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The Moon Trap

The set is the spacious lounge of an old house, furnished with a sofa, chairs, a wooden coffee table, a cocktail bar, an entertainment system, bizarre archaeological artifacts and eccentric works of art - including a fearsome leather mask of a dog-like creature, crowned with dark animal hair, sitting on a rectangular plinth like a museum exhibit. Wooden fangs project from the jaws of the mask which are muzzled with a long, thick strip of leather. A bookcase, a writing desk, swivel chair, and a collection of wall-mounted broadswords and battleaxes can be seen at the back of the stage. Dark curtains are drawn across a large bay window, and an open doorway connects to a hallway beyond.

I

Thursday night.

A shaft of pale moonlight shines through a gap in the curtains to provide an ambient light. A woman stands at the curtains gazing up at the moon. She is in her early thirties and wears a nightshirt.

The woman seems unaware that she is being watched by a pair of fiery glowing eyes. A ghostly figure stands motionless at the boundary between shadow and darkness. A biped, with the distinct outline of a human female wearing a catsuit; though with the angular facial features of a wolf.

An electric light is switched on in the hallway and light shines in through the open doorway, illuminating the centre of the lounge and casting the wolf-spirit in penumbra. The wolf-spirit steps

back into the darkness as a man enters the room. He is of similar age to the woman, dressed in a t-shirt and boxer shorts, as if disturbed from sleep.

DAN Kate?

*There's no reaction from the woman. She remains standing with her back to him, and her eyes gazing outwards.
Dan takes a few steps towards her.*

What are you doing?

KATE Watching the moon rise.

DAN At this time of night?

KATE She's so close and bright, I could almost reach out and ...

*Kate extends a hand in an exaggerated balletic mannerism, as if plucking an insect from the air, which she then clutches protectively to her breast.
Dan puts a sympathetic hand on her shoulder.*

DAN It's cold down here - you should go back to bed.

Kate turns round to face him.

KATE What are you doing here?

DAN I thought I heard something.

KATE Did I wake you up?

DAN I wasn't asleep.

Kate turns to the window again, raises a palm, and 'releases' the captive moon into the air as if it were a flying insect.

KATE No need for apologies then.

DAN I don't want an apology, I want you to ...

Kate puts a finger to his lips to silence him.

KATE Don't say it - you want me to leave.

DAN I want you to get help.

Kate turns to the window.

KATE I'm getting all the help I need right here.

DAN I don't see how. If anything you're getting worse.

KATE You'll find out soon enough.

DAN Is there someone else?

Kate faces him.

KATE That's a very perceptive remark. Is there nothing hidden from that great brain of yours?

DAN Anyone I know?

KATE I don't think so.

Kate glances into the shadows.

Unless you've met on the road to hell.

DAN Is that how you feel?

KATE I wasn't speaking figuratively.

DAN In that case - wouldn't I have to be dead?

KATE Depends where the road begins - or where it ends.

DAN Where do you think it will end?

KATE In some form of damnation.

DAN What have we done to deserve that?

KATE It's what we're going to do.

Kate smiles grimly and peers out of the window again.

We're into another full quarter. You know what they say about lunatics and the moon.

The beam of moonlight falls on one side of Kate's face, giving her a slightly sinister appearance.

Dan twists her round to face him.

DAN We both know you're not mad.

KATE Is that what you told the doctor?

DAN What doctor?

KATE (*Groucho Marx*) Doctor, doctor, my friend's wife is six quid short of a tenner - so tell her to ask for a pay rise!

DAN I don't know what you're talking about.

KATE He sent you a list of shrinks and clinics who specialize in cases like me - obsessive compulsive over-achievers who go off the rails at the worst possible time in their careers - a fate worse than getting pregnant.

DAN Are you reading my mail now?

KATE There's no need for that. Don't you know we crazy people have special powers? Especially when the moon rises. Double, double, toil and trouble; Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

Kate cackles and claws the air like a hammy Macbeth witch.

You throw me in the skip and they take me away like last year's fridge, is that how it works?

DAN Don't be ridiculous.

KATE How much are you willing to pay for my lobotomy, Dan? You know I can't afford it. I wouldn't waste my money on those quacks even if I could. I've seen too many looking stoned or hungover the morning after.

DAN It's not what you think

KATE O heinous, strong, and bold conspiracy! Lovers shouldn't keep secrets from each other. Neither should erstwhile lovers whilst living under the same roof. You'll burn in hell for what you've done and rightly so.

DAN Now you're beginning to sound hysterical.

KATE That's a form of madness, isn't it? Caused by the womb - my feminist friends used to say, when conspiring against 'the man' Freud. Better make a note for the government mental health workers and their super-

market surveillance teams.

DAN I said you were having trouble sleeping, that's all. Insomnia is a fairly common condition.

KATE Insomnia? That was very tactful of you.

DAN It's the truth, isn't it?

KATE Truth is nothing more than received wisdom. What we perceive it to be is of little consequence.

Kate smiles tenderly, as if sympathetic to his ignorance.

There are no facts, only interpretations - Nietzsche 101.

Dan steps back in contemplation.

DAN Even so - I'm beginning to think that maybe you are becoming seriously deluded.

KATE Keep your voice down, Dan. We don't want the neighbours to hear.

DAN What neighbours?

KATE Listen! They're whispering and rustling their leaves in the breeze. They're calling my name. They want me to go outside and join them ...

DAN Alright, Kate, that's enough! The windows are closed, no sound can get in through the double glazing.

KATE Always one for the rational explanation. If you can't hear them, why stick around?

DAN And leave you here by yourself?

Kate smiles tellingly.

KATE What makes you think I'd be by myself?

DAN So there is someone else?

KATE Why should that concern you?

DAN I'm not leaving you here on your own. I feel ... responsible.

KATE Spare me the bullshit, please.

DAN Alright then, call it exasperation. Something about this house just isn't right for you.

KATE I'm beginning to think that your concern for me is matched only by your fondness for my home.

DAN Our home, don't forget. I'm quite happy living here, despite all the Dark Age paraphernalia you leave lying around.

KATE That's because you don't have a soul.

Dan glances at the dog mask.

DAN I don't share your belief in the power of these things. To me they're just pieces of dead wood, and no amount of empathy is going to bring them back to life.

KATE They don't need your empathy - neither do I. Find somewhere else, Dan. You can afford it. You'll still have your investment. I'll buy you out as soon as I can.

DAN I'm not leaving you here by yourself - not like this.

KATE I'll be fine.

DAN You're not fine. You're like an insect trapped on the surface of a pond by a force beyond your comprehension.

KATE I'd hate to drown after we spent so much money on damp proofing.

DAN Manifet has become a quagmire, dragging you down into God-only-knows where.

KATE This quagmire is the focus of my work. Am I supposed to give it all up just because you don't approve of my lifestyle? You shouldn't make judgments about things you don't understand.

Dan glances around the lounge with a perplexed frown, able to sense a presence but unable to rationalize the perception.

DAN There's something here which you just can't deal with at the present time. Move out, at least for a while, say six months - call it a trial separation, and judge for

yourself the difference it makes to your mental state.

KATE A separation from you - or from Manifest?

DAN Both.

KATE Is that your - clinical diagnosis?

DAN For most people, there are some things which are best left buried.

KATE There speaks the voice of ignorance. There was a time when I valued your opinion quite highly. A serious case of delusion.

DAN I'm going back to bed. I have to get up early in the morning. Will you be here tomorrow when I get back?

KATE No.

DAN See you on Sunday then.

Exit Dan.

KATE Turn off the light!

The hallway light goes out. Footsteps are heard ascending the stairs and then traversing the corridor overhead.

Kate looks around the room and rubs her shoulders as if suddenly cold. She selects a music track from an entertainment system in a wall unit, then lays down on the sofa where she curls up in a foetal position and closes her eyes. A quiet, haunting opus begins to play.

The wolf-spirit takes a balletic step forward, becoming clearly visible again, and begins to dance. Light, graceful, ethereal movements which would be a challenge for even the most lithe and accomplished mortal ballerina.

The music fades away as the track comes to an end.

Kate opens her eyes suddenly and sits up, sensing the presence of the wolf-spirit standing behind her. She stares straight ahead as she speaks.

Why won't you tell me your name? Maybe I should call you Harlequin? The strength of your allure is enough to overcome my fear, but not my conscience. Dan is

here and he suspects.

The wolf-spirit approaches her from behind and massages her shoulders in a comforting manner. She closes her eyes and arches her neck in response to the soothing, soporific effect of this touch, which immediately induces a relaxed state, and draws away all her earthly tension and anxiety.

Why now - when I least know my own mind? Is that where your power lies? What are you? The familiar of a long dead witch or the product of my madness? If Dan is right, then I should leave here and abandon you, and so cast your memory into the pit of my nightmares to brood unseen forever. Damn him, and damn you for my confusion.

The wolf-spirit leans over the back of the sofa, puts a hand on her face to turn her cheek, and envelopes her in a passionate kiss.

II

Friday night.

The lounge is dark and empty, except for the wolf-spirit loitering by the window like a pet awaiting the return of its owner, and peering up at the night sky through a gap in the curtains with wondrous longing, as if blessed with a primitive religious mysticism.

It suddenly crouches and cocks its ear, as a beast of the forest might when startled by the approach of man. A car engine becomes audible several seconds later, followed by the sound of tyres on gravel. The engine dies and a car door is heard to open and close - and close again. Footsteps on gravel are heard, followed by that of a key slipping into a lock and turning, then a heavy door closing with a thump. The wolf-spirit leaps over the sofa and disappears into the shadows as the hallway light comes on.

Dan enters, wearing a suit as if just home from work. He switches on a low-powered standing lamp, then removes his jacket, leaving it over the back of a chair, and goes to the cocktail bar. He speaks aloud, as if addressing someone whom, or something which, cannot be seen.

DAN Would you like a drink?

There is no reply.

Dan pours whiskey from a crystal decanter into a pair of tumblers.

Soda?

Still no reply.

Dan squirts a dash of soda into each glass and glances around the lounge as if waiting for someone to appear.

