



# MIDSUMMER

A GAME BY MIKKEL BÆKGAARD

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## **Character descriptons**

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Lasse

Lene

Liv

Jesper

## **Summaries**

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Before the game begin - Briefing and casting

Main themes and conflicts + Relevant tools

First act - Lasse returns

Second act - Some sort of daily routine

Third act - The gave has to be filled



# INTRODUCTION

## MIDSUMMER

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Midsummer is inspired by the tv series Les Revenants (The Returned) but is not in any way an adaptation of that series.

Midsummer is a gloomy and sad love story with some chilling notes to it. It is about a family in which a departed father and husband one day rises from the grave. The focus of the story are the relationships between the four main characters, their emotions, and how they react when a departed man suddenly returns from the dead.

The scenario is an intense chamber piece and a sad melodrama. The setting for the game is a remote country house broiling in sultry midsummer heat. Every scene in the game takes place in the house or in close vicinity to it. The four family members are the only characters in the story.

## THE STORY

Lene and her teenage daughter Liv live in a country house. They are still affected by the death of Lasse, Lene's husband and Liv's father, who died five years ago. They are still in grief and since Lasse's death they have grown more and more apart, struggling to handle their loss in very different ways.

Lene's new partner, Jesper, has recently moved into the house trying to find his own way in a new family.

Together the three inhabitants of the house are preparing the midsummer celebration - a three

day holiday focusing on the memory of the dead and celebrating the long summer days and the bright Nordic summer nights.

On the first night of midsummer celebration, things turn out very differently than expected - and different from what anyone would ever think possible. On the five year anniversary of his death, Lasse suddenly rises from his grave in the garden. He is alive, as though nothing has happened to him, as fresh and clean as the day he was buried. Lasse returns to his house to find his wife and daughter living with a another man.

How will each character react to this weird situation? Will Lene throw herself in the arms of her returning husband - or will she be sceptical or even scared? What does Lasse think of Jesper as a new man in his house, taking his place? How does Liv feel about her sorely missed father returning shortly after a new potential father figure has finally shown up in her life? And how does Jesper handle a dead man from the past returning to live with what Jesper sees as his new family?

Who will stay together in the house? And who, in the end, will have to take up the empty space in the grave in the far end of the garden?

What none of the characters know from the beginning is that they only have three days and three nights together. On the third night of midsummer Lasse has to return to his grave unless one of the other characters agrees to take his place instead.

## THEME

Midsummer is a game about the complexity of love, grief, faithfulness, and obligations.

The game asks hard questions: Would people you love be able to live a good - or even better - life without you being a part of it? Would you

be able to reject the ones you love - out of love? Could you sacrifice your own happiness to make other people happy?

Would it, for instance, be possible for Lene to fully dig into her relationship with Jesper to once again feel an overwhelming love? And would she at the same time still be able provide a good life for her daughter? Would Lasse be ready to accept that the best way for him to help and support his family might actually be if he returned to his grave?

Would it be possible for Jesper to realise that Lene could be happier living with her returned husband instead of living with him? And would Liv be able to accept her mother's need for love beyond that of her daughter - and would she thereby be willing to let go of some of the attention she craves?

## SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS WITHOUT EXPLANATION

In this game you'll find no logical explanation to the supernatural events. Nobody can tell why Lasse suddenly is able to rise from his grave - not even Lasse himself. That is just the way it is. You won't find any explanation for the reason for him rising from the grave, either.

Not is there any explanation of why one of the four characters has to lay down in the grave at the end of the game. That, again, is just how it is.

The players and the characters are welcome, during the game, to bring their own explanations into play. But it is very important for the game not to turn in to a story of solving a mystery or trying to defeat some supernatural enemy.

## MOOD AND SETTING

The mood of this game is intense and heavy with a hint of horror.

The game is set in a magic realistic version of a contemporary Scandinavian country (Denmark, for instance) - but it could also be set anywhere else, at least anywhere with bright and short summer nights.

In this world the midsummer holiday marks a short opening between the land of the dead and the land of the living. In this magical version of our world, a dead man is able to rise from the grave without a deeper explanation.

The game is set far out in the countryside in an idyllic rural house with a huge garden and the most beautiful sunsets. It is time for midsummer - normally the most wonderful part of the summer - but this year the weather is far warmer than usual. In this heat the house seems almost claustrophobic. The nights are burning hot too. It is hard to sleep, and sheets and bed linen becomes soaked. Swarming flies are attracted by sweaty skin.

## STRUCTURE OF THE GAME

The game is divided into three acts - one for each day of midsummer.

The acts runs chronologically and each of them has an open and loose structure. The actual scenes and the flow of the story are very much a result of the players' input and how the relationships of the characters evolve. In each act, though, you will find some mandatory scenes, often tied to the rituals and traditions of the celebration of midsummer.

Aside from the scenes with direct interaction between the four characters, the players will also be asked narrate to relate their characters' history and emotions. By doing so, the relationships, conflicts and feelings of the characters will be elaborated upon and extended during the game. In that way the game will become more complex and nuanced as the story unfolds.

- ◇ In the **first act** Lene, Liv, and Jesper are about to mark the five year anniversary of Lasse's death when he suddenly returns. How do the characters react to Lasse's return?
- ◇ The **second act** is set the next day. Lasse is still alive and the light of midsummer is at its peak. It almost seems like Lasse being alive is the new normal, so the characters have to consider how to handle this new situation. At the end of the day an unsettling feeling starts to spread - giving the impression that the situation might not be able to continue like this after all.
- ◇ **Third act** is defined by an impossible choice the characters have to make: Who will go to the grave to let the others live? The characters start to realise that one of them has to choose death - and it isn't necessarily Lasse who has to go. The game reaches its peak with a bonfire in the garden, marking the end of the midsummer celebration.

# THE CHARACTERS

The four characters are the essence of Midsummer. They are the only characters in the game and the story evolves from their emotions and relationships. How the characters interact with each other is the focus of the game.

## LASSE

Lasse has been dead for five years. He is buried in the far end of the garden surrounding the house. He and Lene bought the house when Liv was a little girl and they wanted a new beginning in their marriage. Even though Lasse remembers his relationship with Lene as happy, it wasn't all sunny days and happiness. Lasse was often domineering, and he dreamt of having a closer relationship with Liv.

No one knows how Lasse suddenly is able to rise from the dead - not even Lasse himself. One day he finds himself standing next to his grave, confused about his situation and quite anxious about it all. He can see his house at the other end of the garden, his family walking around inside.

For Lasse the game is about figuring out what to get out of this weird situation of suddenly returning from the dead. Is it about reconnecting with Lene and chasing away the new man in the house? Or is it about getting closer to Liv and perhaps helping her out of her loneliness?

Lasse has no idea on how long he'll stay among the living. Would it actually be possible for him to continue his life with his family as if nothing had happened? During the game he has to figure out what it's all about and make some decisions. In the end, will he want to fight for regaining his place among the living - or will he accept that he might be destined to return to the grave?

## NO EXPLANATION ON LASSE'S DEATH

It is not established why Lasse died five years ago. Nowhere in this text is it defined whether it was an accident, long term illness, or even suicide that killed him. It is up to you and the players to decide during play - if it becomes important at all. Perhaps the players will insinuate something during play but never speak it out loud - or maybe they want to decide it clearly during the game. There is nothing wrong with playing the game without ever discussing why Lasse died.

## LENE

Following the death of Lasse, Lene has been mired in her grief - an all embracing grief that has made her and Liv drift apart. Lene has not been able to handle both of their misery at the same time. She hasn't been able to pay attention to the needs of her daughter.

In Jesper, however, Lene has managed to find a new light in her life. He supports her and fills her with happiness. But he also causes some tension - being happy and in love with Jesper makes Lene feel like she is betraying her deceased husband and neglecting her responsibility as Liv's mother.

It feels hard for Lene to accept that she sometimes has to settle for less. She wants it all: She wants to feel an overwhelming love for Jesper, to mourn the loss of Lasse, and to have a close relationship with her daughter. All at the same time without compromising.

Handling all these needs is hard for her. Being in love with Jesper makes her feel guilty. She feels like she is disappointing Liv. And she is totally aware that by focusing too much on her

own needs she has been letting Liv down over and over again. Lene has no idea on how to reach out to Liv and how to talk to her.

At the same time, Jesper doesn't make it easy. He finds it difficult to understand her loss. Accepting and understanding the love she still feels for Lasse is very hard for him - especially to understand the fact that this love will never go away.

For Lene the game is about figuring out what she really wants. Does she choose a new and safe life with Jesper even though Lasse has returned? Or will she throw herself back in the arms of Lasse, a man who has been gone for years and made her feel so much pain? Is it actually possible for her to regain a relationship with a man who has been dead?

On top of all that that she has to figure out what her relationship with Liv is. Is she able to handle a romantic relationship with either Jesper or Lasse and be an attentive mother for Liv too? Is she able to balance her own needs with her responsibility as a mother?

## LIV

Liv is a lonely teenage girl who spends most of her time in her room. In there she wonders about death and writes status updates in an empty, ghost-like cyberspace where no one is following her and no one ever replies to her desperate cries for help.

Since the death of her father, Liv has felt totally alone. Lene's grief had taken up all the space in the house, leaving no room for Liv's emotions. Instead Liv has done everything in her power to comfort and support her mother - but without anyone paying attention to her emotions in return.

Liv really wants to see her mother happy. But she is desperately in need of her mother's comfort and attention, too. And now with Jesper in the house, she is stuck in a situation that's hard to handle - on one hand it seems clear to her that Jesper makes Lene happy. But on the other hand, it also seems clear that Lene lets her love for Jesper overwhelm her, resulting in her giving Liv even less attention. As a result, Liv can't decide whether Jesper is a new highly needed father figure or if he is a threat to her.

For Liv the game is about finding a way out her loneliness and figuring out who she really can attach to. Where to find those close bonds she really needs? What is most important for her - her mother's happiness, or her own? Is she able to find the strength to escape that bubble of loneliness she has been caught in for too long?

# JESPER

Jesper is the stranger in the house, struggling to find his place after recently taking the big step of moving in. He is deeply in love with Lene, his first love in many years, and he wants to do everything in his power to make her happy. In his own mind, his most important task is to save Lene from the pool of misery she has been trapped in for way too long.

