbo stuck between two worlds.

LUNORA: Limbo? Am I dead?

MOTHER LEAF: No. I do not think so. From my understanding this place is for the lost and neglected, however whether you are dead or not is beyond me. I feel alive, and I would hope you feel the same.

[LUNORA *pinches her forearm, and she winces in pain.*]

LUNORA: I feel pain. I guess I'm alive.

MOTHER LEAF: [*Giggles.*] You humans are such odd creatures.

LUNORA: Thanks I guess. So, what worlds were you talking about?

MOTHER LEAF: Silly child, obviously yours and the one where I am from. It is called Caligo—the Land of the Fog. It is a place where monsters like me can live freely without prejudice.

LUNORA: Prejudice? There's really a place like that?

MOTHER LEAF: Yes. There is. Why? Is your home different than ours?

LUNORA: Yeah, it kinda is.

MOTHER LEAF: What is it like? How did you end up here?

[*LUNORA looks away as she struggles to remember where she is from. MOTHER LEAF pulls out a small wand with a crystal at the tip and the wand creates a pleasant light.*]

LUNORA: What's that?

MOTHER LEAF: Oh, pardon me. This is just a lantern. I wanted to see you better.

[*LUNORA nods, and steps away. Her memory is fogged, and broken in pieces. MOTHER LEAF sees her straining to remember, and she becomes sad.*]

MOTHER LEAF: Take your time. I am patient.

LUNORA: My mind feels strange. I remember. Pieces. The sun was low. There was smoke. It was coming from the ground, I think, and it was blowing towards me. Yeah, I know it was because my eyes ached. There were kids younger than me crying, but it wasn't from the smoke. There were soldiers! Papa! Papa was there! He grabbed me.

[LUNORA *touches her arm.*]

LUNORA: We hid under the stairs behind the wall.

[LUNORA *pauses for moment and closes her eyes. Her hands reach for her ears, and the warm pressure triggers more memories.*]

LUNORA: His grip. His grip was unbearable. My ears were hot and sweaty. It all seemed so pointless.

MOTHER LEAF: I am curious to know why.

[LUNORA *lowers her hands as she feels a sudden chill. She feels pricks in her arms and rubs them, but something makes her frown. For a short-lived moment, a soft satirical chuckle escapes her lips, and MOTHER LEAF grows more concerned.*]

LUNORA: I always knew what was happening. Every kid did. Parents thought they could protect us, but all they did was delay it. It's like stopping someone from learning to swim because you're afraid of them drowning. Sooner or later they'll need that skill. If you never learn, you can't survive against the waves. Would you? I think it would be much harder.

MOTHER LEAF: I see. What was happening?

LUNORA: If we weren't hiding, we were running.

MOTHER LEAF: Running from what?

LUNORA: People. They wanted to hurt us. Papa said evil men used our beliefs to spread hate—that the world had been blinded. The masses believed we were all wicked and ignorance—it led to war. Papa wanted no part of it, so we ran. We kept running hoping to find a better place without all the death.

MOTHER LEAF: Did you?

LUNORA: I don't know.

[**MOTHER LEAF** *nears LUNORA. The girl looks up and they both grow sad. The leafy monster brushes the girl's hair out of her face before kneeling down. The girl's eyes become watery, but she wipes them dry before the leafy monster takes notice.*]

MOTHER LEAF: What is the last thing you recollect, little one?

LUNORA: The last thing I remember. I remember [*long pause*] the smell of sulfur burning my nose while papa pulled my arm. His grip, unpleasant like normal, was the safest feeling I could hope for. We were using the fires from the bombing as a decoy for our escape. It was frightening, especially with the refugees moving around us, yet things got worse like always. We dove into a diseased canal filled with half-eaten bodies; the ones that weren't gnawed on by crocodiles or fish were worse. Bloating bodies floated in piles towards us. They were soft and foul. I stared at them. I still see them. I, I close my eyes but they

don't go away. It's a nightmare I can't wake up from. Just like this place.

[LUNORA *clasps her head as the horrid memories return, but MOTHER LEAF embraces her before she hurts herself. The girl begins to cry frantically as she attempts to speak again.*]

LUNORA: The birds feasted at the shoreline. It made it hard to know who was dead. I saw a woman's eye plucked by a crow. Her scream. Her scream was drawing too much attention and everyone was afraid. I didn't want to keep looking, but I couldn't turn away. The man with her urged her to stop. He begged her, but she couldn't. He killed her with tears in his eyes. He drowned her because she couldn't stop screaming. I cried so much. I couldn't stop. Papa, my papa carried me away.

[LUNORA *struggles to continue.*]

MOTHER LEAF: Continue, little one.

[LUNORA *nods and wipes her face.*]

LUNORA: We made it out of the canal into a place littered with skeletons of old buildings. I think papa was scared of the place. I could see it in his eyes. We heard explosions—loud and close. Daylight was murky and smothered in weird smells, but within the unpleasant sky those glinting planes drew me. I wanted to fly away. Things became quiet though. The planes had been gone a while. Then this popping sound started behind us. Quiet at first, it made my ears ring so bad I couldn't hear papa. I just saw him look at me. Making sure I was okay. He kept grabbing my head so I'd stay focused on him, but he knew I saw the



people fall. So many. The rest scattered desperately. I don't know why we didn't too.

