

Rue

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*This play is a love letter to my beautiful daughters, Josie and Edie.
My Josephine and Kassie. Together, we will continue to work to
take one step forward.*

Cast of Characters

JOSEPHINE (JO), sixteen-year-old girl of the swamp, struggles with anxiety

MOTHER, Don and Josephine's mother

FATHER, Don and Josephine's father, also plays LOUP-GAROU

DON, eighteen, Josephine's brother

WILLA, old lady fue follet

BATTERY (BAT-tree), old man fue follet

KASSIE BOGGS, Jo's best friend, *not* from the swamp

FLORA BOGGS, Kassie's older sister

LYLE BOGGS, Kassie's father

ANITA JUSTICE, town gossip

MISS VICKIE, town gossip

MIZ CREESHA, old swamp hag

LOUP-GAROU, a monster from Cajun folklore who lives in the swamp, often described as having the body of a man and the head of a wolf

ECHOES/EXTRAS

Cajun Slang

Fue Follet: fluorescent balls of light which loom over the marshlands, similar to a will-o'-the-wisp. Also known as Cajun fairies, these creatures can be either good or bad, depending on the circumstances. They appear as fluorescent balls of light which loom over the marshlands of Louisiana. In some cases, they are your loved ones coming to greet you and bring good fortune. In others, they are demonic forces that play tricks and lead you to your demise in the swamps. Their friendly, but often sinister, nature makes these Cajun fairies some of the most dangerous Louisiana monsters.

Gone on: go on

Hoss fly: horse fly

Skeeters: mosquitos

Author's Note

Anxiety is a hungry beast, disguising itself in many different ways. It hides in the fog swirling around in our brains and lunges out of the darkness when we least expect it. It distracts us from what we know to be true and leads us to places we don't like to go. It lies to us, deceives us, and immobilizes us.

Special Thanks

My family is my heart and soul. They are my biggest motivators and constant encouragers. Thank you, Chris, for loving me through the roller coaster of emotions that comes with the artistic journey. You are my rock, my safe place. Edie and Josie, of all my jobs, being your mom is the best. You are my biggest reason why. Thank you, Theresa Hornung, my Miz Creesha, for being a source of wisdom and courage and for being my ultimate support system, the voice of reason and clarity when I feel stuck and unsure. Thank you, Jillbo, for helping me sort through all the feelings of parenting through anxiety. Thank you, Cassidy, my Kassie, for being my standard for inner strength. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for not ever giving up on all my basket-weaving adventures. I love you all.

Finally, thank you to my incredible China Spring Theatre One-Act Play Company, who brought *Rue* to life. You poured your guts into authentically sharing these characters and this story, all while fighting your own monsters. I couldn't have asked for a better beginning for this swamp tale. "You knows what ya knows an' yer wiser fer it."

Production History

Rue was first performed by China Spring High School Theatre on March 1, 2022. The show advanced to the UIL State One-Act Play Contest on May 5, 2022. It was directed by Mandy Conner. The cast and crew were as follows:

JOSEPHINE	Allison Martin
MOTHER	Caty Pedelty
FATHER/LOUP-GAROU.....	Blake Beaman
DON	Aaron Douglas
WILLA	Lexis Bailey
BATTERY	Zeke Borland
KASSIE BOGGS.....	Eddie Conner
FLORA BOGGS	Sofia Pirrello
LYLE BOGGS.....	Hunter Dillon
ANITA JUSTICE	Michelle Saucedo
MISS VICKIE	Lauren Giedt
MIZ CREESHA	Sydnee Holt
MAN.....	Ryan Martin
ENSEMBLE	Tasiana Lopez, Landen Presnull
Stage Manager	Myles Rodriguez
Production Assistants	Olivia Cadieux, Hayden Stephens
Technical Crew	Nate Collins, Harlee Hampton, Emma Hawkins, Zakia Sidney

RUE

by Mandy Conner

Scene 1

(Sounds of the swamp underscore the scene. Swamp lights twinkle. JOSEPHINE, sixteen, a true child of the swamp, sits center.)

JOSEPHINE. When I was a little, tiny girl child, my momma would always whisper in my ear . . .

