

The Moth and Ghengis Khan

by

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Scene I Act I

The Scene:

[We enter a dark room haunted by music that sounds like a cross between Gregorian chant and whale song. The room is sparsely furnished: a large round table dotted with candles along its edge, a black IKEA bookshelf overstuffed with papers and books, some of which spill onto the floor. The shades are drawn here with the trace of afternoon light behind, and triangles drawn in fluorescent chalk at different angles. The mistress of the room is a gaunt woman. Her cheeks appear to be smudged with coal to help her face seem hollow. Her dress and shawl are made from overlapping lapping shades of gray. She smiles. Two other couples mill in the room. Ben and Leslie wander about with their eyes forward, their eyes having failed to adjust to the dark. Shawn and Carl take hold of two chairs and walk towards the table.]

Shawn I thought you said this was a parenting meeting? I can't believe he'd come in a suit. What, do you think he thinks the spirits will be impressed by his tie?

Carl Shh...

Shawn I can't believe you talked me into this. If the table starts floating I'm leaving.

Leslie Is this your first time? It's mine. I kind of like it so far, I mean, well, I like the atmosphere.

Shawn I should be studying, Carl, not doing... this.

Ben Leslie, why are you talking to them? Do you know what kind of people they must be, to come here? [Ben crosses himself]

Leslie Relax. I just... I mean we're all here for the same reason right.

Ben I wonder if they got a student discount.

Mistress Would anyone like some punch? The spirits may thirst in their quest of this world, but there is no reason we should.

Shawn Oh jeez.

Mistress Many do not believe, as our years turn many forget the magic of the world. The spirits within us turn to look only to the touch. We cling to the tangible world, to the comfort. So many learn not to hear. The world is thus frozen, like metal. Yet still as it is, sometimes we feel or remember a ripple. What kind of world is this? Is it a world of wonder or rape? Is it wise to bring a child here? What can you give to the world? What will this spirit you hope to invite into your lives bring you [pause] but who knows what spirit will choose to come. Even today, even here, who knows if any will show. Will we be left impoverished in our ignorance? Such is the great mystery of the spirits. Yet let us hope, that [reads from a piece of paper] Ben and Leslie Holten, and Shawn Jeffers and Carl Goshen will be answered.

Ben Let's leave.

Leslie We've already paid Ben. We might as well...

Shawn [Makes ghostly sounds, then laughs]

Carl Shh... Show some respect, I mean, it's kind of cool.

Mistress Ben Holten, you want to speak to your son or perhaps to your daughter?

Ben Excuse me, I'm Ben.

Mistress You are here to speak to the boy or girl you dream of.

Shawn Well, that's safe Leslie, she's predicting their kid will be either a boy or a girl.

Ben Yeah I guess, I guess that's why we're here. Look we should go. We're not even expecting yet and...

Leslie Have you spoken to our child?

Mistress I do not even know if a spirit has chosen you, but I will seek for you.

Shawn Can we pick someone famous, like the ghost of Abe Lincoln? I think I'd like to be mom to the reincarnated Lincoln.

Mistress Your child can not be Lincoln.

Shawn How about Ghandi?

Mistress I am the reincarnation of Lincoln, but tell me, why do you want to be parent to these poor souls. Each murdered. Murder can cloud many lives and requires much easing.

Ben Did you hear that? She's Lincoln. Lincoln just asked me if I wanted punch. Asked us if we wanted to speak to our un-conceived child. How much did you pay for this?

Leslie One hundred and thirty-five... [Defensively] Your support groups weren't doing any good either.

[Mistress lights one candle and motions for Ben and Leslie to sit]

Mistress You will speak to this flame. Study this flame, see how it slithers, how it stretches and flickers. It is flame. It is alive. It has the motion of life. Quick. Abrupt. Fanatic.

Shawn Fanatic.

Mistress Lost souls are trapped in the flame. Locked in a frantic search for life. I will guide you and you will interview

Shawn Interview. So, Lincoln... why did you leave your last life. Could you describe your past responsibilities? Well, we'll need a resume and three references before we get back in touch...

Mistress Silence! The flame can hear! They always listen. They always listen, but never so closely as in flame.

Carl Easy, I think...

Shawn We'll talk about this when we get home.

Ben We will talk about this.

Leslie Where's your spirit of adventure?

Mistress I said silence! [pause] Good. Good. [pause] You, since you offend the flames will draw the summoning around your candle, thus it will not be my fault if no one answers you.

Ben I... [shakes his head] I wonder if I'll have to go to confession for doing this.

Mistress You will draw a most powerful welcoming sigil. Draw your hand forth and place it into the red liquid.

Carl Ooh Blood.

Shawn That's the punch.

Ben It's just punch.

Mistress Pull your hand free. Carefully... No, do not drip! Carefully, draw a circle around your candle. Yes, I can feel the spirits coalescing. A circle for wholeness, for the journey of life to death and back again. Return your hand to the liquid. Place a drop on your tongue.