[LUNORA *pauses and moves away from* MOTHER LEAF.]

LUNORA: I don't remember what happened next. How can that be? I can't remember. Why can't I remember!?

[LUNORA *becomes frantic.*]

LUNORA: My papa! What happened to him? I need to find him. He's all I have left.

[MOTHER LEAF *holds her down and hugs her tighter.*]

MOTHER LEAF: Calm down, little one.

LUNORA: You don't understand. I can't. I need to go back to that place and find him.

[LUNORA *starts to cry again.*]

MOTHER LEAF: He is not here. No one is, apart from us.

LUNORA: [*Sniffle.*] Will you help me?

MOTHER LEAF: I cannot promise you anything, but I will try.

[LUNORA *nods as she notices strange things spinning in the distance.*]

LUNORA: What are they?

[LUNORA *wipes her tears before pointing towards the spinning VOIDLINGS trapped in darkness.*]

MOTHER LEAF: They were once many things, but now they are not. That is all they are. What is, but isn't. What should be and should not. Those spinning shadows lost in the avenues between our stars are what hold our worlds together in a single thought.

LUNORA: A single thought? I don't understand.

MOTHER LEAF: Neither I.

[MOTHER LEAF *giggles and offers her a hand.*]

LUNORA: Do they have a name?

MOTHER LEAF: We call them Voidlings, come now, we must leave this place. Come child.

[LUNORA *examines MOTHER LEAF's hand before accepting it. Suddenly, the distant light above the pillars begins to flicker, and it alarms the leafy monster.*]

MOTHER LEAF: Our way out is closing soon.

[*Exit all.*]

SCENE II

On a bright hill near a lovely dwelling, young LUNORA sits. She drinks tea with newly made friends on a set of logs. Her new friends are DANCING MONSTER's from all locations of the land, including TATI the spinning four eared rabbit. The monsters are filled with mirth as they dance around the girl, but MOTHER LEAF is alone and distant beneath a tree overlooking the hill. She carefully holds a rusty key in her hands as she watches over the girl.

MOTHER LEAF: Much time has come and gone since Lunora stepped into these warped corners full of forgotten phantoms and jaded glares. She is unaware of the countless years and the years are unaware of her. She has become our felicity during this obsidian blur. Her youthful heart is unlike any child from the past, and I dare never to lose it. Our kind has yet to understand the complexity of the pearl trapped inside her brittle nacreous walls. It glimmers with a light unseen by any of us. We are creatures lost in a sea of degradation. Prone to age and dimly flicker away, but nothing seems to fade in her. The never-ending flow of time transforms those that dwell in its confines, yet she remains timeless and unaffected. She is an undaunted spirit fighting against the ever-moving pendulum that all grayed folk learn to fear – that I have come to fear.

[Enter ALFON.]

ALFON: She is also fighting against us. Mother Leaf, I do not trust her. Her father remains the single most important thing in her mind, and she will do whatever it takes to have him back. It is her only fixation, and we will suffer for it.

[MOTHER LEAF *quickly hides the rusty key before ALFON notices it.*]

MOTHER LEAF: I disagree.

ALFON: Disagree all you want, but you know I am right. When a human is passionate enough they will even traverse Hades to have what they want. Nothing stands between them and their own desires. Soon, she will journey to a forest of dark and the path will not be straight or found. It will be a savage, rough, and stern environment where innocence is bitterly stripped away like the seeds of a fruit.

MOTHER LEAF: Sir Alfon, does not the seed of a fruit bear promise?

ALFON: A promise to repeat itself if you ask me. Why would you advocate a creature to undergo the same pain and mistakes of its forbearers? Is it not enough to falter once? Seeds can be a blessing, but they are also a repetitive cycle of life, repetition, and death. If she continues this path the King will surely find her, and he will learn of this transgression. I will not die for her nor should you. You still have a chance to stop this hopeless defiance against our sovereign ruler. I suggest you take it before it is too late.

MOTHER LEAF: Since our benevolent princess died we have done nothing except survive. We no longer have the courage to do what is right, and most of our smiles have become nothing more but facades meant to appease a mourning King. Sir Alfon, tell me what you see at that table? Tell me what you hear, and do not dare redirect your eyes from it.

[ALFON's *impish eyes turn to the table and sees LUNORA dancing with other monsters. MOTHER LEAF joins him and gazes towards the euphoric girl.*]

LUNORA: So, what's with the black sun?

TATI: Beats me. Is there something wrong with it?

LUNORA: Well, where I'm from the sun's white. It looks yellow depending on the time of day, but science tells us differently.

TATI: What's a day? Anyway, a white sun sounds pretty gross. Ew, just thinking about it gave me shudders. I mean how would we be able to see it? After all, everything is white or transparent, even the Eversea is colorless.

LUNORA: The Eversea?

TATI: Hooray, she said it! Isn't it such a lovely name?

LUNORA: Yes?

TATI: Hooray! We all love it.