(Bits of memories of her parents appear, physically or vocally.)

MOTHER. "We know what we *are*, but not what we may *be*."

JO. It was almost like a lullaby to me . . . her voice . . .

MOTHER. "We know what we are . . ."

JO. Those words . . .

MOTHER. . . . but not what we may be . . .

JO. an' . . . an' the music of the marsh . . . an' my daddy's low grumble . . .

(At the memory of her parents, her anxiety begins to subtly seep in.)

FATHER. We love you more than th' stars in th' sky . . .

MOTHER. . . . n' more than th' sand on th' shore . . .

FATHER. . . . n' more than all th' skeeters in th' swamp . . .

JO. He called me his lil swamp tail.

FATHER. . . . I love you, my lil swamp tail.

ECHOES. . . . swamp tail . . . swamp . . . tail . . .

(Her parents disappear. DON, Jo's brother, enters.)

DON. Ya know that's just a nice way of sayin' sumthin' *else*, dontcha?

JO. *(Relaxing a bit in his presence:)* Oh hush, you.

DON. What are you doin' way down in here?

JO. Just thinkin'.

DON. Is she tellin' you them stories again, Willa?

(WILLA, a duplicitous old female fue follet, is revealed.)

JO. I said hush. Nobody asked you. Willa, don't lissen t' him.

WILLA. ooohhsss dem stories is good for de soul, Don-tee.

JO. Yeah, Don-tee.

DON. Uh uh! No. You don't get t' call me that, you little Swamp Aaaa—

WILLA. —Ah ah ahhhhh! Watch yer tongue-oooh-lay. You's best bees de gentlemens, Don-tee.

DON. Yes, Mrs. Willa.

WILLA. Make-uh yer momma n' daddy prouds a' yas. Deys were some fine, fine human folk, ya knows? Deys wanted da worlds fer ya . . . fer both a'ya. Didn't dey, Battry?

(**BATTERY**, *Willa's husband*, *appears*.)

BATTERY. Yessoooo deys did. Josephine, yer de spittin' image a' yer mommas.

WILLA. Yer mommas, she was an actress. Didjoo knows abouts dat?

JO. She was a teacher.

DON. Yeah, but before that, she was an actress.

JO. She really was? Like . . . like, on the stage?

DON. Yeah. You sound just like her.

JO. No, I don't. I'm . . . I'm just a dumb swamp girl. That's what the town kids always say.

BATTERY. Nows a' Josephine, don'tchu go talkin' 'bout yerself like dat, ya hears?

DON. Well, she hasn't been t' school in a year or so, so . . .

WILLA. Boy, ya stops all thats bein' uglies.

JO. He can't help it. He's always ugly! Ha ha ha!

BATTERY. Shhhh, nows . . . shhh both a' ya . . . stop. Jo, don'tchu lissen at 'im. Town folks, dey think de folks in de swamp be foolish . . . an' . . . an' . . . an' dat nobody need um, not you, Jo. You's a' learnin everythin' ya needs t' rightchere, all your life—learnin here . . . safe—froms all dem and dat . . . rightchere in de swamp.

DON. Don't you go fillin' her head with that mess, Battry! There *is* a life beyond the edge of this swamp. And she needs t'—

JO. (*Panic begins to rise:*) —'n look what happened t' Momma n' Daddy when they wanted outta this swamp! They left one minute and . . . and . . . and the next minute, they were—

DON. (*Calming her:*) —Shhhhh. That's not gonna happen to us. Look at me, Jo. Take a breath. You're alright. An' nobody's gonna make you do anything you don't wanna, but you know I've left this swamp to go t' town a buncha times since Momma n' Daddy . . .

since they been gone, and . . . and I'm fine, right? Look at me. Right? Don't listen to those town folks. You *are* smart enough and you know I'm just playin' with ya. You're just like Momma. And, Kass is still teachin' ya those lessons, right?

JO. (*Changing the subject:*) Whatcha askin' bout Kass for, Donnieeeee?

DON. Ya see, Willa?! D'ya see what I put up with?

