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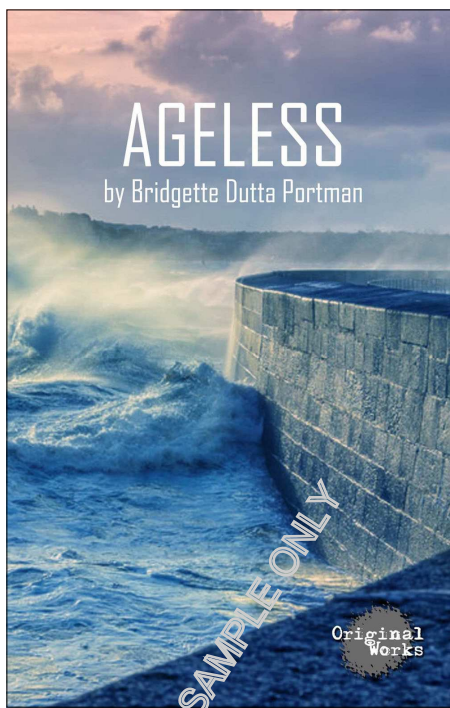
AGLAONIKE’S TIGER

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AGELESS by Bridgette Dutta Portman

Synopsis: Ninety is the new thirty at the turn of the 22nd century. When Marin refuses to take the anti-aging drug celebrated by the rest of society, she invokes her mother's ire and risks becoming marginalized in a culture that worships youth, denies death, and treats old age as a malady. As Marin's choice begins to affect not only her but the people she loves, will she find the strength to hold out, or succumb to social pressure?

Cast Size: 4 Females, 2 Males, 4 Various

AGLAONIKE'S TIGER

By Claudia Barnett

SAMPLE ONLY

Orpheus: I told you not to mention her name again. She almost ruined you, didn't she? A woman who drinks, who walks the streets with a tiger on a leash, who puts ideas in our wives' heads and scares young girls out of marriage.

Eurydice: But that's her religion. It's moon worship!

—Jean Cocteau

SAMPLE ONLY

Aglaonike's Tiger had its world premiere production at Venus Theatre (Deborah Randall, artistic director) in Laurel, Maryland, on September 7, 2017. Deborah Randall directed. Kristin Thompson designed the lights, Neil McFadden designed the sound, Amy Belschner Rhodes designed the set, Deborah Randall designed the costumes and props. Puppet bones were created by Matthew Pauli and masks by Tara Carioso. Choreography was by Alison Talvacchio. Laura Schraven designed and Olivia Lightener illustrated the graphics. Lynn Bruce served as stage manager, and Heather Helinsky as dramaturg. The company was as follows:

AGLAONIKE—Ann Fraistat
TIGER—Matthew Marcus
ERICHTHO—Deborah Randall
CHORUS 1—Katie Hileman
CHORUS 2—Katie Jeffries Zelonka
CHORUS 3—Amy Belschner Rhodes

Historical Note

Very little is known about Aglaonike, also known as Aganice of Thessaly. She is mentioned briefly in the writings of Plutarch and Apollonius of Rhodes. Historians place her at various dates, from the first to fifth century BCE; some say she was a mythological figure. If she lived, it must have been earlier than the second century BCE, when the availability of the Antikythera mechanism—a device used to predict eclipses—became widespread. Since no one knows how Aglaonike predicted eclipses, I've attributed theories of some later scientists (such as Hipparchos) to her.

Acknowledgments

I'm grateful to directors Blair Cadden, Shelby Brewster, Deborah Randall, and Carol Herin Jordan for embracing this play's challenges and to dramaturg Heather Helinsky for her insights. Thanks to March Forth Productions, the Magic City Reading Series and the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame, 5th Wall Productions, the University of Pittsburgh, and Western Kentucky University for staged readings, workshop and student productions, and the opportunity to work with the *many* wonderful actors, designers, dramaturgs, dancers, choreographers, composers, and musicians who have contributed to the development of this script, including Eric Webb, Bree Windham, Jason Olson, and Michael McDevitt. Thanks too for the support of Middle Tennessee State University, specifically the College of Liberal Arts, the English Department, the Faculty Development Committee, the Faculty Research and Creative Activity Committee, and the Women's and Gender Studies Program.

One Last Thing

Aglaonike's Tiger is not a children's play.

for Naomi London

SAMPLE ONLY

AGLAONIKE'S TIGER

Prelude

A bright moon hangs suspended above a dark stage, illuminating it. TIGER enters, prowling, and crosses the stage. When he is about to exit, HE looks back at the moon. It turns red, as if filling with blood. HE exits. The moon turns black. Darkness.

End of Prelude

Scene 1

At rise. Darkness. Suddenly the moon shines. Directly below it, at the point where three roads meet, CHORUS 1, 2, and 3 stand frozen, their backs to each other, forming a human pillar (Hekate Triformis). They wear masks of the goddesses Hekate, Artemis, and Selene. Each looks straight ahead. Off-stage, TIGER roars.

CHORUS 1 takes several steps forward.

CHORUS 1

One road leads to the forest.

CHORUS 2 takes several steps forward.

CHORUS 2

Another to the sea.

CHORUS 3 takes several steps forward.

CHORUS 3

The third to Thessaly.

CHORUS 1

Could one walk, or must one fly like an ibis
to visit the gods on Mount Olympus?

CHORUS 2

(Unfurling a map of ancient Greece.)
The map depicts the land and seas
of Jason, Achilles, and Hercules,

CHORUS 3

but charts neither underworld nor heavens,
realms of magic and superstitions,

CHORUS 1

from whence the goddess of the moon
surveys the world with her triple frown.

CHORUS 2

Like that three-headed hellhound, ferocious Cerberus,
the triformis goddess has multiple faces.

CHORUS 3

She guards the crossroads where three paths converge,
a mythical place where spells are conjured.

CHORUS 1

The Witches of Thessaly claim the deity sanctions
their mystical moonlit machinations.

CHORUS 2

Yet the moon goddess hallows one little mortal:
neither siren nor sorceress but a studious girl.

*AGLAONIKE enters holding a wineskin as the
CHORUS transforms into three Astronomers. The
ASTRONOMERS huddle together.*

AGLAONIKE

Greetings, Astronomers.

ASTRONOMER 1

It's a girl.

ASTRONOMER 2

What's she doing here?