[DANCING MONSTERS *cheer alongside TATI.*]

TATI: You make me happy. I'll gladly tell you. The Eversea is an ocean of foreverness. It is gorgeous with its elegant nonexistent waves, and bottomless unknown. We sometimes stare at it for breathless yowls. Oh, how I miss it. We should try it together!

[TATI *eyes LUNORA intently and the girl sighs in defeat. She shrugs with a carefree smile, and TATI grins too.*]

LUNORA: Sure, why not. Maybe it can lead me closer to finding papa.

TATI: Hooray let the yowling begin!

[TATI *begins yowling like a walrus alongside a few other DANCING MONSTERS.*]

LUNORA: [*Laughs.*] Interesting . . .

[DANCING MONSTERS *circle LUNORA happily.*]

BEEPER: It is absolutely interesting! Beep, beep!

WEEDLEQUACK: Yes, yes. My aunt fell in. Weedlequack!

[LUNORA *cups her mouth after hearing the horrifying news of WEEDLEQUACK's aunt.*]

LUNORA: Oh my . . . what happened to her?

WEEDLEQUACK: Not sure. I bet it must have been fun. Weedlequack!

LUNORA: [*Giggles.*] Oh, goodness.

[DANCING MONSTERS urge LUNORA to join them in a silly dance. She happily accepts.]

ALFON: I see a fleeting moment of glee. It is certainly a rare sight these days, and though it might have unpolluted motives it does not change how naïve it all is. She is a foolish child rolling around in the snake's den awaiting the imminent venom of reality. Your optimism is tender, nonetheless flawed. Mother Leaf, this has proven nothing in your favor. Let our sovereign ruler have her.

[MOTHER LEAF feels an unfamiliar aversion towards ALFON. Her hands begin to shake with the need to rid him, but something inside her urges her gaze away. She steps away from the imp in order to compose herself.]

MOTHER LEAF: Sir Alfon, I will not. She is mine and you will not take her from me. She is the only shred of innocence this world has left. I will not lose her to him or to you. I will keep her safe from every monster that dare threaten her. The dangers that exist are invisible like air to mortal eyes, and now I see that that danger includes you.

[MOTHER LEAF glares ALFON down with eyes that resemble a territorial animal protecting its young, and it makes the imp slightly uncomfortable.]

ALFON: Whether she is here to remind us of the love we lost or the importance our lives still hold—I sadly do not care. My only concern is to survive, and it should be yours too. Well, at least I did my part. I tried to reason with you, but you are beyond my help. I will leave now. I do not want any conflict in my life. I vow to keep your transgression far from my mind, so steer those wild eyes away from me.

[LUNORA notices ALFON, and stops dancing by the sheer excitement of his presence. She rushes to him with a flower at hand.]

LUNORA: Big brother Alfie!

[ALFON cringes to the sound of her voice.]

ALFON: Ugh, it is Alfon! What is it child?

[LUNORA smiles, and bows her head before *presenting a flower to ALFON.*]

ALFON: Why are you handing me this thing? Is it poisoned? Should I be concerned?

[LUNORA *laughs, and shakes her head.*]

LUNORA: No, of course not. It's just . . . it's just my papa always gave me flowers when I was sad. It always made me happy. I want you to be happy too big brother Alfie.

ALFON: It is Alfo—

[LUNORA *leans in and interrupts ALFON's train of thought with a warm hug, and the imp becomes confused.*]

LUNORA: Thank you for coming by. I missed you.

[ALFON *glances over to MOTHER LEAF with shame written over his face and she frowns. He pats the girl awkwardly on the back, hesitant to reciprocate the affection he is feeling, however after a few seconds, the hug becomes unbearable.*]

ALFON: Okay, too much affection. Stop.

[LUNORA *steps back and lets* ALFON *go, however the imp notices an unfamiliar expression on her face, and he becomes captured by it. Her wide curious stare renders him unsure of his choices, and* MOTHER LEAF *takes notice. She begins to see the fault in his heart as the girl politely bows her head, and runs back to the table.*]

MOTHER LEAF: Do you still feel the same, Sir Alfon?

[ALFON *touches his heart, and turns away from* MOTHER LEAF.]

ALFON: I can't do this.

[*Exit* ALFON.]

MOTHER LEAF: It is too late. The decision you had found resolute is now in question.

[MOTHER LEAF *takes a moment to herself as her hands return to the rusty key hidden in her wooden pouch. She caresses the item in secret as if drawn by it by some unnatural force. LUNORA exchanges a few laughs to the crowd of* DANCING MONSTERS *before they invite her to another twirl. In the dance, the girl begins to feel a strange loneliness. It urges her to glance over to* MOTHER LEAF. *She sees the leafy monster gazing up at the sky, and it urges her away from the crowd.*]

LUNORA: Mother Leaf, come dance with us. It'll be fun.

[LUNORA *waves* MOTHER LEAF *over as* TATI *spins around the table. The crowd of* DANCING MONSTERS *hears LUNORA's request, and they join her too.*]

RANDOM DANCING MONSTER: Yep, yep, burl with us Momma Leaf. Burl until your heart whirls out of you! Fuu! Fuu!