You can show yourself, there's no need to hide. Kate's not here tonight - it's just you and me.

Dan leans against the bar and casually sips his drink, waiting patiently for someone to appear.

Enter Julia, a woman in her mid-twenties, carrying an overnight bag and dressed in a power suit.

JULIA Who are you talking to?

DAN You, of course.

Julia drops her bag and walks around the room, viewing the decor in a slightly regal and judgmental manner. She pauses in front of the plinth supporting the wooden mask. It stares back at her defiantly through dark, soulless eye-slits.

JULIA A strange pet to keep in the house?

DAN It has a strange owner.

JULIA They say pets grow to resemble their owners.

DAN I thought it was the other way round. Don't worry, he's house-trained.

JULIA I'm glad to hear it. What's his name?

DAN That depends on your cosmogony. The old religions had different names for their dog-gods. In Ancient Egypt there was Anubis, a jackal which devoured the souls of the dead. The Ancient Greeks had Cerberus, the mythical hound guarding the gateway to Hades.

JULIA Why did the Ancient Greeks have such small penises?

Dan frowns as he hands her a glass.

Just kidding! Tell me more about your little monster -

with his jaws wired up.

DAN It's one of Kate's finds. These canine creatures are a recurring theme in all mythologies. People would sit around their camp fires and listen to the wolves howling at the moon. Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome, were suckled by a she-wolf. Even Dante used a she-wolf in Divine Comedy - as a symbol of fraud and deceit on the road to hell ... *(pause)* ... the road to hell.

JULIA Dan?

DAN I was just thinking about something Kate said last night. She talks in riddles these days. Where was I?

JULIA Dog-gods.

DAN Dog-gods are older than civilization itself. Soon after the first man adopted a fox cub, the idea was formed that the gods must have their own supernatural mutts to rollover and fetch sticks ...

JULIA And devour wicked people, like Hugo of Baskerville Hall. Conan Doyle based his devil-dog on an archetype of the collective unconscious - according to John Fowles in his introduction to The Hound of the Baskervilles.

DAN You're very well read for a journalist.

JULIA I wrote a review of your book. It was a very good.

DAN It wasn't supposed to be good. It was supposed to be a bestseller.

JULIA I meant my review. You shouldn't be so modest though. Carl Jung would have been very impressed with the way you slipped him in between the covers.

DAN I'd be wary of accepting accolades from Herr Jung.

JULIA Why - because he's dead?

DAN Because of the dangers of being misunderstood by left-wing critics. I'm just a dilettante in the field. Most of the ideas were lifted from Kate's research notes and journals.

JULIA You mean you plagiarised her work?

DAN How many times have you been inspired by a glance at

someone else's copy?

JULIA That's different. Journalism is a dog-eat-dog business. But I wouldn't want to further my career at the expense of a close personal relationship.

DAN What happens when the work and the relationship seem to merge into one and the whole thing blows up in your face like a volatile mix in a test tube.

JULIA You sound like a porn star with marital problems.

DAN Do porn stars have marital problems? I would have thought they make perfect partners. Everyone knows what a good day at the office means. I've no idea what Kate gets up to these days.

JULIA Why should she trust you after you stole her ideas?

DAN I didn't actually steal anything - it was going begging. Kate is a serious academic, she doesn't write popular books, that's why she can't afford to buy me out of Manifest. She's like a sixteenth century pope guarding a set of scriptures against translation.

JULIA Don't you mean exploitation?

DAN You can't cater for the base instincts of a 24 hour news-driven society without sensationalizing a bit.

JULIA It was more than just a bit. You described the archaeologist as both a detective and a grave robber.

DAN That's the popular perception. Sherlock Holmes meets Burke and Hare. They pretend to be forensic scientists, but the big finds are often down to instinct, intuition, and luck. Kate's sharp nose and dogged persistence led to her team unearthing this little gem.

Dan gestures to the wolf-mask.

JULIA Is this real hair?

DAN From *Canis lupus* - the grey or timber wolf. Once common across Europe and North America.

JULIA How old is it?

DAN About fifteen hundred years - give or take a century - according the radio-carbon dating tests.

JULIA Why hasn't the leather decomposed?
 DAN Preserved by the soil.
 JULIA Is it some sort of ritual mask?
 DAN Kate thinks it's a representation of Fenrir, the Fenris wolf from Norse mythology. Almost everything we know about the old Norse religion comes from biased accounts written by Christian monks and scholars. Artifacts like these are a less adulterated voice from the past.
 JULIA Where did she find it?
 DAN Here in Essex. In the ninth and tenth centuries Vikings would come sailing up the rivers in search of landing sites and booty. The Battle of Maldon was fought between Saxons and ship-borne Danes in the year 991. The Sutton Hoo longship was unearthed just up the road from here in Suffolk.
 JULIA The Sutton Hoo ship was buried by Saxons in the eighth century - before the first Vikings arrived.
 DAN It's hard to imagine you as a girlie SWAT.
 JULIA I'm easily inspired.
 DAN All the Germanic tribes believed in a similar bunch of gods and monsters at one time or another; though by the ninth century, when the Vikings began to arrive in force in what is now East Anglia, the Anglo-Saxons had converted to Christianity. The only heathens in England would have been Norsemen and Danes. This thing may well be fifteen hundred years old, but it's only been in the ground for about eleven hundred of those years.
 JULIA How do you know that?
 DAN There was some other material buried in situ which has also been dated.
 JULIA What sort of material?
 DAN Kate thinks the site was a sacred grove where a sacrifice was made to the gods.
 JULIA A human sacrifice?
 DAN We don't know very much about the beliefs of the

Northern heathens because they left no written records. The early medieval Saxon chronicles tell us about the Viking invaders but they don't say much about their religious practices. The only sources that describe sacrifices to heathen gods came from Roman historians, Arab travellers, and German monks.

JULIA So what did she find?

DAN A female skeleton, about twenty years old, according to the experts. There were no signs of injury or disease, but the leather noose around her neck would have been a very tight fit.

JULIA She could have been a murder victim, or even a suicide.

DAN Next time you interview the Archbishop of Canterbury - ask him why he hangs things from trees at Christmas time.

JULIA You think she was a Christmas decoration?

DAN An act of worship to a heathen god. Human bodies have been found well-preserved in peat bogs after suffering a similar fate.

DAN How do you know she wasn't just a common criminal, strung up for stealing sheep?

DAN She was wearing this mask.

Julia instinctively recoils, then overcomes her shock to examine the mask more closely.

JULIA Wolves steal sheep. Maybe it was a way of marking her as a lupine thief. You can't really blame medieval farmers for hunting wolves to extinction. People would do the same thing today if there were any left roaming the countryside.

DAN It wasn't as simple as that. Wolves were demonized as pagan entities by the Christian Church in the West.

JULIA The heathens weren't too impressed with their furry friends either if they used to dress up humans in wolf-masks before hanging them from trees.

- DAN We don't know that the people who sacrificed the wolf-girl - if it was a sacrifice - were heathen. Anglo-Saxon England was a Christian Country.
- JULIA But there were Danish settlements on the East coast.
- DAN Dark Age cultures traditionally held the wolf in high regard as a spirit of the forest, just as the native North Americans did. Germanic tribes would sacrifice criminals or prisoners of war to Odin, or Woden, after victory in battle. But the wolf and the raven were his sacred animals. Sacrifice one of those and you're likely to lose the next fight pretty badly, assuming you weren't struck by a thunderbolt first.
- JULIA Maybe that's why they dressed up a human being rather than use a real wolf.
- DAN That could be right - but no bog body has ever been found wearing an animal mask. Whatever happened may have been unique to 9th century East Anglia.
- JULIA Does Kate have an explanation?
- DAN She thinks a barbarous regression may have taken place in the shadow of the Viking onslaught. An isolated Saxon community, near the coast and exposed to raids, became disillusioned with Christ's impunity in the face of Odin, and turned to the mythical enemies of Asgard, the demoniacal god Loki and his progeny, the Fenris wolf. They asked the gods for deliverance from the fury of the Northmen. The wolf-girl may have been offered to Fenrir as a sacrificial maiden.
- JULIA But you said the sculpture was created three centuries before the Viking raids began.
- DAN The theory does raise some interesting questions about the early religious beliefs of the Germanic tribes. It supposes that this artifact was born of an earlier heathen tradition, survived the Anglo-Saxon conversion, presumably hidden away from the monks and the evangelists, and brought out of storage to be used in a spiritual battle against the Vikings.
- JULIA You can imagine this thing nailed to the prow of a ship

sailing into a storm. Maybe some Vikings brought it over on a longship to settle in a new land - like the Pilgrim Fathers.

DAN I don't think the righteous Puritans would appreciate the comparison.

JULIA They shouldn't be so sensitive.

DAN The heathens believed in a pantheon of gods and monsters, but Fenrir was a demon associated with the end of the world, so any cult worshipping him would have seemed very strange to the rest of the population - Viking or Saxon. Another complication is that we don't think the victim was a Viking or Saxon.

JULIA So what was she?

DAN Probably a Romano-Celt.

JULIA How can you tell?

DAN DNA analysis of human hair fibres found in the mask. She had a cut on her cheek bone, and one on her upper arm, which hadn't healed - suggesting she'd been a victim of sword-play not long before her death.

Julia stares at the mask with morbid fascination.

JULIA Is it valuable? Surely it belongs in a museum, not someone's house. What happens if you get burgled?

DAN Then Kate won't be getting home contents insurance for a while. It shouldn't really be kept here at all, but she's allowed free access for her work.

JULIA Why the muzzle? Does it bite?

DAN Take it off and see.

Julia touches the muzzling strap, then draws her hand away.

Wise move. Fenrir was muzzled by the gods after biting off the hand of Tyr, the sky god.

JULIA Was the mask found like this? With its jaws muzzled.

DAN Exactly - except that this was around the victim's neck vertebrae.

Dan lifts a trailing end of the leather strap to reveal a loop tied with a slip knot.

