

Idyllia

A new one-act play by Jake Lewis

Based on the story “Germelshausen” by Friedrich Gerstaecker

Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

ARNOLD

20s-30s. Handsome, but perhaps not in a movie matinee idol sort of way.
Has a casual air about him.

GERTRUDE

Early 20s, attractive in an unsuspecting way, strong-willed but obedient

MAYOR

Gertrude's father, 50s, large and imposing, bearded perhaps, jovial

STEPMOTHER

Gertrude's stepmother, blunt, a peace-maker when needed

JUDITH

Gertrude's best friend

OLD MAN

A fellow traveler in the woods, an artist, has a connection to Idyllia

ELYSE

Arnold's fiancée

Setting

In and around a magical village in the German countryside,
Present day...or maybe not.

Prologue

*Lights rise on a silhouette of a couple on their wedding day.
ARNOLD's voice is heard.*

ARNOLD

When I was a child, I didn't know the difference between "destiny" and "fate." I got that they both had something to do with the future, but beyond that, I had no clue. As I grew older, I began to understand that fate was the life God planned for me...if you believe in that sort of thing. I didn't. In fact, at all possible opportunities, I tried to do the complete opposite of what the cosmos *intended*. I was making my own path, for better or worse. And that path eventually led me to a small, magical village, where one woman helped me find my destiny.

Lights fade on silhouette.

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## **Scene One**

*Lights rise on ARNOLD, who enters in hiking gear, a large knapsack on his shoulders. After a few moments of standing in pleasant reflection of the picturesque sight before and around him, he throws off his bag and kneels down to drink from a water bottle.*

*While this is happening, from behind some trees, GERTRUDE enters slowly, spying on ARNOLD, who doesn't notice her. She is in an old-fashioned dress as compared to his more modern clothing. As he stands, back or profile still turned to her, she runs towards him with outstretched arms.*

GERTRUDE

Henry! You've returned! I thought--

*He finally sees her, and takes a step back. She suddenly stops her charge when she sees his face.*

GERTRUDE:

Oh! Do not be offended, stranger. I -- I thought --

ARNOLD:

No problem at all. I love when random girls attack me.

GERTRUDE

I don't know what I was thinking. I know he won't be returning.

ARNOLD

Is Henry your boyfriend?

GERTRUDE:

Well, he's many years beyond boyhood, and while we began as friends, we are somewhat more...

ARNOLD:

Your lover, then?

GERTRUDE:

*(Blushing.)*

I have no need to justify this to you, but...Henry and I promised to wait until marriage, sir! What do you take me for?

ARNOLD

A young girl in love.

GERTRUDE

Young? You sound like my father. I'll have you know I have just celebrated my twenty-first birthday! I am a woman!

ARNOLD

I'm sorry if I'm coming across as rude.

GERTRUDE

If truth be told...yes. But you are forgiven, Mr....

ARNOLD

Lowe. Arnold Lowe.

GERTRUDE

Well then, Mr. Arnold Lowe, I'm Gertrude Becker.

ARNOLD

Pleasure to meet you, Ms. Getrude Becker. But unfortunately, I'm not your man. I'm just an uninteresting stranger, passing through.

GERTRUDE

Strangers are the opposite of uninteresting. What could be more fascinating than knowing nothing about another person? All the things you've yet to discover! It's only after getting to know someone entirely that they become dull. Perhaps that's why Henry left. I became boring to him.

ARNOLD

I doubt that.

GERTRUDE

That's a mighty bold statement to make for someone you've just met.

ARNOLD

I apologize. Where did he travel to?

GERTRUDE

Further than I could ever imagine.

*ARNOLD appears confused, and GERTRUDE sees this.*

GERTRUDE

*(Recovering.)*

He said he needed to see more of the world than just our little village. He could not marry me until he knew what was out there.

ARNOLD

And you are just waiting for your dearie to return to you?

GERTRUDE

No. *(Beat.)* I knew then I had to let him go.

ARNOLD

I understand.

GERTRUDE

You do?

ARNOLD

I mean...“If you love somebody, set them free.”

GERTRUDE

That’s a charming quote. Who is the poet that penned that?

ARNOLD

Uh, Sting.

GERTRUDE

Sting? I’m not familiar with that bard. But the library in our little village is somewhat lacking, I’ll admit.

ARNOLD

I know I’ve just met you, but if it’s not too presumptuous...your guy...ummm..

GERTRUDE

Henry. Henry Vokes.

ARNOLD

Mr. Vokes had to have a heart of stone to abandon you.

GERTRUDE

Men's decisions sometimes reside outside of their hearts.

*From a distance, the sound of a bell pealing is heard. It is discordant and sharp.*

GERTRUDE

But I cannot wait any longer. Church is now ending, so I must hurry back or I will be late for dinner, and Father will scold me.

ARNOLD

*(Consulting map.)*

The next town on this map is Witchbury. but that's several hours walk. What are you doing so far away from home?

GERTRUDE

Witchbury, you say? I've lived among these hills all my life and no village with that name exists. Perhaps your map is incorrect, or you're lost.

ARNOLD

My Father once said that being lost is sometimes the secret to finding your way.

GERTRUDE

And my Father always says never be late for dinner. So with that, I will leave you to your travels. Good day.