[Suddenly, a horn bellows behind them, and it grabs everyone's attention.]

[Enter COBWEBS and two MONSTER SUPPORTERS]

COBWEBS: Keeper of the first door! Keeper of the first door! I need a word with you.

[COBWEBS, a concerned monster with shimmering white butterfly wings and menacing purple eyes stomps over to the crowd of DANCING MONSTERS. He glowers over everyone as if in search of something, and unsettles LUNORA. The girl steps behind MOTHER LEAF.]

MOTHER LEAF: Is it not illegal for your people to show their wings in public? I have never seen a Eukarian's wings before. The beauty they hold was not a lie, but I am worried for you. The king is not as forgiving as he once was.

COBWEBS: Eukarians may express emotion during the bereavement of kin or that of a close friend. I appreciate your concern, but I am far more concerned for you.

MOTHER LEAF: I never knew that. I am sorry for your loss, but why are you concerned for me?

[COBWEBS cynically laughs before pointing at LUNORA. The girl becomes startled by him, and his stare. She tightens her grip around MOTHER LEAF's arm and looks away.]

COBWEBS: That is what has me concerned. That thing killed my wolf—faced friend!

MOTHER LEAF: This girl has done no such thing. Why are you making this accusation? What happened?

[COBWEBS *begins to cry angrily. He wipes his face and his eyes turn aglow.*]

COBWEBS: He's dead, Keeper. My dearest friend is dead. The king executed him because of his affection for that human hiding behind you like some guilty rodent, and I couldn't do anything about it. Nothing! No matter how many times I told him to stop. I begged him not to be involved with you, and now he's gone. This is also on you, Keeper.

MOTHER LEAF: Wait, what was his name? Who are you talking about?

COBWEBS: Canus.

[MOTHER LEAF *cups her mouth in shock. Her eyes water to the loss of a friend she also knew.*]

MOTHER LEAF: No . . .

COBWEBS: Shocking, isn't it? Yet, from where I stand it's not. This is just the beginning. More will die for the sake of that human's life. Is that human worth our loved ones? Is it worth our lives? You caused this with this crackbrained rebellion. The princess is dead. Nothing you do will ever change that. I need you to end this. Turn her in.

[*Panic spreads over everyone, even the DANCING MONSTERS step away from LUNORA.*]

BEEPER: I don't want to die! Maybe Cobwebs is right. Maybe we should turn her in. Beep. Beep.

[LUNORA *looks around in confusion.*]

LUNORA: What's happening? Turn me in where? What did I do?

RANDOM DANCING MONSTER: Me heart twiddles for you. Fuu fuu.

[*Several DANCING MONSTERS scatter in terror as others grab LUNORA and pull her away from MOTHER LEAF. WEEDLEQUACK is appalled by what is happening.*]

LUNORA: Stop it. Why are you doing this?

WEEDLEQUACK: This looks wrong. I am sad. It hurts. Weedlequack. It hurts . . .

[WEEDLEQUACK *starts to cry.* MOTHER LEAF *steps forward and glares COBWEBS down.*]

MOTHER LEAF: Let her go!

BEEPER: Aren't you afraid? Me super afraid! Beep. Beep.

[LUNORA *struggles.*]

LUNORA: You're hurting me.

[MOTHER LEAF *roars aggressively, and more monsters scatter away in fear.*]

MOTHER LEAF: I said let her go! I will not repeat myself.

[BEEPER *releases LUNORA and runs away. The girl rushes over to MOTHER LEAF.*]

TATI: [*Sighs.*] This is why I prefer to stare in to the Eversea. It's always so peaceful there. I hate being in this position, but I suppose I should speak my mind before mistakes are made. Momma Leaf, it pains me to say this, but what other choice is there? The King is powerful, and really, really mean. This seraphic child is filled with love and mirth, but is she worth the demise of all of us? I can't side with her and I don't think you should either? The truth is, I adore her, but she's not one of us, and sadly I don't think she ever will. She's human after all—a creature that has no place in Caligo.

MOTHER LEAF: Why should that matter? She is alive and stuck in this world with us. She is more like us than the dusky sand beneath your feet. What gives any of you the right to determine the fate of another?

TATI: The King does, and he's deemed it worth all our lives.

MOTHER LEAF: Then the King will go through me first, and anyone else that dares challenge me will suffer the same consequences!

TATI: [*Stressed.*] I'm leaving. I can't deal with this kind of pressure. I need the Eversea to take me away. Sorry . . .

[*Exit* TATI.]

COBWEBS: Fellow monsters and sprites do not continue this trivial dispute. There is no resolution to someone that has already made up their mind. Her reasoning is tainted by this human. This thing. Mother Leaf, it's a tragedy that you impeach your freedom to protect someone that may not heart the same virtues as you. You trust the night over our counsel, and it will damn you in the end. Soon the sparrows will spread the truth of your treason, and we will be forced to return. The purge is coming and soon we will clean ourselves from their kind.

[*Exit* DANCING MONSTERS, COBWEBS, and his supporters.]

LUNORA: What did he mean by that? Where were they trying to take me?

