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PUBLISHED BY GALLANT KNIGHT GAMES, 2020

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Layton UT, 84040





SICKNESS

By Elizabeth Chaipraditkul



Contents

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INTRODUCTION
Using this adventure
Act 1–A Simple Job6
Act 2–The Clarence Mansion
Outside the Mansion
Inside the Mansion9
William Clarence9
A Change of Fortune10
Act 3–Sacrifice and Sickness10
Act 4-The Burning Question11
Following the Pain11
Finding M12
ACT 5-CONFRONTING MANFRED13
OPEN GAMING LICENCE14



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INTRODUCTION

The scoundrels are recruited by a local cult to abduct an appropriate sacrifice for a dark rite. The sacrifice needs to be a specific person, but the pay is good—so who are they to question the god of gold? Once the scoundrels return the young man for sacrifice, they're paid and head home to rest from a job well done. The next day the scoundrels wake to find they've been struck by a terrible burning sickness—it seems the job wasn't so easy after all. Their investigation leads them to the uncle of the sacrifice who cursed the players to tie up loose ends. The uncle was slowly poisoning his sister (the sacrifice's mother) and his nephew was the only thing standing in the way of inheriting her significant estate. The players deal with the uncle as they see fit, getting him to either remove the curse, or killing him to end the curse.

USING THIS ADVENTURE

Important information is in **bold**. The city described in the adventure is a general grimdark city that could fit into most *For Coin and Blood* campaigns. If you need a city description you can use the following.

CROWSHOME—Crowshome is a sprawling port city overcrowded with people from all walks of life from the uber rich to the destitute. The startling disparity between the haves and have-nots is no more apparent than in the Pearl District where giant looming mansions look over the squalor of the shanty town built up around the docks. Inhabitants of the Pearl District own nearly all of the ships bobbing lazily in the docks and make their money off the backs of the sailors who are born to nothing in the Docks District and join ships hoping for a better life. Instead, they sign up for a life of indentured servitude, unable to repay the life debts they owe their employers for basic life necessities like food, shelter, and even the clothes on their back. It seems the only way for the have-nots to get ahead in Crowshome is a life of crime, in hopes that one day they are a big enough criminal to live in the Pearl District.

Adventure relevant information about Crowshome:

- The Clarence family resides in the Pearl District and owns a large fleet of fishing vessels
- The Ligeia Theatre in Act 1 is located in the Merchant's district, which borders the Docks.

Act 1-A Simple Job

This adventure assumes you have a group of players who've never played together before, for example at a convention or the like. If you have a steady group of players alter the details below to fit the game you're playing.

The characters arrive outside a dilapidated theatre house, the **Ligeia Theatre**, held all manner of plays to delight and excite, but as it lost favor for other more popular theatre houses it was forced to close its doors. Now the theatre lies empty, its windows are boarded up and the once bright, clean cream paint chips from the walls as the building falls into disrepair. Only a few lone souls wander the street at this time of night running between buildings to avoid the near-constant rain and opportunistic criminals lurking around shadowy corners to take advantage of unsuspecting victims.

The players were invited to the theatre by a cult in the city. The cult is trying to make a name for itself and needs the player's help to do so. The cult needs people willing to do *anything* for a bit of coin, and thus they asked the player's characters. They're let into the theatre through a backdoor and led through a moldy hallway to the lower stalls seating right in front of the stage. A shaggy red velvet curtain hangs in tatters from the ceiling and a disturbed layer of dust covers the stage's floorboards.

Ask each player to describe their character and give their motivation for being here—why are they willing to do anything for a bit of coin? Why do they need to see this mission through? Motivations don't have to be anything beyond—I need the money and don't care who I hurt to get it—but let the players decide why they're going through with this and are invested in this story.

Once each player answers, continue with the story.