Jesper has a hard time really understanding the grief Lene and Liv feel. He is scared of the love Lene still feels for her departed husband. From Jesper's point of view, Lene just has to move on - even though Lene's depth of emotions and her melancholy were what he fell for in the first place.

For Jesper the game is about finding his place and his role in the family - especially when Lasse returns. Is he able to keep his relationship and his love for Lene - and is she able to stay in love with him? Does Jesper have the right to stay in the house? Will he be able to support and help Lene and Liv - or do emotions of the past and Lasse's return push him out in the dark?

The game for Jesper is also about deciding what kind of person he wants to be for Lene and Liv - and how he wants to see himself. Is he able to handle and accept his jealousy? Will he be able to find his role as the new man in the house without feeling like a weird reflection of Lasse?

**Tip: Please read the character descriptions before reading on. It will make everything much less confusing.**

# THE MIDSUMMER CELEBRATION

The setting of this game is the celebration of midsummer. In this game, though, the midsummer celebration is different from how it is celebrated for instance in Denmark or in Sweden in real life.

In this game midsummer is about remembrance of the dead. Because the nights are so short and bright at midsummer death can't hold its grip, an old tale tells. That is why some dead are able to rise from their graves and, for a short while, return to the world of the living.

When celebrating midsummer, the dead are remembered and are invited in to the house - at least in a symbolic way. No one actually believes the dead will return for real.

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## THE MIDSUMMER MYTH

*Midsummer is the time of the dead. That is what people far out in the countryside used to say back in the days. When the nights are short and the light never fully disappears death can't hold its grip. Then the dead are - for a short while - able to return to life as if nothing has happened.*

*People also used to say that on the third day the grave had to be filled again - either by the dead person or by someone taking their place.*

Midsummer is celebrated during three nights following each other:

- ◇ The **first night** is a celebration of the nights that now are so short that the dead are able to cross the barrier between life and death. Candles are put in windows to show the way for the dead. Photos of the dead are put on tables and shelves. People cook for the dead as if they were actually present.
- ◇ The **second night** marks the point of actual midsummer, the longest day of the year and the shortest night. Now the dead are truly among the living - at least in a symbolic way. That is celebrated by doing things the dead person liked to do.
- ◇ On the **third night** the darkness is on its way back and the nights are slowly getting longer. That means the dead once again has to return to death - the light is no longer strong enough to keep them among the living, At night a bonfire is lit which, for a short while, will keep the darkness at a distance. But when the fire is finally extinguished it is time for the dead to say goodbye once again.

How much you want to focus on the underlying myth is very much your choice as a gamemaster. The myth is not mentioned in the character descriptions. During play you can introduce parts of the myth to set the mood and to turn the game in a specific direction. And when approaching the third act you can also use the myth to establish the fact that the grave has to be filled on the third day - and also to establish it doesn't necessarily have to be Lasse who puts himself there.

# HOW TO GAMEMASTER MIDSUMMER

It is quite a straightforward job to gamemaster *Midsummer*.

You'll be in charge of getting the game up and running and to set the scene and the mood of the game. Afterwards it is very much up to the players to dig in to their character's relationships, emotions, and conflicts.

Your job is to observe of the game - often watching the game in silence - and then pushing the players in specific directions when necessary.

## PACE AND STYLE OF PLAY

Midsummer is a drama focusing entirely on the story that unfolds in the relationships of the four characters. The drama is solely set inside or around the country house. There are no supporting characters in the game and no scenes will play out in other places.

The focus of the game is on emotions and relationships, not on secrets and hidden agendas. It is totally OK for the players to have off-game knowledge different from the knowledge of their characters. All scenes and interactions will take place openly in front of the other players and there will be no secret play with you taking one or more players outside the door. Let the players be a silent audience when they are not in a given scene - and if two scenes are playing out at the same time, cut back and forth between them instead of letting the players play at the same time in separate parts of the room.

Even though it is a game about big emotions, game play is meant to be underplayed and subtle, making eye movements, gazes and what is

left unspoken as important as the words being said. The pace is slow, allowing time for all these tiny details that create the subtle drama and intensity.

Make room for the players to establish and play their characters and to let them explore the relationships. It is totally OK if some scenes are quite long. A slow pace is recommended - but take care not to slow the pace so much that play becomes boring. It might be necessary for you to vary the pace during play, making the game more dynamic.

The game works best played at a table, but with room for the players to use their body and the room when necessary. Be careful not to play the game as a 100 percent larp - that will make it difficult for you to cut the scenes and make the player narrate and describe when asked to (see more below).

## SETTING AND CUTTING SCENES

The scenes in the game play out in a chronological order. Every scene move us toward the final defining dramatic moment - one of the characters ending up in the grave.

The flow of scenes is quite loose and not well defined beforehand. You will set the main scenes, establishing the course for the game and giving the players a direction. Based on what happens in these scenes, new scenes and situations will present themselves. In this way the game is mixture of scenes set by you as the gamemaster and scenes evolving naturally from the actions of the players.

An example: Liv gets up from the dinner table to go her room. Lene follows her. That makes you set a scene in Liv's room while the two male characters is still at the dinner table. Instead of letting the two groups of players play the scenes simultaneously in separate parts of the room you cut between the scenes. If nothing happens in one of the scenes - if it is all emotionless small talk - you'll quickly cut to the other scene.

You can choose to cut scenes to compress time and to go on with the story - especially if the game is getting too long. Don't play out all situations. You can, for instance, cut from the dinner table to after dinner or even later that day when necessary. You can tell the players what happens in between the actual scenes or you can ask the players about it.

If the game is moving too slow, cut the scene. You should also cut scenes to create suspense or if you want a to stall a specific conflict, wanting it to play out later instead.

## ASK QUESTIONS AND MAKE THE PLAYERS NARRATE

In addition to letting the players play out traditional roleplaying scenes, you can also make the players narrate out of character by asking questions about their characters' emotions and pasts.

In addition to your role as a traditional game-master, you can also consider yourself a kind of journalist or interviewer who will make the players narrate by asking relevant questions - for instance, how they view a certain situation or what they are thinking right now. You can also ask them to tell what happened at a certain time. You can ask questions to create variation in the game, to strengthen conflicts, and to intensify the drama.

If Lene and Lasse's marriage, for instance, is described in a too idyllic a way you can start

asking questions putting their marriage in another light. You can ask about fights and frustration. Make the players tell the story of the not-so-shiny days.

Ask about very specific elements in the game. What is this house, Lasse, your are observing from the far end of the garden? Or what does the grave in the garden look like in the last sun of midsummer eve?

By asking questions and letting the players answer them, you can make emotions and conflicts more complex and multidimensional. If Lasse seems very angry with Jesper you can ask Lasse's player about positive aspects of Jesper's character. If Lene is too focused on her romantic feelings for Lasse and Jesper, you can ask about her emotions and frustrations regarding Liv to focus on her conscience, her dilemmas and her fear of what will happen next.

**Examples:** Lasse shows up while the other characters are having dinner. There is an awkward, hesitant feeling in the room. No one says much while meaningful glances are shot across the room.

At some point you ask Lasse to talk about Lene: How does she look? Has she changed, or does she look the same as before he died? Shortly after you ask Lene sort of the same questions about Lasse.

Later in the evening you ask Liv to tell about the day when Lene introduced Jesper to her for the first time. What happened? What did she think of the situation? You might also ask Lene and Jesper about the same episode to get their points of view.

At some point Lene starts to talk about Liv as a little girl. You want to dig more in to this so you start asking follow up questions: Did Lene easily adapt to motherhood? To having such a big responsibility? Was she able to handle it? How did she experience Lasse becoming a parent and partner?

## LIV'S LONELY SOCIAL MEDIA LIFE

Liv writes lonely and frustrated posts on social media. That makes her the only character with some sort of connection to the outside world.

It is, however, a very lonely connection since cyberspace in this game is an empty, remote place. No one follows or interacts with Liv. She has no friends out there, and no one reacts to her posts. Cyberspace seems totally dead except for what activity Liv undertakes. Still, it doesn't keep her trying to reach out to whatever might be out there, almost crying for attention.

In the game you might use Liv's social media presence to underscore her loneliness and give the player a way to communicate her inner life to the other player - for instance by saying what she writes. You can, of course, also ask the player about her online presence - for instance when she sits somewhere looking intently at her phone or if she has gone to her room to immerse herself in her laptop.

## FRIENDLY GHOST

As a small kid Liv used to tell her parents - and especially Lasse - stories about her imaginary friend Friendly Ghost. He was always close to her and could always lift her gloomy mood. Both her parents were envious of the invisible companion who seemed to have full access to Liv's private, inner world.

Though it might have seemed that way, Liv never thought of Friendly Ghost as real. She was totally aware that she just made him up. But looking at her parents, it often seemed like they actually believed her stories to be true.

Now as a teenager, Liv and her parents all miss the stories of Friendly Ghost. Grieving over the death of her father Liv often wished her departed father would become her new Friendly Ghost. She writes messages online to the ghost hoping to reach him. She often wishes and hopes for the ghost to be real and not just imagination.

After Lasse's return - and if it fits the game - you can let a mysterious Twitter profile named @friendly\_ghost reply to some of Liv's messages. You can consider this a voice coming from the same weird, supernatural world that has also made it possible for Lasse to return from the dead.

Friendly Ghost might be useful as a tool to communicate important - and sometimes scary - information to the players. You might, for instance, let the ghost communicate the fact that Lasse can't stay among the the living - the grave can't be empty forever and it has to be filled again. The ghost might also ask Liv questions - if she believes her father to be back for good, or if she thinks he will abandon her again.

The messages from Friendly Ghost are a tool to give Liv important information and cards to play in a world surrounded by grownups. She has knowledge they don't have - and that can give her power.

# MAIN THEMES AND CONFLICTS

The interaction between the four characters is the main force driving the play in *Midsummer*. To help you run the game, this chapter will give you an overview of the main themes and conflicts.

You will also find a sheet summarizing these themes and conflicts.

## DEATH AND THE GRAVE

Death and the grave in the far end of the garden should be present all through the game. Ask Lasse how it feels to be dead and to lie in a grave. Ask Liv what she imagines death to be like.