[MOTHER LEAF *remains quiet. Her thoughtful gaze bears sorrow, and LUNORA becomes worried.*]

LUNORA: Mother Leaf, please talk to me.

MOTHER LEAF: Do not worry yourself little one. I am not leaving your side.

LUNORA: I'm going to be worried. Are they going to try to hurt you because of me?

MOTHER LEAF: No, little one. Would you like something to eat? I can go prepare a nice treat for you.

LUNORA: I'm not hungry. I want to know what's going on.

MOTHER LEAF: Nothing is.

[MOTHER LEAF *forces a smile, and it reminds LUNORA of her father when he would try to hide things from her.*]

LUNORA: Seriously, stop it. I need you to tell me the truth. You've been avoiding my questions ever since we got to this place, and I cannot keep waiting for things to change. You still haven't told me why the sun doesn't move, or why it's black. You still haven't told me how much time has passed. Is it different here? Is time different? These are things I need to know!

[MOTHER LEAF *turns away in discomfort.*]

MOTHER LEAF: I want to protect you, and I will do whatever it takes to do that.

LUNORA: Will that hurt you? [*Pause*] Will caring for me hurt you?

MOTHER LEAF: No, little one.

LUNORA: Stop lying to me!

MOTHER LEAF: Loving child, has my flicker of sorrow and shame become too obvious to dismiss even with this night? You want the truth, but sometimes things are better left unsaid.

LUNORA: That's how people get hurt – not knowing. Asking the question, while the answer lingers and the world devours you. All I have done is open up to you. I've told you about my life. My family. Tell me or I'm leaving.

MOTHER LEAF: I see. Okay.

LUNORA: Okay?

MOTHER LEAF: Okay, you are right. Listen closely then. I will only speak of this once.

[LUNORA *nods*.]

MOTHER LEAF: Many winds ago the Monster King was a great man filled with hope and promise, but those blissful currents have now gone. It drifted beyond dusk and left us with this moonless Nox.

LUNORA: What happened to him?

MOTHER LEAF: He lost the single most important thing in his life. A girl that was very dear to us as well. In her death, he learned to hate. In her death, he learned to cry. In her death, he learned to kill.

LUNORA: I feel for him, but why does he want to harm me?

MOTHER LEAF: Because you are different. Sometimes we creatures tend to fear the things we don't understand.

LUNORA: We might look different, but our hearts aren't. Maybe I can show him like you showed me.

MOTHER LEAF: Blood of my flesh, fire of my heart, water of my tears, and breath of my life are the only words we monsters identify with. It is what holds us together. Humans however are viewed another way. They are bound by laws that contradict ours. Laws based on the color of

their skin. Laws based on the country they dwell in. Laws based on the faith they pray to. There are laws after laws of ridiculous nonsense made to subjugate, segregate, and hurt. These actions have always disgusted our kind. The King desires to rid the influence of your species and avenge his daughter's death. He wishes to kill every last human for the faults of one, however I do not agree with him. His actions are no different than that of a human.

LUNORA: People are destructive and too fixated on things that shouldn't matter, but not everyone is like that. I'm not like that.

MOTHER LEAF: It does not matter. His mind was made up the day his daughter was found cold and bruised.

LUNORA: That's horrible. I truly feel for him, but what kind of logic is that? He's only spreading more pain. I have blood, a heart, and I breathe like you do. I'm not that different from you or any monster here. Why do I have to be viewed as an outsider?

MOTHER LEAF: You are viewed as an outsider by our king. All it takes is one voice to speak hate for others to follow. It spreads faster than a squid's ink and corrupts the clarity of those in it. It is a poison that cannot be ignored. It infects the ignorant and crowds the weak. It is something I wish we could fight against, but we cannot. Not all monsters are built the same, and neither are humans. You are not like the others we have met, and that is why you have caused quite a stir. You have a heart that disperses the darkness, a mind that challenges the depraved, and a voice that renders the world to a smile. Those that have come to know you can see that, but the fear that rules our land controls their actions.

LUNORA: I didn't hurt his daughter. I only want to find papa. That's why I'm here.

MOTHER LEAF: You may not have done it, but someone from your world did. That is enough for the King to make a decision. Humanity has been known to do the same. All it takes is one person to cause harm for prejudice to blossom. From that prejudice others are grouped into the same category due to fear of reliving the same pain. It is a narrow-minded view that involves individuals running away and turning a blind eye as worse horrors occur for the sake of safety. This is not the way things should be, but it is. I am fighting against it all. We need to stop basing the actions of one twisted being with the actions of others. Whether it is the misconstrued belief of another or the color of their horns, all of it is wrong. You are an individual that should not be tossed into the mix of evil that others from your world have committed. We have no right. No one ever does.

LUNORA: Then don't. Mother leaf, you said you'd help me find my papa. Can you help me? I think it's time for me to go. The longer I stay here the more likely it is for you to get hurt. I don't want that. This strange world needs you.

MOTHER LEAF: I cannot help you.

[MOTHER LEAF *steps away from LUNORA, and she becomes frustrated.*]

LUNORA: You said you would! It's been many days since I came here. At least I think it has. I can never tell with this weird sky.