ASTRONOMER 3

Has she brought olives?

ASTRONOMER 1

And anchovies?

ASTRONOMER 2

And onions?

AGLAONIKE

Forgive me, Astronomers. I've brought only wine.

SHE hands them a wineskin. THEY are overjoyed.

ASTRONOMER 3

Is that all?

AGLAONIKE

I've come with a question. It's about the moon. You've predicted a lunar eclipse in 29 days, but according to my own calculations, it'll happen tonight.

ASTRONOMER 1

Your ... *calculations*?

ASTRONOMER 2

You mean you do math?

AGLAONIKE

Yes. While the frequency of the lunar eclipse is typically six lunations of 29.5 days, this time it will be five. My hypothesis takes into account the elliptical shape of the lunar path. The moon's orbit is an imperfect circle.

ASTRONOMER 3

Imperfect? Impossible!

AGLAONIKE

My father brought home a Mesopotamian moon chart from his pillaging, and in studying it, I've noted that the five-cycle pattern emerges with some regularity.

ASTRONOMER 1

Have you seen *our* chart?

AGLAONIKE

Yes. That's why I've come to ask you—

ASTRONOMER 2

Who sent you to harass us?

ASTRONOMER 3

Do you have any idea what you're saying?

ASTRONOMER 1

Or what an eclipse portends?

ASTRONOMER 2

Drought!

ASTRONOMER 3

Starvation!

ASTRONOMER 1

Disease!

AGLAONIKE

I was hoping you'd explain the science.

ASTRONOMER 2

The science!

ASTRONOMER 3

To a girl?

AGLAONIKE

I was hoping you'd teach me.

ASTRONOMER 1

Next time, bring pomegranates.

ASTRONOMER 2

Next time, stay home!

ASTRONOMER 3

We don't teach girls.

AGLAONIKE exits. The ASTRONOMERS stare at the sky. The moon turns red. The ASTRONOMERS exit. Darkness.

CHORUS 1, 2, and 3

(off-stage)

It's the end of the world!

Drought!

Starvation!

Disease!

The deaths of kings!

Run for your lives!

Lights up on a kiosk with a sign that says "Oracle." The ORACLE sits at the kiosk. ARTEMIS hands the Oracle a kitten and then poses as a statue. AGLAONIKE enters and kneels before her.

AGLAONIKE

They're saying I caused it.

ORACLE

Maybe you caused it.

AGLAONIKE

I couldn't have caused it. I predicted it.

ORACLE

Maybe that's the same thing.

AGLAONIKE

But that doesn't make sense.

The ORACLE hands Aglaonike the kitten.

ORACLE

Here. This'll keep your mind off your troubles.

AGLAONIKE

Uh, thanks, but I'm not really a cat person.

ORACLE

It's from Artemis.

HE gestures to the statue.

AGLAONIKE

Artemis the virgin moon goddess? She's my favorite.

ORACLE

Then surely you recognize her.

AGLAONIKE

All those statues look alike.

ORACLE

She's been watching you.

AGLAONIKE

Sure she has. And she's giving me a kitten.

ORACLE

If you don't believe in miracles, why consult an oracle?

AGLAONIKE

No one else would listen.

As AGLAONIKE exits with the kitten, ARTEMIS gestures toward her as if casting a spell. Tiger music plays.

End of Scene 1

Scene 2

At rise. YIAYIA at home, sweeping. She's ancient. AGLAONIKE enters with her kitten.

AGLAONIKE

Look, Yiayia.

YIAYIA

You've brought home a cat?

AGLAONIKE

Daddy said I could.

YIAYIA

No he did not. Your father's been off to war all year.

AGLAONIKE

It's just a kitten.

YIAYIA

It'll grow.

AGLAONIKE

I'd like that. Please, Yiayia. I'd like to have a great big cat.

YIAYIA

You would? Why? Are you afraid?

AGLAONIKE

I'm the child of brave Hegetor. I can't be afraid. Bravery is hereditary, isn't it, Yiayia?

YIAYIA

It may be. But being brave doesn't mean you have no fear.

AGLAONIKE

It doesn't?

YIAYIA

No. It means you master your fear. The more afraid you are, the braver you need to be. If you haven't any fear, you have a limited imagination.

AGLAONIKE

Imagination? What about facts? Logic? Data? You've always taught me to trust the evidence.

YIAYIA

The world is a dangerous place. You'll prove it yourself. Just remember: Cat or no cat, when you feel scared, and even when you don't, keep trying.

AGLAONIKE

Keep trying what? You always say that.

YIAYIA

I'm afraid for you, Aglaonike.

AGLAONIKE

Then let me keep Tiger. He'll keep me safe. I'm certain.

YIAYIA

Most girls seek husbands to protect them.

AGLAONIKE

I'd rather have a cat.

YIAYIA

He's just a kitten.

AGLAONIKE

But he'll grow, Yiayia.

End of Scene 2

Scene 3

Darkness. Time passes as the moon twirls through phases. Then, at rise: a treetop. AGLAONIKE and TIGER lie on their backs and stare up at the night sky.

AGLAONIKE

Listen, kitten. Did Artemis pluck you from the heavens? You seem happiest high up. Perhaps we'll go, some day.

Time passes as the moon twirls through phases.

Listen, kitten. See those stars? They're named for the Pleiades. Orion stalked seven sisters, and they escaped to the sky. I see only six. Did he catch one?

Those sisters were seduced by the gods. *Seduced* means tricked. That won't happen to me. I'm an only child, so I've learned to take care of myself. Seven's a lot of sisters. When you think someone's got your back, you get sloppy.

Time passes as the moon twirls through phases.

Over there's Orion with his sword, his club, and his lion skin. He hunted women *and* cats. He'll be hunting us forever.

YIAYIA

(Off-stage.)

Aglaonike! Time for bed!

AGLAONIKE

(To Tiger.)

Come on, kitten. Let's go for a walk.

TIGER looks in the direction of Yiayia's voice.

Don't worry. You'll protect me.

AGLAONIKE climbs down from the tree. TIGER leaps down and stands and roars. SHE considers him.

You're not a kitten anymore.

SHE ties a long red ribbon to Tiger and holds it like a leash. THEY exit.

YIAYIA

(Off-stage.)

Aglaonike? Are you asleep?

The sound of hissing snakes as the stage transforms into a creepy forest. AGLAONIKE and TIGER enter.