You should describe to the players that Lasse seems cold, and a certain coldness radiates from him - especially the first night - and you should use the grave as a location during the game. Often the grave is visible in the far end of the garden, and you should ask the players to describe it. Will the characters visit the grave, or do they avoid it? If you want the grave to feel more present you should set a couple of scenes near it.

## GRIEF

For the last five years grief has been all-consuming for Liv and Lene. Let them tell about their grief. How has life been without Lasse? How did they manage to establish a daily routine? How did it feel for Lene to sleep alone in her bed without Lasse by her side? How did Liv manage to go on without her father?

Ask about the times when grief nearly took over. When did it feel the worst? Did it ever go away - even for a short period of time? Ask them about everyday life as well as festive times, for instance Christmas and Midsummer.

## MEMORY OF LASSE VS. REAL LASSE

How do Liv and Lene's memories of Lasse reconcile with the man actually returning from the dead?

Ask about specific situations in the game when they occur - is Lasse behaving the way they remember him? Did he use to act this way? Ask about their memories - have they been accurate? Is the man returning from the dead someone new to them, or is it the Lasse of their memories?

## LENE'S TWO MEN

Lene loves two different men - one who is alive and one who is dead. What happens to her when the dead one returns? Lene has a real "Sophie's Choice" and you should do whatever it takes to make it even harder for her to choose between the two men - if she is at all interested in choosing. Ask about her feelings, dilemmas and internal conflict.

Make space for both Jesper and Lasse to show their love and affection for her - and make space for her to do so, too. Why does she love Jesper? And why did she love Lasse?

You should also make space for conflicts and clashes between Lasse and Jesper. Is it a subtle and silent fight or is it an open confrontation? Make sure to set scenes involving each of the three - in pairs, and as a trio.

## THE PURPOSE OF LASSE'S RETURN

Why Lasse has returned from the dead is, of course, an important question - especially for Lasse. Focus on the uncertainty of why he has come back. Make space for Lasse to be hesitant and searching for answers, especially in the beginning of the game.

But the matter of Lasse's return is also important for the rest of the cast. What do they make of it? Are they trying to come up with an explanation - or are they reluctant to?

## JESPER'S JEALOUSY AND FEAR OF LASSE

Even before Lasse returns from the dead Jesper is jealous of Lasse. With the shadow of the departed Lasse lying heavy over the house, Jesper finds it hard live up to his role as Lene's new partner. Jesper wants to be more than just a substitute for a dead man.

The question for Jesper is: Is it OK to be jealous of a dead man? Focus on Jesper's feelings of impotence and fear when when he compares himself with Lasse. Make space for frustration and jealousy and ask about how this feels unacceptable. Ask about Jesper's actual fear of Lasse and why he rarely comes near the grave in garden. What does he think when a dead man suddenly stands alive before him?

## LENE'S GUILT

Lene's relationship with Liv fills her with frustration and guilt. By focusing too much on her own needs and grief she is totally aware that she has neglected Liv's need for comfort. Even though, as the mother of a hurting daughter, it should be the other way around.

By focusing on her own happiness - and now with Jesper in the house - she feels she is neglecting Liv once again. Ask about how it feels to focus on your own needs instead of living up to the ideal of the perfect mother prepared to sacrifice everything for her child.

## LASSE'S FAILURE TO HIS OWN FAMILY

By dying and being dead in his grave, Lasse has abandoned his family - even though it might not be his own fault. Still, it gives him a sense of being a disappointment and failure.

Ask about this feeling. Does he feel like he is to blame for it? Push the other players feelings of being abandoned and let down by Lasse. You can even encourage Jesper's feeling of being the one who was there for them - contrary to Lasse, who were just lying dead in his grave.

## LIV BEING LONELY

Liv feels abandoned and neglected by everyone. Her dad is dead, her mum has disappeared into her own grief, and Jesper is mainly in the house to support and comfort mum. Nobody pays Liv any attention, it seems like.

Make sure that Liv's loneliness is apparent. Surrounded by people who try to move on and be happy in different ways, Liv is lost in her desperate need for some care and attention.

You might also focus on the other characters and their relationship to Liv. Do they understand how lonely she is - and why? Do they try to reach out to her? Is she able to accept care and love at all - or did all her comfort for her mother make her forget about her own needs?

You can use Liv's cry for help as an active part of the game. Make her speak out loud what she types - and let her wait for reply without success. By focusing on the stories of Friendly Ghost you can focus on how hard it is for Liv to connect to other people - and how hard it is for other people to reach out for her.

## LIV'S WISH TO HELP HER MOTHER

Liv is willing to do almost anything to make her mother happy. But in her urge to do so she has almost forgotten about her own needs.

Ask Lene to share the many times Liv was there for her when she was the most sad. And ask Liv about how it always improved the atmosphere in the house to cheer her mother up. Make sure also to explain how hard that was - and ask Lene about how it feels to let her daughter down.

## LIV'S FATHER FIGURES

During the last five years Liv really has felt the absence of a father figure - and often the absence of a mother too. How does she feel when Lasse returns? Is she ready to let him back in to her life even though he has been gone for so long?

Ask about her doubt and the feeling of abandonment. Give both Lasse and Jesper the opportunity to approach her - and make space for her to approach them too.

The question is: What kind of father figure does she actually need? Is Lasse capable of playing the role of a father to a teenage girl given the fact that she was five years younger when he last saw her? Is he making her play the role as daddy's little girl - and will Liv go back into that role due to her habit of behaving in a way everybody else wants her to?

# BRIEFING AND CASTING

Before you start to play it is necessary to brief the players well. Tell them about the concept, genre and style of the game.

Whether you want to tell the players about the end of the game - that one of the characters must be put in the grave - is up to you. Personally I, the writer of the game, prefer it to be a surprise for the players. I think it makes room for some interesting play if Lasse's player considers staying among the living an actual possibility.

## FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GAME

- ◇ About a family living far out in the countryside. Lene and Liv has been mourning since Lasse died five years ago. Lene's new partner, Jesper, has just moved in when Lasse suddenly returns from the dead.
- ◇ A character-driven love story and emotional drama with some supernatural elements in it. The main focus is on emotion, and relationships between the characters.
- ◇ The supernatural elements help to establish the game's atmosphere and have an impact on the story. Nevertheless the game is neither about explaining the supernatural nor denying or fighting it.
- ◇ Why Lasse is able to return from the dead is not explained in the game. The only explanation is what, if anything, the players make up during play.
- ◇ Why and how Lasse died is not defined.

## STYLE OF PLAY

- ◇ The game takes place over three days of midsummer celebrations - a fictitious festival quite different from how midsummer is celebrated in real life.
- ◇ The game is organized into three acts - one for each of the three days of the midsummer celebration. The midsummer traditions form the framework for the story.
- ◇ As a gamemaster you are in charge of setting scenes and cutting when necessary - but the different scenes and the flow of the story are, to a great extent, up to how the internal play of the characters, their relationships, and their emotions play out.
- ◇ All scenes are set in or in near vicinity of the rural house.
- ◇ All scenes are played openly and the players are not supposed to keep secrets for each other. Please avoid scenes outside the door without all the players present.
- ◇ The only four characters in the game are the four main characters. Their relationship with the surrounding world is not important.
- ◇ The scenes play out in chronological order. During the game you will, however, ask and answer questions about the past and the character's inner life.
- ◇ The game is supposed to be subtle. Things left unspoken and quiet glances are as important as conversation.

- ◇ The pace of the game should be slow, almost dreamy at some points. Even though it might not seem to move anywhere, your role as a gamemaster is to make the story move forward by cutting scenes when necessary.
- ◇ The game is best played sitting around a table, but you should make room for the players to move around and play physically if they want to.

## THE MIDSUMMER CELEBRATION

- ◇ Celebrates the summer light and the summer solstice, long days and short nights.
- ◇ Is a three day celebration.
- ◇ The first night celebrates that the light is on the way to its highest point.
- ◇ The second night - Midsummer Eve - celebrates that the night now is as bright and short as possible. The light is at its ultimate high point.
- ◇ The third night focus on the darkness now returning.
- ◇ Midsummer is a time to remember the dead. Long ago people used to say that due to the brightness, death couldn't hold its grip. The holiday is marked by putting out photos of the dead, by cooking their favorite meals and setting the table as if they were going to join the meal. The celebration ends with a huge fire, lighting the night enough to hold the cherished dead among the living until it burns out.

## WARM UP

Before deciding which of the players should play which character, some warm up is recommended. This will warm the players up and get them ready to play. At the same time, you can get an idea about the play styles of the different players.

You may begin with some small exercises like making the players free-associate with the words 'death' or 'grave'. You could also ask them to share a real life celebration of midsummer and what traditions they associate with midsummer. Finally you might ask the players who they would want to see return from the dead if possible - this could be both close acquaintances or celebrities.

Practicing the playing style with the players answering questions and sharing past events and emotions is also a good idea. Set a scene with a family where the grandmother has just died. The grandmother's two grown children and her grandchildren sit by her deathbed. Ask one of the players to describe the grandmother as she lies on the bed. Ask another player about memories of the grandmother - and ask the third player about the same events from their perspective instead. Finally, ask the fourth player why they feel differently than the others about the same situation. Let the players play out the scene while you occasionally ask more questions.

## CASTING AND BRIEFING FOR EACH PLAYER

It is very important to carefully choose which player will play which character.

Ask the players about their preferences when it comes to roleplaying - what kind of charac-

ters do they prefer? Do they like introverted or extroverted characters? How would they describe their playing style?

Share a bit about the four characters, their characteristics and - just as important - about what each character demands from a player to be played well.

- ◇ **Lasse** should be played by a player capable of setting the right mood and who is comfortable with narration. They should be able to focus on the uncertainty regarding Lasse's return. A player who is able to be humble and curious at the same time would be the perfect match for Lasse - especially if they are able to intensify emotions and drama as the game evolves.
- ◇ **Lene** is best played by a player who has some life experience and who is able to find balance between the fine line of her emotions and interpersonal problems. She needs a player who relates to her dilemmas and understands the complexity to love and relationships - and who also relates to her sense of responsibility and her feelings of letting Liv down. The perfect player for Lene is able to show her emotions without being too melodramatic.
- ◇ **Jesper** needs a player who is capable of creating conflict and pushing the drama without letting it get out of hand. Jesper also needs a player who understands how it feels to fall in love - and how jealousy often accompanies it. The perfect player to play Jesper is able to play him as a character who is respectful to the other characters but also knows when to stand up for himself when necessary.