MOTHER LEAF: It has been far more than days, little one. Time is different here.

LUNORA: It doesn't matter to me. I'll find him myself if I have to.

MOTHER LEAF: I will not let you. I will not lose you.

LUNORA: I remember someone telling me that kind fortune smiles on those that believe the fate of another can be controlled. My fate is to find my papa, and that is my fate alone. If you won't help me, then I'll find my own way. We'll always be friends, but I need this. I now see the storm in the distance, and it scares me, but I don't want you to be a part of it. I've seen too many people get hurt. I'm growing tired of it.

MOTHER LEAF: I am no people. I am a monster.

LUNORA: People and monsters are the same in my eyes. You're no different than me.

[MOTHER LEAF *meekly smiles.*]

MOTHER LEAF: It gives me some strange felicity to hear that, but I will not let you go. My heart does not want to bear it. You will die out there. You will get injured and nothing will save you.

LUNORA: I won't. I'll find him. Don't worry, Mother Leaf. I've been through a lot, even if my memory is blurred. I feel it in here.

[LUNORA *gestures to her heart.*]

LUNORA: Goodbye.

[LUNORA *walks away, but* MOTHER LEAF *blocks her way.*]

MOTHER LEAF: You are my child. I have come to love you like my own. You do not realize how long it has been, but I know the truth.

LUNORA: Why do you keep saying that? Fine, enlighten me. How long has it been?

MOTHER LEAF: Seven years.

LUNORA: [*Shock.*] Wait, what? What are you talking about? You're wrong! It was only a few days ago when I woke up. I'm positive.

MOTHER LEAF: Was it? How would you know the difference?

LUNORA: My body would have changed. It's called aging. It's pretty common where I'm from.

MOTHER LEAF: Time is different here. You are different here.

LUNORA: Like mud it is. Stop lying to me. It hasn't been seven years since I saw papa. I won't believe that. I can't.

MOTHER LEAF: I'm sorry.

[*Exit* LUNORA.]

MOTHER LEAF: Little do you know that you stand in the isle of the forgotten. Stranded are those that arrive

here, and lost is what becomes of them. Fate cannot frown here, nor can it smile. Sorrow murmurs in the breeze and it tells life to go away. Go away it repeats with its deplorable howl. Why should one stay? Why should one cave? The mournful breeze whispers as it goes where the streams of death creep.

[MOTHER LEAF *raises her hand towards the sky as her heart pains her. Tears gently fall from her face as her eyes reflect the black sun's blaze.*]

MOTHER LEAF: Little one, do not follow the stream. Do not dwell in the past for it is far more painful than you could ever imagine. For this night, you shall be alone. For this night, you shall be gone. However, tomorrow will flicker a new aurora. I hope you will return to me by then, and step out of the timeless snow that has encumbered you so.

[*Exit* MOTHER LEAF.]

› H.S. Crow ‹
†ACT II†



SCENE I

An ancient pale door stands between two spires. The door appears disconnected from the world as a peculiar mist arises from beneath its corners. MOTHER LEAF's appearance has changed. She seems much older with wrinkles around her eyes and brown foliage down her back. She stares at the door deeply as she carefully nears its mysterious presence. She appears stranded in her thoughts as the heavens above flicker between white void and absolute darkness.

MOTHER LEAF: Long ago, there was a dream within a dream that allowed joy to reign, but that youthful breath drifted away as swiftly as a summer's rain. There was nothing left after all was said and done. What remained was a world darkened by a King's broken heart. How I long for it to be as it was. To be a young mind in an uncharted world drifting beneath carefree skies.

[Enter LUNORA.]

LUNORA: Mother Leaf?

[MOTHER LEAF *gives a sad smile. She quietly studies the door, and notices the sparkling water flowing on its surface. LUNORA waits for a response as she carefully studies this new place.*]

MOTHER LEAF: How strange, the fresh dew on this door is trickling down like tears. I believe they hold the bewailing disgrace of our race. Such a fierce vexation this reality holds. I feel lost in Selene's mare. Blind to the shame I fought to ignore. Be what was not to be. See what was not to see. The arrow of Hyperion is long gone, and with it, light is no more. Nox has given us a blanket of blessed ignorance to hide our sad and pitiful truth.

LUNORA: What truth?

MOTHER LEAF: My kind has become its own enmity. They sleep with hate and fear in a blanket of sorrow. They have been pulled into the stygian river, and if you stray deeper little one, you will follow the same fate. They will drown you for an eternity for the sake of their own comfort. I pray that you have decided correctly.

LUNORA: Yes. I have. The ice has melted and I remember my mother's key. I didn't understand it at first, but it came to me as I was staring at the sky. Curious, isn't it? The sky changes for the first time and I...I changed too. Why is the sky doing this? Is there a connection? It's not because of what happened. I know it's not. I feel it in here.

[LUNORA *gestures to her heart.*]

LUNORA: Something is eating away at me. I don't know what it is, but I need it to stop. I think it's connected to papa. I want to find him. I need to find out what happened.

Once I do, I'm going to try and save your world too. I promise.

MOTHER LEAF: To be naïve and filled with hope. Endearing goals, but you are no match for the King.