A lone cloaked figure walks on stage and a light shines atop him obscuring his features. From his voice, it's clear he's speaking through ' a mask. He welcomes the characters and introduces himself as M. He's unwilling to speak about himself and doesn't much care who the characters are either. He explains the job to them:

- His cult needs them to abduct someone from the Pearl district.
- They plan to make a sacrifice and want someone important so the sacrifice 'means something'.
- The person he wants the characters to abduct is a young man by the name of William Clarence, he gives the player's the address. He doesn't know much about the house, but knows it is well guarded.
- M needs William by the next full moon (two days' time) if the ritual is going to work—so there is some haste for the players.
- The character should bring William back to the theatre alive and place him on the stage.

Once M gives the players the mission, **he offers to pay** the scoundrels 50 gold each for the mission once William is successfully brought to the theatre. He's willing to go as high as 75 gold each and will also pay half upfront. Once the characters agree to the terms, the lights in the theatre turn off and then come back on again. M has disappeared from the stage and (if the players negotiated to get half up front) the agreed money is at their feet.

Act 2–The Clarence Mansion

The Clarence Mansion is located on a giant estate in the Pearl District. Lush gardens filled to the brim with obnoxiously pruned topiary lead up to the mansion itself, which boasts no less than fifteen rooms, with a well-appointed cellar and ballroom to boot. During the day the Mansion is a lively place with the people of the house, servants, and various ship captains all coming and going. At night the mansion quiets and the family enjoys the relative privacy their large state grants them.

The grounds are patrolled by three sets of guards and guard dogs during the day, and five at night. The guards are instructed to kill anyone without proper papers on sight and have no hesitation doing so. The Clarence guards are well paid and treated fairly by their employers, bribing them is likely to cost the players more than they are willing to part with—but if they are willing the guards will take the bride. There are three main inhabitants of the Clarence Mansion:

- Matilda Clarence—the Matriarch of the family who lives in the west wing of the home. She once controlled all of the family business but is now bed bound and sickly. Because of her condition, Matilda is always located in her room in the west wing on the second floor.
- William Clarence—Matilda's son who lives in the west wing with his mother and cares for her. When Matilda passes, he'll inherit the Clarence estate and business. During the day William is located downstairs in the drawing room reading and at night he's in his bedroom, which is right next to his mother's so he can care for her in the evening.
- Manfred Clarence—Manfred is Matilda's brother and lives in the east wing of the home. He handles much of the day-to-day business of the Clarence's shipping business since Matilda fell ill. During the day Manfred is busy running business from the office on the first floor and at night he enjoys a nightcap in the smoking room before retiring to his bed in the east wing. Manfred Clarence isn't willing to die for his family and doesn't interfere with the characters, even if he knows what they're doing. If they find him, he pays them to not harm him.

OUTSIDE THE MANSION

Characters can approach the abduction a number of ways, below is a list of possible scenarios with their linked benefits and risks. Players are free to think of something else completely, use the information below to help shape the abduction.

Players steal credentials—the guards are instructed to kill anyone without proper credentials on sight. If they wanted to, the characters could follow one of the ship captain's off the mansion grounds and take their credentials. In this case, characters could run into the potential problem that the captain's crew mates are waiting for her outside the mansion—will they subdue the group or try to pick the captain's pocket stealthy? Once the players have the credentials, they'll most likely still have to bluff their way inside as there is a large group of them rather than one person.

Players could subdue the guards—the guards patrolling the mansion are well trained and well-armed. Players could approach them in an upfront fight, in which case they'll most likely fight all the guards at once as the patrols hear the sounds of fighting; or the characters could sneak up behind a few patrols and take them out. If the characters don't hide the bodies—the patrols will find the knocked out/dead guards and be on the lookout for the characters.

Players could avoid the guard entirely—by watching the guard's patrolling pattern the character could slip into the mansion without noticing.

INSIDE THE MANSION

During the day there are six servants and 1d4 visitors in the mansion. The servants are busy tidying the house and dealing with their daily tasks, the visitors are there to speak to Manfred and are either in his office or waiting in the lounge. If the characters are spotted during the day and can't bluff their way out of the situation whoever spots them calls the guards.