WILLA. Oooohhhh . . . wells, why dontcha answer de girl's question? You's is sweet on de Miss Kassie, Don-tee?

BATTERY. Awww, I think dat's reealls nice, Don. Dat girl's a good 'un, she is. Even if she *is* one a dem town folks. She ain't like dem doh. She gots th' smarts an' . . . an' she be nice an' . . . an' . . . polite . . . Dat girl's a good friend t' yer sister.

DON. Awwww, nah . . . uh-uhhh . . . nope . . . I'm not gonna stand here and get ganged up on by the likes of you three. I gotta get inta town and pick up some stuff from Lyle.

JO. (*Anxious:*) Please be careful, Don.

DON. Hey, I'll be fine. I always am! Unless I run into loup-garou!

JO. Don!

DON. I'm only kiddin'!

(He exits.)

(The anxiety begins to swell in JO's chest as she watches DON leave the swamp.)

WILLA. Miss Josephine.

(No response.)

Josephine. Takes in da air. He gone be juss fine, he is.

(JO's breathing intensifies into a full-blown panic attack: gasping for breath, clawing at her arms/legs/head, sobbing/yelling.)

JO. No! No, he won't! DON! Stop, please! I can't! I can't do this!

BATTERY. Shhhh.

WILLA. Josephine. Jo. Takes ya a breathers. You gone be juss fine . . . juss look heres right at me. You *can* do dis. We's rightchere witcha. Mes an' Battery. Shhhhhhhh. Juss rest . . . shhhhhh . . .

JO. (*Struggling to gain control:*) Stop, please. I can't.

BATTERY. Rest yer thinkers an' yer thoughts . . . do it juss like yer momma n' daddy taught yas t'do's.

JO. I . . . I can't.

(MOTHER and FATHER appear [or their voices can be pre-recorded].)

MOTHER. Yes, you can.

JO. Momma?!

MOTHER. . . . find your thoughts . . .

FATHER. think about th' stars in th' sky . . .

JO. th' stars in th' sky . . .

MOTHER. and th' sand on th' shore . . .

JO. th' sand on th' shore . . .

FATHER. and th' skeeters in th' swamp . . .

JO. th' skeeters in th' swamp . . .

WILLA. You's safe.

JO. (*Sighing, gaining back control, exhausted from the attack:*) . . . safe.

(*As the scene transitions, people move about the stage with flashlights/lanterns as if searching for someone lost.*)

Scene 2

(A different part of the swamp. Jo's best friend KASSIE, or Kass, enters.)

KASSIE. Jo? Hey! Where are you? Ugh. I hate this place. It's always so . . . so . . . so sticky and smelly. I still don't git why you wanna stay here! Hey!

(A low growl begins to echo through the swamp.)

Jo? If you're tryin' t' scare me, then you better stop it, Josephine! Get out here right now! Jooooooooo?!

JO. *(Jumping out with a roar:)* ARRRRRRHHHHH!

KASSIE. *(Screaming:)* UGH! I hate when you do that! I thought you were loup-garou!

JO. That swamp monster would eat you alive! LOOOOUUUPPPP-GAROUUUUUU.

KASSIE. Quit it! You know this place creeps me out!

JO. Ha ha ha! Then, why do you keep comin' in here?

KASSIE. T' keep trying to convince you to get *out*! Ha ha!

JO. You know that's never gonna happen. It's th' only tie I still have to Momma n' Daddy. I juss feel . . . I feel safe. An' I like the smell. *(Looking at the bag KASSIE is holding:)* What's in th' bag?

KASSIE. Dad told me you and Donnie—

JO. —Oooooohhhh . . . Donnie?

KASSIE. Sigh. Dad said *you* and Don needed some oil for th' lanterns.

JO. Tell 'im I said thanks.

KASSIE. Ya know, you could come t' town with Donnie . . . with Don . . . or me and thank my daddy yourself.

JO. Kass . . .

KASSIE. I know, I know.

(She hands JO the bag.)

JO. How's yer daddy doin'?

KASSIE. He says he's fine, but you know Lyle. Gonna keep on keepin' on, no matter what.