AGLAONIKE

Tigers are not afraid of snakes. Tigers are not afraid of snakes. Tigers are not afraid of snakes. Tigers are not af—

The hissing stops. ERICHTHO appears in a cloud of smoke, a wreath of vipers around her neck. SHE stands imperiously in their path. TIGER growls and steps in front of Aglaonike.

Are you a snake?

ERICHTHO

I am the sorceress Erichtho.

AGLAONIKE

The sorceress Erichtho. Vipers are venomous, yet you wear them 'round your neck?

ERICHTHO

Tigers are carnivorous, yet you keep one at your beck.

AGLAONIKE

How did you make the smoke?

ERICHTHO

You ask too many questions. You must be Aglaonike. I've been waiting for you. And your little cat, too.

ERICHTHO takes a step towards Tiger. HE takes a step back.

AGLAONIKE

He doesn't like strangers.

ERICHTHO

He's a tiger, not a puppy. He's so accustomed to your coddling, he thinks he's a pet.

(To Tiger.)

You have no idea who you are, tigrine beast.

AGLAONIKE

We're not impressed with your riddles and snakes. You're trying to scare us, but we're not trembling.

ERICHTHO

You have gumption, I'll grant you. Do you get it from Yiayia's grape leaves?

AGLAONIKE

How do you know my grandmother?

ERICHTHO

It's a pity her powers are merely culinary. She had potential. As do you, Aglaonike, which is why I've lingered in this copse. I come with a proposition.

AGLAONIKE

No thank you.

ERICHTHO

Shouldn't you hear it before you refuse? You're far too impetuous. You'll learn to curb your emotions as you encounter adversity. To that end, I propose to take you on as an apprentice. If you can tame a tiger, you can cast a spell.

AGLAONIKE

Apprentice in sorcery? I don't think so. I want to learn science.

ERICHTHO

I've made you a better offer. Consider with care. A period of indenture could lead to infinite erudition. Is that not your prime objective?

AGLAONIKE

You're trying to trick me into telling how I caused that eclipse.

ERICHTHO

You haven't been listening. I offered to teach you. And I know you didn't cause that eclipse: That's not in your power. Though some say the eclipse occurs when an animal eats the moon.

AGLAONIKE

You mean Tiger? You think Tiger can cause an eclipse? You think he's supernatural.

ERICHTHO

How do you explain a tiger in Greece?

AGLAONIKE

Alexander the Great had one.

ERICHTHO

You compare yourself to a king?

AGLAONIKE

My tiger could be his tiger's grandson.

ERICHTHO

His tiger was male. And solitary. He spawned no descendants. Alexander brought him home from Asia, a tribute from his vanquished foes. That tiger gazed at the sky with longing: lonesome, impotent, fattened with bloody meat.

AGLAONIKE

You sound as if you remember, yet you can't be *that* old.

ERICHTHO

Your youth is a simple fact; my age is an achievement.
My life has spanned centuries. Don't twist it to insult me.

*ERICHTHO grabs a viper and tosses it at Aglaonike.
TIGER races to intercept. The viper vanishes mid-air.*

AGLAONIKE

What happened? Where'd it go?

ERICHTHO

Magic.

AGLAONIKE

I don't believe in magic.

ERICHTHO

You saw it with your own eyes. Isn't that what you call
"empirical evidence"?

AGLAONIKE

I call it a trick.

ERICHTHO

What of the gods? Do you doubt them, too?

AGLAONIKE

The gods watch over me.

ERICHTHO

You believe what's in your best interest.

AGLAONIKE

I know you're no god.

ERICHTHO

When you come to your senses, remember my name.

With a dramatic flourish, ERICHTHO disappears in a cloud of smoke.

AGLAONIKE

Erichtho: vaporized. Impressive. I'd like to learn to do that.

AGLAONIKE sniffs the air.

Smells like rancid quail eggs.

AGLAONIKE waves her arm through the air.

Feels like frosty winter.

TIGER sniffs the ground and tries to track ERICHTHO's scent. HE crawls in circles and stops. AGLAONIKE kneels beside him and examines the ground where Erichtho stood. SHE rubs her hands against the ground and tastes her fingertip.

Tastes like honey mead. A recipe for smoke? I'll unravel the formula, uncover the catalyst, pinpoint the proportions. Maybe I can do *that*.

SHE stands and poses as Erichtho.

How'd I look with vipers 'round my neck?

TIGER growls.

You're right. Who needs snakes when you've got your own tiger?

SHE kisses Tiger, picks up his leash, and leads him away. The hissing resumes.

End of Scene 3

Scene 4

Darkness. Time passes as the moon twirls through phases. Then, at rise: A tent with a door in front and a hole on top. A rope-and-pulley system is hooked up at one side. In front of the tent, a sign: "Lunar Eclipse. 5 Drachmas." WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 sell tickets. They are puppets. WITCH 2 wears an eye patch. AGLAONIKE and TIGER approach.

WITCH 1

One night only!

WITCH 2

Standing-room only!

AGLAONIKE

A lunar eclipse? Tonight? That's impossible.

WITCH 1

Not impossible at all.

WITCH 2

Our sorcery is strong

WITCH 1

We're the Witches of Thessaly. Haven't you heard of us?

AGLAONIKE

Witches? Then you must know Erichtho. I've been wanting to ask her—

WITCH 2

We draw the moon down to the ground.

WITCH 1

Where it emits its lunar froth.

WITCH 2

That noxious ooze that coats the ground at daybreak.

AGLAONIKE

That's ridiculous.

WITCH 1

Not ridiculous at all.

WITCH 2

Terrifying, maybe.

WITCH 1

Unless you're a believer.

AGLAONIKE

A believer in what?

WITCH 1

That'll be five drachmas.

AGLAONIKE hands Witch 1 some money and begins to enter the tent, pulling TIGER by his leash.

WITCH 2

No pets allowed.

TIGER sits beside the door. AGLAONIKE nods at him and enters the tent. WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 follow her. Witchy music plays.

Lights up inside the tent: a puppet theater. WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 are on stage. Their audience is a mass of bobblehead silhouettes.

WITCH 1

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to tonight's enchantment of the moon. And now, at mortal risk to ourselves and our standing with the gods—

WITCH 2

Last time, I lost an eye!

SHE holds up her eye.

WITCH 1

(As if reciting a dramatic monologue.)