At night there are 1d6 servants awake who are still dealing with the last piece of business they have for the day - or grabbing a quick nighttime snack from the kitchen. If the characters are spotted at night, the guards are called immediately, no one but the family and servants (who know each other) should be in the house at night. If the characters subdued all the guards, add an additional 1d4 guard who are inside protecting the home.

WILLIAM CLARENCE

Once the characters reach William, he won't put up much of a fight. If he is in a position to scream for help without risking his life, he will do so. Likewise, if he can easily escape or flee, he will do so. If the characters try to abduct William from his bedroom and his mother hears noise coming from William's room, she'll use the bell in her room to call for help. In which case, 1d4 guards appear to deal with the characters.

William doesn't know how to fight, so he is pretty much at the mercy of the characters, however, one thing William does have is money. He wants to know why the characters are here and offers to pay more than whoever hired them to leave him alone. Assuming the characters look poorer than him, he'll offer an additional 5 gold per person on top of what M offers but can be negotiated/intimidated up for 20 gold per person.

Assuming the characters don't make a deal with William, they abduct him and move on to the next Act. If there are guards left on the premises, the characters may need to avoid them while leaving.

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE

This adventure is written assuming that the players don't make a deal with William in order to save his life. If they do, make the following changes to the adventure:

- William survives, but the characters are still cursed that night. It isn't the cult, but the Burning God himself who curses them, because he doesn't get his sacrifice.
- In the final confrontation with Manfred, the players find William bound and gagged in the home—Manfred was planning on killing him himself.
- Only Manfred can remove the player's curse, if they kill him—they're cursed forever, and he makes this abundantly clear. He's willing to remove the curse if they let him live.
- If William survives the ordeal, he has Manfred arrested.

Act 3—Sacrifice and Sickness

The characters bring William back to the Ligeia Theatre and place him on stage. Once they leave the stage, cultists come from behind the curtain and grab the young man. M also steps out and pays the characters what they're owed, dismissing them. If the players want to stay and participate in the ritual, they are welcome to, as long as they are earnest in their interest. The cultists are all masked and don't say more about the ritual than it is to appease their god. Once the ritual is complete, they leave the scene quickly.

The cultists place William in the center of the stage with five black candles around him. A chanting cultist stands behind each candle, with M in the cardinal south position. In turn each cultist picks up their candle and pours the hot wax over William whose gone limp and is softly crying through a gag placed over his mouth. M is the last cultist to pour wax on William then dropping his candle on the young man who is instantly set alight. The lights on the stage go out and the only light in the room comes from the writhing figure of William on stage. The sound and scent of the burning body overwhelms the senses and it is impossible to hear the young man's screams, which must be deafening in their agony. The body burns for only a minute until it turns to a pile of ash and the ritual concludes.

The characters are now free to do what they want for the rest of the night until they go to bed. At night each one of them has the same dream.

You're laying naked in the center of a stage. Your entire body is set alight with a searing paint you cannot see. Instead the face of a burned corpse hovers over you, its gnashing white teeth scraping against themselves in terrifying malice. The corpse's hands wrap around your neck and choke you. You feel smoke snaking its way down your throat and into it your lungs. You blink and instead of the corpse you see M choking you, his facemask emblazoned with a burning man searing itself into your memory. SICKNESS

The characters wake to find a part of their body suffers from a corrupted third-degree burn—skin boils, oozes with puss, and flakes away—touching the affected area causes a searing pain. Right before their eyes they see the burn spread slowly up their body. Ask each player where they're burned.

During the game each player should roll an additional 1d8 any time they make a d20 roll. On a 1—their check fails and the burn spreads on their body—follow the chart below:

Burn Number	DAMAGE TAKEN	New Burn Chance Die
1	1 d 4	1d6
2	2 d 4	1 d 4
3	2 d 4	1d2
4+	Stays as 3	Stays as 3

The characters must now find out what is happening to them before it is too late.