We think the victim was hanged with this leather thong, then laid in a shallow grave with her face covered by the mask, which was muzzled with the free end of the thong to prevent her spirit from rising. In Norse mythology, Fenrir will break free at Ragnarok, the last battle between light and darkness, and tear the moon from the sky. The early skaldic poets were clearly influenced by the sight of wolves howling at the moon, just as the artist who sculpted this piece was by the legend.

Julia steps over to the window and peers up at the night sky through a gap in the curtains.

JULIA Is Ragnarok the end of the world?

DAN No, it's more like a twilight of the gods, as in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. The apocalypse from which human beings will emerge to repopulate the earth.

JULIA Adam and Eve?

DAN That would be a convenient Christian interpretation.

JULIA Or Kate and Dan perhaps?

DAN It depends on whether you think of Ragnarok as a past event or something waiting to happen.

JULIA There's a full moon out tonight. Do you think the wolf is hungry for a snack?

Julia puts a hand on a curtain, as if to draw it wide open.

Dan put his drink down on the coffee table and steps behind her. He gently, but firmly, pulls her hand from the curtain.

DAN Come and sit down on the sofa.

Julia turns to face him with a look of suspicion.

We like to keep the curtains closed at night.

JULIA Don't tell me you believe in that stuff?

DAN Kate does, and we should respect her views.

A distant howl from outside the window is heard which startles Julia.

JULIA What was that?

DAN Just foxes rutting in the woods. It's quite common this time of year.

Dan closes the curtains completely.

Julia walks over to the sofa and stands behind it, still clutching her glass.

Dan sits down on the sofa, picks up his glass from the coffee table, and waits for her to walk round into view again, but she remains standing behind him.

He begins to tell a story.

An early medieval village by the river grew into a small port, with a population of perhaps two or three hundred people. The houses and livestock shelters were built of timber and straw, and set back from the wooden quayside to avoid the risk of being swept away by floods, or high tides, or north-easterly gales sweeping in off the sea - such were the natural perils, and the wrath of the capricious gods, facing these hardy people.

The village and the port prospered. The surrounding land, a mixture of peat and boulder clay, was flat and fertile, in comparison with the granite uplands of northern Europe. The warmer and drier climate were better suited to the cultivation of valuable cereals. The hinterland farms were bountiful; and the port, with the blessing of winds from every quarter, provided a gateway to the rest of the known world.

Slow, rugged, dependable sailing craft carried their produce to the continent; to the people their ancestors had left behind, just across the water, in the Age of Migration after the withdrawal of the Roman legions. To the Franks, Frisians, Angles, Saxons, and Jutes.

Grain was the principal export, along with preserved beef and pork. But with grain, there is ale; with hides, there is leather; with wool, there are textiles; with clay there is pottery. These manufactured goods were traded for silver and gold, with which to import finer cloth and spices from the East, and wine from the Mediterranean; and for the iron technology which defined the age.

This was the Kingdom of the East Saxons - later known as Essex. A small kingdom on the east coast, facing continental Europe, sandwiched between the East Angles to the north, and Kent to the south. To the west lay the mightier kingdom of Mercia, locked in a power struggle with Wessex and Northumbria for hegemony over that part of Britain which would later become known as England.

This isolated community traded peacefully for generations until, sometime near the close of the eighth century, news began to arrive of terrible raids by the pagan Northmen, beginning with an attack on the Holy Island of Northumbria in which the monks were slaughtered and the treasures of the monastery were pillaged. But for those who lived near the sea, and derived sustenance from it, there was little that could be done except sleep lightly, with a sword at hand.

A meeting was held one evening by the village council to discuss what could be done in the event of a Viking raid. It was agreed that one man should act as a sentry each night, watching the river as the others slept, and ready to sound the alarm by blowing a horn, as Heimdall would for the old gods at Ragnarok.

Then all the men of the village, and any fighting

women, would muster with whatever swords or spears they possessed to repel the attack. If a single longship emerged from the gloom, the men of the village would prevail by weight of numbers. If more than two or three came on a single night, there would be a massacre.

This assessment was greeted with grim fortitude by the villagers - and mocking laughter by someone at the back of the hall.

All heads turned to see a fearsome creature walking towards the great table where the council sat. It was a shaman from the forest, dressed in animal skins. By his side trotted a huge wolf. The assembled people parted fearfully at the sight of this strange man and his wolf.

This community knew the shaman lived among the wolves and worshipped the old gods. He was rarely seen, and regarded as a harmless hermit. Christianity in the British Isles had not yet developed into a genocidal political movement, and despite the conversion of the Saxons to the Christ god, the old pagan beliefs were still very much part of a rural society with customs interwoven with the cycles and wonders of the natural world and the mysticism it inspires.

'Your swords will not save you,' he taunted them. 'You are peaceful farmers; these warriors are *besirka* - they come with fury for the fight - and the spoils.'

He put his finger to the cheek of a teenage girl with a pretty face, which lit up at the attention, and partial comprehension at the lewd insinuation. Her mother scowled angrily and pulled the girl away from him.

'What do you advise us to do - old man?' the leader of the council muttered contemptuously.

'These Northmen do not fear mortals in battle. But they fear the gods. They worship Odin and dedicate their prisoners to his glory.'

The leader laughed. 'The old heathen superstition - we worship Christ now, the one true god.'

'Where was this Christ god when they attacked the holy island? Don't you think the monks were praying to him as they were butchered? Why did the Christ god not grant them deliverance? Because he is weak and feeble. There is only one who can defeat Odin, as he will at Ragnarok.'

'Are you suggesting we dedicate ourselves to a monster?'

'Fenrir! He will stand for us - if we set him free and offer him a worthy sacrifice,' the shaman announced, looking around at the anxious assembly. His gaze fixed on a tall, steely eyed young woman with high cheek bones and jet black hair; a Romano-Celtic trait among the fair-haired Anglo-Saxons. She glared at him defiantly and put her hand on the hilt of a dagger she carried.

The Christian leader drew his broadsword and raised it over his shoulder in a two handed grip as if to smote the offender. 'Begone, heathen! And do not return!' he barked.

The shaman grimaced, drawing back his lips to reveal pointed yellow teeth. 'Without the protection of the wolf, they will take the sword from you before cutting the blood eagle on your back,' he predicted grimly, turning to leave.

The weeks of summer passed and the threat receded as autumn approached and the days grew shorter. Each night the sentry was less alert, knowing the season for crossing the treacherous North Sea was coming to a close. But such complacency made this the most dangerous time.

One night, whilst a negligent sentry slept, as he was apt to do on his watch, a ghostly shape with a square sail glided up the river. The crew consisted of about thirty tough, handpicked men; lean, hungry, and experienced fighters who'd seen many years service as raiders and mercenaries. About twenty disembarked some way

short of the village and made their way along the riverbank. This was the vanguard which would attack the village without warning. The remainder would dock the boat at the quayside after the initial surprise of the attack.

The sentry was awakened by a rough hand covering his mouth and the pain of a sharp blade slicing through the skin and muscle of his throat. He struggled but was held firm until his life-blood drained away like a slaughtered pig.

The raiding party swept through the village, breaking down flimsy doors and killing the men as they slept, or were rising from their sleep; and any of the women and children who fought or screamed. Only those who cowered silently were bypassed for now. Perhaps half the fighting men of the village were dead before the raiders encountered any serious resistance, but by then they were reinforced by those from the ship, tying up at the quay. A dozen more heavily armed Vikings leapt ashore and joined the affray, though to the villagers it seemed like a huge reinforcing horde. As the shaman had predicted, the peaceful Saxon farmers were totally outclassed by the veteran warriors of the longship, wielding broadswords, shields, and battleaxes.

The traumatized survivors fled into the nearby woodland where they would be hidden - with only the terrors of the night to contend with. Those who chose this option included a number of men of fighting age, who would later reflect with shame on what seemed a prudent action at the time.

The raiders did not pursue the villagers into the forest. They had enough to contend with securing the village and seeking out items of value. This was, after all, a commercial enterprise, not just an excuse to rough-up the natives. Gold, silver, and fine cloth were the booty of choice, and there was some room on the boat for valued slaves. But it was important to depart by dawn,

before news of their presence spread and larger forces assembled to avenge the outrage.

As the sun rose, the surviving villagers emerged from the cover of the trees and returned to their homes. The buildings had not been set alight, as the smoke and flames would have signalled the Viking presence far more effectively than a horse-born messenger, but they had been ransacked in search of valuables. Bodies were strewn everywhere. Some had died in the fight, others lay with their hands bound and their throats cut.

The most terrible fate of all had been reserved for the village leader, captured in the battle. He was spread-eagled beneath the branch of a tree with his lungs draped over his shoulders like an eagle - as predicted by the shaman.

The surviving villagers were devastated and now lacked any form of leadership. The most able of their men were killed in the fighting.

The shaman emerged from the forest to observe the devastation and take advantage of the situation.

'This will happen again and again - without the protection of Fenrir,' he warned, inspecting the body of the slain village leader with grim satisfaction.

The Celtic woman approached him with a determined scowl, seeking to lay blame and eke out vengeance. She carried a sword and had cuts to her cheek and arm. She raised the sword point to the throat of the shaman as if he were somehow complicit in the raid.

'What does your wolf god ask in return?' she demanded to know.

'A sacrifice - a bride who will unite with him in battle and destroy the raiders.'

The villagers gasped and were visibly cowed by such a proposition.

'Then take me,' she announced boldly, turning the sword point to earth and plunging it into the ground.

The eyes of the shaman lit up in eager anticipation of

this opportunity to satiate his god. 'Very well - this evening - when the moon rises.'

After sunset, the surviving villagers gathered in the sacred grove of the shaman. The site was lit by fires, set in a circle around a huge ash tree, which gave off an intoxicating aroma, causing those attending to become light-headed. A bough of the ash tree had been pulled down and tethered to a stake driven into the ground so that its lower leaves and branches were at about head height.

Next to the stake, a trench, like a shallow grave, had been dug and draped with a linen shroud.

The shaman and his pet wolf appeared soon after the moon began to rise. He was a terrifying sight, naked except for a loincloth and a mask in the form of a wolf's head. The Celtic woman followed, with a leather cord around her neck like a leash. She wore a white tunic, and seemed drugged or in a trance as she was led into view through the smoke.