—my sisters in sorcery will charm the moon into darkness and lower it to the Earth.

The sound of cymbals clashing (off-stage). As WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 speak, outside the tent WITCH 3 (human) enters with a spray bottle and a set of cymbals, which she places on the ground. SHE starts fiddling with the rope-and-pulley system, causing a cover to spread slowly, squeakily, across the hole in the roof.

WITCH 1 *(continued)*

The moon crosses the sky in various guises: disk, crescent, hemicycle. With unearthly magic, she mitigates darkness so we may navigate night. Like a celestial magnet, she draws the tide towards our beaches as she crosses the sky. In the absence of sunlight, the moon reigns supreme.

WITCH 2

Three goddesses converge in the moon. Selene in the sky. Artemis on Earth. And when the world is wrapped in blackness, like a Cimmerian cave, Hekate overshadows all. Darkness is her domain.

When the hole is completely covered, witchy music stops playing. Sounds of ooh and aah from the audience.

WITCH 1

The moon has descended to Earth. Ladies and gentlemen, we now enter the blackest moments of our journey—our blind tour of the underworld as we motionlessly descend. Eyes open or closed, you see blackness. Listen to the ripples of the River Lethe. Feel the dewy souls of the dead. Fathom. In. Silence.

Outside the tent, WITCH 3 picks up the cymbals and clashes them together. The bobbleheads bob. Silence. WITCH 3 retrieves her spray bottle and sprays the ground. TIGER watches her. SHE considers spraying Tiger. HE stands as if to growl. SHE places a finger over her lips. Witchy music plays.

Ladies and gentlemen, beseech the dark goddess. The moon will rise again. What will you sacrifice for coruscation? Will you promise your love? Will you pledge your soul? Will you contribute cold, hard cash?

As WITCH 1 speaks, WITCH 2 floats about with a collection plate, and coins are tossed in it. Outside the tent, WITCH 3 fiddles with the ropes and pulleys, and re-opens the hole. More oohs and aahs from the audience. WITCH 3 exits with her cymbals and spray bottle. Witchy music stops.

WITCH 2

Thank you for coming, and have a nice day.

THREE spectators emerge from the tent.

SPECTATOR 1

That was terrifying.

SPECTATOR 2

Exhilarating.

SPECTATOR 3

Worth every drachma.

SPECTATOR 1

I've never felt so clean.

AGLAONIKE emerges from the tent.

AGLAONIKE

(To Tiger.)

There wasn't any science. There wasn't even witchcraft. They just covered the hole in the roof so we couldn't see the sky.

SPECTATOR 1

(Pointing to a spot on the ground.)

Noxious ooze! The moon left venom in its wake!
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

SPECTATOR 1 runs off screaming. AGLAONIKE kneels and touches the spot on the ground.

AGLAONIKE

Venom? Sticky.

SHE holds up a finger to the Spectators and tastes it.

Carob molasses? I could do better than that.

SPECTATOR 2

The girl has no modesty.

SPECTATOR 3

No reverence.

SPECTATOR 2

No fear.

SPECTATOR 3

Don't you remember? We knew her in school.

SPECTATOR 2

Girls don't go to school.

SPECTATOR 3

She snuck in. Dressed as a boy.

AGLAONIKE

And I scored higher on exams than you. Tiger?

TIGER approaches Aglaonike and nuzzles her.

You were out here when the moon “descended.” How’d you avoid the venom? Shouldn’t you be coated with ooze?

(To the Spectators, as she pets Tiger.)

Not sticky. No lunar suppuration on Tiger.

SPECTATOR 2

You ought to be ashamed.

TIGER growls at the SPECTATORS, who run off in fear.

AGLAONIKE

(To Tiger.)

I’m glad the moon didn’t get you.

WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 emerge from the tent. Witch 2’s eye patch dangles around her neck, and there’s a hole where one of her eyes should be.

WITCH 1

(To Witch 2.)

Sister, your oculus.

WITCH 2

(Popping her eye back in place.)

Oops. I forgot. Again!

(To Aglaonike.)

Show’s over.

AGLAONIKE

You didn’t draw the moon down. You didn’t even try.

WITCH 1

Why would we try?

WITCH 2

Are you questioning our witchcraft?

AGLAONIKE

I'm questioning your science.

WITCH 1

Science? We're witches.

AGLAONIKE

I could do better than that.

WITCH 2

Is that a challenge, little girl?

AGLAONIKE

It's a fact.

WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 cackle.

End of Scene 4

Scene 5

At rise. Noon. TIGER lies in the treetop and stares up at the sky. AGLAONIKE stands below and holds up her hands as if to frame the sky. SHE tries her hands in different positions, creating shadows on the ground.

AGLAONIKE

It's all about shadows. They change. Time of year, time of day: You won't see stars at noon.

TIGER stares at the sky.

Listen, kitten. I need you. I know you're nocturnal, but it's important.

TIGER takes one last look at the sky and hops down.

You know the drill.

TIGER checks the ground and positions himself.

Stand straight.

TIGER stands straight. AGLAONIKE uses a red ribbon to measure Tiger's shadow. SHE makes a mark on the ground where it ends.

Relax.

SHE holds up the ribbon and indicates an inch at the end.

Shorter. This much. Every day exactly this much. You're not still growing, are you? That would interfere with my calculations.

SHE folds the ribbon in half and considers it.

We're almost at equinox, when the scales of Libra balance. I predict that in two days, the lengths will be equal. After that, the shadows will get longer. That means ... springtime!

TIGER roars with delight. Tiger music plays. HE stands and holds out his arms to Aglaonike. THEY tango. They're good.

Enter ARTEMIS (played by ERICHTHO instead of Chorus 3). SHE is the source of the Tiger music, which she plays with a lyre. SHE continues to play as SHE observes the dance. When SHE stops playing, TIGER and AGLAONIKE stop dancing. AGLAONIKE gasps and kneels to the goddess. TIGER kneels, too.

Mighty Artemis. I recognize you from your statue. But weren't you taller?

A clap of thunder.

I admit I was skeptical, goddess, but I see you standing before me, and I heard your music play. My kitten's grown into my Tiger. How can I express my thanks?

ARTEMIS spins and transforms into ERICHTHO.

The sorceress Erichtho?

ERICHTHO

The necropolis at midnight. Bring the cat.

ERICHTHO exits.