Shawn Yuck

Ben No, it's sweet.

Mistress Silence. Would you try to invoke the spirits with reminders that life can be bitter or sour? Now return your hand to the vessel. Place... [yells] Do not drip! Place a dot on either side of the candle in the upper half of the circle you've drawn.

Carl This is kind of spooky.

Ben Oh shut up. [dryly] The spirits can hear.

Mistress Indeed.

Ben How's that?

Mistress We will know if you are answered. Your hand

Ben Back in the vessel right. My fingers are starting to stick together. Are we almost done? [looks at her] Oh yeah, silence.

Mistress You will draw a... Do

Ben Not Drip. Yeah, I know, I figured that out.

Mistress Forgive them spirits and hear them, there is kindness in them as well as amnesia. You will draw a half circle within the circle, under the two dots. Yes, that's good. You have made a very powerful invocation.

Ben [looking down] It's a smiley face. She made me draw a stupid smiley face. [turns] Leslie, please, she's just trying to make fools of... No, I will not humiliate myself I want my money b...

Leslie Look at the flame. Look at it.

Shawn and Ben What! [pause] It's not doing anything.

Leslie I... you're right. I thought...

Mistress The disbelief is too strong. You frighten the spirits.

Ben Right. Cowering Casper. Whimpering Mrs. Muir. Those guys on that pirate ship, the shivering, floating Irish men too...

Carl Dutch men.

Ben Floating Dutch men?

Carl Yeah, it was the Floating Dutchman.

Leslie And wasn't Mrs. Muir the one who was alive?

Ben I was just kidding. You spend over a hundred bucks you ought to at least enjoy yourself.

[Mistress sprinkles some powder over the candle and the flame turns blue for a moment.]

Jim Spirit Joy?

Shawn Oh shit, she's drugged us.

Ben No, it's just a tape recorder. [feels under the table]

Leslie Are you going to be our son. I mean if we decide to...

[From the center of the table, a figure emerges. He looks around disdainfully. He is wearing a brown bath robe and has a copper halo taped above his head]

Jim Spirit I don't know. My last parents sucked. You don't look so swell either. I'm thinking I'd be better off going to the back of the line.

Ben What!

Jim Spirit You know the line for brains you went to the back of. Gosh, what kind of moron goes to Seance to summon the unborn. Seances are for the dead!

Leslie [Turning to mistress] Is this a joke?

Mistress I... the spirits are wise and do what they...

Jim Spirit What a pretentious blowhard. Okay, you want to be my parents. Convince me.

Ben How do we know you're really a spirit?

Jim Spirit How do you know! How do you know. Look buddy, I'm pretty happy up here in heaven. I don't have to go to Earth. If anyone owes an explanation! [short pause] I tell you what. This'll make you feel better. Ooo Ooo Ooo, you have summoned the mighty spirits. Why have you called upon us.

Shawn About Elvis?

Carl Shut up.

Jim Spirit Oy. Well, what can you expect.

Leslie You're a Jewish spirit? [turns to Mistress] How can we have a Jewish spirit! We can't have a Jewish spirit.

Ben You heard him. He can step aside. We can just get the next spirit in line. Hey, candle guy move aside will ya?

Carl Why's he Jewish? What's wrong with being Jewish.

Jim Spirit Let's say I'm out past curfew and I come home a little drunk. How much trouble will I be in?

Ben You better not be out drinking young man!

Jim Spirit Bad answer. Oh and Ghengis Khan is the guy behind me. Say hello, Ghengis. [Pause] He is there you know, he's just feeling a little shy just now. Oh swell, don't believe me. My own parents! My own potential parents don't even believe Ghengis Khan has been assigned to be their second child.

Shawn Look, he's just a guy. There's a trapdoor under the table or something. Hello!

Carl Ooh weird, it's like they can't hear us. This is so cool. I hope our kid doesn't turn out to be such a jerk.

Shawn Carl!

Jim Spirit Okay, let's say that I invent some really neat vaccine, but I refuse to distribute it and hold the world for ransom while Glaxo, Merk, and Johnson and Johnson have a bidding war? Would you support me?

Leslie Maybe Ghengis Khan would be better?

Ben Maybe we were drugged. Shit, I'm about to be kidnapped and forced to join a cult!

Jim Spirit Now that'd be swell. Would you like shave your head and wear white dresses and do dope all the time or would it be one of those gun-toting cults.

Ben I'm not joining...

Jim Spirit Cause I really can't endorse guns. Of course, growing up on a co-op, doing a little farming, trying different mushrooms so I can get back in touch with my spirituality...

Leslie He wants to be born so he can get in touch with his spirituality?

Jim Spirit No, I really don't think so. [he shakes his head] Your divorce would really get me down. I just wouldn't understand. When she learns about your affair, it'll destroy her. You two are really inadequate.