*She turns to leave.*

ARNOLD

Wait! I'm headed that way. May I accompany you?

GERTRUDE

Whatever for? I do not need you to protect me. There are no brigands in these woods--

ARNOLD

No, of course not. I was hoping *you* would protect *me*. As you said, I'm likely lost, and will need a meal and place to stay once it gets dark.

GERTRUDE

*(Thinks a moment.)*

Very well, then. You do not seem to pose a threat, despite your odd manner of speech and dress. Stick closely to me, as the path can be difficult to discern as we approach the mists.

ARNOLD

Thank you. What is your village called?

GERTRUDE

Idyllia.

*She exits.*

*ARNOLD looks around, contemplatively.*

*She re-enters.*

GERTRUDE

Are you coming, Mr. Lowe? Time waits for no man.

*Exits again.*

*ARNOLD grabs his bag and follows her off.*



*Lights fade to black.*

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Scene Two

The outskirts of Idyllia. The exterior of an inn in a small square with a fountain and some benches surrounding. ARNOLD takes out his water bottle, finds it empty, and goes towards the fountain.

ARNOLD
It's safe, right?

GERTRUDE
Well, yes, I suppose

He fills his canteen and splashes some water on his face and appears refreshed.

ARNOLD
You weren't kidding about not being able to see the path on the way in here. That mist we passed through, it was...Like a curtain.

GERTRUDE
It comes from the swamp surrounding our village.

ARNOLD
(A little horrified.)
I just put swamp water on my face?

GERTRUDE
It's completely harmless, I assure you. Some Idyllians believe it has intoxicating properties.

ARNOLD

Harmless *and* intoxicating? Sounds like magic.

GERTRUDE

Perhaps it is.

ARNOLD

(Looking around.)

It's charming here. Feels like I've been transported to a simpler time.

GERTRUDE

We are a peaceful and pleasant people here. But I regret I must leave you now, Mr. Lowe. There is much to do before tonight's Festival. I hope the remainder of your travels are uneventful.

ARNOLD

Does this inn serve food?

GERTRUDE

It does offer a small menu which is digestible as long as you do not pay too much heed to what you are consuming.

ARNOLD

You need to work on your sales pitch. Will you at least join me, then? I hate eating alone.

GERTRUDE

Lars, the proprietor of this inn, will certainly be happy to talk your ear off as you sup. Ask him about the story with the drunk goat.

ARNOLD

I will. Well then, until we meet again, Gertrude.

ARNOLD begins to head towards the inn's entrance.

GERTRUDE
Why are you out?

ARNOLD
I was just heading in. In to the inn. Heh!

GERTRUDE
No, you mistake my meaning. Why were you out, wandering amongst the hills?

ARNOLD
Would you believe me if I said I was trying to understand what God wants from me?

GERTRUDE
I might. Did He tell you what your Fate was?

ARNOLD
Not yet, but I'm getting there, I think,

GERTRUDE
A better place to receive it might be in Church.

ARNOLD
I've only found more questions than answers there.

GERTRUDE
Yes.
(Smiling.)
Your honesty is refreshing.

ARNOLD
So is this water!
(Beat.)
Wait. Don't move.

He goes to his bag and pulls out paper and pencils.

GERTRUDE
What are you doing?

ARNOLD
I'm going to sketch you. If that's alright.

GERTRUDE
But Father--

ARNOLD
I can sketch him later, but first, you. It will only take five minutes. Five minutes won't make a difference, will it?

GERTRUDE
No, not yet. And what am I to do?

ARNOLD
Just sit there. On that bench. The fountain and inn will make a nice backdrop.

GERTRUDE
Very well. *(She does so.)* Do you make a living at this, Mr. Lowe?

ARNOLD
Arnold, please. And no, not much of one. Not yet. I guess you could say I'm a starving artist. Ha!

GERTRUDE
But it brings you joy, even if it doesn't put food in your belly.

ARNOLD
Well, I like food too, but I feel God speaks to me more in the sunrise over a hillside than a dusty prayerbook.

GERTRUDE

The countryside here is excellent fodder, then, to find inspiration.

ARNOLD

The sights are beautiful indeed.

(Beat.)

GERTRUDE

Perhaps...

ARNOLD

What?

GERTRUDE

Since you're an artist looking for work, perhaps you could fix up the pictures in the church. They look so very poor and shabby.

ARNOLD

Oh, that's very kind of you, but...I don't plan to stay long. I must be in Witchbury by tomorrow evening.

GERTRUDE

That fictional town again. What awaits you there?

ARNOLD

(Evasively.)

A prior engagement.

GERTRUDE

Ooh, how mysterious!

ARNOLD

Ha! Anything but! *(Trying to change the subject.)* And what about you?

GERTRUDE
What do you mean?

ARNOLD
What inspires you? Speaks to your soul?

GERTRUDE
That is a very forward question to ask someone you have just met.

ARNOLD
I try not to waste time. It's always in short supply.

Silence as this settles and ARNOLD sketches.

GERTRUDE
Family.

ARNOLD
Hmm?

GERTRUDE
You asked what inspires me. My answer is family. I think there is nothing more important or beautiful in this world. *(Suddenly aware of the time.)*
Which reminds me I really must be going now.