- ◇ **Liv** works best when played by a player who is happy playing in a shy and quiet way and wants to immerse into some intense play - but also a player who, by seeing the big picture of the game, is able to push the other players with subtle hints and comments. A player who understands Liv's loneliness without overdoing her teenage emotions - and thereby avoids turning her into a boring stereotype of a teenager - is a great match for Liv. Please make it clear for the players that to play Liv in the best way, finesse and devotion are needed.

When the players has read the character descriptions it might be a good idea to talk a bit with each player alone. Ask about how they perceive the character and give some advice on how to play the character. You might also make clear for each player what to be aware of during play - that Lasse, for instance, should be reluctant in the beginning and Lene shouldn't seem too unsympathetic.

# FIRST ACT - LASSE'S RETURN

It is the first night of the midsummer celebration, time to remember Lasse, who died this very evening five years ago. Lene, Liv and Jesper are about to sit by the dinner table to enjoy some of Lasse's old favorites when Lasse suddenly arrives, returned from the dead to turn everything upside down.

The surprise of Lasse returning and how the characters react to this weird situation is in focus in this first act. It's time for tears, delight and grim glances exchanged between two men who now have to fight for the attention of Lene and Liv.

The purpose of this act is to introduce the characters and to establish the main conflict.

The playing time of this act should be no more than two hours.

## FIRST NIGHT OF MIDSUMMER

On this first night of midsummer people celebrate that the night is now so short and bright that the dead are said to be able reenter the world of the living. Candles are put in windows to show the way for the dead. Photos of the dead are presented, and people cook for the dead as if they were actually there - of course in a symbolic way. No one really thinks the dead will actually return.

## WARM, WITH A WEIRD COLDNESS TOO

This summer night is hot, almost sultry. Windows have to be kept open while curtains flap and candles flicker lightly in the warm summer breeze. At the same time a weird coldness is also present, suddenly making people shiver - like the heat for a short moment suddenly disappears. A minute later the warmth might seem even more intense.

## THE HOUSE, THE GARDEN, AND THE GRAVE

The house, a large two storey house, is surrounded by a big garden, fields, and woods. The garden has seen better times, having been neglected since Lasse died. Jesper, however, does his best to handle it now that he has moved in. He seems to avoid the area near the grave, though.

In the far end of the garden, surrounded by tall wild grass is the grave. From a distance it seems totally normal, like it has for the last five years. Getting near it, some sort of coldness coming from the grave will be revealed. The dirt also seems to have been disturbed, maybe because someone has dragged himself out and tried to cover it up again.

## LASSE SEEMS COLD - BUT HE IS NOT A CORPSE

When standing next to his grave Lasse looks just like when he was alive. He might seem pale and confused but he is not a wandering corpse. He wears normal clothes and doesn't smell of decay and rot. Perhaps he is a bit dirty. Leave the details to the player to fill out.

He is, however, weirdly cold, almost radiating it. Insects and birds becomes silent when he is around. With time the coldness wears off and in the second act it is gone.

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## LASSE ARRIVES

The moment when Lasse shows up in the house is the central scene in the first act. Let the player who plays Lasse decide when and how he arrives. Make sure all the players have had a moment to get in to their characters and get a bit warmed up before it happens.

This is a very important scene, so take your time to create tension and drama. Make space for extra long gazes and for doubt, tears and disbelief - after all, it isn't every day a dead man suddenly shows up.

You might help Lasse's player to be hesitant and to keep the tension in the scene by asking relevant questions. He doesn't have a clue why he suddenly is here or what's supposed to happen.

## DINNER

Tonight's dinner is supposed to be held in remembrance of Lasse. His favorite dish is on the menu and there is a place for him at the table.

How does each character feel about it? Make space for glances, irritation and emotions around the table.

And when Lasse shows up: What now? How will dinner evolve? Will it be dramatic and emotional or filled with politeness and awkwardness. And how will Jesper react to a dead man in his house? He is not involved emotionally in the memory of Lasse in the same way the women are.

Give the dinner scene time to evolve. This is the dramatic peak of the first act.

## REST OF THE EVENING

After dinner, make space for scenes with characters interacting two and two. Does Jesper want to talk to Lene alone? Does Lasse want to express love to his wife? Has Liv withdrawn herself to her room and does anyone show up there to talk to her? Will she try to post in her empty version of cyberspace - and will she actually get an answer this time from an old ghostly friend?

If the players are a bit hesitant, you can help them by setting some actual scenes. You can, for instance, say that Liv has gone to her room and Lene enters.

Let play run for as long as it make sense. Make room for some conflict to evolve, but be careful not to let everything explode yet. Focus on a weird, unreal and underplayed atmosphere. You might also cut scenes pretty tight at this point - it is not necessary to play out everything yet. You might also let the players narrate what's happening once in a while instead of playing every scene as traditional roleplay.

## MESSAGES FROM FRIENDLY GHOST?

If you want to communicate some information through the mysterious Twitter account @friendly\_ghost you might want to introduce it now - even though it is still not time for important information to be communicated.

Suddenly a message for Liv pops up in the otherwise totally empty cyberspace. It'll be the first time anyone contacts her there. It could be a message like: "Is he coming back?" or "Do you think he'll stay?"

Use the messages carefully and not too much. You wouldn't want to overshadow the mystique of Lasse's resurrection.

If Liv writes back she won't get any replies.

Liv får ingen svar, hvis hun skriver tilbage.

## READY FOR THE NIGHT

When it is time for bed, end the first act. Play some scenes with characters saying good night and laying in bed. Make them talk about how they are getting ready for bed. Who sleeps where? Is Lasse assigned a guest room? Will anyone sleep on the couch? Who is sleeping in Lene's bed?

# CUES AND TIPS FOR THE FIRST ACT

## **Lasse**

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- ◇ Confused and surprised to suddenly be back among the living. Hesitant to approach both Lene and Liv.
- ◇ Everything seems familiar and yet weird and somehow new.
- ◇ Focus on his uncertainty about the situation.

## **Lene**

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- ◇ Five year anniversary for the death of Lasse - is it commemorated the way she wants it to be? And what does Liv expect to happen?
- ◇ How does Jesper feel about the commemoration?
- ◇ Focus on her insecurity and perplexity - especially when Lasse shows up.
- ◇ Will there be tears? Or is she also frustrated at Lasse's return? Is he tearing open wounds that were finally healing?

## **Jesper**

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- ◇ What is his place and role this night, which grimly focuses on the memory of a man long gone?
- ◇ How will he react when a dead man shows up in the house? Is he scared? What is his opinion?
- ◇ Is he being helpful this evening, or is he trying to obstruct the remembrance?
- ◇ Somehow a stranger in his own new home. Doesn't Jesper actually belong more to the house than Lasse does? After all, Lasse has been absent for the last five years. And it is Jesper who now takes care of Lene and Liv, isn't it?

## **Liv**

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- ◇ What does Liv expect from this night? Is she unconcerned about it, or does she expect family unity and shared memories?
- ◇ Make room for the player to express the teenage girl as she really is - perhaps by tweets and the expression of her inner thoughts.
- ◇ How does she react when Lasse returns? Does it make her happy? Or will she express disappointment in him for being absent and letting her down?
- ◇ Please give her a hard time finding her space. The grownups might have a challenging time finding the energy to actually talk to her, and the focus is more on the memory of Lasse than it is on Liv.

# SECOND ACT - SOME SORT OF DAILY ROUTINE

The second act is set on the second day of mid-summer. That is the high point of summer. It is the longest day of the year and the amount of light is at its peak.

Lasse is still alive, waking up to a sunny day with dewy grass and birds singing. Perhaps he is actually going to stay among the living. Is this the new normal?

Act two consists of several points of impact during the day focusing on the characters doing different activities while trying to absorb the fact that Lasse actually has returned - and might be here to stay. No character knows yet, but it's just a matter of time before Lasse or one of the others must return to the grave.

Make sure that the different scenes seem as prosaic as possible, without forgetting how strange it is that one of the characters in the house has risen from the dead.

The purpose of this act is to let the characters fully comprehend this new situation. Since Lasse really is back, relationships and roles in the family must be restructured. Who is Lene's partner? Who is the father figure for Liv? Who has the right to be a part of the family? All these questions should lead to sharpened conflicts, jealousy and doubt - but still in an underplayed and subtle way.

Near the end of this a mysterious atmosphere takes over, along with a lurking feeling that something is wrong. Lasse gets the feeling that he might be back for a short visit.

This second act should take no more than one hour to play. Please keep it more tight and cut more aggressively than in the first act.

## SECOND NIGHT OF MIDSUMMER

The second night of midsummer - the high point of summer - is usually celebrated by relaxing and being together with your loved ones. The dead are commemorated with their favorite activities.

Ask the players how the family used to celebrate this day. What did Lasse like to do? What special traditions kept the family together? Use these inputs as inspiration for setting actual scenes. You might also focus on the difference between the memories of Lasse versus how he actually is when returned - that could create some dramatic situations with Lasse acting differently than Lene remembers him in a nostalgic light.

## IDYLIC WEATHER AND MORNING DEW

Yesterday's sultry weather is gone, and the newly dawned summer day is going to be lovely. In the morning, dew covers the grass and it gets warm in a nice way without getting too hot. By nightfall when the drama in the house gets more intense, the uncomfortable heat slowly returns and it feels uncomfortable to get near the grave.

## MESSAGES TO LIV

When everything starts to tighten up near the end of second act, you might want to bring new information into play using the mysterious Twitter profile @friendly\_ghost. Liv might receive messages saying things like "It can't go on like this" or "Soon it will be over".

If Liv writes back she still doesn't receive any replies.

## BREAKFAST AND EARLY MORNING

Start the act by describing the morning asking the players questions. Who wakes up first, and when? Where did the characters sleep and how well did each of them sleep? Did anything happen during the night?

Then it is time for breakfast, coffee and morning greetings. Who takes charge of all the small rituals regarding the food and coffee? Who takes the initiative regarding the different activities for the day? Who does what, who sits where? Is everybody present at breakfast?