Leslie What?

Ben What!

Leslie What affair?

Ben It's not true.

Jim Spirit Come again, prove to me you've mended your ways and we'll talk.
[bends down blows the candle out. Stage darkens. When the lights dimly rises the spirit is gone and the Mistress is holding the jug of punch towards Shawn.]

Leslie That's not what I expected. I didn't think our son would be so... Gee Ben, him and Ghengis Khan, maybe we just shouldn't have kids. Ben was he, he was lying wasn't he?

Mistress Rise Shawn Jeffers and Carl Goshen. Move to the table. Ah, you are already with child. Do you wish to learn which spirit has chosen you? Some come to ask what name the spirit would like. What color would it like its room painted. You may ask these questions.

Shawn I'm not showing yet am I?

Carl Wow, that's really eerie. How did she know?

Mistress Carl Goshen, you will draw the welcoming sigil after I have lit the candle.

Carl This is just cool. I know we'll have a really great kid.

Shawn Yeah, look who's already showed up. You don't really believe? Do you?

Carl Well,

Mistress You will draw the circle about the candle.

Carl Right. Come on spirits. Steady now, don't drip.

Mistress and Carl Taste from the liquid.

Shawn I should have known when you took me to a palm reader on our first date.

Mistress You are quite adept at this Carl Goshen. I feel an affinity between you and the spirit world.

Carl Really?

Ben I bet he gets a really good *spirit*. Can we go now.

Mistress No spirit may leave this room until all the invocations are completed.

Ben Great.

Leslie I want to know about this affair.

Ben There was no affair. Oh come on, some stupid guy pops out of a table and

Mistress Silence... You are giving the spirits a headache. [Sprinkles some dust over the flame]

Here are two who are seeking. Spirit who wishes to enjoin life with their life, emerge.

Shawn But who knows if the spirit will deign to show.

Mistress Indeed.

[from the center of the table emerges a brightly dressed woman. Her face is covered with a phosphorescent make up]

Spirit Mel Please do not kill me, I will be good.

Shawn What?

Spirit Mel My last life was so short. Please, do not kill me. I can be a proper child to you. I will earn you honor. You will receive no worry from me. My life was so short.

Carl We would never kill our child. We would never kill you.

Spirit Mel Do you say this to comfort? Can you mean this? In my last life I only but touched the light and I vanished.

Shawn [quietly] It's not murder. We're not monsters. [turns to the others] We're not monsters.

Spirit Mel I beg of you let me live

Carl Why are you so frightened of us.

Spirit Mel I heard you. Day after day you contemplate killing me, but you are not too young. I swear to you that I am a good child.

Ben Why couldn't we have gotten this actress.

Shawn What have you heard.

Spirit Mel I am sorry, I will not spy again. I will give you room. You will have sleep. You will have no problems. I shall never fuss over my food. Do not kill me!

Ben See. I told you, good kid.

Leslie I wonder what she was in her last life.

Shawn [reaching a hand forward to stroke the spirit's hair, to comfort her] We're not monsters.

Spirit Mel Momma.

Carl This is just too cool.

Spirit Mel I promise, I will never cry while you are studying. I just must live. I need to feel the dew under my feet. To remember the tickle of grass as it whispers across your wings. The warm restive heat of the sun. The soft embrace of a flower petal as it cushions the feet. Oh, you do not know how one can miss the urgency of life, that terrible, desperate longing for what is next. How can you stand the joy when the wind cups your face and lifts you up! The tastes. Please. Please, let me live to show you the joy of the Earth. As all toddlers teach their parents. I will teach you wonder and I will never ask for too much.

Shawn Of course we'll let you...

Leslie Wings? The grass is tickling your wings?

Carl Who were you spirit. Why was your life so sad, so short.

Spirit Mel Oh no, it was not sad. Every moment was joy. I can remember flying with the autumn leaves. I can remember the scent of a child's hair. The taste of a leaf. Please, I am eager to return because living is a perfect thing. I will not be angry at you because I will be born into what I was not. I will feel no sorrow at being born a lesser creature.

Shawn Lesser creature?

Spirit Mel No, you are magnificent. I did not mean to offend.

Carl What were you? What were you before?

Spirit Mel [proudly] I was a moth.

Leslie A moth.

Carl A moth!

Ben A moth?

Shawn A moth! They get Ghengis Khan. Lincoln is sitting next to us and we get a moth! I don't want a moth for my baby!

Carl Shawn.

Shawn She's a moth.

Carl She won't be a moth when she's born.

Shawn She's going to eat my furniture and go poking at light bulbs.

Carl What are you saying?

Spirit Mel No! Do not have the abortion. I will go! You may have someone else! Do not do this. I am not fully within you yet. My soul is not woven within yours. I will go, do not kill me. [Spirit blows out the candle. Darkness crashes upon the room and the spirit exits].