JO. I know he's gotta be hurtin', though. Flora too.

KASSIE. He ain't never gonna show it. Not gonna give that woman the satisfaction. She walked out on us. Said she was too good for this nasty little ole town. And Flora. Ugh. My sister thinks she owns th' place . . . tellin' me what t' do and how t' do it. She ain't my momma.

JO. She's about as stuck up as your momma.

KASSIE. No lie. And . . . and . . . I'm sorry 'bout the way she treated you.

JO. It wasn't just her. It was all those girls . . . throwin' their garbage at me . . . sayin' "Here ya go, swamp trash!"

(Girls voices echo in the swamp, saying "swamp trash." KASSIE doesn't hear this. It is part of Jo's anxiety amplifying her insecurities.)

Or "Hey, swamp trash! Yer crazy like yer crazy momma. Prob'ly why yer daddy's gone too!" My momma wasn't crazy. What kind of person says that, Kassie?! What'd I ever do t'them?

KASSIE. I dunno, Jo. People are just dumb sometimes. No home trainin', I guess. You just gotta focus on the ones that love ya! *(Beat.)* Look, I know it's been hard . . . I know it's hard not knowin' 'bout your parents . . . what really happened. But, somebody's gotta know somethin', right? Why don't you go ask that ole swamp witch about yer momma and daddy?

JO. Oh no. Uh-uh. Miz Creesha don't talk to nobody unless they got money. And I ain't got nuthin'.

(Beat.)

KASSIE. Josephine? I . . . I found something else while I was in town.

JO. Oh! Before I forget . . . *(Handing her a bunch of herbs:)* I promised your daddy I'd send him some rue t' keep those doggone dogs outta his garden.

KASSIE. Oh yeah, thanks, he asked about that. Now, look in the bag!

JO. Oh yeah! Ooooh! What . . . what is it?

(She digs through the bag and finds a copy of Hamlet.)

Kass! Is this? Oh . . . it . . . it's the play Momma would read from, isn't it?!

KASSIE. It's *Hamlet*. Look inside the front cover.

JO. Oh, Kass. No. No way. *(Beat.)* It's hers. That's her . . . that's her name . . . in her handwriting. How . . . where . . . where did you find this?

KASSIE. Find the page. The one with the quote. Act four—

JO. *(Flipping through furiously:)* —Act four, Scene five . . . "We know what we *are*, but not what we may *be*." *(Beat.)* Kassie, it's wonderful.

KASSIE. Look down at the bottom, Jo. Look at what she wrote.

JO. (*Reading:*) "I am Op . . . Op-he . . ."

KASSIE. Ophelia.

JO. "I am Ophelia. Ophelia in the swamp . . . tor—tormented . . . an—an—"

KASSIE. —Anxious—

JO. —anxious . . . un-certain." What does . . . I don't . . . I don't know what all that means. Anxious? Like . . . like me? Why would she write that?

KASSIE. I dunno.

JO. Don told me Momma was an actress. Did you know that? I guess before she had me and Don. I dunno when, but . . .

KASSIE. We're readin' it in school, ya know? The play. It's Shakespeare. You'd like it. If you came back—

JO. I'm not comin' back. I just . . . I just can't. Those girls . . . your sister . . . They were so, so ugly t' me . . .

KASSIE. I know. (*Beat.*) . . . maybe . . . maybe your momma felt like that lady, the one in the play. Ophelia. Kinda . . . kinda like you feel sometimes, ya know? Like when you have one of your . . . your . . . spells.

JO. It's . . . it's not a spell. Don't call it that, like . . . like I'm crazy. I'm not crazy, Kass.

KASSIE. I know that and that's not what I'm sayin' . . . it's just that Don said that . . . that they've . . . they've been happenin' a lot . . . an' that—

JO. —Don needs t' shut his big mouth, is what Don needs t' do.

KASSIE. He loves you, Jo.

JO. He's never home . . . gone all the time. Workin' fer yer daddy or . . . or hangin' out with you. It's just me and Willa and Battry.

(KASSIE *laughs.*)

What's so funny?

KASSIE. I just like that you name your firefly friends. It's cute.