ARNOLD
Just finishing now. *(Finishes sketch.)* What do you think?

GERTRUDE
It's...me.

ARNOLD
Yes. That's the general idea.

GERTRUDE

Perhaps my father would like to buy this work. To help you in your career. I bet you could get a good price for this from him.

ARNOLD

It's not much.

GERTRUDE

How dare you, sir, call me "not much"? Come to dinner with me tonight, and discuss the matter over with Father.

ARNOLD

(Sarcastically.)

I don't know...your high praise of the inn's cuisine really sold me.

GERTRUDE

You did say you're a starving artist.

ARNOLD

Indeed I did. Then, I would love to join you for a home cooked meal.

She smiles and then begins to hurry off.

GERTRUDE

This way!

ARNOLD

Where you lead, I will follow.

They exit together as lights fade to black.

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**Scene Three**

*The interior of Gertrude's home.*

ARNOLD

Are you sure this is ok? I can just go back to the inn...

GERTRUDE

Do you doubt my kindness? Perhaps you think I am disingenuous and am luring you into my web like a spider to a fly?

ARNOLD

Very funny. It's just that...Everyone was looking at me oddly as they hurried past.

GERTRUDE

We don't get many visitors here in Idyllia, especially dressed the way you are. And besides, people are eager to be home before tonight's Festival.

ARNOLD

What is this Festival all about that you keep mentioning?

*THE MAYOR, GERTRUDE's father, enters the room.*

MAYOR

Gertrude! What a long time you have stayed out today! You missed a wonderful sermon from Reverend Lerner. It was about man's destiny, and--

*(Sees ARNOLD.)*

Oh.

GERTRUDE

This is Arnold. He was at The Doorway.

*ARNOLD is slightly confused by this description.*



MAYOR

Oh? (*Realizing.*) Yes. Of course.

*Getrude's STEPMOTHER enters from another place within the house. ARNOLD drifts backwards, and STEPMOTHER doesn't notice him.*

STEPMOTHER

Out waiting for Henry again? Why do you torment yourself so?

MAYOR

Now, now...

STEPMOTHER

I mean Henry Vokes no ill will. He was always a kind, if not strange boy. But I'm sure that he has discovered the error of his choice, wherever he ended up.

MAYOR

I think what she's trying to say is--

STEPMOTHER

Don't tell her what I'm trying to say! I'm a grown woman, and I can tell her myself!

MAYOR

(*Cowed.*)

Yes, dear.

STEPMOTHER

Gertrude, I love you, and you're old enough to hear this: You need to look more to the future and stop dwelling on the past.

MAYOR

Yes, exactly! And to that end, she has brought a guest home with her for dinner!

*STEPMOTHER* sees *ARNOLD*, who gives a small wave.

STEPMOTHER

Oh. Hello, young man.

MAYOR

*(To ARNOLD, extending hand.)*

I welcome you to Idyllia and to our humble home. It may not be large in size, but it bursts with love.

*MAYOR* vigorously shakes his hand.

MAYOR

Now, let's fall to our heart's content with the glorious meal your mother has prepared, and anything else we can speak of later.

*They go to the table, laid with food, and all sit.*

MAYOR

A prayer, then?

*They all join hands and close their eyes, ARNOLD following suit.*

MAYOR

Dear Heavenly Father, please protect your faithful servants here in Idyllia and forgive those of us who do not embrace your protection and gifts. *(He eyes GERTRUDE.)* The way you have laid for us is one we may not understand but know in our hearts that you have set us on for some greater purpose. Amen.

*They open their eyes and drop their hands. Then, they begin eating.*

MAYOR

So! Where is your home, Mr. Lowe?

ARNOLD

Please, call me Arnold. And I'm actually from Boston.

MAYOR

Bos-ton, you say? I'm not familiar with that village.

STEPMOTHER

That is because you hardly ever leave Idyllia, husband.

MAYOR

For good reason! What more could you want than what you can find right here?

GERTRUDE

*(Under her breath.)*

I could think of a few things.

MAYOR

*(Hearing but ignoring her comment.)*

I suppose that is why you are dressed in such a...ern...unusual manner.

ARNOLD

Is it?

MAYOR

You certainly can't go to the Festival like that!

ARNOLD

Oh, I wasn't plan--

GERTRUDE

Father, he must be going--

MAYOR

*(Lights up and snaps his fingers.)*

I have it! You can use an old suit of mine for tonight's celebration!

ARNOLD

You really don't need to--

MAYOR

My old blue getup will suit just fine, I think!

*ARNOLD looks unsure, as the MAYOR is much larger than him.*

MAYOR

*(Sheepishly.)*

I was once a much trimmer fellow, I'll have you know.

ARNOLD

Oh. Yes. Of course.

MAYOR

Anyway...What is it you do in your village of Bosh-tone?

GERTRUDE

He's an artist, Father. I mentioned the church paintings needing some work.

MAYOR

Oh yes? Lovely!

GERTRUDE

Yes! And he's already done a sketch of me. Just have a look!

*After a bit of nudging, ARNOLD retrieves the sketch from his bag and shows it to the MAYOR who looks at it for many moments in stern concentration.*

GERTRUDE

He has quite a deft hand, does he not?