AGLAONIKE

Impersonating a statue. That's cheap. But did you notice, Tiger? She cast no shadow.

The sound of hissing snakes.

End of Scene 5

Scene 6

At rise. The necropolis. HEKATE, SELENE, and ARTEMIS pose as statues and hold candles (unlit). Silence. A full moon lights the sky. AGLAONIKE and TIGER enter. AGLAONIKE holds a small package. THEY search for signs of Erichtho.

AGLAONIKE

Maybe she meant a different necropolis?

Suddenly, a flash of smoke and a hiss. ERICHTHO appears from behind a statue.

ERICHTHO

I summoned and you came. Does this mean you've reconsidered?

AGLAONIKE

No, but I'd like to know the formula for smoke.

ERICHTHO

If you won't trade your soul for my secrets, what have you brought in its stead?

AGLAONIKE hands Erichtho the package.

AGLAONIKE

Grape leaves.

ERICHTHO accepts the package, opens it, and sniffs.

Yiayia's recipe, but I made them myself.

ERICHTHO

That's something.

ERICHTHO rewraps the bag and stashes it.

All right, then. Watch this.

ERICHTHO gestures toward an unlit candle and snaps her fingers to ignite a flame.

Now you try.

AGLAONIKE skeptically snaps her fingers. The flame goes out. Then TIGER sneezes, and all the candles are lit.

Just as I thought.

AGLAONIKE

The Witches of Thessaly could do that.

ERICHTHO

The women of whom you speak have inherited the title but not the sanctity of their foremothers. They cannot illumine the fires in Hekate's temple. They idolize her darkness but fail to see her light.

AGLAONIKE

Hekate? Artemis' sunless sister?

ERICHTHO

The triformis goddess has multiple faces: Hekate, Artemis, and Selene. The truly enlightened enchantress absorbs facets from all three.

AGLAONIKE

Like I do. I'm magical.

AGLAONIKE snaps her fingers. The flames go out. SHE snaps them again. The flames ignite.

You must have this rigged.

ERICHTHO

You have mystical powers.

AGLAONIKE

Is that why you summoned me? Don't you have your own magic?

ERICHTHO

Of course.

SHE holds up a hoop and creates the flickering illusion of a Tigress within it. It shimmers in the moonlight. TIGER approaches it with interest.

But an arrangement between us could be mutually beneficial.

ERICHTHO lowers the hoop. The illusion disappears. TIGER deflates.

AGLAONIKE

Another illusion.

ERICHTHO

The cat yearns to know his own kind.

AGLAONIKE

I am his own kind.

SHE puts her arms around Tiger.

ERICHTHO

One day, he'll feel the primal call, the feline urge to roam and hunt and mate. He's a creature of the jungle.

AGLAONIKE

He'd never leave me.

ERICHTHO

You seem eager to learn till you find the facts disagreeable.

AGLAONIKE

Facts!

ERICHTHO

You forget my omniscience.

AGLAONIKE

I don't forget. I disbelieve.

ERICHTHO

Blasphemous girl.

ERICHTHO begins to chant, a series of eerie hisses. Then SHE holds up the hoop. TIGER perks up and watches as the Tigress illusion reappears. ERICHTHO poses like a lion tamer, and TIGER leaps into the hoop (& maybe the hoop catches fire?). HE disappears. AGLAONIKE runs after him, but ERICHTHO slams the hoop to the ground as AGLAONIKE screams:

AGLAONIKE

Noooooooooo!

AGLAONIKE attempts to grab the hoop from ERICHTHO, who silently steps inside it.

Bring him back.

ERICHTHO

He departed of his own volition. I told you what he wants, and he agreed.

AGLAONIKE

Bring him back.

ERICHTHO

And if I do?

AGLAONIKE

What do you want? Anything. Please. I'll do whatever you say.

ERICHTHO

Will you? Then swear before Hekate. Swear you'll do whatever I say.

AGLAONIKE

One thing. I'll do one thing you say.

ERICHTHO

You'll become my apprentice.

AGLAONIKE

For how long?

ERICHTHO

Forever.

AGLAONIKE

Not forever. For ... one month.

ERICHTHO

You're in no position to bargain, and you know you're intrigued. But fine. We'll agree on an epoch: one year.

AGLAONIKE

One year for Tiger. Okay. Where is he?

ERICHTHO

He's safe.

AGLAONIKE

Why should I trust you?

ERICHTHO holds up the hoop, displaying a vision of TIGER dozing contentedly in some trees.

ERICHTHO

Optical evidence. Now swear to the goddess. One year for Tiger.

AGLAONIKE

(To the Hekate statue.)

I swear.

ERICHTHO

Go pack your things.

ERICHTHO vanishes. Unseen by Aglaonike, HEKATE nods. All the flames are suddenly extinguished.

End of Scene 6

Scene 7

At rise. YIAYIA scrubs the floor. SHE feels a pain in her chest. SHE dies. AGLAONIKE enters talking.

AGLAONIKE

I need help, Yiayia. I've done something bad. Yiayia?

AGLAONIKE approaches Yiayia and touches her. SHE realizes Yiayia is dead. SHE wraps her arms around her.

Okay, Yiayia.
I'll be brave.

AGLAONIKE exits. SELENE enters and gently leads YIAYIA away.

End of Scene 7

Scene 8

At rise. The necropolis at night. Pillars, graves, a shrub. Yiayia's grave is a shrine signified by a candelabra, unlit. AGLAONIKE kneels before it. SHE holds a lit candle. A moment of silence. SHE rises to light the rest of the candles. A hiss. The candles are suddenly lit. ERICHTHO appears.

AGLAONIKE

It's my grandmother's funeral.

ERICHTHO

I can raise the dead.

AGLAONIKE

Is that why you killed her?

ERICHTHO

Killed her so I could raise her? I'm a sorceress, not a sociopath. Yiayia died of age.

AGLAONIKE

You're older than she was.

ERICHTHO

You're not going to ask me *how* I raise the dead? Isn't your little scientific mind piqued?

AGLAONIKE

What I want is to be free, and I can't get that by becoming more beholden. Bring back Tiger.

ERICHTHO

I give the orders. You're the apprentice. First things first:
We'll bring back the dead.

ERICHTHO raises her arms as if to cast a spell.

AGLAONIKE

Let her rest in peace. Please.

ERICHTHO

We'll raise someone else. Here.