The shaman positioned his subject under the drawn down branch, so that her face was obscured by the leaves. He wrapped the cord around the tree branches in an intricate weave which took up the slack and kept the victim tethered to the spot.

The shaman began shouting and wailing and dancing wildly, terrifying the already shocked ensemble. He crouched on all fours, looked to the moon, and howled like a wolf. A cloud covered the moon and he paused, waiting for it to slowly drift past and the golden orb to shine once more. Then he leapt to the stake, produced a knife, and slit the tethering chord.

The strong bough straightened out, seeking its former elevation, carrying with it the human form tethered by the neck. The young woman was lifted high into the air, with her weight pulling the springy bough down again part of the way, then up and down in an oscillatory motion with her feet well off the ground. In

her groggy state, she clawed at her neck and kicked feebly for a few dramatic seconds, before fading into unconsciousness and hanging limply.

The Shaman howled and shrieked an invocation in a tongue no one understood, then pointed to the high branches.

"It is Fenrir, he appears!"

The drugged audience looked up into the high branches where the rising ashes from the fire swirled, and imagined they saw the malevolent red eyes of a spectral monster emerging from a smoky cloud within the tree.

The people fled in terror, believing that Fenrir had been invoked and would devour them.

Once the audience had departed, the shaman pulled on a leg to set the body oscillating again, then wrapped an arm around her waist and put a hand on her shoulder as she came down; her neck stretching grotesquely under the added strain.

He grasped a branch of the bough in one hand, and untangled the tight cord with the other until it was sufficiently free to slither through the remaining entanglements like a snake as the limp body slumped to the ground. Free of a great part of its load, the bough rose again, dragging the shaman up into the air until he released his grip on the branch and landed on his feet, catlike, beside the prostrate form of the sacrificial victim.

He laid the body out in the grave, and placed the wolf mask he had worn over her face, then closed the jaws to hide her mortal features for all eternity. The noose knot had bitten deep into the flesh of her neck and he wrapped the trailing leather cord about the jaws like a muzzle before securing it tightly. He covered the body with the shroud and filled in the grave as the full autumn moon sank beneath the horizon.

There's no record of whether the Northmen ever

returned, and if they did what befell them, or what became of the shaman after that. Subsequent generations abandoned the village for larger ports and faster growing towns. The sea retreated and the village was ploughed under. The ash tree survived for centuries to come, but eventually died and rotted away, as new tree life took its place, undisturbed by superstitious farmers. The grim burial site in the once sacred grove remained dedicated to Fenrir for over a thousand years, until its discovery by archaeologists in the twenty first century.

Julia wanders round to stand before him in a sceptical pose.

- JULIA You can't possibly know that's what happened.
DAN Some of it happened, we can't be sure about all of it.
JULIA Did you see the way the moon was shining down on the house tonight as we arrived? It was eerie the way it seemed to reflect off the roof.
DAN That was the solar tiles.
JULIA 'Even a man who is pure at heart
And says his prayers by night
May become a wolf when the wolf bane blooms
And the autumn moon is bright.'

DAN You've seen too many old werewolf films.

Julia wanders around.

- JULIA It must be scary at times living in a house like this with all these creepy old things. How do you sleep at night?
DAN I turn off the light and go to bed.
JULIA What about Kate? Doesn't she ever have nightmares?
DAN If she did, she wouldn't bring these things home and sit up all night talking to them.
JULIA That's a sad reflection on you, Dan. She should be talking to you.

DAN She sleep walks. What am I supposed to do? Keep her on a lead?

JULIA People have different ways of coping with their fears. It sounds as if Kate has been confronting hers head on.

DAN Something has definitely unhinged her. Maybe it's the constant reminder of her own mortality. Rather than face reality, she's turning to a mythical world in her head, and an extreme form of solipsism which excludes everyone else from her life.

JULIA Even you?

DAN Especially me.

JULIA Has she seen a doctor lately?

DAN She doesn't trust doctors, especially those who work for the government.

JULIA What about her colleagues? Have they noticed any strange behaviour lately?

DAN University academics are mostly a bunch of fruitcakes anyway. You need an obsessive compulsive personality to keep the faith and persist with your research, sometimes for years on end, despite all the failures and the blind alleys. But Kate's eccentricity only seems to manifest itself when she's here in Manifet. She's written three highly acclaimed research papers in the last two years - setting out ideas then substantiating them through field work - more like a physicist than an archaeologist, but it's as if she's made a Faustian pact and the price of that knowledge is her sanity.

JULIA Can't you help her through it?

DAN No.

JULIA Not much room for doubt there.

DAN I'm not a medical doctor. I'm not even a clinical psychologist.

JULIA You are still a human being though - aren't you?

DAN Kate is a very complex character. I wouldn't know where to begin trying to understand the root cause of her obsession. The best description I could give is that,

like so many others before her, she's been seduced by her own take on the mythology.

Julia sits down in a chair opposite him, still holding a glass in her hand.

JULIA Where is she tonight?

DAN Removed from the scene so we won't be disturbed.

JULIA Removed - how?

DAN Chopped in half and laid out in the freezer - between the fish fingers and the oven chips.

JULIA Why does that not surprise me?

DAN Because you know I'd do anything so that we can be together.

JULIA Now tell me some real lies.

DAN She left this morning. She won't be back until Sunday evening.

JULIA Where has she gone?

DAN Ask me on Sunday evening.

JULIA You mean you don't know?

Pause.

She could be standing on a bridge right now getting ready to jump.

DAN Kate can be a bit melodramatic at times, but she's not suicidal.

JULIA You could still show a bit more concern.

DAN I thought I just did?

JULIA I mean real concern. Wouldn't you like to know where she is right now?

DAN Keeping tabs on her would be an impossible task. And even if I could, I don't think it would be right.

JULIA I'd like to know where she is and I'm not even her husband.

DAN Neither am I.

JULIA I thought you were married?

DAN Let me guess, you don't do unmarried men?
JULIA It looks like I've made an exception in your case.
DAN I've been up since dawn. Let's go before I'm too tired to do anything but sleep.

Dan drains his glass, gets to his feet, and heads for the doorway.

JULIA I want to finish my drink first.
DAN Bring it up with you.

*Julia stares into the glass, as if lost in contemplation.
Dan pauses by the door.*

DAN What's the matter now?
JULIA Don't rush me, Dan. I don't feel right about this anymore.
DAN Don't feel right about what?

*Julia glances at the wolf-mask and frowns.
Dan follows her line of sight to the piece.*

DAN If it makes you feel any better, that thing can sleep in the dustbin.
JULIA It's not his fault.
DAN It's Kate again. Still causing problems for me even when she isn't here.
JULIA Doesn't she match up to your mother?

Dan sits on the arm of the chair in which Julia is sitting.

DAN You haven't met my mother yet. Crazy woman! Kate is quite sane compared to her. Why are you being so sensitive tonight? You're a journalist, you don't care about other people's feelings.
JULIA This house is not quite what I expected.
DAN What did you expect? Snow White's cottage and the Seven Dwarfs sitting around on the porch?

JULIA No, just something less homely.
DAN I've never heard Manifet called homely before. Creepy, yes, but never homely.
JULIA This decor is all a facade to hide something intimate going on in the shadows.
DAN Intimate? In what way?
JULIA Private and personal - frequently in a sexual context.
DAN Yes, I know what it means, but what do you think is going on here?
JULIA I don't know yet.

Julia stands up and walks away from him, rubbing her arms defensively.

I'm beginning to feel uneasy, as if I'm not entirely welcome here.

DAN You're my guest. Manifet doesn't mind a few guests, so long as they don't chew the furniture.

JULIA Manifet may not mind, but what about Kate?

DAN We're just housemates now, the relationship is over.

JULIA If it's over, why don't you move out?

DAN I'm happy living here.

JULIA But why would she stay here with you if there wasn't still something, perhaps something unspoken, between you?

DAN Convenience. Whatever existed between us is dead - just like the wolf-mask. We'll go our separate ways eventually - when we have to - we just haven't reached that fork in the road yet.

JULIA But you're still enamoured with her work. You're like a high priest serving a goddess, and I feel like an intruder about to desecrate her temple.

DAN You're letting your imagination run away with you. Let's go back to your flat before Elvira flies in through the window on her broomstick and turns us both into toads.

JULIA Now you're suggesting that she's a witch.

DAN She drinks blood and howls at the moon.
JULIA That's a terrible thing to say. Does she really?
DAN You've seen her bat-cave - what do you think?
JULIA I must admit I have had a curious itch to see this place for a while now.
DAN You know what they say about curiosity?
JULIA Do you have any cats?
DAN Kate keeps one around here somewhere.

Dan gets down on his hands and knees behind the sofa as if looking for a cat.

Julia sits tentatively on the edge of a chair.

JULIA Cats are very sensitive animals. I think they would find the atmosphere in here quite disturbing.
DAN Not this one. It's way past caring. It was found in a pickle jar in the tomb of an Egyptian mummy. Here it is. Oh my God, it's still alive! Meowww!!!

Dan rises from the floor and tosses a small, dark-brown cushion into Julia's lap.

Julia screams, leaping out of the chair, dropping the cushion and her drink onto the floor.

JULIA Don't do things like that - not tonight!

Dan laughs as Julia lifts the cushion from the floor to examine it and reassure herself that it contains nothing more sinister than soft foam padding.

So not everything in this house is tainted by the macabre?

DAN Not everything, some things are perfectly normal.

Julia throws the cushion toy onto the sofa, lifts her glass from the carpet, and steps over to the bar to refill it.

JULIA Why the sudden rush to leave?

DAN There's no rush. But you're right, there is something strange about the ambience in here tonight. Maybe it's not such a good idea for you to stay on this occasion.

Dan glances around the room, his expression reflective, as if perplexed and a little uneasy. He crosses to the window and makes a gap in the curtains in order to peer out.

JULIA Are you trying to get rid of me?