Act 4–The Burning Question

Act 4 is split into two parts—discovering who did this to them and finding that person. If the players figure out it is M from their dream and decide to track him down—move directly to 'Finding M'. Players may decide to do both parts at the same time, or a different order, in whatever case use the information below to form their investigation

Following the Pain

Who did this? The characters must discover who cursed them—M the cult leader. A few ideas on how to do this would be:

- The diabolist asking a demon—probably in exchange for a 'favor'
- The Magus/Witch Hunter doing some research into the matter
- The characters going to a person with significant occult knowledge to tell them what is going on

What happened to them exactly? Whatever route they use to discover what happened to them ends with them discovering the following information:

- They were cursed by a burning sickness that is spreading over their entire body and if it isn't removed, they will die.
- The sickness can be removed by killing the person who cursed them or getting them to remove the curse.
- (Religious knowledge) They were cursed by a follower of the Burning God who promises to one day set the world alight in his glory. Players may or may not connect this to the mask they've seen in their nightmare.

FINDING M

When the characters discover who cursed them, they must find M. M is in fact Manfred Clarence and characters track him back to the Clarence mansion, where they have their final showdown with Manfred. There are a few leads the characters may follow to lead them to Manfred.

Investigate the theatre—There are a few clues in the theatre that lead the characters in the right direction. There aren't any tracks outside the theatre that would lead them to the cultists.

- If they search the inside of the theatre the players find a robe with a brothel calling card in the pocket. If they go to the brothel and ask around one of the prostitutes, Kesslin, remarks that she recognized the robe—Manfred Clarence one of her regulars has one just like it.
- The characters may also find a partial piece of a burned mask. The mask still has the maker's mark on the inside. The mark belongs to a clay worker in the docks district. Lars is a man of little importance or wealth; he'll share information in exchange for a warm meal or a few coins. He made these masks for a few guards from the Pearl District. They kept their identity a secret, but he heard them mentioning to each other as they left, "I wonder what old Manfred Clarence wants with these."

Ask around the theatre—The characters may want to ask the locals if they've seen people coming and going from the theatre. Locals have the following information to share:

• The theatre is owned by a family from the Pearl district, no one knows who, but the records are probably at city hall. If a character breaks into city hall and finds the records they learn it is owned by the Clarence family.



• Some homeless people a few streets further on remark on how they were paid to stay clear of the theatre. They give a description of Manfred making it clear he was exceedingly rich but explain he didn't give them a name. Asking around the Merchant of Pearl District will eventually lead the characters to Manfred as he's a well-known figure of the area.

Use magic—A character may have an appropriate spell or ability that allows them to track someone down or scry for them. In this case they will likely need an item from the person and should investigate the theatre for clues. Once they have the item, they can scry for them.

• Using the mask or the robe to scry with leads them to a cultist who lives in the Docks and worships the Burning God. The cultist is suffering from the same curse as the players but is exceedingly happy with it. She wants to die and be with her god. If the players threaten to keep her alive, she turns on Manfred (her cult leader) rather than face the agony of life.

ACT S-CONFRONTING MANFRED

The characters head to the Clarence mansion to deal with Manfred. Having finally gotten rid of William, he's the last remaining heir of Matilda's fortune. She'll soon die and leave him with everything. Manfred is a true believer in the Burning God and even more so after the god cursed the characters for him. Manfred cursed them so they'd die and any loose ends tying him to William's crime would be wrapped up.

Players must fight the fanatical members of the Burning God cult and Manfred. Every member of the cult is fanatically loyal to Manfred and fights to the death. Manfred, on the other hand, doesn't want to die and if it is clear he is losing offers an exorbitant amount of money to the players (and removal of the curse) if they let him live. He is greedy and only willing to do this if his life is on the line.

The players chose to either kill Manfred or spare him. Once the curse is lifted the burning stops spreading and heals within a few days. If they kill Manfred any players who reached the third level of burns have dreams of the Burning God every night of their life until they die. If the spare him, Manfred is true to his word and all they have to show from their ordeal a few days later is the faintest scar.

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