SHE spins around and points to a recent grave.

Break a branch.

SHE points to a bush growing near the grave.

Do it.

AGLAONIKE breaks a branch off the shrub.

Scorch it.

ERICHTHO points to the candelabra. AGLAONIKE holds the branch in the flame of the candelabra and lights it on fire. As SHE holds the burning branch before her, ASTRONOMER 1 appears suspended above the grave. AGLAONIKE continues to hold the branch.

AGLAONIKE

(To Erichtho.)

How—?

ERICHTHO

(To Aglaonike.)

Ask *him* anything.

AGLAONIKE

Sir?

ASTRONOMER 1

What is it?

AGLAONIKE

My Yiayia ... Have you seen her? I'd like to know she's okay.

ASTRONOMER 1

Hey, I remember you. You're that girl who came to ask about the moon.

AGLAONIKE

Oh! You're one of the astronomers! What happened to you?

ASTRONOMER 1

I died.

AGLAONIKE

I'm sorry.

ASTRONOMER 1

Yeah, well. Rotten pomegranate.

AGLAONIKE

You died eating fruit?

ASTRONOMER 1

I slipped on it and broke my neck.

AGLAONIKE

Oh.

ASTRONOMER 1

So what'd you raise me up for? Another interrogation?

AGLAONIKE

My Yiayia ...

ASTRONOMER 1

She stuffs the best grape leaves.

AGLAONIKE

Yes that's her.

ASTRONOMER 1

This place is ten times better since she arrived. I mean ... *that* place. Can I go back now? It's almost suppertime.

AGLAONIKE

Well, while you're here ...

ASTRONOMER 1

Okay, look. I like your Yiayia, and you brought us wine, so I'm willing to overlook that you're a girl for just a minute. Brief lesson in astronomy. That shrine there?

HE points to the candles.

That's the sun. And you, you're the Earth, so you orbit the sun. Got it?

Moon music plays softly. AGLAONIKE walks in a wide circle around the candelabra.

ASTRONOMER 1

And you, lady—

ERICHTHO

I am the sorceress Erichtho.

ASTRONOMER 1

Okay, sorceress lady. You're the moon. That means you orbit the Earth.

ERICHTHO

I know what the moon means.

ERICHTHO circles Aglaonike.

ASTRONOMER 1

Okay, stop.

Moon music stops playing. AGLAONIKE and ERICHTHO stop moving.

Now look around. See how the sun shines on both Earth and moon? So both are illuminated. That's what the sun does. Got it? Okay, start again.

Moon music plays softly. AGLAONIKE and ERICHTHO resume their orbits. At the moment when the candelabra, AGLAONIKE, and ERICHTHO are all in a straight line (in that order), ASTRONOMER 1 speaks:

Stop.

Moon music stops playing. AGLAONIKE and ERICHTHO stop moving.

You see, girl, how the moon's in your shadow? It's like that in the sky. When they're all in a line, the sun shines on the moon, but then Earth gets in its way—and the moon seems to vanish. Briefly. We call that an eclipse. A lunar eclipse. It takes 365 days for the Earth to orbit the sun, and it takes one day for the moon to orbit the Earth. So if you want to know the frequency of the eclipse, just do the math. Got it?

AGLAONIKE

Yes, sir, but ...

ASTRONOMER 1

You don't even have to do the math. You can just read my moon chart.

AGLAONIKE

I know, but ... I know all this. My questions are more advanced. I want to know why sometimes the moon chart's mistaken.

ASTRONOMER 1

Now you're being ridiculous. You can't have called me here to question my legacy.

AGLAONIKE

But it's not always right.

ASTRONOMER 1

The gods don't want us to know everything.

AGLAONIKE

You mean if you can't figure something out, you just blame the gods? But this is science. It needs to make sense. I'm trying to understand.

ASTRONOMER 1

Did you hear that? Definitely the dinner bell. Your Yiayia's making moussaka.

ASTRONOMER 1 vanishes. AGLAONIKE examines the branch, which has stopped burning.

AGLAONIKE

Yiayia made the best moussaka.

ERICHTHO

So you see, science can't answer all your questions.

AGLAONIKE

Maybe science just isn't advanced enough yet.

ERICHTHO

Are you going to advance it?

AGLAONIKE

I'm going to try. What's that shrub?

ERICHTHO

When Medea flew off in her dragon chariot, her herb pouch burst open, and her magical seeds rained down to this necropolis.

AGLAONIKE

So you can burn it to raise the dead, but what happens if you eat it? Or if you make tea of it? Or if you grind it into powder? Does it flower, and if it does, have you tested the petals? Does it work differently at different times of year? I'll take a few branches, conduct a few tests.

AGLAONIKE picks a branch and tastes a leaf.

Trial and error. Cause and effect.

ERICHTHO

That vocabulary won't suit sorcery.

AGLAONIKE

The difference between science and magic is words?

ERICHTHO

Say goodbye to grandma. And then come back to me.

ERICHTHO vanishes. AGLAONIKE kneels before the shrine.

AGLAONIKE

(To the shrine.)

You told me the world is a dangerous place, but it never felt that way with you. Don't worry about me, Yiayia. I can take care of myself. But I'll miss you. And I promise to keep trying, even if I'm not sure what that means.

End of Scene 8

Scene 9

At rise. The necropolis. Darkness. Time passes as the moon twirls through phases. CHORUS 1, 2, and 3 address the audience.

CHORUS 1

While Yiayia embraced her new underworld role,
and Tiger roamed free in his mystical jungle,

CHORUS 2

Aglaonike worked hard to demystify magic,
to reduce it to formulas and pure mathematics.

CHORUS 3

She put on a brave face, all alone without Tiger.
Her obsession with logic amused her new mentor.

CHORUS 1, 2, and 3 become statues of Hekate, Selene, and Artemis. AGLAONIKE enters, twirling Erichtho's hoop. SHE examines it. SHE holds it up to the sky. SHE sprinkles powder on it. SHE blows into it. SHE steps inside it. Nothing. ERICHTHO enters.

ERICHTHO

Try mice.

AGLAONIKE

Mice?

ERICHTHO holds a mouse by its tail and hands it to Aglaonike. AGLAONIKE sets it inside the hoop and watches it disappear.

Oh! Where'd it go!? What did I do? What does it mean?

ERICHTHO

You ask the wrong questions.