DAN I was just thinking that if we're going back to your flat we really ought to go now.

JULIA You're concerned about something. What is it?

DAN You driving my car after a few drinks.

JULIA Are you trying to scare me again?

DAN I thought you liked scary movies?

JULIA Only the old ones in black and white.

Dan shrugs his shoulders and obligingly sits in a chair. Julia remains standing in the role of an interrogator.

Did Kate have any misgivings about moving in with you?

DAN No, why should she?

JULIA It's a serious commitment - not the sort of thing you do unless you trust the other person implicitly.

DAN Or think you do. Women are easily taken in by those skilled in the art of persuasion.

JULIA We allow ourselves to be taken in.

DAN If you say so.

JULIA Do you consider yourself to be - skilled in the art?

DAN Where Kate is concerned, I don't need to be. She's never been taken in by anyone. Strictly speaking, it was me who did the moving in with her. She came across an abandoned old house while working on a dig and decided that she wanted to restore it - and for that she needed the financial assistance of a sympathetic

colleague.

JULIA Where was this dig?

DAN The woodland out there.

JULIA Is that where she found the wolf-mask?

Dan nods.

You said Kate's theory is that a coastal community sacrificed the girl for Loki's protection from Vikings. We're miles from the coast - how does she explain that?

DAN The sea has receded in the last thousand years, and in any case the longships could penetrate far inland using the rivers. Any riverbank settlement would have been an easy target for a longship raid.

Julia glances warily at the curtains.

JULIA Whereabouts out there?

DAN I'll show you in the morning when the sun rises. There's a copse of ancient woodland in the corner of an overgrown field.

JULIA You mean you renovated a house next to a heathen burial site?

DAN The estate agent reckoned it's worth ten percent more with the National Trust sign at the end of the drive.

JULIA It all sounds a bit ghoulish.

DAN That's Kate for you.

JULIA Blaming the woman again?

DAN She cared more about a derelict medieval farmhouse that nobody gave two hoots for than a sixth century mask which every museum curator in the country would kill for. All she wanted was to buy Manifet and have it restored.

JULIA Why does that surprise you? She obviously has a deep affinity for the past. But why would anyone abandon such a magnificent old house in the first place?

DAN This magnificent old house was a draughty smelly old shack with a leaky roof and a bucket for plumbing. It needed far more work done than she could afford by herself so the *femme fatale* fluttered her eyelashes at me.

JULIA You mean you weren't living together at the time?

DAN No, but she knew I was deeply interested in her work, so it became part of the deal. I moved into a spare room and eventually we became one more nauseating yuppie partnership - trapped between negative equity and bad sex.

Dan gets up and pours himself another drink.

JULIA What are you so bitter about? I thought you loved this place.

DAN I do. So does she.

JULIA She must regret the moment she let you in through the front door.

DAN You make me sound like a vampire who crossed the threshold to prey on a virtuous maiden. The funny thing is that Manifet didn't mean a thing to me at first, all that mattered was Kate. But it pays never to invest too much in a relationship. Ours wore out faster than a cheap dish washer, and when it finally broke down we couldn't decide how to split Manifet - neither of us wanted to sell up or move out.

JULIA So the house is the reason you two stay together?

Dan nods, smiles, and sips his drink.

Old cottages are not without their charm, and maybe this one has more character than most, but is it really worth that much to you?

DAN I want to know why it's worth so much to her.

JULIA Isn't it obvious? She's formed an emotional attachment to something which symbolizes her life's work. Why don't you just move out and leave her to get on with

it?

DAN Because Manifet is as much mine now as it is hers. More so in terms of the financial commitment.

JULIA You'll still have your investment. It looks like Kate is not the only one with an obsession here.

DAN What's that supposed to mean?

JULIA Why did the relationship break down in the first place?

DAN Some people grow closer with time, we just drifted apart. She used me for a while when she needed me, and after that things began to change. Not that I minded much by then. The magic had passed. What I don't understand is how she managed to bewitch me in the first place. I remember she brought me here one night to sell the idea of the restoration and we ended up making love inside the ruins. It was a strange, almost other-worldly, experience. It was a moonlit night, but in the dark shadows I felt as if a succubus had taken Kate's place.

JULIA Maybe she was in love with you.

DAN I don't think Kate has ever been in love with any man. Her intellect gets in the way of playing Jane to anyone's Tarzan.

JULIA You thought you could buy a part of her, didn't you? Now, if you lose your possession of Manifet, you lose her. That's why you're so desperate to hold on.

DAN I prefer to think of it as a property investment. It sounds less feeble-minded. But what if I really did invest in something more than just a relationship with a thinking-woman's dyke. Suppose there was a valuable aspect to the property which had nothing directly to do with Kate.

JULIA You mean like booming house prices?

DAN Better than that.

JULIA Well? What?

DAN Manifet is no ordinary house. You became aware of it the moment you walked in.

JULIA That's because you fill the place with the weirdest

collect-ion of things I've ever seen. It's enough to freak anyone out.

DAN You think that's the only reason?

JULIA Isn't it enough? Most people would think that you're into the occult.

DAN Imagine this room without the unusual artifacts. What does that leave?

JULIA The air is highly charged - you and Kate have argued in here recently.

DAN Would you know that if you were a complete stranger who'd just walked in?

JULIA Possibly. It's something I'm quite sensitive to.

DAN Are you sensitive to anything else?

JULIA Like what for instance?

DAN Like ghosts for instance?

JULIA You're joking?

DAN You once told me you had a grandmother who was a medium. You may not have noticed at the time, but my ears pricked. Doesn't that psychic thing run in the family?

JULIA Granny used to con gullible people for the price of a bottle of gin. You'd have more chance of finding a genuine psychic in the phone book. Why do you think Manifet is haunted?

DAN Haunted may not be the right technical term, but we do seem to have a sitting tenant who's not paying any rent, at least not to me.

JULIA How much have you had to drink?

DAN Not enough to joke about a thing like this.

JULIA Have you actually seen a ghost?

DAN She won't show herself to me, but there have been times, always in the full quarter of the moon, when I've sensed her presence here in this room.

JULIA Her presence?

DAN Alright, let's say - its presence.

JULIA What makes you think it's a woman?

DAN Ectoplasmic oestrogen in the air. How do you know

when there's a man standing behind you in a bus queue?

JULIA His grunting usually gives him away.

DAN This thing doesn't grunt, but it's the same presence I felt the night Kate brought me here for the first time.

JULIA Doesn't it frighten you?

DAN Why should it? Any form of paranormal phenomenon is a godsend. It means there may actually be something waiting for us on the other side.

JULIA Suppose it's something you'd rather not meet?

DAN Better to be in hell with the Devil than in the ground with the worms - he does better barbecues.

JULIA Try working for my editor. You might start putting a higher premium on the company of worms. Is that why Manifet is so important to you? You think you've discovered a hotline to God - or the Devil?

Dan laughs.

DAN Of course not, but it's an interesting thought.

JULIA Have you checked the parish records? Manifet could have a history of things going bump in the night.

DAN Yeah, but there's not a snitch out of the ordinary there, never mind a bump. I'm tempted to forge some Victorian testimonies and slip them into the record for the psychic research people to find when they look, but for now we've only got our experiences to go on, and Kate won't speak openly about hers.

JULIA Why was the house abandoned in the first place. It seems like a waste of a good building?

DAN When the last farmer sold out in the 1970s, this place was already in such a state of disrepair that it was left to rot.

JULIA Manifet is an unusual name. Is it French?

DAN We think it comes from Manifetr, which is an old place-name associated with the grove where Kate discovered the wolf-mask. The word itself is a

conjunction of the old Norse words for moon and
fetter.

JULIA Moon-fetter?

DAN Don't tell me the moon has never cast a romantic spell
over you?

JULIA Not since I grew out of B cups.

*Julia removes her jacket and lays it smoothly over the back of a
chair. She takes a notepad and pen from her bag, sits down and
begins making notes.*

There could be a human interest story here. Academic
believes that he lives in a haunted house with a mad
genius ex-common law wife.

*Julia reaches into her bag for a camera, then stands and begins
taking photographs.*

Mind if I take some pictures?

DAN Don't you ever go anywhere without that thing?

JULIA If I did, knowing my luck, I'd meet Lord Lucan in a
restaurant.

DAN He must be dead by now.

JULIA Or his ghost. Smile!

*Dan poses by the writing desk, smiles cheesily as the flashbulb
goes off, then rotates the swivel chair and sits 'cowboy-style' facing
Julia.*

DAN I didn't bring you here to feed you a story. What
you've heard so far is off the record - it's strictly
between us.

JULIA The people have a right to know.

DAN You may be an opportunist bitch by day, but I thought
we were on a personal level tonight.

JULIA Whatever gave you that idea?

DAN You're the only person I can trust enough to share this

with.

JULIA Bullshit! It's not like that between us, Dan. It never has been.

DAN Alright, the real reason for exposing the skeletons in the family closet to a lean and hungry newshound is to let you know what's going on in case anything unfortunate should happen to me. If it does, and I'm past caring, then you can publish and be damned for it. See you in hell, as they say.

JULIA What do you think is going to happen?

DAN Do we have a deal?

JULIA For the time being. Tell me more.

Julia puts her pad and camera back in her bag.

DAN I don't know - but you read about this sort of thing quite a lot in the newspapers.

JULIA What papers have you been reading?

DAN Ones like yours.

JULIA But you're a fascist liberal; you don't read the tabloids - do you?

DAN It was purely for research purposes.

JULIA So did it provide you with the insight you were looking for?

DAN No, not really. But I'm expecting to find my ties cut with pruning shears any day now.

JULIA Tie cutting is a bit *passé*. She could always dunk your CDs in the chip fryer or mash your golf balls with a hammer.

DAN Ouch! That would hurt - if I played golf.

JULIA I'm beginning to wonder whether Kate really is the mad one around here. You sound distinctly paranoid to me.

DAN It isn't paranoia, it's a premonition.

JULIA If you had some sort of an accident, in suspicious circumstances, wouldn't Kate be the prime suspect?

DAN Remember that when you write my obituary.