JO. They're not fireflies! They're—oh, forget it. You think I'm stupid anyway. You won't git it.

KASSIE. Uh-uh. Don't do that. You're not stupid and you know it. Ya gotta stop talkin' like that, Jo. You are so much more than th' bad things that happened to ya. You refuse to go *one step* outside of this sweaty, dark, depressing swamp. (*Beat.*) You really think your momma and daddy woulda wanted ya to stay here?

JO. . . . stop . . .

KASSIE. . . . you know they didn't want that.

JO. No, I *don't* know that Kass! They're not here! They're dead and gone an' they can't tell me *what* they woulda wanted, now can they?! They didn't just run away from their family like your momma did! They're *dead!*

KASSIE. (*Hurt:*) Oh. Alright . . . ha . . . okay . . . I think . . . I . . . I'm just . . . I'm just gonna go.

JO. Kass . . . I'm sorry . . . I didn't mean t'—

KASSIE. You're stuck, ya know? Here in this . . . this swamp . . . and in . . . in your head . . . and . . . and . . . in th' past. I'm just tryin' t' help ya and you just keep pushing me away. You're not the only one who's gone through tough stuff, Jo.

JO. I know . . . I'm sorry, Kass . . . I just . . . it's just that . . . I don't know how.

KASSIE. I don't either . . . and, honestly, I'm tired of tryin'. Maybe you *should* go see Miz Creesha. Cuz you sure ain't listening t' me.

(*She exits.*)

JO. Oh, c'mon! Don't leave . . . hey, Kass! Come back! Please! Kass, I'm really sorry—

ECHOES. (*Overlapping themselves:*) Pleaseeeee . . . Kassssssss . . . commmmmeeee baaaaaaack . . .

(*JO begins to follow after her but is stopped by WILLA and BATTERY.*)

BATTERY. Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Slows it down dere, hoss fly!

WILLA. Juss leave 'er be, Miss Josephine. Dat gurl needs a mite bit a' time away froms ya. Nows you juss stick close t' ole Willa an' Battery an' let us git ya back home.

JO. Y'all go on ahead. I'll be there in just a little bit. I need t' do something first.

WILLA. Ya bes careful now. Ya hears? Ya stays rightchere in de swamp like yer s'pose t'.

JO. Yessum, I will.

(*As the scene transitions, people move about the stage searching for and calling for Jo.*)

Scene 3

(At the edge of the swamp. KASSIE is headed back home after her encounter with Jo.)

DON. Josephine! Hey, Jo! *(Running into KASSIE:)* Whoa . . . whoa! Hey, hold up. What's the matter?

KASSIE. I gotta get home, Donnie.

DON. Now, stop for just a minute. What did . . . did somethin' happen?

KASSIE. Jo and I just—

DON. Is Josephine okay? Where is she?

KASSIE. You're always gonna take her side, aren't ya.

DON. I'm not *taking* sides, Kass! I dunno what's even goin' on! But . . . but, she's my sister. She's all I got.

KASSIE. Oh . . .

DON. That's not what I mean and you know it. C'mon. *(He grabs her hand.)* Talk to me. What happened?

KASSIE. You know . . . she just shuts me out, an' I . . . I keep tryin' . . . I mean . . . I want to help her so badly, but . . . I dunno. I mean, I know losing your mamma and daddy was hard, but I just think that stayin' in this . . . this swamp . . . away from ever-body isn't helping her.

DON. It wasn't just losin' Mom n' Dad, Kass. It's . . . it's . . . ya know, when they went missin' . . . it broke her. And, then, when they . . . when they found Momma like that . . .

KASSIE. It's okay. You don't have to talk about it. I mean, unless you want to.

DON. It's a lot to think about. Josephine has just struggled so much since then. No mamma. And them never findin' Dad's body. I . . . I try and raise her the best I can and—

KASSIE. —and you shouldn't have to.

DON. Who else is gonna? She won't go to school no more. You don't know the half of what she went through at that school when all this happened. People are cruel . . . just ugly in their souls. You're a town girl . . . they don't look at you like they look at us . . . swamp trash.