AGLAONIKE

How can I make it return?

ERICHTHO

Exactly.

AGLAONIKE

If I can bring back the mouse, can I bring back Tiger?

ERICHTHO

Keep trying.

AGLAONIKE

That's what Yiayia used to say.

AGLAONIKE does some impressive gymnastic feat with the hoop. SHE pops her head into it. Nothing.

Ugh! It's just a ring!

ERICHTHO

Just a ring? You of all humans should appreciate the potency of the circlet, the efficacy of the ambit, the harness of the hoop.

AGLAONIKE

Riddles, riddles, riddles: ugh! I of all humans. Why me? What makes me special? Oh, I know: I'm a scientist! On hiatus, but still. The potency of the circlet, the circle, the ... orbit. ... The moon's path is an imperfect circle ... An *imperfect circle*.

SHE stretches the hoop slightly and holds it up vertically. A mouse jumps out and runs away.

A mouse! I did it! I brought it back. Is imperfection the answer?

ERICHTHO

What else can you do?

AGLAONIKE stretches the hoop. Unseen by Aglaonike, ARTEMIS nods. TIGER emerges from the hoop.

Tiger!

AGLAONIKE and TIGER hug and dance silently, preoccupied with their reunion, as HEKATE, SELENE, and ARTEMIS revert to Chorus 1, 2, and 3.

CHORUS 3

The next months passed quickly; the three lived in accord. Student heeded mentor and hung on her words.

ERICHTHO enters, regally. AGLAONIKE and TIGER sit at her feet as if to absorb to her brilliance. After a brief tableau, the CHORUS continues.

CHORUS 1

Erichtho's night ritual was brushing the tiger.
He enjoyed the sensation while shedding his striped fur.

ERICHTHO holds up a silver hairbrush and brushes Tiger.

CHORUS 2

Meanwhile the girl monitored lunar rotations
and derived astronomical abstract equations.

AGLAONIKE scribbles equations, crosses them out, studies the sky, and scribbles some more.

CHORUS 3

She saw the moon moved fastest near Earth
but slowed in the distant skies of its girth.

CHORUS 1

Then the mentor objected: Too much mathematics,
and dazzled her student with some fresh hocus pocus.

ERICHTHO causes a tiny explosion. AGLAONIKE is intrigued. ERICHTHO hands her a vial. AGLAONIKE sniffs it. AGLAONIKE mixes formulas. TIGER assists.

CHORUS 2

She mixed viscous and frothy blood-red concoctions
and chanted dark spells with a convert's devotion.

AGLAONIKE

(Holding up a beaker.)

Black tar blackberry black pit of despair,
Mix six daktylos swamp water with one tiger hair.

SHE plucks a hair from Tiger and adds it to the beaker. The contents change color. TIGER applauds.

CHORUS 3

Her potions caused minor phenomena to occur,
from unearthly projections to spontaneous weather.

A clap of thunder. Then: AGLAONIKE holds up a mouse by its tail.

AGLAONIKE

(To Tiger.)

I wonder where the mice go, where I send them.

(Pause.)

I know. Let's paint them pink. That way, if we see them again, we'll recognize them.

TIGER grabs the mouse and finds a paintbrush. HE twirls around with them. AGLAONIKE resumes her experiments.

CHORUS 1

The problem was none of it made any sense.
Nothing could be explained by science.

AGLAONIKE

(Throwing her hands up in frustration.)

I don't get it!

CHORUS 2

No matter how exactly she tested ingredients,
she could never determine what made them expedient.

CHORUS 3

Therefore, one year later, at the end of her servitude,
of her magic she maintained her skeptical attitude.

A full moon suddenly appears. (Or: A moon has been present throughout the scene, but it's gone through all its phases, starting and ending up full.) CHORUS 1, 2, and 3 step back and watch the rest of the scene unfold. AGLAONIKE begins to pack a small suitcase.

AGLAONIKE

(To Erichtho.)

I still don't understand how anything works, and I still don't understand why you wanted to teach me.

ERICHTHO

You don't need to understand. You're a sorceress now.

AGLAONIKE

Why would you want the competition?

ERICHTHO

You'll see.

AGLAONIKE

Well, anyway. Thank you.

ERICHTHO

Your father's at war. Your grandmother's gone. Most women your age are married.

AGLAONIKE

Most women your age are dead.

AGLAONIKE zips up her suitcase.

I'll send you a postcard.

ERICHTHO

That's not necessary. I'll know where you are. You'll draw attention: You have a tiger. Unless you'd like to leave him with me?

AGLAONIKE

He doesn't like you.

ERICHTHO

Nor do you. But you'll miss me just the same.

AGLAONIKE ties a red ribbon to Tiger. Tiger music plays. AGLAONIKE and TIGER tango as THEY exit. CHORUS 1, 2, and 3 exit, tangoing. ERICHTHO raises a hand to signal the music, which suddenly stops. SHE pulls out an enormous sack of fur, quite full, and holds it up, triumphant.

End of Scene 9

Scene 10

At rise. Outside the tent of the Witches of Thessaly. The rope-and-pulley system is hooked up like before. In front of the tent, a sign: "Lunar Eclipse. 10 Drachmas." WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 (puppets) sell tickets. WITCH 2 wears an eye patch. AGLAONIKE and TIGER approach. AGLAONIKE carries her suitcase.

WITCH 1

One night only!

WITCH 2

Standing-room only!

AGLAONIKE

A lunar eclipse? Tonight? That's impossible.

WITCH 1

You again.

WITCH 2

(To Witch 1.)

Her again.

WITCH 1

Last time you were here, you scared away our customers.

AGLAONIKE

You scared your customers! Wasn't that what you wanted?

WITCH 2

We wanted them to be scared. Not scared away. Scared *away* doesn't pay the rent.

WITCH 1

But that's okay. We're delighted to see you.

WITCH 2

We were hoping you'd come.

WITCH 1

We've been waiting a while.

WITCH 2

Perhaps you'd care for a cup of tea?

WITCH 1

Never let it be said we're not gracious.

WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 cackle. WITCH 3 (human) enters surreptitiously and starts fiddling with the rope-and-pulley system. AGLAONIKE doesn't notice her. (TIGER might.)

AGLAONIKE

I see you've raised your price.

WITCH 2

Inflation.

WITCH 1

Too rich for your wallet?