JULIA This doesn't make any sense. You're not a fatalist, Dan, you're a coward. If you were in any tangible form of danger living here, you'd pack your bags and move out straight away.

DAN People change. Manifest changes people who enter its domain. Haven't you noticed the way it has changed you tonight. You had no concern for Kate's feelings when you first arrived. You break up marriages like other people hunt foxes.

JULIA So there's a flaw to my character.

Julia looks around warily.

I just don't think it would be wise to indulge it around here.

DAN Far better to face your fate without fear and trust in the vengeance of a kinsman than to run away and live as an outcast with the conscience of a coward.

JULIA Whatever Dark Age spores that mask gives off have gone straight to your head. You sound like something out of *Beowulf*.

DAN Does that make Kate Grendel? Or Grendel's mother?

JULIA That's a horrible thing to say.

DAN Put yourself in her shoes. How would you get me out of here?

JULIA It's just a house, for God's sake. A neatly stacked pile of old bricks.

DAN Ever been in love?

JULIA Yes, I suppose so.

DAN Imagine yourself in a *menage-a-trois* under the same roof as another person. How would you eliminate your rival?

JULIA Who's the third person here?

Dan glances around with a slightly perplexed expression.

DAN The house itself.

- JULIA I have a 1970s punk collection. I could make a lot of noise.
- DAN Kate wouldn't do anything like that. She's invested too much in Manifet as a misanthropic retreat.
- JULIA Well, if it were me, I'd ask my brother to have a quiet word with you, and make you an offer you couldn't refuse.
- DAN She's an only child.
- JULIA She could hire some thugs and arrange for you to disappear.
- DAN That sort of common violence is not her style. She'd use intellect and guile. The decor you see around you is Kate's idea of a makeover. She's trying to spook me out. But Voodoo psychology is never going to work so where does she go from here?
- JULIA Suppose she accuses you of a sexual assault. You could end up in jail for years. At the very least, she could get a court order banning you from Manifet while she's living here.
- DAN She has an ulterior motive for wanting me out of the way.
- JULIA So do you.
- DAN I don't want her to leave. She just needs time away from here.
- JULIA But if a jury believed her, then it would all be over - and there would be no vengeance by kinsmen either.
- DAN Maybe not by kinsmen, but there would still be a score to settle. Manifet has its own restorative form of justice.
- JULIA If I were her I'd take that chance. Very few hardened criminals go gunning for their accusers after a long stretch in jail, never mind a Walter Mitty psychologist with a Dark Age fixation.
- DAN Walter Mitty? Come here, you cheeky bitch! I'll show you Walter Mitty! How do you like this?

Dan grabs Julia's wrist, pulls her up, puts her over his shoulder

in a fireman's lift and twirls her around.

JULIA Dan! Put me down!

DAN Don't you know my ancestors were cavemen!

JULIA All our ancestors were cavemen, now put me down!

DAN Yeah? Well, mine used to wrestle woolly mammoths.

He slaps her bum and she squeals, disturbing the sanctity of the old house and its mystical relics.

JULIA Dan! Please put me down!!

DAN Not until you apologize.

JULIA Alright! I'm sorry!

Dan puts her down and they began to kiss in a slow, passionate clinch.

The light fades until most of the lounge is in shadow, with just sufficient ambient light seeping through the curtains to make out the characters on stage.

JULIA Have you got a dimmer switch in your pocket?

DAN No, I'm just pleased to see you.

JULIA What's happened to the light?

Dan switches the lamp on and off, then tries the wall switch.

DAN There's a tripswitch in the cellar. It must have gone off.

Julia hears a sound of footsteps on gravel.

JULIA What was that?

DAN What?

JULIA I heard something.

DAN These old timbers are always creaking and groaning - like an old dog snoring.

JULIA It came from outside. Like someone walking on the

gravel.

Julia goes to the window and peers out through the gap in the curtains.

There could be someone out there.

DAN No one comes out here at this time of night, and you wouldn't hear anything anyway. The windows are completely sound-proof.

JULIA We heard a fox earlier.

Julia examines the window.

It isn't closed properly.

Dan moves her out of the way, secures the window, and draws the curtains closed; then he takes a flashlight from the desk drawer and switches on the beam.

DAN Wait here.

JULIA Where are you going?

DAN To switch the lights back on.

JULIA You're not leaving me here on my own in the dark?

DAN You won't be on your own. You've got the wolf-mask for company. Kate thinks it makes a good guard-dog. She even takes it out for walks.

DAN That's a comforting thought.

Exit Dan.

Julia begins photographing the lounge with staccato flashes, before putting the camera down on the coffee table and running her finger along the muzzle of the sculpture.

She peers out through the curtains again to see if there is anyone outside, then pulls them apart and draws them together several times in quick succession, playing a childish game of peek-a-boo with the pale projected light of the moonbeam so that it briefly illuminates the wolf-mask.

Tiring of this, she pours herself another drink and sits down on the sofa.

Unbeknown to Julia, the demeanour of the wolf-mask changes suddenly. The black eye-slits began to glow an angry red. A shadow passes over the wolf's head and the muzzling leather thong seems to slip off as if by a supernatural hand.

Julia lifts the cushion with one hand and smiles at the thought of her earlier reaction.

The entertainment system suddenly powers up and begins to play a dissonant, powerful piece from Stravinsky's 'The Rite of Spring'.

Julia is startled, but assumes that the power has been restored.

The wolf-spirit leaps into view behind her, arms outstretched clutching the leather thong, legs bent in a strong, aggressive stance. It begins a primitive dance, mimicking a wolf stalking a deer.

Julia continues sipping from her glass as she waits for Dan to reappear.

The wolf-spirit lunges forward to choke Julia from behind until she goes limp and is left sitting on the sofa with head back and limbs outstretched.

The wolf-spirit goes to the gap in the curtains and howls at the moon.

Lights down.

III

Sunday night.

Kate sits at the writing desk, wearing a t-shirt, jeans, and spectacles. She works beneath the light of a desk lamp, with a laptop computer open, and is sifting through a pile of research papers, making margin notes with a pencil.

The curtains are parted slightly.

A dark, shadowy figure glides into view through the open doorway.

Kate registers a movement in her peripheral vision. She removes her reading glasses and glances up.

Dan stands before her, wearing an overcoat and a scarf over jeans and a t-shirt. His eyes are dark and hollow as if through sleeplessness.

KATE You gave me a fright. I didn't hear you come in.

DAN Sorry.

KATE Did you have a nice weekend?

DAN I'd say it's been interesting - so far.

KATE So far?

DAN It's not over yet.

KATE I'm not sure I like the sound of that.

Kate glances at her mobile phone, resting on the coffee table.

DAN What happened, Kate?

KATE Happened? When?

DAN Friday night?

KATE That's none of your business.

Dan turns his back on her and surveys the room.

DAN Where did you go on Friday?

Kate moves towards the table and picks up the phone, but Dan reaches out and grabs her wrist from behind, twisting her arm and putting a hand on her shoulder to force her down on her knees in front of the sofa before taking the phone from her hand. Dan walks to the drinks cabinet, puts the phone down and pours a drink.

Kate sits up on the sofa, rubbing her arm and glowering at him.

There's no need to bring anyone else into this affair. Manifest is our problem to resolve, and if we can't do that, then neither of us deserve to be here.

*Dan holds out the glass as a conciliatory offering.
Kate knocks it out of his hand.*

That's no way to treat the carpet.

KATE This was our problem - until you brought her back here.

DAN What makes you think I brought someone back?

KATE There was a hair on the sofa. A long, dark hair, treated with spray and conditioner. Who was she?

DAN A journalist.

KATE What!?

DAN She reviewed my book and wanted to see Manifest for herself.

KATE A book review?

DAN Let's not forget who was the first to bring a third party into this relationship.

KATE Why do you say that? Did you expect to find someone else here when you crept in just now?

Dan looks around suspiciously, as if expecting someone to emerge from the shadows.

DAN Do you know what happened here on Friday night?
KATE How could I possibly know anything? I was miles away.
DAN You seem to have almost magical powers of deduction where this house is concerned.
KATE You make it sound like witchcraft.
DAN I'll ask you one more time - on your oath - what happened?
KATE On my oath? Are you drunk?
DAN Perjury carries a heavy sentence.
KATE We're a long way from any court.
DAN Not so far as you might think. This Dark Age evocation you have created for yourself has its own barbarous form of justice. Our dispute can be resolved according to ancient custom - just as the people you study would have understood ten centuries ago.
KATE Grow up, Dan. I'm not one of your populist readers.
DAN On Friday night, Manifet revealed to me something of its true nature. Something you've known for a long time.

*Dan takes a battleaxe in his gloved hands from the collection on the wall. He swings it lazily in the air.
Kate becomes alarmed.*

KATE What is it you want?
DAN Restorative justice.
KATE For what?
DAN For Julia, my guest, who came here under my protection.
KATE You've gone mad!

*Dan wields the axe with both hands above his head.
Kate instinctively covers on the sofa, protecting her head with a cushion. She screams as he brings it down with great force on the coffee table near her foot, embedding the iron blade in the soft*

wooden surface.

He leaves the axe planted in the table and walks towards the writing desk.

DAN We were talking in here at about eleven pm when the nights went out.

Dan switches off the desk lamp to darken the room.

There was a full moon, just like tonight, and the light poured in through a gap in the curtains to flood the lounge with its pale hue.

Dan steps towards the curtains.

Julia thought she heard a sound from the window just after the lights went out. She thought there was someone outside in the courtyard.

Dan studies Kate's face for a moment, but there is no reaction. After the initial shock, she has hardened herself to the charade.

I closed the window and the curtains ...

Dan closes the window and draws the curtains.

... then took a flashlight and went down to the cellar to re-set the trip-switch. Meanwhile, Julia took some photographs with her camera. She moved the curtains slightly to check outside again and to let in a bit more light.

Dan parts the curtains slightly.

Then she sat down - where you are now.

Dan pauses, waiting for a response.

KATE Then what?

DAN When the power was restored, a music track began to play.