*Suddenly, a frantic knocking is heard at the door, startling everyone else.*

MAYOR

Now who would dare be so brazen during the dinner hour?

*Beat.*

ALL (EXCEPT ARNOLD)

Judith.

*JUDITH opens the door for herself and hurries in.*

MAYOR

*(Muttering.)*

Please, Ms. Broadbent, come right in.

JUDITH

Dearest Gertrude!

GERTRUDE

Dearest Judith! What ever is the matter?

JUDITH

Word has come to me that you have found a gentleman and brought him--

*(Sees ARNOLD and is immediately attracted.)*

Oh. Hello. I'm smitten. I mean, Judith. Planning on staying long in Idyllia?

ARNOLD

Just for the night, I think.

JUDITH

You think? So we may be able to entice you to stay longer?

ARNOLD  
I...ummm...

*GERTRUDE* grabs *JUDITH* and moves her toward the door.

GERTRUDE  
What are you doing? You know he can't stay past midnight!

JUDITH  
So you say.

GERTRUDE  
You know perfectly well what happens at the stroke of twelve on this night!

JUDITH  
It's not my fault! I can count on one hand the few men our age who remain here!

GERTRUDE  
Ah! So you're here to claim him for yourself, then. I thought you and Leo Renner were rather cozy last I saw you two together.

JUDITH  
Dear God, no. If his cowlick wasn't bad enough, his womanly hands would be a deterrent!

GERTRUDE  
I think he's rather sweet.

JUDITH  
Then you marry him!

GERTRUDE

You sound like Father.

JUDITH

Gertrude, you are my dearest friend, and it pained me to see you when Henry left. But this...very handsome...man has come into your life for a reason. It's destiny!

GERTRUDE

*(Hesitant.)*

I see no such designs. God has no hand in our lives. I learned that a long time ago.

JUDITH

He likes you, Gertrude. Look how he glances at you.

GERTRUDE

He is only curious, reasonably so, about this madwoman who has burst into my home during our dinner!

JUDITH

I like to make an entrance.

GERTRUDE

To keep him here without him knowing the truth would be cruel!

JUDITH

I never said to hide Idyllia's secret. Certainly tell him. Let him decide for himself.

GERTRUDE

If I tell you I'll think about it, will you cease this lecturing?

JUDITH

I know you too well, Gertrude Becker. You're simply trying to get me to go.

GERTRUDE

Yes, I am. But I shall think about your...insightful words. Now...

*(She pulls loose one of JUDITH's barrets.)*

Oh dear! it looks like your hair has come loose and you must return home  
to fix it!

JUDITH

*(Understanding.)*

So it has. Well then, until this evening.

*(She gives a look to GERTRUDE and exits.)*

ARNOLD

*(To STEPMOTHER.)*

Mrs. Becker, I must compliment you on this meal. You are a fabulous cook!

*An awkward silence falls over the room. ARNOLD realizes he said something wrong.*

GERTRUDE

This is not my mother, Arnold. Hildy is my stepmother. My real mother  
is...gone.

MAYOR

*(Quietly, but firmly.)*

She died several years ago.

GERTRUDE

Father, she--

MAYOR

*(Shouting.)*

SHE. IS. DEAD! AND WE WILL SPEAK NO MORE OF IT!

*A terrible silence has fallen over the room. GERTRUDE pushes back from the table.*

STEBMOTHER



Perhaps a little wine is in order? After all, it is Festival Night.

MAYOR  
A fine idea.

*She goes to the cupboard and removes a bottle. She pours a glass for everyone, who takes a drink.*

ARNOLD  
I have never tasted wine like this before.

STEPMOTHER  
It is made right here in Idyllia. Our own special creation.

*ARNOLD looks slightly concerned, but finishes his drink.*

GERTRUDE  
Come, Arnold, let us go for a walk about the village.

*ARNOLD pauses as he looks at MAYOR, worried he may be scolded for leaving the table prematurely.*

MAYOR  
Well? What keeps you there, boy? When a woman invites you for a promenade, you drop what you're doing and join her!

*ARNOLD rises from the chair and heads toward the door with GERTRUDE.*

MAYOR  
And remember to be back by five o'clock sharp.

GERTRUDE  
Yes, Father.

MAYOR

Take in our magical hamlet, for it may be a long while before you see it again.

*ARNOLD and GERTRUDE start to leave.*

MAYOR  
And young man?

ARNOLD  
Yes?

MAYOR  
How much do you want for your sketch?

ARNOLD  
Nothing.

MAYOR  
Come now, you cannot give away your talents for free.

ARNOLD  
You welcomed me into your home and made a delicious meal. I believe that makes it even.

MAYOR  
Very well. It shall be treasured in our family.

*ARNOLD smiles, as GERTRUDE pulls him through the door, and lights fade to black.*

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Scene Four

A path through the village, eventually leading to the cemetery. The lighting should reflect the dense mist that hangs over the darkening town.

ARNOLD

Is the mist here always so dense?

GERTRUDE

Yes, it has been draped over our town...for a long while. Father says it is like a veil, protecting the good of Idyllia, while keeping out the ills of what lies beyond.

ARNOLD

The world outside isn't so bad, really.

GERTRUDE

I have thought about leaving Idyllia many times, but...