AGLAONIKE

I've seen your show.

WITCH 2

Lots of people come to see it again.

WITCH 1

Some every week.

AGLAONIKE

Why would they do that?

WITCH 1

We provide an essential service to the community.

AGLAONIKE

You're a menace to society. Come on, Tiger.

WITCH 1

What's your hurry? Are you going somewhere?

WITCH 2

Or are you on your way home?

AGLAONIKE

Neither.

WITCH 1

Ooh, cryptic. We like that.

WITCH 2

You know, haughty girl, most people are afraid of us.

WITCH 1

Of course, most people are afraid of you, too. Well, they're afraid of your tiger.

TIGER growls. WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 quiver and titter.

WITCH 1

Ooh, scary. We like that.

WITCH 2 glances over at WITCH 3, who nods.

WITCH 2

(To Aglaonike.)

Would you mind taking three steps to the left? Just the girl?

AGLAONIKE

What for?

AGLAONIKE takes Tiger's paw.

WITCH 1

Please step away from the cat.

AGLAONIKE

We're leaving.

WITCH 2

Have it your way.

WITCH 3 jumps back from the pulley system. We hear a loud squeak, and suddenly a cage falls down and encloses Aglaonike and Tiger. TIGER roars.

AGLAONIKE

What are you doing? Let us out of here!

AGLAONIKE grips the bars and shakes them. TIGER paces like an animal in a cage.

WITCH 1

We like our fear contained.

WITCH 2

Better for business.

The WITCHES cackle. WITCH 3 covers the sign with a new sign: "Terrible Tiger. 12 Drachmas."

AGLAONIKE

Let us out!

WITCH 1

We think not.

AGLAONIKE

Let *me* out then. Just me. You didn't mean to trap me anyway.

TIGER growls at Aglaonike.

WITCH 2

We didn't mean to, but we're glad we did.

WITCH 1

After all, what do tigers eat?

WITCH 2

Meat!

As WITCH 1 and WITCH 2 cackle with glee, WITCH 3 uses a marker to cross out the sign and write: "Tiger Eats Girl. 20 Drachmas."

End of Scene 10

Scene 11

At rise. Morning. AGLAONIKE and TIGER inside the cage. The suitcase is still there. TIGER paces.

AGLAONIKE

Thank you for not eating me.

TIGER ignores Aglaonike.

I'm sure they'll give you another shot tonight. Or you could get it over with now.

HE pauses to consider this option.

I wasn't going to just leave you. I was going to get help.

HE resumes pacing.

I love you. I'd never leave you.

HE ignores her.

You think it's my fault we're in here.

It's not my fault. Is it?

Can't you stop pacing? Can't we just sleep? I'm so tired.

SHE lies on the ground. HE approaches her and growls.

You're supposed to protect me.

HE might be dangerous. SHE gets up.

Even if you eat me, they won't free you. They'd just find someone else to feed to you. How will we get out of here? Wouldn't it be great if ... Wait! Have an idea. I'll use magic. I'll make like we're mice! I'm not a sorceress for nothing.

SHE opens the suitcase and begins rummaging through it. As she finds each ingredient, she slowly says its name aloud.

One drop of narcissus nectar. One hyacinth petal. One sunflower stamen. Beak of a swan, powdered. Half a mollusk shell, shattered. One wagtail feather, ground to dust. One saffron thread. Four fingers of fermented barley water. Juice of one white mushroom ... You know what I'm missing? This is so ridiculous. I'm missing a grape.

TIGER paces.

A grape, Tiger. All I need's a grape. I didn't bother to pack any because they're so easy to find.

HE growls at her.

I think I could do it. I could make us disappear. I've never done it before, but it's time to be brave. The pink mice came back when I called them. They were fine. Didn't they seem fine to you? You ate them. Did they taste strange?

HE stops pacing and stares at her.

All I need is one grape. I guess they're not likely to bring us breakfast. They'll want to keep you hungry.

SHE kneels and prays.

Oh mighty Artemis. I know it's been a while since last time I prayed, but I really need your help. And it's not just for myself but for Tiger—the kitten you gave me through the oracle. He's all grown up now, and he's my best friend, and we're trapped in a cage and we need to get out before he ... starves to death. I think I could get us out myself if I only had a grape. If you could send one my way, I'll be grateful forever.

Enter WITCH 3 with a fruit platter.

Thank you, Artemis!

AGLAONIKE rises. WITCH 3 walks right past the cage without stopping.

Wait!

WITCH 3 pauses.

I'm hungry.

WITCH 3

You put on a lousy show last night. You were supposed to get eaten, and instead you droned on about equations.

AGLAONIKE

The audience seemed interested.

WITCH 3

They were interested to see if you'd die a slow and bloody death.

AGLAONIKE

Maybe they'll come back tonight to find out.

WITCH 3

If you get mauled tonight, I'll give you fruit.

WITCH 3 exits.

AGLAONIKE

(To Tiger.)

Now what?

TIGER spots something on the ground right outside the cage. HE roars.

What is it? A grape! It's a grape! It must have fallen off the witch's platter. Can you reach it?

THEY both bend down and reach through the bars, trying to get the grape. Neither is successful.

It's too far. Wait! I know.

SHE reaches into her suitcase and finds a long feather. SHE pokes it through the bars and gently rolls the grape. TIGER growls.

It must be unblemished. Slowly, slowly ... I've got it. I got it! It's perfect!

SHE holds up the grape and kisses Tiger. HE lets her.

Okay. I need to get everything together. All the ingredients in one vial ...

SHE takes a vial from the suitcase, and as she hurriedly names each ingredient, she pours it into the container.

One drop of narcissus nectar. One hyacinth petal. One sunflower stamen. One beetle wing. Beak of a swan, powdered. Half a mollusk shell, shattered. One wagtail feather, ground to dust. One saffron thread. Four fingers of fermented barley water. Juice of one white mushroom. And ...

SHE smashes the grape between her fingers and adds it to the vial.

One grape!

SHE corks the vial.

Now shake.

SHE shakes the vial.

And finally, the incantation.

SHE dangles the vial before Tiger's mouth. HE roars.

Are you ready? Here we go!

SHE holds up the vial to Tiger's lips as HE drinks. Then SHE drinks and caps what remains. THEY wait, staring at each other in silence. After a long, awkward moment, THEY vanish.

End of Scene 11

END OF SAMPLE