## ACTIVITIES AND TRADITIONS DURING THE DAY

You might set a series of small scenes that simultaneously show the simplicity of the different activities and emphasizing and escalating conflicts. It could be a walk in the woods near the house, a game of croquet in the garden or wood chopping for the midsummer fire. The grill also needs to be lit, the lettuce has to be washed and the steaks must be grilled.

Make room for the characters to explore their different relationships. Does Liv want to be near her father, or does she try to keep away from him? Which of the two men is Lene closest to during the day? What is the mood between Lasse and Jesper?

Use the different scenes to emphasize the relationships: Who grills the steaks? Who lights the grill? What is the distribution of the unspoken roles in the family - and does anyone try to change it? Is Liv trying to help out during the day or does she distance herself?

## POST DINNER - SEEMS LIKE SOMETHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN

Cut to after dinner - there is no reason to play another dinner scene. You could ask the players to describe what happened at the dinner table, or you might frame a scene with the characters sitting by the table after dinner is finished.

As night falls the claustrophobic, uncomfortable atmosphere takes over again. The weather turns steamy, making people sweat. At one point, by accident, one of the characters takes a long look at the grave: Something feels different about it, and it is partly covered by fog.

Lasse gets the lurking feeling that things cannot go on like this. He is suddenly sure that something has to happen. Depending on the feel of the game you might whisper this in his ear or speak it out loud for everyone to hear.

Yet it is still just a weird feeling. No character yet knows that it might be possible for someone other than Lasse to lay themselves in the grave.

## NIGHT AGAIN

If needed, you might set a couple of scenes emphasizing the discomfort and conflicts between the characters. Still, you might want to avoid direct confrontations. It is better to have a lot of tension and unspoken words thickening the air.

End the act with a couple of scenes leading up to another night. Who is first to go to bed? Who sleeps where? Is everyone able to fall asleep? What happens during the night?

# CUES AND TIPS FOR THE SECOND ACT

## **Lasse**

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- ◇ What is Lasse's role when returned? Does he belong here or does he feel like he is in the way?
- ◇ Make room for one-on-one scenes with Lasse and Lene - and with Lasse and Jesper.
- ◇ Is he still shy and reluctant or does he try hard to reestablish his role as Lene's husband and Liv's father?
- ◇ Ask about how things were before he died, compared to now.

## **Lene**

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- ◇ How does she feel about the two men she really loves being in the same house?
- ◇ Keep focusing on her insecurity - regarding Liv as well as love. Ask about her doubt.
- ◇ Make sure she gets more and more confused and frustrated about her own chaotic emotions.

## **Liv**

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- ◇ Make space for one-on-one scenes with Liv and each of the adults. How do they talk to her? How does she talk to them? Is she open about her emotions or is she getting even more introverted and secretive?
- ◇ Focus on Liv's desire to make her mother happy.
- ◇ You might question her relationship to her to potential father figures. Which of them can she trust?

- ◇ Use messages from @friendly\_ghost to communicate important information to her - and in that way that gives her the upper hand.
- ◇ Ask about how it felt when Jesper came into her mother's life. How did it feel to once again have a man in the house?

## **Jesper**

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- ◇ Is Jesper getting pushed out of the house he just moved into? Give him the chance to fight back.
- ◇ Let Jesper show what he is worth, for instance by helping out in all the necessary tasks of the day.
- ◇ If Lasse gets too much space, encourage Jesper and Liv to make a connection. Do the opposite if Lasse has a hard time finding his place after returning. Help the players by setting scenes involving these characters.

## **Ask more about the past**

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- ◇ You can use questions regarding the past to balance the game, both when it comes to relationships between the characters and sympathy for each of them.
- ◇ Ask questions about the Lene and Lasse's relationship, especially the less romantic and happy sides of it.
- ◇ Ask about how Jesper and Lene met and about their relationship. Maybe ask about the first time Jesper came to the house.
- ◇ Ask questions about grief and the feeling of meaninglessness, especially near the end of the second act.

# THIRD ACT - THE GRAVE HAS TO BE FILLED

The third act is set on the third day of midsummer and is meant to be the climax of the game. The characters are forced to make hard choices. One of the characters has to sacrifice themselves - or be sacrificed - and barely-contained emotions get to fully explode.

In the far end of the garden the grave is fully open and at nightfall, when the big midsummer fire is lit and the darkness indicate the coming of winter, it is time once again for death to balance the score.

The act is split in two parts. At first you'll set a couple of scenes during the day in which the characters realise the grave is open and something is about to happen. While getting ready for the final night of the midsummer celebration, these scenes can be used for escalating conflict and to extend the relationships between the characters even further.

The second part of the act is the climax, set by the big midsummer fire in the garden. Here the game must reach its conclusion and one of the characters must leave the land of living to lay themselves in the cold grave instead.

The act should take no more than one hour to play.

## THIRD NIGHT OF MIDSUMMER

The third and final night of midsummer celebrates the fact that summer has now peaked and darker times are coming. The dead must now return to their graves, tradition says - at least in a symbolic way.

Usually this night is celebrated by a big fire, indicating farewell to the dead. The fire sheds light for a while, even when night has fallen. The light from the fire is said to make the dead hang on to life for a little while. Tradition has it that once the fire dies out, the dead have to return to their graves. The symbolic goodbye to the dead is often marked by extinguishing the last embers of the fire and allowing the darkness of the night to finally take over.

You can ask the players to fill out the details of the celebration. How is this third night of midsummer celebrated by the characters in this game? What traditions and ritual do they have? How was it celebrated before Lasse died - and after his death?

## EVEN HOTTER - BUT COLD TOO

The sultry heat and humid sweatiness from the night before continues. During the day it gets even worse. But if someone tries to approach the grave it is different. Near the grave it feels chilly, almost freezing and uncomfortable.

## LASSE IS GETTING COLD AGAIN

As the day goes on, Lasse starts getting colder once again and animals get silent too if he approaches. If someone other than Lasse decides to lay down in the grave the coldness stick to Lasse afterwards - as if he doesn't belong to the world of the living somehow.

## TENSE MORNING - THE GRAVE IS OPEN

Let the players play one more morning - most likely with an even more intense atmosphere than the day before. Who wakes up first, who makes coffee, who sets the table?

Sometime during the morning one of the characters realizes that the grave in the garden is open. Now it is a deep hole in the ground with piles of dirt next to it. Soon it is time for someone to put themselves in it forever.

Perhaps Liv receives one or more messages from @friendly\_ghost saying that the time is near.

## PREPARATIONS FOR THE MIDSUMMER FIRE

The big fire for midsummer eve has to be prepared, as well as preparations for the final night of the celebration.

You can use the different activities as a framework for different scenes involving the characters. Firewood has to be chopped, lighter fluid has to be fetched. Who is supposed to do what? Do the characters have a mutual agreement on how the night is supposed to play out?

How is this symbolic farewell to the dead usually characterized? How will it be different, now that an actual dead person is among the living?

## THE MIDSUMMER FIRE

When darkness is about to fall it is time to light the fire. The garden is illuminated by the flames and sheds flickering light on the empty grave. You can describe how the sunlight disappears as the darkness falls - and how the fire seems to become a more and more dominant source of light. Now it is only a matter of time until the veil between life and death descends once more.

Now, standing by the fire, it has to be clear for both the players and their characters that one of them has to lay themselves in the grave. Most likely someone will fight this notion and refuse to accept it - but there is no way around it. This fact is very clear, ultimately.

Make the players understand that it has to be this way. You can suggest it very clearly or you can just let them infer it. It is important that the characters realise it too - not only the players. Perhaps they just suddenly know it - or perhaps Friendly Ghost tells Liv in a message.

## A HARD CHOICE - IF ANY CHOICE AT ALL

The slowly dying fire should be used as a countdown for deciding who in the end has to face death.

The choice can be obvious for some player groups - often Lasse would be the obvious choice. He has already died once and should be the one returning to his grave.

But one of the others might offer to take his place: It could be Liv, believing she would thereby help her parents stay together. It could be Jesper who, out of love for Lene, sacrifices himself, not wanting to stand in the way of Lene's happiness. Or it could be Lene, who might think Liv deserves to be with her father instead of her hopeless mother.

Make sure the scene is emotional, moving and dramatic. There might be tears, conflict and hard dilemmas. Make sure the final decision is hard to make.

You should also make sure the scene isn't getting too tactical and too much of a negotiation - the scene will not be interesting if it gets too long or too driven by reason. It is not interesting if someone just sacrifices themselves because "someone has to do it". The choices and conflicts should be driven by emotion, not logic. In the end, the scene is about the true core of this game's theme: Would you sacrifice your own happiness to make the ones you love happy instead?

Ask the players questions and set mini-scenes to emphasize emotions - and try to keep all the four characters from clustering together to start up a rational discussion. Cut the scene if they do so. Ask more questions and try to split the group, making room for emotional talks and maybe some monologues expressing the inner feelings and dilemmas. That is what should drive the scene rather than direct negotiations.

## INTO THE GRAVE

When the fire burns out it is time to say goodbye. Make room for glances, kisses, hugs and last minute attempts to change it all. But in the end it has to happen, someone has to walk towards the dark hole in the far end of the garden.

It might be a good idea to cut the scene before the actual burial. Describing someone climbing into their grave might feel too clumsy and corny - the same with describing dirt being tossed atop someone below. Instead you can focus on the three characters left behind and what they are going to do now. Do they walk towards the house or do they wait hesitantly? Who is holding who?

## EPILOGUE AND POSTSCRIPT

To sum up the game, you can set a couple more scenes. How is the atmosphere in the house now? Who lies close to each other in Lene's bed? What is Liv doing?

You can also let the players play a short scene set the next morning, like a reprise of the mornings they just have played. Who wakes up first? Who makes coffee? Is everyday life with normal routines back? What kind of everyday life is it?

You might also ask the one in the grave question. What is death like? How does it feel to lie in the dark soil?