LUNORA: I don't have to be. I'm not here to fight or start a war. I've seen a lifetime of bloodshed and grief. I'm tired of it. I won't make the same mistakes my people have. Now please, let me pass.

[LUNORA notices that MOTHER LEAF is fixated on the door, and she begins to wonder if that is the exit she has been seeking.]

LUNORA: That's it, isn't it? That's the door that'll take me to papa.

[LUNORA gets closer, but MOTHER LEAF reacts aggressively. It scares LUNORA. Backshore backs away from MOTHER LEAF.]

LUNORA: Please, let me pass. You can't expect me to stay here forever. It's not right.

MOTHER LEAF: Little bird, it laments me how you foolishly fly against the winds. If you continue this path those tiny wings will grow tired and you will fall.

[LUNORA glares at MOTHER LEAF in frustration.]

LUNORA: So what if I fall? At least I tried. I would rather fall than stand by. Rooted to the ground – helpless.

MOTHER LEAF: I suppose there is no other way . . .

LUNORA: No. There is not.

MOTHER LEAF: I will give you the trial of your life. If you desire to enter this door, you will need to defeat me. You will take my life, and with my soul, you will become powerful enough to rival the fiercest monsters. I will be your key to face everything that dares to wound you.

LUNORA: What's wrong with you? What would you... how could you say such a thing?

MOTHER LEAF: You have no choice.

LUNORA: No choice? That's all I have is choice. I don't have my life anymore. I don't have my papa. He always protected me. Well I'm capable of making my own decisions and I don't need shelter anymore... from anyone. We all have a choice Mother Leaf.

MOTHER LEAF: No, we don't.

[MOTHER LEAF turns around and LUNORA takes notice of her wrinkled and aged face. The vines and leaves covering her shoulders have browned as well. It frightens her, and LUNORA steps back.]

LUNORA: Wha... what happened? Your face. You look... your leaves? You're decaying! I saw you a few hours ago. How can this be?

MOTHER LEAF: Hush and prepare yourself. Just know this. You are the child I wished for and I am grateful for every moment I spent with you, but there is no other way. I love you. I've always loved you. This, I choose to never stop.

[MOTHER LEAF *pulls out an obsidian knife from a hidden pocket and steps towards LUNORA.*]

LUNORA: [*Unable to hold back heavy tears.*] No! Haven't you been listening to me? I'm not going to fight you. I will not fight you. I won't.

[LUNORA *is stunned by MOTHER LEAF's decision. She begins to question whether she is serious or not, but when MOTHER LEAF attacks her and wounds her, everything turns grim. The blood on LUNORA's arm shakes her need to survive. The girl runs away from MOTHER LEAF, and hides behind a column.*]

LUNORA: I can't believe you attacked me. You actually attacked me. What's wrong with you? Stop this. I'm not taking your life. I can't.

MOTHER LEAF: You have to. Your innate need to survive will take over soon. Let it become you and you shall be strong.

[LUNORA *tries to stop the bleeding from her arm and rushes to the other column. MOTHER LEAF walks calmly to her with the knife at hand.*]

LUNORA: I won't do it! Killing represents everything I'm against. In this world, in my world, it doesn't matter. I hate your reasoning and would rather die than bring you harm, so please... please stop. It hurts to think you would consider it a choice. It breaks my heart.

[LUNORA *sobs.*]

MOTHER LEAF: You say that as you run. Little one, it is in your nature to survive. I have played this game before, and I will not make the same mistake. I have always been too kind, too caring, but I will not allow myself to be that way with you. You are too important.

LUNORA: That doesn't make sense! Then why are you attacking me?

MOTHER LEAF: Simple. Every human that has fallen in this place suffers the same fate. I have seen it time and time again. They arrive. They leave. They die. They always die! You naïve child, if you leave...if you go. If you go through this rueful door, they will kill you. He will kill you. I am protecting you like a mother should. I need you to be different and listen to me. Turn around and forget this path. We can go back and dance on the fields as we did before. We will be together—just me and you.

LUNORA: I can't! Don't you get it? I can't abandon my papa. Don't ask that of me. He needs me.

MOTHER LEAF: I need you.

LUNORA: I'll come back for you.

MOTHER LEAF: No one has ever come back.

[MOTHER LEAF *gazes down at the knife.*]

MOTHER LEAF: There is only one path for us now. Become strong little one and defeat the monster of the first door.

[MOTHER LEAF *lunges towards LUNORA. The girl closes her eyes in fear, and she screams.*]

LUNORA: Mom, stop!

[MOTHER LEAF *stops to the sound of the word 'Mom'. The leafy monster presses the knife against LUNORA's chest with the aim to kill her, but her hands commences to shake. LUNORA reopens her eyes, and sees MOTHER LEAF shaking with hesitation.*]

LUNORA: [*Whisper.*] Mother Leaf . . .

[LUNORA *sees every leaf and flower on MOTHER LEAF's wooden body glitter with tears, and she too begins to cry. They both stay silent as the skies above flicker. LUNORA sees the internal struggle MOTHER LEAF is going through, and her heart begins to ache. Her empathetic stare locks with the monster seeking to kill her, and her hands reach for the creature's wrinkled face.*]

MOTHER LEAF: Tragic is it not? I have never been able to save anyone.