KASSIE. Hey. That ain't true.

DON. Yeah, well I know that! But it's different for Jo. She's lost. Thinks she's gonna find all the answers to Momma and Daddy . . . and what happened . . . somewhere in this swamp. It's like it's sucking her in and pulling her further and further down in th' darkness. Like it did 't Momma. And if she doesn't get out . . . I can't . . . I can't lose her, Kass.

KASSIE. You won't. She's strong.

DON. Not lately. Her . . . episodes . . . are getting worse. I been tryin' t' keep a close eye on her . . . mostly cuz I'm scared. She don't need to be wanderin' alone all th' time. She's not safe by herself.

KASSIE. Oh . . . uh . . .

FLORA. (*From off:*) Kassie?!

DON. What? What is it?

KASSIE. Just a minute, Flora! Um . . . we mighta had an argument and I mighta told her to go see Miz Creesha?

DON. You sent her to the swamp witch? Kass, why would you do that?!

FLORA. (*Entering:*) Little girl! I have been callin' you for an hour—

KASSIE. I said just a minute! I'm . . . I'm sorry, Donnie! We were fightin' an' . . .

FLORA. Dad said t' come and get you because one of the town folks saw the loup-garou!

DON. Where? Where was he?

FLORA. I dunno. He just said t' come get Kassie and take her home.

DON. First th' swamp witch an' now loup-garou? Great goin', Kass. I gotta find her!

FLORA. What'd you do?

KASSIE. (*To FLORA:*) You mind your business! Donnie, wait! I'm so sorry!

DON. (*Exiting, calling for his sister:*) Josephine! Jooooo!

FLORA. Kassie Boggs! Don't you dare go one step further into this garbage place! I will not have my sister hanging out with the crazy swamp trash!

KASSIE. You shut your fat mouth, Flora! You're part of the reason *for* this mess! You and your ugly friends always lookin' down on other people . . . thinkin' you're better than ever-body. Just like Momma! Maybe you should just leave too, like she did!

FLORA. Wow. I guess hangin' out with the swamp trash has made you a piece of garbage too. Go find your stupid lil boyfriend and his crazy sister. I hope you get lost in this dump. I'm not coming back for you. Maybe *you* were the reason Mom left, Kassie. You, Kassie Boggs. Ever think of that?

KASSIE. I hate you. I really, really do. Donnie?! Donnie, wait! I'm comin'!

(As the scene transitions, people move about the stage searching for and calling for Jo.)

Scene 4

(A different part of the swamp. LYLE BOGGS and a group of men from town are searching the swamp.)

LYLE. This way, fellas!

MAN. Somebody said they saw 'im on th' south end of th' swamp. Coulda just been ole Mrs. Justice needin' her glasses fixed, but then again . . . after what happened to those kids' parents . . .

LYLE. Spread out then. Y'all take the south end; we'll spread out 'round here.

MAN. Alright, we'll circle around an' meet ya back here in a bit.

LYLE. Holler if ya see somethin'.

(DON enters. Other men exit.)

DON. Josephine! Jooooo! Lyle? Ya seen Jo? Kass said she ran off t'wards the swamp witch and then Flora said somebody caught sight of loup-garou? Is that true?

LYLE. Well, we don't really know, but Mrs. Justice thinks she saw somethin'—

(KASSIE enters, followed by FLORA.)

KASSIE. Donnie! Don—Oh, Dad! What're you doin' down here?

DON. Somebody thinks they saw . . . somethin'.

FLORA. Daddy, I tried to get her t' go home, but, of course, she wouldn't listen. Hardheaded little—

LYLE. Enough! Now y'all git home. I don't wantcha hangin' out here on account a' the loup-garou sightin'.

FLORA. Loup-garou?

DON. That's what they're sayin'.

KASSIE. I don't even know what a loup-garou is. Just that everybody is scared of it.

FLORA. It's a him. They're scared of him.

DON. Some people say th' monster was once a human that was holdin' on t' some kinda terrible secret.

LYLE. An' when somebody comes into contact with the loup-garou an' sheds his blood, he changes to his human form an' comes out with his secret.