ARNOLD

But what?

GERTRUDE

But it's just so...vast. I wouldn't know how to begin!

ARNOLD

It's easy. Just start walking until you get somewhere.

GERTRUDE

You make it sound so easy!

ARNOLD

For me, I guess it is! There's just so much of this world to see and learn about. I don't want to miss any of it in the time I have left.

GERTRUDE

How dramatic! You sound as if you are running out of time.

ARNOLD

In a way, aren't we all?

GERTRUDE

Some faster than others.

ARNOLD

Don't I know it.

ARNOLD retrieves his phone.

GERTRUDE

What is that?

ARNOLD

This? It's a phone. I know, it's an old model, but it still works. (*Taps at it.*)

Well, used to.

GERTRUDE

It's unlike anything I've ever seen.

ARNOLD

Seriously? Even out here in the sticks, you must have phones.

GERTRUDE

What does it do?

ARNOLD

Not much. You don't have any reception here. Must be this mist. I should probably turn it off to save the battery.

GERTRUDE is confused. ARNOLD tucks it away.

GERTRUDE

Arnold, I must tell you something...about this town.

ARNOLD

Ok.

GERTRUDE

Idyllia is...well...unusual.

ARNOLD

I already know that.

GERTRUDE

What I mean is...this is difficult to explain. Here. Let me show you.

They have reached the cemetery. She guides him to a specific tombstone.

GERTRUDE

Read it.

ARNOLD

“Anna Fredericks Becker, born December 16th, 1688, died, December 2nd, 1724.”

GERTRUDE

That is my mother’s grave.

ARNOLD

But...how is that possible? It says she died in 1724.

GERTRUDE

My father couldn’t bear the fact that she left us. Left *him*. So he had this erected after several years had passed--

ARNOLD

Several years? Gertrude, that's almost 300 years ago.

GERTRUDE

This is what I'm trying to tell you, Arnold. For you, it's been centuries. For me, simply a few years since she...left.

ARNOLD

Oh! I understand!

GERTRUDE

(With relief.)

You do?

ARNOLD

Yes, I lost my mother too at a young age.

GERTRUDE

No....

ARNOLD

Cancer. Sometimes I feel like you, where it seems like it was just the other day, while other times--

GERTRUDE

(Angrily.)

That's not it!

ARNOLD

Oh. I'm sorry. I'm trying to understand.

GERTRUDE

Time...moves differently here in Idyllia.

ARNOLD

I've sensed that, too.

GERTRUDE

Today, we are here, occupying the same point in time. But tomorrow...

ARNOLD

What about tomorrow?

GERTRUDE

Tomorrow you'll be gone. Just like countless other people who have left Idyllia. Like Henry! Like my mother!

ARNOLD

And what will happen to you?

GERTRUDE

I will sleep.

ARNOLD

That doesn't sound so bad.

GERTRUDE

You have no idea. But you could sleep here with me.

ARNOLD

(Blown back a bit.)

Gertrude, I like you, but--

GERTRUDE

You would be very happy here in Idyllia!

ARNOLD

I'm sure I would. But--

GERTRUDE suddenly kisses him. He appears shocked. She looks guilty.

GERTRUDE

I'm sorry. That was wrong of me.

ARNOLD

No, it was...I'm sorry, I should go. Thank your father--

GERTRUDE

Your path led you here. To Idyllia. To me!

ARNOLD

And maybe your path is leading you out of Idyllia.

GERTRUDE

You mean for me to leave? Go with you, I suppose.

ARNOLD

No, not exactly, I--

GERTRUDE

Leave Father? Judith? Hildy? No. My life is here.

ARNOLD

(Getting an idea.)

Here. Give me your hand.

She slowly extends it. He takes her pinky finger and hooks his pinkie in it.

GERTRUDE

What are you doing?

ARNOLD

I'm making you a pinky promise.

GERTRUDE

A what?

ARNOLD

A pinky promise. The strongest kind of promise a person can make.

GERTRUDE

And what is it you're committing to?

ARNOLD

We will meet again. Someday.

GERTRUDE

I didn't know you were a seer as well as a painter.

ARNOLD

Haven't you ever had a feeling that you can't explain but that doesn't make it any less true?

GERTRUDE

Perhaps I have. But as for tonight, you will go off into your world, while I remain a spinster here for the next 100 years!

ARNOLD

There's no need to exaggerate. What about that Leo Renner Judith was mentioning?

A bell rings from a distance.

GERTRUDE

The Festival is beginning shortly and we have spent too much time here among the dead. We must hurry back and join the living, if only for a brief while.

She quickly rises and starts to leave. ARNOLD doesn't move.

GERTRUDE

Are you coming?

ARNOLD

I'll be along soon.

GERTRUDE

Promise?

ARNOLD wiggles his pinky at her.

She exits. He remains, befuddled, as lights fade.

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**Scene Five**

*The town square has been turned into a dance hall. Many villagers are scattered about, and there is an air of festiveness, as of waiting for things to begin.*

*A few moments later, GERTRUDE and ARNOLD enter, with MAYOR and STEPMOTHER behind. They are wearing more formal clothes, he is more fitting of the time. JUDITH runs up to them.*

JUDITH

Gertrude! At last you're here. I saw you both walking before, and thought maybe you had slipped off to Farmer Winston's barn instead for your own type of celebrating.