## EXAMPLES OF ENDINGS

The game in general, and the third act in particular, might evolve in very different ways. Here are some examples:

- ◇ The purpose of Lasse returning to life is to help Liv and Lene to get better, he realizes. In this he succeeds and therefore he afterwards decides to lay himself in the grave. A tearful goodbye.
- ◇ Liv wants to do everything in her power to help her mother and father - even sacrificing herself. She can't bear the thought of her father or anybody else lying in the grave - especially not when she is so lonely. Therefore she decides to sneak out and put herself in the hole. When dawn breaks the other characters finds her dead in the grave.
- ◇ Lasse suggests that he should be the one returning to his grave but Lene can't bear the thought of it. Instead she tries to run to the grave to take his place - she has done enough damage by letting everybody down, she thinks. At the last minute, the other characters manage to stop her and Lasse takes back his place in the grave while Lene begs him of all her heart to stay among the living.
- ◇ Even though he loves Lene with all his heart, she seems to love Lasse even more, Jesper realises. Full of sorrow and pain in his broken heart, he decides not to stand in the way for the happiness of his loved one. In the end it is Jesper who puts himself in the grave. The following morning a beautiful scene plays out like Lasse has never been gone.

# CUES AND TIPS FOR THE THIRD ACT

## Lasse

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- ◇ Make sure the grave seems more and more present for him - almost like it is calling for him. Ask about how it might feel to return the grave? The loneliness, the cold, the emptiness...
- ◇ Does he really belong among the living? Perhaps it's better for him to return to the dead? His mission might be complete if he is able to help Liv feel less lonely. Perhaps the most important thing for him is to help Lene live on without him, perhaps even to be happy.
- ◇ Will he fight for Lene's love and attention to the bitter end?
- ◇ Is he able to leave his daughter once again? Does she actually need him?

## Lene

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- ◇ Is she getting a clear idea of what she wishes her future to be like? Is she at all able to make a choice? Who does she love the most and who does she want to live with?
- ◇ Is there any way for Lene to help Liv feel less lonely? Is it possible that she deserves to be with her father instead of her mother?
- ◇ Would it be possible for Lene to sacrifice herself to keep the three persons she really loves from suffering? Would she, for once, be able to put other people's needs ahead of her own?

## Liv

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- ◇ How does the open grave affect her? Does it seem tempting or frightening? Would she choose death to help her mother and father?
- ◇ Ask her about her thoughts about death. What does she think death would be like? How will it feel to be dead?
- ◇ What are her thoughts about the future? Does she believe she has a future at all? Does she finally feel like someone sees her and understands her?
- ◇ What is the best way for her to help her mother, father, and Jespers?
- ◇ Who does she actually want to help? The other characters or herself?

## Jesper

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- ◇ Is Jesper aggressively trying to get a rid of Lasse again? Or is he playing a more passive role? How does he actually feel about Lasse and about the love and past that Lene shares with her departed husband?
- ◇ How much does Jesper love Lene? Is she really his one and only - or did he fall for her because she was there for him at the right time in his life? Would he be able to sacrifice himself out of love for her? Could he do the same to help Liv?
- ◇ And what about Liv? Could he be the father figure she really needs? Would he be able to live with her even after everything that has happened this midsummer?
- ◇ Does Jesper think he deserves to spend his life with Lene?

SUMMARIES  
CHEAT SHEETS

# BRIEFING AND CASTING

## Fundamentals of the game

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- ◇ A family in the countryside. Lene and Liv are grieving. Lasse died 5 years ago. Jesper has recently moved in when Lasse returns from the dead..
- ◇ Character driven love story. Some supernatural elements. Focus on emotions and relationships.
- ◇ Supernatural elements establishes an atmosphere and impacts the story. Not about explaining or denying or fighting the supernatural.
- ◇ Not explained why Lasse is able to return. Only explanation is what the players make.
- ◇ Why and how Lasse died is not defined.

## Style of play

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- ◇ Takes place over three days of midsummer - a fictitious festival different from real life midsummer celebration.
- ◇ Three acts. The midsummer traditions form the framework.
- ◇ You set and cut scenes - but the flow of the story are created by the internal play, relationships, and emotions.
- ◇ All scenes are set near the house.
- ◇ All scenes are played open. No secrets. Avoid scenes outside the door.
- ◇ Only four characters in the game. The surrounding world is not important.
- ◇ Plays out in chronological order. You ask questions about the past and the character's inner life.
- ◇ The game is subtle. Unspoken things and quiet glances are important. Slow pace, almost dreamlike. You are in charge of letting the game evolve. You cut when necessary.
- ◇ Best played around a table. Ok to move around and play physically.

## The midsummer celebration

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- ◇ Celebrates summer light and solstice. Long days and short nights.
- ◇ A three day celebration.
- ◇ First night celebrates light is on the way to its highest point.
- ◇ Second night - Midsummer Eve - celebrates night is as bright and short as possible.
- ◇ The third night focus on the return of darkness.

- ◇ A remembrance of the dead. People used to say that due to the brightness, death couldn't hold its grip. Picture of the dead are put out, favorite dishes are cooked, a seat for the dead at the table. Ends with a huge fire, keeping on the dead until it burns out.

## Warm up

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- ◇ Dramatic exercises: Associate the words 'death' and 'grave'. Ask about real life midsummer celebration. Who would you wish could return from the dead?
- ◇ Practice the playing style: A scene in which Grandma has just died. Her two adult children and her grandchildren by her deathbed. Let the players describe her, tell about situations. Another perspective. Why did the fourth player feel different about the situation?

## Casting and individual briefing

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- ◇ Ask about each player's preferences and playing style.
- ◇ Tell the players about the character - both about characteristic and what kind of players will fit the best.
- ◇ **Lasse's player:** Is able to create atmosphere while playing and is good at narrating. Is able to focus on his insecurity when returned. Humble and seeking, but is also capable of intensifying emotions and drama when needed.
- ◇ **Lene's player:** Is able to balance her characteristics and emotions - has some live experience and is able to understand Lene's dilemmas and the complexity when it comes to love. Sense of responsibility and the feeling of letting Liv down. Focus on emotions without getting too much, too selfish or too unsympathetic.
- ◇ **Jesper's player:** Is able to create conflict and to push the drama forward. Understands how it is to fall in love and the jealousy that often follows it. Is able to play Jesper as respectful - but also to speak out loud what he needs.
- ◇ **Liv's player:** Is OK with an introvert and sometimes quiet character. Is able to create some intense play and to push the other character by remarking and commenting them. Understands Liv's loneliness without her teenage emotions gets too much. Demands both sacrifices and finesse to play.
- ◇ Speak to the players one at a time. How do they see the character. Give some advice on how to play it and talk about what the character demands from them as a player.

# MAIN THEMES AND CONFLICTS

## **Death and the grave**

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- ◇ Coldness from Lasse the first night.
- ◇ Lasse: How does it feel to be dead, lying in a grave?
- ◇ Liv: How do you imagine death to be like?
- ◇ The grave as important location. What does it look like?

## **Grief**

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- ◇ Lene and Liv: Tell about your grief. Life without Lasse. Everyday life, alone on the bed. No dad.
- ◇ When did it feel at worst? Did the grief ever let go? - at least just for a while?

## **The memory of Lasse**

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- ◇ Does the memory of Lasse fit reconcile with the man actually returning?
- ◇ Actual situations while playing - is this how you remember Lasse?

## **The purpose of Lasse's return**

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- ◇ Nobody knows why.
- ◇ Lasse is hesitant and seeking - especially in the beginning.

## **Lene's two men**

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- ◇ Make it hard for Lene to choose.
- ◇ Make room for both male character to show their love - and for Lene to show hers too.
- ◇ Why does she love them?
- ◇ Two-on-two scenes - and scenes with all four characters.

## **Jesper's jealousy and fear for Lasse**

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- ◇ Is it ok to be jaloux on a dead man?
- ◇ Jesper wants to be more than just a new version of Lasse.
- ◇ Feeling of impotence and fear when it comes to Lasse

## **Lene's guilt**

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- ◇ Lene feels guilty. Has been too focused on her own grief, making Liv comfort her mother - not the other way around.
- ◇ Does she let Liv down by being in love with Jesper? Is she just following her own needs?

## **Lasse's failure to his own family**

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- ◇ Has Lasse led down his family by being away?
- ◇ Is it his own fault?
- ◇ Does the other players feel neglected by Lasse? Did Jesper take care of them instead?

## **Liv's loneliness**

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- ◇ Do the other characters understand how lonely Liv is?
- ◇ Is Liv able to accept care?
- ◇ Use social media as a way for Liv to communicate her inner feelings.
- ◇ Childhood stories about Friendly Ghost.

## **Liv's wish to help her mother**

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- ◇ Liv wants to help her mother - but has forgotten her own needs.
- ◇ Lene: How does it feel that Liv always supports and comforts you?
- ◇ Liv: How did you help your mother? Why was it hard?

## **Liv's father figures**

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- ◇ Is there room for Lasse in Liv's life when he returns? Will she let him in?
- ◇ Doubt, loss and the feeling of abandonment.
- ◇ Make room for Lasse or Jesper to try to reach out for her - and for her to reach out for them.

# FIRST ACT - LASSE'S RETURN

Playing time: 2 hours max. Time establishing relationships and emotion.

Sultry summer night, suddenly some coldness. Chilly getting near to Lasse or the grave.

## First night of midsummer

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Nights so short and bright that dead people can enter the world of the living. Candles in windows to show the way. Pictures of the dead, food for them.

## SCENES

### Introducing the characters

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Lasse standing by his grave. Can see the house.

Lene in the kitchen, getting ready for dinner in the memory of Lasse.

Liv in her room.

Jesper in the living room - or helping out in the kitchen.

### Dinner preparations - cut to Lasse in the grave

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Everyday like, small stuff. Soon dinner is ready. Liv, please come down.

Lasse in the garden. Impressions from nature and being alive is overwhelming.

### Lasse shows up

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A dead man appears. What now?

A long and hesitant scene.

### Dinner

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Lasse's favorite dishes. Expectations and emotions.

What happens when Lasse suddenly is there?

Let the scene run for quite some time.

### The rest of the evening

---

Two-on-two scenes. Love and conflict?

Messages in cyberspace?

Weird, unreal, subtle.

Ask about what happens - and tell the players. Don't play out everything,

### Ready for the night

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Goodnight scenes - lie-in-the-bed scenes.

Who sleeps where?

## CUES AND TIPS

### Lasse

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- ◇ Surprised and confused to be among the living. Hesitant.
- ◇ Everything seems familiar - and yet quite weird and somehow new.
- ◇ Uncertainty.