FLORA. They also say that loup-garou is somebody the victim knows.

KASSIE. No. I don't believe that! People're just makin' stuff up t' scare people!

FLORA. Nuh-uh! I know people who've actually seen him!

KASSIE. Oh, no you don't. You don't know anybody that's seen 'im. You're lyin', and you know how I know you're lyin'? Your mouth is movin'!

FLORA. Shut up!

KASSIE. What's he look like, then? Miss I-Know-More-Than-Anybody-Else.

LYLE. Girls!

FLORA. I know more than you do! He looks like . . . like . . . like a half-wolf . . . half-man . . . kinda thing. Loup-garou is actually French for werewolf. So, if you actually paid attention in school rather than hangin' out with the swamp crazies, you might know some things!

KASSIE. (*Giving FLORA a good shove to the ground.*) They're not crazy!

LYLE. That's it! Both a' ya need to stop! This ain't th' time or th' place for this! Flora, get up and get her home.

KASSIE. But dad, I wanna help find Jo.

LYLE. I know ya do . . . but I . . . I don't wanna risk losin' any more a' my girls. You hear me?

KASSIE. Yessir. I hear you. (*Hugging him.*) I love you, Daddy. Please find my friend. (*Beat.*) Donnie, I am sorry.

LYLE. Go on now. Scoot.

(The girls exit.)

We gotta let 'em know t' be on the lookout for Josephine too. Lessgo, Don. We're wastin' daylight.

Scene 5

(Deeper in the swamp. The swamp hag Miz Creesha's shack. The swamp witch is singing/chanting. [Tuvan throat singing?] JO enters with trepidation.)

MIZ CREESHA. *(Sensing, not seeing, JO:)* Don't just stand there in th' doorway, lil girl. Git yer swamp tail inside.

JO. Wha . . . wh . . . what'd you say?

MIZ CREESHA. I saaaaaid git in. Whatchu come here for?

JO. Uhh . . . uhhh . . . ummm . . . I . . .

MIZ CREESHA. Swamp monsta gotcha tongue? Speak up, child!

JO. I . . . I just . . . I . . . I heard you might know some things . . .

MIZ CREESHA. *(Chuckling:)* Lil girl, I know *lots* of things.

JO. Yes ma'am. I . . . I just . . . I just mean . . . about . . . about my parents.

MIZ CREESHA. That ain't none a my neva-mind. I don't go messin' in other folks' business. 'Specially not for free.

JO. Oh. Ohh. I don't . . . I mean . . . I don't have any . . . any money.

MIZ CREESHA. Who said anythin' 'bout money, girl child? Whatchu got 'n that lil bag a yers?

JO. Umm . . . not . . . not much, really . . . just . . . just some oil for the lantern.

(She pulls out the book so she can continue searching in the bag.)

And . . . and . . . ummm . . . some rue an' rosemary bug salve . . . a hankie . . .

(MIZ CREESHA snatches the salve and the book from her hand.)

MIZ CREESHA. These'll do.

JO. *(Lunging for the book, beginning to panic:)* No! That's my momma's! Please give it—

MIZ CREESHA. —Ah-ah-ahh! Lemme just look at 'em fer a minute. Sit.

JO. —but I can't—

MIZ CREESHA. I said *sit*. *(Looking at the salve, and then at the book:)* "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance and there's rue for you; and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace a Sundays."

(JO sits uncomfortably, panic rising but masking it as MIZ CREESHA moves about the shack looking through the book.)

JO. (*Breathing heavily and grabbing her thighs:*) Miz Creesh—

MIZ CREESHA. Lil girl, don't open that mouth a' yers again until I tells ya. Got it?

(*JO nods, gripping the seat, growing more and more anxious. MIZ CREESHA, seemingly not noticing Jo's panic, turns to a dog-eared page and reads.*)

"We know what we *are*, but not what we may *be*." Do ya *know* what you are, girl?"

JO. (*Beginning to gasp for breath and claw at her thighs, stiffening in the overwhelming attack:*) I'm . . . I'm . . . I can't . . . I need . . . I gotta . . .