GERTRUDE

Judith, you seem to forget that I'm not you, and bedding any man who looks at me.

JUDITH

You know as well as I do that the choice of men in this village gets smaller every year because of the call of the world beyond. Which is why you're so lucky to have found this wayward traveler! Good evening, Mr. Lowe. Your getup is much more becoming than before!

MAYOR

From the wardrobe of yours truly!

STEBMOTHER

I remember when you could fit in that. You were quite a sight then!

MAYOR

You only have yourself to blame, my dear wife, for feeding me so well ever since. Now, my current shape must make its way to the stage for my opening remarks!

*MAYOR goes to the center of the stage and addresses the crowd.*

MAYOR

My fellow citizens of Idyllia. We have come once again to the momentous day on our calendar when we gather together to celebrate and honor our place in this vast world. Only during this magical period of time each year do we awaken to hear God's call. We are tested, and do not question our Fate. No, we celebrate His trusting us with this responsibility. Let us, then, rejoice in our collective strength, and honor those who could not bear its burden. *(Beat as all are in silent prayer.)* Now, enough of me talking. Let the festivities begin!

*Scattered applause as music starts up.*

*ARNOLD takes GERTRUDE by the arm and leads her out to the dance floor.*

ARNOLD

I promised you a dance.

*They engage in a whimsical dance, at one point, ARNOLD's phone falls from his pocket without his knowing.*

*The dance ends with ARNOLD and GERTRUDE in a very close position, gazing into each other's eyes. When they realize the intimacy of the moment, they awkwardly pull away from each other, and return to the side of the dance floor.*

GERTRUDE

Where did you learn to dance like that

ARNOLD

*(A little evasive.)*

I have been taking lessons.

GERTRUDE

Well they have paid off.

ARNOLD

You're not so bad yourself.

*MAYOR, STEPMOTHER, and JUDITH saunter over.*

MAYOR

She learns from the best, you know.

GERTRUDE

Yes, mother was a fine dancer.

STEBMOTHER

Your father is a wonderful dancer. He continues to sweep me off my feet!

*The band begins a new song, and MAYOR does just that -- sweeps STEPMOTHER off her feet and onto the dance floor.*

GERTRUDE

Oh, how I love this song! Come, Arnold!

ARNOLD

I think I need to sit this one out.

GERTRUDE

Your loss! I will have to find another dancing partner then!

*She crosses to the floor and begins to dance with others.*

JUDITH

She took you to the cemetery, then?

ARNOLD

Yes. It's amazing how old it is!

JUDITH

Then she told you about her mother, I take it.

ARNOLD

What happened to her?

JUDITH

She was the first one who left. Some blame her for the curse on this village--

ARNOLD

A curse?

JUDITH

Well, that's what some believe, at least. They called her a witch because of it. But that was a long time ago. People like The Mayor, they see it as a blessing. I'm not sure which it is, honestly. A little bit of both, perhaps.

ARNOLD

Why must everyone speak in riddles and never give a direct answer??

JUDITH

I apologize. I'm so used to it, I forget you don't know what I mean.

*During the following dialogue, off to the other side, GERTRUDE finds ARNOLD's phone. She picks it up and starts to bring it back to him, but she sees he's talking to JUDITH and pauses.*

*She touches the phone, which lights up. She touches it again a few*

*times, and then stops when she sees something on the screen. Her face drops, and tears start to come to her eyes.*

JUDITH

When Gertrude's mother stepped from the mists of Idyllia and crossed into the very hillside where you were found this morning, the way back for her was sealed. She would not be able to re-enter Idyllia for 100 more of her years.

ARNOLD

What? Why not?

JUDITH

Because 100 years of your time is only one night's sleep for us.

ARNOLD

This must be a joke.

JUDITH

I'm somewhat known to be "the silly girl" in town, but...about The Doorway we do not jest.

ARNOLD

You're making it sound like this is some sort of fairy tale.

JUDITH

Perhaps, but without a happy ending in sight. It's just a vicious circle. Eat, drink, sleep, repeat.

ARNOLD

Then I cannot stay.

JUDITH

Why not? What awaits you out there?

*ARNOLD looks away and doesn't answer.*

JUDITH

*(Understanding dawns.)*

Ohhh....I see now. Well then. Does she make you happy?

ARNOLD

I understand you believe yourself to be in some alternate dimension, but in the real world, things are not always so easily answered.

JUDITH

The real world. Ha! If it is so real, why do so many people abandon the most authentic thing of all -- their heart's yearnings?

*By this point, GERTRUDE has come back with his phone.*

GERTRUDE

You must have dropped this.  
*(Hands the phone back to him.)*

ARNOLD

Oh. *(Takes it. Beat.)* Are you alright, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE

Of course. Just winded from the spirited dancing! Why do you think something would be wrong?

*ARNOLD looks at the phone, and cannot conceal his shock either.*

ARNOLD

Gertrude, I can explain.

GERTRUDE

There is nothing to explain.



*The church bells strike eleven. All the villagers stand in silence, as in a reverie.*

MAYOR

Friends! In our final hour before The Doorway once again closes to the world beyond, let us pause in our merrymaking and welcome a new face amongst our motley assortment. Mr. Lowe? Come join me here, son!