### Lene

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- ◇ Five year anniversary for Lasse's death - is it commemorated the way she wants? What about Liv?
- ◇ How does Jesper feel about it all?
- ◇ Focus on her uncertainty and confusion.
- ◇ Reunion tears? Frustration over Lasse's return? Is he tearing old wounds open?

### Jesper

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- ◇ What is his role when it comes to remember a dead man?
- ◇ Is he helping or obstructing?
- ◇ A stranger is his new home.
- ◇ Doesn't Jesper belong more to the house than Lasse does? After all, Lasse has been absent for the last five years.

### Liv

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- ◇ What does Liv expect from this night? Is she unconcerned, or does she expect family unity and shared memories?
- ◇ Make room for the teenage girl to show. Tweets and thoughts.
- ◇ Happy or disappointed when Lasse returns? Has he let her down?
- ◇ Hard to find her place.

# SECOND ACT - SOME SORT OF DAILY ROUTINE

Playing time: 1 hour max. Some kind of normality - renegotiation of roles and relationships. Everyday things to do.

A lurking feeling of something is wrong.

Nice summer weather, morning dew on the grass, sultry by nightfall.

## **Second night of midsummer**

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The highpoint of summer. Time for relaxation, activities the dead would have liked.

## SCENES

### **Morning and breakfast.**

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Who wakes when and where? Breakfast, good morning-greetings, coffee. Who is in charge, who sits where?

### **Activities and traditions during the day**

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Small scenes from the day. Everyday-like. Time to expand conflict.

Perhaps a walk, a game a croquette with view to the grave, woodchipping. Who grills the steaks, who lights the grill?

### **Post dinner - seems like something is going to happen**

---

Ask about what happens at dinner.

The uncomfortable atmosphere comes back. Sultry, sweaty. Misty by the grave, the characters realize. Something has changed.

Lasse gets a lurking feeling - this can't go on.

Perhaps messages from @friendly\_ghost.

### **Night again**

---

Scenes to emphasize the feeling of discomfort and the conflicts - one-on-one scenes.

Who goes to bed when? And sleep where? Is everybody able to fall asleep?

## CUES AND TIPS

### **Lasse**

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- ◇ What is Lasse's role now? Does he feel like he belongs here? - or is he in his way?
- ◇ One-on-one scenes with Lasse and Lene - Jesper and Lasse.
- ◇ Still hesitant? Is he trying to conquer back his role as Lene's husband and Liv's father?
- ◇ How was everything like when he was alive - and now?

### **Lene**

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- ◇ The two men she loves is in the same house?
- ◇ Uncertainty - towards love and towards Liv. Doubt?
- ◇ Gets more and more confused and frustrated about her chaotic feelings.

### **Liv**

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- ◇ One-on-scenes with Liv and the adults. How do they talk to her? Does she express her feelings or is she pulling out?
- ◇ An urge to make Mum happy.
- ◇ Make her in doubt about her to father figures?
- ◇ Ask about how it felt like when Jesper came into her mother's life - a man in the house once again.

### **Jesper**

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- ◇ Maybe he is getting pushed out of his new him. Let him fight it.
- ◇ Let him show what he is worth, for instance by helping out in all the necessary tasks of the day.
- ◇ Make connections between Liv and Jesper if Lasse gets too much space - and the other way around. Set relevant scenes.

### **Ask more about the past**

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- ◇ Ask questions about the past to balance the game - both when it comes to relationships between the characters and sympathy for each of them.
- ◇ Ask about Lasse and Lene's relationship, especially the less romantic and happy sides of it.
- ◇ How did Jesper and Lene meet? How it their relationship like? Ask about Jesper's first visit to the house.
- ◇ Ask about grief and sense of meaninglessness - especially by the end of second act.

# THIRD ACT - THE GRAVE HAS TO BE FILLED

Playing time: 1 hour max. Hard choices and big emotions out in the open.

The grave is open.

Even more sultry - but freezingly cold by the grave. Lasse is turning cold again.

## **The third night of midsummer**

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Darkness is on its way back. A big fire marks the end of midsummer and keeps the darkness away for a short while.

## SCENES

### **Tense morning - the grave is open**

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Another morning - who sleeps where? Coffee? Good morning.

The grave is open, one of the characters realises. A deep whole, piles of dirt. Someone has to lay there.

### **Preparations for the midsummer fire**

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Use the different activities as a framework for scenes involving the characters. Firewood has to be chopped, lighter fluid has to be fetched.

How did it use to be? And now?

### **The midsummer fire**

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Flames are lighting the grave. The sunlight disappears and the light from the fire takes over. Only a matter of time before the dead has to return to their graves.

Someone has to lay themselves in the grave - and not necessarily Lasse.

Make that clear for the players - maybe a message from @friendly\_ghost

### **A hard choice - if any choice at all**

---

The choice might be obvious - or is it hard? Make sure the scene is emotional and dramatic.

Tears, conflicts and hard dilemmas? Please avoid the scene turning too tactical or too rational. Avoid direct negotiations. Ask questions and set smaller scenes to push the drama.

### **Into the grave**

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Time to say goodbye, kisses and hugs. Last attempt to change the decision. Avoid a funeral scene.

### **Epilogue and postscript**

---

Round up the game by setting a couple of scenes. Who lies in Lene's bed? And the next morning? What is it like in the grave?

## CUES AND TIPS

### **Lasse**

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- ◇ The grave becomes more and more present for him - almost calling for him. Ask about what it feels like to lay down there - and to return? Loneliness, the cold, emptiness?
- ◇ Does he really belong to the living? Perhaps he should return to the dead?
- ◇ Will he fight for Lene's affection to the bitter end?
- ◇ Is he able to leave his daughter once again?

### **Lene**

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- ◇ Is she getting an idea of what she wants from the future? Is she able to make a choice? Who does she want to live with?
- ◇ Is she able to help Liv to get a better life and being less lonely? Does Liv deserve to be with her father instead of her mother?
- ◇ Would Lene be able to sacrifice herself - and thereby avoiding sacrificing the others? Put the need of others ahead of her own?

### **Liv**

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- ◇ Is the open grave tempting or scary? Would she be able to choose death?
- ◇ Ask about her thoughts about death?
- ◇ What are her thoughts about the future? Does she believe she has a future? Does she finally feel like she has been seen and understood?
- ◇ What is the best way for her to help her mother, father, and Jesper?
- ◇ Who does she want to help? The other characters or herself?

### **Jesper**

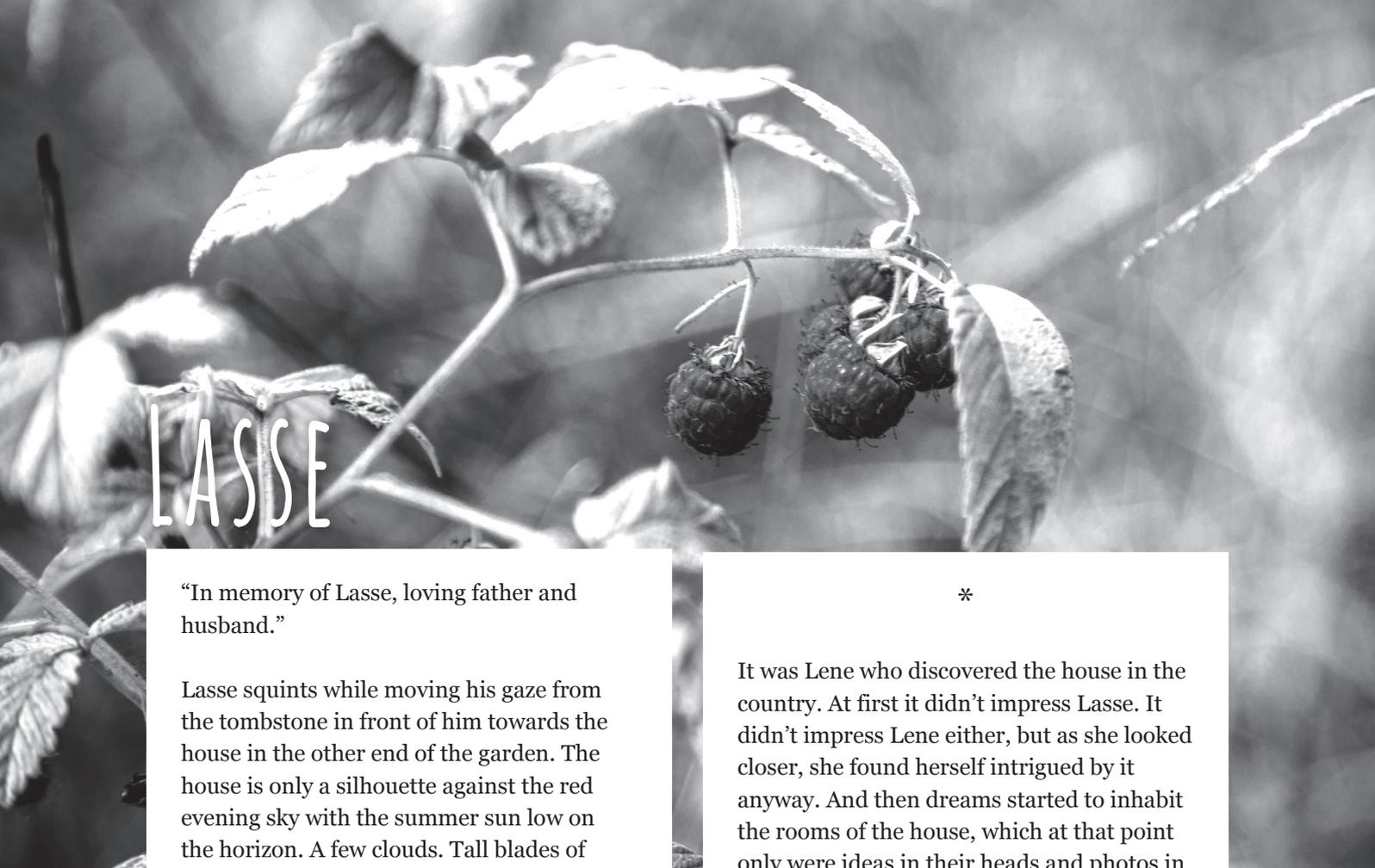
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- ◇ Is Jesper aggressively trying to get a rid of Lasse? Or is he playing a more passive role? How does he actually feel about the past that Lene shares with Lasse?
- ◇ How much does Jesper love Lene? Could he sacrifice himself for her - and for Liv perhaps?
- ◇ Would he be able to be a new father figure for Liv? Would they be able to live together?
- ◇ Does Jesper deserve a life together with Lene?