MIZ CREESHA. (*Rambling, beginning to mix a potion:*) Cuz ya gotta know who you *are* before you can even *start* to know what you might *be*. Ya see, knowin' one's self is an unattainable goal. I mean, we's can start to understand the monstas within us and we can learn ourselves how t' keep 'em calm or we's can give *in t'* those monstas and get all sideways and crossways from where we's supposta be.

(*MIZ CREESHA blows a bit of the potion from her palm onto JO. It paralyzes her and levitates her, if possible.*)

Now, lil girl, I wantchu t' lissen an' lissen good. You gots t' find out some thin's on yer own. Ain't no potions or voodoo or no magic gonna help you with whatchu strugglin' with. Whatchu need t' know 'bout yer momma and yer daddy's waitin' out there in this swamp . . . in th' deep, dark places yer scared t' go. Now, I'm gonna snap you outta this and you gonna run on outta here an' think 'bout what you need t' think 'bout. An' when you think you know, yous come on back here for this book.

(*MIZ CREESHA snaps JO out of the spell and JO slumps/falls back on the chair/stool/stump.*)

Gone one. Scat, ya little swamp tail! Ha ha ha.

(*JO, wide-eyed, does as she says and runs off.*)

Scene 6

(Sounds of the swamp grow ominous. The search for Josephine intensifies; the ensemble calls out for her throughout the scene.)

MRS. JUSTICE. Oh, Miss Vickie, I just pray she's okay. Bless her heart.

MISS VICKIE. Poor girl. Lost her momma so tragically . . . and her daddy—

MRS. JUSTICE. —And she don't even know the real story . . .

MISS VICKIE. She's already so skittish. If she knew what really happened, I just can't imagine what she'd do.

LYLE. Any sign of the girl?

MRS. JUSTICE. Oh, Lyle! You gave me a start!

LYLE. Mrs. Justice, I know you're tryin' t' help . . . but how 'bout y'all focus less on yer gossip and more on findin' th' girl.

MISS VICKIE. Any luck, Don?

DON. No, ma'am. Didja see anythin', Lyle?

LYLE. Not yet. Keep lookin'.

DON. Ummmm . . . Lyle?

LYLE. Yeah?

DON. One of the men said he saw somethin' that might be—

LYLE. —What was it?

DON. They . . . they . . . uh . . . found some blood. It was on a broken branch, but—

MRS. JUSTICE. No! Oh no!

MISS VICKIE. Oh my! Oh . . .

LYLE. Now, ladies, calm down. That don't mean nothin'.

MISS VICKIE. It just *might* mean somethin', Mr. Lyle. Ya know what that monster did to—

LYLE. —Stop. We are not going to talk about that right here and right now.

DON. It's alright, Lyle. I know what people say.

LYLE. Mrs. Justice . . . Miss Vickie, y'all go on an' head back home, now. You can pick back up again t'morrow when the sun comes up.

MISS VICKIE. But—

LYLE. No buts. Just go.

(They exit.)

I'm real sorry ya had to hear that, Don.

(Beat.)

DON. Is all that stuff people're sayin' true?

LYLE. I don't know. Ya know, it might be. Shoot. These stupid people're full of all kinds a stories. Tellin' versions they got no business tellin'. Ever-body likes to blame a monster . . . but, some people *are* the monsters . . . they just hide it real good.

DON. But loup-garou is a monster. A real one. An' . . . an' if . . . if it's true what they say . . . that loup-garou killed Momma an' Daddy . . . then maybe he . . . maybe he knew them . . . an' . . . an' maybe he's out for us too. *(Beginning to panic:)* And Jo's somewhere out there . . . with him roamin' around. We gotta find her, Lyle.

(Beat.)

LYLE. Have the . . . the things gotten worse?

DON. The spells? You don't even know th' half of it. She's out there, by herself n' there's no tellin' what—

LYLE. —hey. We're gonna find her.

DON. I just wanna find her before he . . . before . . .

JO. *(From off:)* Don! Don, I—

LYLE. You go get Jo! I'll swing around the south side and check with the others. Holler if you need me.

(The search continues with calls for Jo.)

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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