Dan selects the same track which Julia had heard, then wanders behind the sofa where Kate is sitting.

Then someone, or something, attacked her.

KATE Attacked? How?

Dan wraps his scarf around her neck and pulls it tight to choke off her scream.

Kate claws at the ligature and arches her neck to look straight at Dan. She reaches up and tries to scratch his face, but he steps back, keeping her at arms length until she goes limp, sitting with her head back and limbs outstretched, as Julia was left.

Dan switches the desk lamp on, pours himself a drink, sits in a chair opposite Kate and reflects meditatively on what has just happened.

Kate stirs, then coughs and wheezes as she pulls the scarf from her neck and throws it angrily onto the floor. She massages her throat and glares at him.

Dan avoids her accusatory gaze, keeping his eyes fixed on the glass.

DAN But for some reason, the assailant didn't kill her.

KATE Where is she now?

DAN At home I expect, writing up her story.

KATE You let her go?

DAN What was I supposed to do? Finish the job?

KATE Did she call the police?

DAN No, surprisingly, she didn't.

KATE Lucky for you. I might not be so - forbearing.

Dan glances up in surprise.

DAN Why do you say that?

Kate collects her mobile phone from the cocktail bar.

KATE I would have thought that would have been obvious.

Kate presses a number sequence into the key pad and puts the device to her ear.

Hello, just calling to let you know I'm home. Dan has just walked in, we've got something to sort out. I'll speak to you later. Bye for now.

Kate puts the phone down on the bar.

DAN Who was that?

KATE My father.

DAN Why would Julia think I had anything to do with it?

KATE Sounds like you two were playing some sort of kinky game which got out of hand. Did you rig the lights to go out, then sneak back in here under the cover of darkness to give her the fright of her life?

DAN You haven't asked me yet - what the assailant looked like?

KATE I thought it was dark - she couldn't see.

DAN You looked straight up into my eyes just now, you tried to claw them out, but Julia didn't see anyone.

KATE Maybe you crouched low, behind the sofa. Or you could have hired someone to get rid of me - *Dial M for Murder* - but he chose the wrong woman on the wrong night. She didn't die because you came back into the room in time to stop him killing her.

DAN That's a bit far-fetched.

KATE Where would journalists be without their conspiracy theories?

DAN Not the theory, but the idea of a plan of mine going so awry.

KATE The best laid plans o' mice'n'men gang aft agley. You may have had a dim-witted accomplice.

DAN There was no evidence of a break-in. To get in and out without a trace, he would have needed a key.

KATE Precisely.

DAN And to the best of my knowledge, there are only two people who could have given him one.

KATE The plot thickens. Why would I do such a thing?

DAN Jealousy.

KATE Jealousy?

Kate laughs.

I used you to get what I wanted. That's all you ever meant to me. It was so obvious, I thought you understood all along.

DAN For some reason, I've always needed to hear you say it.

KATE All you had to do was ask. You got something in return - an *Uberfrau* to study at close quarters.

DAN So now that I've served my purpose, are you trying to arrange for me to live somewhere else - like a secure unit, for instance?

KATE I stayed at my father's house on Friday. Whatever happened in here was down to you and your guest.

DAN The entire night? Where did you sleep?

KATE A spare room.

DAN The spare room alibi is not very convincing. You could easily have sneaked out.

KATE Dad would have heard me leave the house.

DAN But would he tell the police? Fathers are very protective of their daughters. He wouldn't say anything which could harm the defence of his little girl.

KATE There's nothing to tell. I was there all night.

DAN If you didn't come in person, maybe you employed some-one to frame me - and gave them a key.

KATE Where do you get this idea from that I consort with psychopaths - other than present company?

DAN Not a psychopath, perhaps. But someone more subtle - who understands the situation between us.

KATE If this mysterious intruder really does exist, and if he's ever caught, whose name is he likely to have on his lips?

DAN Mine, probably - if that was the deal.

KATE I've got no money, you know that. Every penny went into this house.

DAN There are other forms of payment.

KATE Such as?

DAN Emotional and spiritual rewards.

KATE I thought professional assassins dealt in hard cash.

DAN Professionals probably do; but amateurs, especially young amateurs, are more easy to beguile.

KATE What are you suggesting - infatuation of some kind?

DAN It has been known for an attractive, intelligent woman to acquire an impressionable accomplice.

KATE This is the twenty first century. That sort of thing may have happened to Agatha Christie, but young men today are more obsessed with themselves than the 'beguiling' older woman.

DAN Who said anything about a young man?

KATE There can't be many women who would have the strength, or the nerve, to creep into a house and choke someone half-to-death.

Dan stands and wanders round in a contemplative manner.

DAN Christianity is predicated on the belief that *Homo sapiens* is spiritually superior to the rest of the natural world, and the religion seeks to repress all behaviour which reminds and distresses the pious congregation-
alist that we remain, zoologically speaking, trapped in animal form. Most human beings embrace this simple article of faith. Would you like to proclaim your adherence to this - and your belief in the primacy of the human soul?

KATE What I believe in is none of your business.

DAN *Lasciate ogni speranza ...*

KATE Excuse me?

DAN Abandon all hope - ye who pass through here. The message to all those souls entering hell - the point of no return - except Dante himself of course. The observer, the voyeur who knows he'll awake unharmed from his dream.

KATE I know what it means. What's it got to do with here and now?

DAN Maybe nothing. But I'd very much like to meet this assailant and ask him, or her, how they sneaked in and out so quietly without being seen, either by me or by Julia.

Dan looks out through the gap in the curtains.

There's a clear sky tonight, it hasn't rained for several days. You can see the old willow tree at the end of the drive from here. There could be a car parked under it, hiding like a reclusive creature of the night. When was the last time someone parked under the willow?

KATE Why would anyone park there?

DAN To avoid being seen from the house. I checked under the tree with a flashlight tonight. There's a tyre track on a patch of damp earth not covered by gravel. Would you give me odds on it matching the tyres of your car?

KATE I could give you very long odds indeed. I had a new set of tyres fitted only yesterday.

DAN Why did you feel the need to do that?

KATE You wouldn't want me to drive on worn tyres, would you? It's against the law. Besides, this is my drive. I could have parked anywhere, anytime, before or since. It proves nothing.

DAN Someone parked there on Friday night.

Dan removes his coat and throws it onto the sofa where Kate is sitting.

There's no wire or tape recorder hidden in the pockets. I'm not trying to incriminate you, I just want to know why you came back here on Friday night.

Kate glances at the coat with some suspicion before addressing Dan.

KATE Why should I say anything to you?

DAN Because you still owe me something. I made all of this possible for you. And because I once felt the same way about Manifet as you do - before Julia became involved and fell victim to its darker side.

KATE How terrible for you. I thought psychologists were made of sterner stuff. What hope is there for the rest of us?

DAN My solicitor has instructions to transfer my share of the deed to you in trust, until you can afford to buy me out. It's over, Kate. Congratulations. How does it feel to have won?

KATE Why should I believe you?

DAN Why should I lie?

KATE I'd like you to go now. If you don't, I'll call the police.

Dan sits down in a chair opposite her and sighs.

DAN Alright, call the police.

KATE All I want is to be left alone to get on with my work.

DAN Just being near you used to be an electrifying experience for me. You were like the perfect drug - a constant source of adrenalin and buzz of well-being. Do you know how that feels?

KATE It's too late for that sort of talk. Too many things have come between us. You'll just have to accept that it's over and move on.

DAN Call it professional curiosity. My job is to understand these things in other people, just as you do with the things you find. You look the same, but now there's a different being inside. How can someone alter their personality so greatly in a few short months?

KATE How can you be so sure that it's me who's changed?

DAN I've changed a bit, but you're not the same person anymore.

KATE Could be *Invasion of the body snatchers!*

DAN Personality shifts usually occur in late adolescence. People decide to reinvent themselves and fashion a personality based on someone, or something, they admire or aspire to be like, or at least perceived as being like.

KATE Maybe I'm just a late developer.

DAN There are other circumstances in which it can happen - after physical or mental trauma for instance.

KATE You'll never fully understand our relationship, or me. You're far too close to the woods to see the trees - any of your colleagues will tell you that. I'm surprised Julia didn't mention it to you when she was hearing your confession on Friday night.

DAN But I can't walk away from here until I do - anymore than you can leave an important site without understanding its full meaning and significance to your work.

KATE For someone who came here to avenge his girlfriend, you're suddenly showing a bit too much self interest. Same old Dan. The last time I trusted you with some personal observations they ended up in print for the whole world to see.

DAN But this time you get full possession of Manifest in return - uncontested.

KATE This house has become an important part of my life. The ambience in here is both inspirational and highly conducive to my work, or at least it was before you and your friends started playing kinky party games with the artifacts.

Dan's eyes flicker, and he flashes a glance at the muzzle on the wolf-mask. He gets up and strokes the wooden carving thoughtfully as if it were a pet.

DAN Why did you come back here on Friday night?

KATE You don't listen, do you?

DAN How did the muzzle get back on the wolf's jaws?

Kate glances at the mask and frowns.

KATE I didn't know it was missing.

DAN It was gone when I found Julia slumped on the sofa. We deduced that the assailant used it to strangle her, but now it's reappeared. Suppose I take it with me for safe-keeping? I wouldn't want it to disappear again before a forensics team get a chance to look at it.

Dan begins to unfasten the leather thong.

Kate leaps up and grabs his arm.

KATE How do I know you won't just throw it away? After all, it could be used as evidence against you.

DAN Throw away part of such an important find? What sort of a Philistine do you think I am?

KATE The worst sort. Leave it where it is and I'll tell you what you want to hear.

Dan nods and steps back from the mask.

Kate lifts his coat from the sofa and checks the pockets before speaking.

I came to see Manifet in the moonlight. Naturally, I hoped to avoid the tedium of bumping into you or your guest. So I parked under the willow, walked twice around the garden, and then drove back to my father's house.

DAN How did you know I had a guest? There was only my car parked in the forecourt.

KATE It's not hard to guess what happens when I'm not here.

DAN You may find this hard to believe, but last Friday was the one and only time I ever brought anyone out here.