[MOTHER LEAF *drops the knife, and falls to the ground. LUNORA falls with her, and embraces her.*]

MOTHER LEAF: I failed you again. I wanted to protect you.

LUNORA: I'm sorry . . .

[MOTHER LEAF *pulls out a rusty key and hands it to LUNORA. The girl becomes disquieted by the old key.*]

LUNORA: How do you have this? 'This belonged to my-
...

MOTHER LEAF: It did. Now it is yours. 'There will come a time when your heart will be conflicted. I know you will choose wisely when that day arrives, but if your heart wavers –remember this relic. Use it to remind you of what is important. What lies ahead of you are things unknown to me, so be careful little one. It is not a place for the kindhearted.

[MOTHER LEAF *places her wrinkled hands on LUNORA's face, and dolefully chuckles. LUNORA tightens her grip on the key as tears stream down her face.*]

MOTHER LEAF: You have changed so little.

LUNORA: I don't understand.

MOTHER LEAF: You don't have to. I will open the door. Go on. Go find your father.

[MOTHER LEAF *stands up and approaches the door. She glances painfully at LUNORA before her hands touch the pale surface. The sky flickers as the door starts to move. The girl winces away apprehensively to the sound of a dissonant creak as a baleful wind slithers out after.*]

LUNORA: The last time I saw this key was around my papa's neck. Was he here? Did you meet him?

MOTHER LEAF: Yes. I did. You have his strength, and his stubborn nature. However, time is against us. The door cannot stay open for more than a minute. You must go.

LUNORA: But, there's still so much I need to ask . . .

MOTHER LEAF: If you remain here, you will be stranded. You must make a decision quickly

[LUNORA becomes angry and she screams in frustration. She forces herself to the door, and drags her fingers over one of the many symbols carved into it. Her stare is insecure and afraid. She pushes the door and a frigid mystifying wind hits her. It blows her hair out of her face as her dress flaps against the strong current. Suddenly, it stops and what is left inside her is sheer awe. Her gaze widens to the obscurity before her eyes.]

LUNORA: This is really dark. I can't see anything. Are you sure this is the way?

MOTHER LEAF: *[Softly Smiles.]* It is never too dark. If you try looking, there is always light no matter where you go.

[LUNORA clasps her head as memories of her mother flash in her mind.]

LUNORA: Those words. They feel familiar.

MOTHER LEAF: How so?

LUNORA: Never mind. I'm sorry. I guess this is goodbye. Thank you... for choosing me.

[LUNORA steps inside the door and feels an invisible force slowly pull her deeper into the black abyss, but something in her heart yearns her back. Her eyes drift down to the old key in her hands as she struggles to keep moving forward. However, in her moment of question, the vision of her mother enters her mind. She sees her

mother's loving smile and that of MOTHER LEAF. Her mind goes blank to the uncanny resemblance they both bear and she turns around in disbelief. Her eyes lock with the leafy monster outside the door, and they widen to the reality she so blindly ignored. The identity of the strange monster becomes clear. LUNORA runs back to the entrance, and reaches out to her mother in desperation. The door begins to close, and she screams for her attention. She fights against the invisible force, and MOTHER LEAF takes notice.]

LUNORA: It can't be. I didn't understand why I called you Mom earlier. You gave me a key that belonged to her and it confused me even more, but now I know why. I didn't want to accept it. I couldn't believe it. After all, you were dead. Papa said you were dead!

[LUNORA's emotions pour out, and MOTHER LEAF rushes to her, unwilling to let her go.]

LUNORA: I see what I couldn't see before. It's you, isn't it?!

[MOTHER LEAF grabs her hand, but the ominous wind pushes her away.]

MOTHER LEAF: It is!

[MOTHER LEAF attempts to fight against the odd forces, but they compel her down. Her hands reach for her daughter in retaliation to the black apparitions appearing before her, and LUNORA screams. The leafy monster's flushed face is tinged in failure.]

MOTHER LEAF: I am sorry for leaving you and your father alone in that world. I never meant to. I tried so hard to come back to you, but time was always against me. I do not know how I ended up here or how my memories had

gone, but seeing you returned them to me. I did not want to believe it at first, but now I see it to be true. I remember now. I remember everything, and I will never forget them again! I will forever love you. Do you understand?

[Black figures appear around LUNORA and they begin to pull her into the dark unknown. The girl wails in defiance as MOTHER LEAF watches in grief.]

LUNORA: No, no, no. Not again. Not again! Mom! Mom!

MOTHER LEAF: The longer you stay here, the more you forget. Keep moving forward—never back.

[Exit LUNORA.]

[MOTHER LEAF's voice cracks as she fights to hold in her tears. The door slams shut and the black figures around her vanish.]

MOTHER LEAF: I love you . . .

[MOTHER LEAF's heart breaks as the heavens start to rain. The inky droplets of night touch her wrinkled face and she begins to sob. Anger takes over her and she screams to the darkening world.]

[Exit MOTHER LEAF.]