*ARNOLD hesitantly makes his way to the stage.*

MAYOR

This young man from...BAH-STAN...has, thanks to the path from the One above, found his way through the Doorway. I know someone who is certainly glad for your arrival! As are we all, isn't that correct?  
*Assorted replies of agreement.*

MAYOR

Arnold Lowe, we hope you will remain with us here in Idyllia and be happy! We may not dress in the fashions of your home, but I'm sure you will find much to paint and enjoy the rest of your days here! May they be many!

*They all look to ARNOLD in expectation of him giving a speech. Instead, he runs off. Everyone reacts in surprise.*

*JUDITH gives GERTRUDE a look, and she hurries off after ARNOLD.*

MAYOR

Yes. Erm...well...a man of few words, I see. Perhaps I should take a hint from him and cease my ramblings. *(To the band)* Play on, boys!

*The music strikes back up as the crowd tries to regain their celebratory atmosphere.*

*Lights fade to black.*

**Scene Six**

*Moments later, outside the inn on the edge of the village.  
GERTRUDE enters. ARNOLD is sitting on a bench.*

ARNOLD

I don't know what's happening.

GERTRUDE

It is very confusing.

ARNOLD

Less than a day ago, I thought I knew what my future held. The way was clear for me. And then I came here, and met you, and your family, and now...

GERTRUDE

And now you must leave.

ARNOLD

Must I? Why would I have found Idyllia if it weren't for a reason? I could have taken any other number of paths to get from Liddleford to Witchbury. But I didn't. I was...directed here. Like it was my Destiny.

GERTRUDE

If I didn't know any better, I'd think you believe in God now.

ARNOLD

Maybe I do. I can't explain it any other way.

*There is a silence as GERTRUDE moves to sit next to ARNOLD, who is looking again at his phone.*

ARNOLD

So you saw her picture.

GERTRUDE  
Yes. Who is she?

ARNOLD  
You remember when I said I had an engagement in Witchbury? Well, I  
meant it literally.

GERTRUDE  
I don't understand.

ARNOLD  
I'm getting married there in two days. (*Indicates the phone.*) To her. That's  
Elyse.

GERTRUDE  
She's lovely.

ARNOLD  
She looks a little like you.

*GERTRUDE looks away to hide the sadness or shock of this  
revelation.*

ARNOLD  
I'm sorry, I should've told you sooner.

GERTRUDE  
You have nothing to be sorry for. You did nothing wrong. (*Beat.*) Is she an  
artist too?

ARNOLD  
In a way. A lawyer. And a good one at that.

GERTRUDE

*(Sensing he wants to say more.)*

But?

ARNOLD

But..But sometimes I wonder if she doesn't understand what I do. Why I love it.

GERTRUDE

She wants to marry you, doesn't she?

ARNOLD

Yes.

GERTRUDE

Then she accepts you and what you love. If I didn't know you better, Arnold Lowe, I would say you're just having cold feet.

ARNOLD

"Go get them warmed up."

GERTRUDE

Pardon?

ARNOLD

That's what she said to me before I set off. "Go get those cold feet warmed up." That's why I'm hiking to Witchbury. She's already there -- it's where she grew up. I guess she thought --no, she knew -- that I needed some time to wrap my head around it all.

GERTRUDE

You lover her.

ARNOLD

I do.

GERTRUDE  
See? You just did it.

ARNOLD  
Did what?

GERTRUDE  
Said "I do." That wasn't that difficult, now, was it?

ARNOLD  
*(Laughing.)*  
No, I guess not. But what about you?

GERTRUDE  
Don't worry about me. Remember our promise?

ARNOLD  
Yes. That we will meet again someday.

GERTRUDE  
Exactly.

*She rises and goes off briefly, returning with his bag. She hands it to him.*

GERTRUDE  
Now listen closely. Wait by this inn door. Do not move one step to the left or right until you've heard the town bell strike twelve.

ARNOLD  
Ok. And where will you be, then?

GERTRUDE  
I will always be right here.

ARNOLD  
Gertrude--

GERTRUDE  
Ssh! It is nearly time. Promise me you will not move from this very spot!

ARNOLD  
I promise.

BOTH  
Pinky promise.

GERTRUDE  
Farewell for now, Arnold Lowe.

*She leans in and kisses him. Afterwards, she begins to cry but runs off quickly.*