KATE What you get up to is your own affair - so long as it doesn't affect me or my work.

DAN Why did you deny you were here?

KATE I didn't see or hear anything suspicious.

DAN It takes nearly an hour to drive from your father's house to here. That's a long way for a quick stroll around the garden.

KATE It was a nice evening for a drive.

DAN Most women don't like driving at night - they're afraid of the tail-gating bogey man.

KATE In case you haven't noticed, I'm not most women. I'm a leading expert in my field, and it's all down to the inspiration I get from being here.

Kate presses her palms and her cheek against a wall and closes her eyes as if an invisible being were standing behind her and embracing her fondly.

She opens her eyes and turns to face him again.

I feel almost euphoric when I'm here, just as some people feel better with a glass in their hand.

DAN Most of those people would be better off without the glass.

KATE It's a question of moderation and control.

DAN Who, or what, is in control here, Kate? You or this house?

KATE I am. And I didn't see your girlfriend, or anyone else, here on Friday night.

DAN What did you see when you arrived?

KATE No more than you would expect. There was a cry of foxes in the distance and the moon had just dropped below the horizon. Manifest was just a dark, brooding

silhouette against the starlight.

DAN The moon was high in the sky until well after midnight.

KATE Maybe it was later than I thought.

DAN When Julia saw these things in here, she wondered if we were Devil-worshippers.

KATE Maybe she's a Christian.

DAN Could that be the reason why she was attacked?

KATE You tell me - you were the one inside the house with her.

DAN Yes, but was I the only one? What if she encountered something which, for millenia, has been fundamentally opposed to her spiritual beliefs?

KATE I didn't think journalists had spiritual beliefs. Do you honestly think that a Biblical Devil, with all of creation to play with, would find time to toy with a tabloid journalist? That's quite an exclusive she's got there. I look forward to reading it.

DAN What if this particular devil didn't have all of creation to play with? Suppose it was confined to Manifest. What if it was still here now, biding its time? Listening to every word and watching every move like a child watching its warring parents marriage disintegrate?

Kate looks around, giving away a momentary sign of nervousness.

KATE Be careful, Dan.

DAN Why? If there's no one else to hear, what can possibly happen?

KATE Nothing. You're just beginning to sound a little bit crazy, that's all.

DAN Is it possible for an inanimate object to possess or harbour a soul?

Kate instinctively glances at the wolf-mask.

KATE Why ask me? I'm not a theologian.

DAN You dug that thing up and studied it intensely.
KATE You said yourself, that thing is just a mask of dead leather and wolf-hair.
DAN You've made no secret of where your affection lies.
KATE As a metaphor for my work. I never literally meant that ... what are you trying to say? That I've been seduced by a myth?
DAN More than that. You didn't come to see Manifet in the moonlight, you came because she called you here, just as any of us would for a passionate lover.
KATE Have you any idea how ridiculous that sounds?
DAN Does it? None of us know for sure what took place out there over a thousand years ago, but I think I'm beginning to understand what happened in here on Friday night. The question is, do you?

Dan takes a photograph from his trouser pocket and drops it onto the table.

Kate picks it up and examines it.

KATE Where did you get this?
DAN Julia's camera. She took some photographs just before the attack.

Kate goes to the desk drawer, takes out a magnifying glass, and examines the photograph closely to make out a faint image of a face in the shadows.

KATE That's impossible!
DAN It proves you were here.
KATE It's a fake. A manipulation - anyone could rig this up in five minutes on their home computer.
DAN Photos may lie, but not as often as people. That's precisely the image I uploaded from the camera.
KATE Has Julia seen it?
DAN No one has - except you and me. I told Julia her assailant must have taken the camera.

KATE Why did you do that?

DAN Anticipation. I thought you were involved in some way. Leaving the camera is just the sort of contrived mistake which used to get otherwise intelligent people hung in mystery thrillers. I don't understand why you left such an incriminating piece of evidence at the scene? If the police had found this in Julia's camera, you would have had some very awkward questions to answer.

Kate frowns as if perplexed.

KATE I did not come into the house that night.

DAN But you do admit to being in the garden without actually seeing the moon?

KATE Like I said, it must have been later than I thought.

DAN I checked round the garden soon after Julia recovered. There was no sign of anyone.

KATE Well, perhaps it wasn't so late and the moon was hidden behind a cloud.

DAN Or maybe, for a while that night, you just didn't see anything at all.

KATE What are you saying? That I slipped past you and attacked Julia in my sleep?

Dan puts a finger on the photograph.

DAN What are those things in the corner there?

Kate lifts the magnifying glass to examine the photograph again.

KATE They look like cat's eyes.

DAN Could they belong to something larger? Like a dog or a wolf?

As Kate studies the photograph, Dan lifts a draught of a research paper she left lying on the desk and glances through it.

KATE That's not ready for publication.
DAN You've changed your view. You don't think the site was dedicated to Loki or Fenrir after all?
KATE It was probably no more than the grave of an executed criminal.
DAN What are you trying to hide? She was more than that. I heard her howl for the wild on Friday night and ran up from the cellar to see what was going on. What I couldn't understand at first was why Julia? Why didn't you just set that thing on me and be done with it?
KATE Don't flatter yourself.
DAN The reason, I think, is that you don't control her at all - she controls you. She used you, Kate. Used us both to try and escape this trap.
KATE You're insane.
DAN Am I? In that case you won't mind indulging me.

Dan switches off the desk lamp.

Is this how the ritual begins?

Dan selects the opus that Kate used to summon the wolf-spirit. The wolf-spirit emerges from the shadows to observe events as he begins to untie the muzzle from the mask.

KATE You said you wouldn't ...
DAN You still haven't told me everything. I'm not sure you know everything. There's a full moon rising. It's been a long time since the wolf-spirit was free to run through the forest by moonlight.

Dan carries the muzzle towards the window and puts a hand on the curtain.

KATE No, don't do that!

Kate rushes forward and grabs Dan's arm, but he pushes her aside and she falls to the floor.

DAN She doesn't belong here. The ancient burial ritual imprisoned her soul. She should be out in the forest with the ghosts of her own kind.

Dan pulls the curtains wide apart. A bright shaft of moonlight falls onto the wolf-mask.

The music suddenly changes to the dissonant piece which played when Julia was attacked.

KATE You can't do this. I won't let you!

Kate tries to close the curtains, but Dan grabs her round the waist and pulls her back.

Don't let him do this! Stop him! Kill him!!

A sudden wind whips up the papers on the desk like a dust-devil and scatters them on the carpet.

A deafening howl fills the room.

Dan releases Kate and clutches his ears in pain.

The wolf-spirit charges at Dan, but then swallow dives through the window. The shock wave from something rushing past him knocks him into a chair.

The sound of glass shattering leaves Dan and Kate stunned.

The music ceases.

There is a pause, then a howl of triumph is heard, fading away into the distance.

Dan stands up.

DAN She's gone. To Valhalla, or to hell, or whatever you believe is waiting out there for all of us in the end. You're alone again amongst the living, with nothing but your own cynicism for comfort, just like the rest of us.

KATE Why? You were leaving anyway. Why destroy my work, my creation, everything that existed here for me?

DAN You let your desire for that creature, and the mythology it stood for, take control of your life. You're free of the spell now, Kate, and you have a choice to make.

Dan puts the muzzle on the coffee table together with her mobile phone. He collects his coat and his scarf and walks towards the door.

KATE How dare you persecute me with your ignorance! You've no idea what you've just done - what you've just destroyed!

DAN I haven't destroyed anything. I've set something free.

Exit Dan.

The outside door is heard to close and footsteps are heard through the broken window, crunching on gravel towards a car. The car door opens and closes, an engine starts, and the car drives away. Kate lifts the muzzle thong in her hands like an offering.

KATE I understand why you had to go. It wasn't right to keep you here. Dan is very clever, but he doesn't fully understand. He never will. Now that you've gone, I no longer have any use for him or for Manifest. Slow your pace awhile, don't run too fast. Wait for me to follow.

Kate walks into a shadowy corner carrying the thong. She stands up on a stool with only her feet and ankles visible, then kicks the stool away, leaving her body suspended. Her feet twitch briefly, then are still, with toes pointing downward.

A swiftly moving figure crosses the room from the doorway, dislodges the axe from the table, and carries it into the shadow where Kate is hanging. The blade is heard biting into the beam and the figure catches her limp body around the waist as she drops down.

Dan emerges from the shadow with Kate slung over his shoulder and the severed leather strap trailing from her neck. He lays her on the sofa, removes the noose, and put his fingers on her neck, feeling for a pulse.

He closes the curtains, muzzles the wolf sculpture with the remains of the thong, then sits in a chair and waits.

Kate stirs slowly, then thrashes about for a few seconds in panic as if fighting off an attacker, until finally she recovers her wits and sits up in a confused state. She stares at him, her eyes fierce and maniacal. She puts her hand to her throat and looks around for the thong. She sees the muzzle on the sculpture and tries to get up, but is still unsteady on her feet and leans on the back of the sofa for support. Dan rises to help her.

KATE No, stay where you are.

Dan steps back.

Kate goes over to the window and draws back the curtains to view the shattered window pain. She stares at the moon for a few seconds, then unties the muzzle thong and walks into the shadow again as if determined to finish the job.

Dan waits anxiously.

Kate steps up on the stool, then steps down and reemerges into the twilight. She goes to the writing desk, puts the rope down, switches on the desk lamp, lifts a sheet of paper from the floor and begins to read. When she speaks, she does so without looking up at Dan.

I still have some work to do. If I don't get the basis of a new theory written down before going to sleep, the idea may be lost forever.

DAN Would that be such a bad thing?

KATE Who are we to judge? There's nothing more you can do down here tonight.

DAN Will you still be here in the morning?

KATE Yes.

Exit Dan.

Kate sits at her desk and puts on her reading glasses. She reads for a moment, and types some notes into a laptop, then takes off her glasses and selects a music track - the wolf-spirit opus - before lying down on the sofa and closing her eyes.

Lights down.

Curtain.