*The stage goes almost black except for light on ARNOLD.*

*Suddenly, the bell strikes twelve. ARNOLD's circle of light grows dimmer and dimmer, until the stage is completely black.*

~~~

Scene Seven

The next morning.

ARNOLD is asleep outside the inn door, but it has aged dramatically; covered by vines, the door is hanging loose, etc.

An OLD MAN is set up with an easel, where he is painting.

ARNOLD awakens.

ARNOLD
(*Seeing the OLD MAN*)
Oh. Good morning.

The OLD MAN nods and continues painting.

ARNOLD
Is it tomorrow?

OLD MAN
Hm?

ARNOLD
I mean...Are you from...around here?

OLD MAN
Born and raised right over there in Liddleford. My family was one of the founders, in fact!

ARNOLD
I was on my way from there to Witchbury. I stopped in Idyllia yesterday--

OLD MAN

(Stops painting suddenly.)

Where?

ARNOLD

Idyllia. It's just over there...*(looks in that direction)*. At least, I thought it was.

OLD MAN

Nothing over there. Anymore.

ARNOLD

No, I swear it was! It was tucked into a little valley, amongst the willows and alders...and was surrounded....

BOTH

By mist.

ARNOLD

Yes!

OLD MAN

I haven't heard about that place since I was a child. It's a bit of a local legend. My great-grandfather loved to talk about it when I was a very small boy. He said he'd been there once and fallen in love with a beautiful woman. My great-grandmother didn't care for the story, but she knew it was just a legend.

ARNOLD

A legend? No! Idyllia is real!

OLD MAN

Well, from what great-granddad told me, it was real, once...until...

ARNOLD
Until what?

OLD MAN
It sank into the swamp. Legend goes, it was too perfect. Neighbor taking care of neighbor, all that fairy tale stuff. Too good for our world. Nonsense, if you ask me. But every one hundred years it is raised up again, for just one day. So they say.

ARNOLD
I was there last night! Talking, and dancing, and drinking!

OLD MAN
I don't doubt the drinking part.

ARNOLD
Do you know the time?

OLD MAN
Yes.

He doesn't tell ARNOLD, though. ARNOLD pulls out his phone. That's when he sees something he didn't expect on the screen.

ARNOLD
Gertrude...

OLD MAN
(Coming over to look at the phone.)
Is she your missus?

ARNOLD
No, she's from Idyllia. She must have taken this picture of herself before...

OLD MAN

Huh. Well, she's quite a beauty. Must've been hard to leave her behind.

ARNOLD

But now, she's...since I'm here...

OLD MAN

Let the dead rest, especially those who do not enjoy eternal sleep but are made to keep rising amongst us. God, he's a tricky bugger.

OLD MAN starts to leave.

OLD MAN

You're welcome to follow me back to Liddleford. I may not be the mayor of anymore, but the name Henry Vokes still holds some clout!

ARNOLD

Did you say Henry Vokes?

OLD MAN

The third, actually, but you can call me Hank. *(Extends hand to shake.)*

ARNOLD

Arnold Lowe.

They shake.

ARNOLD

I appreciate your offer, but I have to get to Witchbury.

OLD MAN

Good luck to you then, Arnold Lowe, in wherever your road may lead you.

OLD MAN walks off.

ARNOLD takes one last look towards Idyllia, and exits.

Lights fade to black.

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**Epilogue**

*The interior of a small home, which may resemble the interior of GERTRUDE's home, although of our time. A long, flat gift is wrapped and leaning against a wall or chair.*

*ARNOLD and ELYSE enter, she in her wedding dress, he in his tuxedo, now undone. They collapse onto the couch.*

ELYSE  
Can you believe it?

ARNOLD  
Believe what?

ELYSE  
We did! We're married!

ARNOLD  
It's pretty amazing, come to think of it.

ELYSE  
You're pretty amazing, too.

ARNOLD  
*(Jokingly.)*  
You're not so bad yourself, lady.

*ELYSE sees the wrapped gift.*

ELYSE  
What do you think that is?

ARNOLD  
Let's find out!

*He gets up and brings the gift over to ELYSE, who unwraps it.*

ELYSE

*(In awe.)*

Oh my God! I can't believe it!

*It is a framed painting but we cannot see the front of it yet.*

ARNOLD

Where did you...who is that from?

ELYSE

It's a family heirloom. It's been passed down from generation to generation. I've admired it ever since I was a little girl. This must be from Father.

*She reveals the gift. It is the sketch that ARNOLD drew of GERTRUDE, in an expensive frame.*

ELYSE

That's supposedly my great-great-great-great grandmother, or something. Trudy. She was the first one to settle here in Witchbury. Just her and her husband Leo.

ARNOLD

I guess she didn't mind the cowlick.

ELYSE

Huh?

ARNOLD

Oh. Nothing. Sorry.

ELYSE

Where she grew up, people thought her mother was a witch. So, when she left and settled here, she named it as a way of burying that lie. Now look at the place!

ARNOLD

She did it...

ELYSE

The old girl did well, huh?

ARNOLD

*(A smile starts to spread across his face as he realizes what this means.)*

You're related to her, so of course she did.

ELYSE

I know exactly where to hang it too!

*ELYSE takes it to an empty spot and hangs it up.*

ELYSE

Whoever did this had real talent, don't you think? Like you, Arnie. This looks like something you did. You weren't around 300 years ago by any chance, were you?

ARNOLD

Heh...It's not bad.

ELYSE

I would look at this painting growing up and realize how love can travel through time. I mean, there she is, the object of someone's affection, and here we are, centuries later, having it look over us on our wedding day.

ARNOLD

Yeah. I like that.

ELYSE

It's what first attracted me to you, you know. That you're an artist. It's one of the many things I love about you.

ARNOLD

I love you too...Now and all of our tomorrows.

ELYSE

You promise?

ARNOLD

Pinkie promise.

*They hook pinkies as they look at each other, then give a small laugh.*

*The lights start to fade with a pinspot on the painting being the last to go out.*

THE END