# LASSE

APPROX. 40 YEARS OLD, DEAD



# LASSE

“In memory of Lasse, loving father and husband.”

Lasse squints while moving his gaze from the tombstone in front of him towards the house in the other end of the garden. The house is only a silhouette against the red evening sky with the summer sun low on the horizon. A few clouds. Tall blades of grass becoming almost black backlit by the sun. Grasshoppers making noise. Light in the eyes, blinding him. Light and sun. Everything but darkness.

It seems so nice and well-kept here - much more well-kept than he remembers it.

It must be summer. Close to midsummer, he thinks.

The grasshoppers becomes silent when he gets near them. Everything becomes silent. No more birds singing, no more frogs croaking or insects buzzing. They all seem to sense the presence of the dead.

He takes a step closer, then another one. Slowly through the tall grass, surrounding the house. The apples are about to grow at the apple tree, he notices. The cherries are already here. And also the raspberries shine red in the evening sun.

But Lasse hasn't come for berries or fruits. He is here for his family, to once again be among the living.

\*

It was Lene who discovered the house in the country. At first it didn't impress Lasse. It didn't impress Lene either, but as she looked closer, she found herself intrigued by it anyway. And then dreams started to inhabit the rooms of the house, which at that point only were ideas in their heads and photos in a real estate ad.

It was like falling in the love when he entered the house for the first time. He was holding Lene's hand and looking at Liv running around, being the amazing and enthralled little girl she was at that time. It was the only place for them. It was supposed to become their place - just the three of them in that house. Moving in any other place else would feel like infidelity. He didn't care about any other houses after he had seen this one. Nobody else should take part in their happiness.

No one else were supposed to live in this house.

\*

They were meant to be for ever. That was what they promised each other - in front of the priest, the guests and The Holy Lord.

Did he believe in it? Deep down inside? He never answered that question. But he said

yes when he had to and cried of happiness when Liv was born. Never before did he feel that strong - so deep, so intense, so emotional.

And never again did feel that way. Maybe with the only exception of when he knew he was going to die. In that moment everything stood clearer than ever. And in that moment it was too late to feel anything.

\*

Liv is the one he has missed the most. Of course it is, it is her he had let down the most. In his absence her fragile child mind must have turned into a teenage mind. A mind now evolving into the mind of an adult - and a mind that must have missed her father so much. Who else should guide her, talk to her and try to understand her in the same way that Lasse used to - and in a way that Lene never was able to?

How was Liv supposed to handle her grief without her father? How could he leave her in the darkest of all darkness? That was what Lasse most often worried about from the depth of his death.

If only he was able to help her through the darkness. Just stroke her hair, tell her everything would be ok. If only he could be the father who would never let her down - a father she always would listen to. If only he could be the father he never managed to be while he was alive.

\*

As a kid Liv often talked about Friendly Ghost - about all the stuff he did which no one else was able to see. She talked about his shenanigans, naughty behavior and how he once in awhile a helped her with comforting words making her childhood life seem easier.

If only Lasse could be the friendly ghost, he often thought - the idea of gaining access to Liv's world as only the fictional ghost could, intrigu-

ed him. He would then to be able to understand her and to comfort her in an even better way. When he was alive he often thought so.

And in his death Lasse prayed even more to be able - at least just once - to turn into this diffuse ghostly friend; a friend who would be long forgotten now with the years gone by and Liv's childly innocence replaced by worries, teenage angst and a big dark hole in her heart.

If only this friend just for once could turn into a real ghost instead of just being a silly childhood idea.

\*

Lasse is aware that he has been gone for a long time. Way too long. Is it too long to turn everything back as it used be?

The thought of what has possibly happened since then makes makes him cold. He shivers just by thinking of it. What kind of life did they live while he wasn't among them?

Which words have been said in the house? What tears have been shed? What kisses have been kissed? What screams have been cried out?

He has been denied so many wonderful experiences - he is sure of that. Experiences he'll never be able to fully understand. What strong arms have been comforting Liv and Lene? Which comforting voices have spoken to keep away the sorrow, making room for happiness instead?

What kind of love has moved in? Who has taken Lasse's place? Who has been taking care of the well being of the garden?

\*

Lene was nothing without Lasse, she used to say. He made her life make sense, he gave her life and the strength to be who she dreamt of being. She said so, when she was not scolding

him for not making enough room to meet her needs, for not listening, or for draining her of all her energy and personality.

And who is she now? Who has she become without Lasse by her side? What dream did she follow without him to support her? How did she manage to live a life that turned out completely different from what they promised each other? That day by the house, that day in the church, and that day when Liv entered screaming into the world. A day full of hearts, tears and an overwhelming love, deeper than anything else.

And who is Lasse now? Is he just a departed man without a future, without a life?

\*

The grave is so cold, even in the hottest hour of summer. So cold and lonely. So terrible lonely. So intensively filled with nothing.

Often he wanted to call for them. Wanted to cry, whisper and shout. But death is silent, totally silent. Silent like ... the grave.

How long has he been dead? How long before he has to go back? How much did he lose? How much can he regain?

He has to see them, that's certain. They got to see him. He has to go back - back to what once belonged to him.

\*

The heat of the sun is strong. Oh, the joy of feeling it against his skin, heating his face, to be blinded by the light. The smell of the flowers, the meadow and the summer. The smell of rot and decay. The smell of life and death, birth, destruction and everything in between.

To rise from the dead wasn't hard. He just did it. Suddenly he was able to do so. Suddenly he stood there by the grave in the far end of the garden opposite from the house. He was living, not dead. He could take a step, then another one. And then one more step, leading to him walking, to movement, to everything but the silence of death.

He stares at the house. There is life inside. They are still here. People move around, they are living their lives inside - even at this warm summer night. Even now at the time of midsummer.

But what now? he thinks. What is supposed to happen? What is expected of him? How to do this? What to do?

How long will he be allowed to stay?

## DEAR PLAYER

In this game you will be playing Lasse, a dead man returning to life - at least for a while. It isn't clear in this game how Lasse died and the reason for his death. That is up to you and the other players to decide. Maybe it will be decided during play, maybe not.

No one knows why Lasse one day is able to rise from the grave. That just how it is. Maybe he has been chosen to do so? Maybe there is something he has to do. Maybe it is just the way it is without any explanation.

It is mystery to Lasse too. And you should use that when playing him. Please make him - at least in the beginning of the game - be seeking, hesitant and perhaps even confused. The doubt and confusion you probably feel right now - and all the questions you might have - they are also felt and asked by Lasse. He misses his family, his wife and daughter and he would - of all things in the world - very much like to see them again.

But what then when has seen them? - and when they have seen him? What is then supposed to happen? With them, with him, with everything? This is the big question in this game for you. Who should live and who should die? Who is supposed to be happy and who is not?

During the game you will be asked to tell about the past. You'll be asked to tell about the relationship between Lasse and Lene. About his relationship with Liv. About how it is to be alive and all the shades of grey that make up the full picture of life. About all the things that went well, and about the things that went totally different than expected.

You'll also be asked to tell about death. How it was to die. How it was to be dead. About emptiness, longing and silence. You could start now by thinking a bit about it, how it must be to be dead, how it must be to die.

And then think a bit about how it must be to return from the dead full of doubt, hope and anxiety.

## KEYWORDS

- ◇ Doubtful, seeking, humble - at least in the beginning of the game.
- ◇ Misses Lene intensively - but who is she now? Does she still love him? What did 'forever' mean?
- ◇ Wants to get closer to Liv than what he managed to do when he was alive. He really wants to take care of her and comfort her.
- ◇ Will it all be like it used to be? Is it supposed to be the same?



LENE

APPROX. 45 YEARS OLD



# LENE

“I have betrayed the two of us. I have betrayed what we promised each other. I know that,” Lene thinks, sitting on her knees in front of the grave in the far end of the garden.

“But that is how it must be,” she also thinks. In her hand are flowers, a small bunch of red poppies picked from the fields surrounding the house. That, at least, is what she owes him on this specific evening.

“In memory of Lasse, loving father and husband,” the words on the tombstone say. The low midsummer sun paints everything in orange colours, making the cross stand like a silhouette against the evening sky.

Here by the grave she doesn't say anything out loud. She can't say the words aloud, even though they are just at the tip of her tongue. She looks at the flowers, which she brought. They seem almost pathetic, she suddenly thinks. They seem like a poor excuse from her, now when she finally feels a bit of happiness.

“But this is the way it has to be,” she repeats to herself.

\*

She promised him eternal love, but she didn't give it to him. The word fidelity was never spoken out loud - but it was what they both thought of: To be true to each other in sickness and in health.

She was nothing without him, Lene used to say. He made her live, gave her life a purpose and the strength to be who she dreamed of being. She used to say so - at least when she was not scolding for not listening to what she wanted or not giving her enough space to meet her needs.

“Till death do you part,” was the official statement. But it was meant to go way beyond that - she knew that when it all became too serious and Lasse wasn't there anymore. She would love him forever, she vowed. Despite death and loneliness. She would never love anybody else, she said.

Back then she didn't doubt that statement for a minute. She was certain that it never would change. She never thought it to be more complex than that.

\*

Inside the house by the couch the evening sun lights up Jesper's head from behind, making his hair glow almost like a halo. He lies down, relaxing for a while after his hard work of gardening outside.

She really does love him - she's certain of that. Now it is him and her. It's meant to be that way. Perhaps even ... forever.

Her eyes turn wet. How dares she consider these words once again? Is she really allowed to think so twice in one lifetime?

He loves her too - she is also certain of that. Otherwise he would never have come all this way to live out here. Otherwise he wouldn't have entered a house haunted by silence, loss and grief. Otherwise he wouldn't do all in his power to shine a light and bring happiness to the house. If he didn't love her he would never have undertaken the task of managing the garden, which was totally overgrown and inaccessible after five years of silence.

Lene closes her eyes, breathing deeply. She smells the summer evening, smells his scent. He smells good - almost like Lasse, she sometimes catches herself thinking. Then, with a beating heart and tears ready to be shed, she closes her eyes. She tries as hard as she can to think forward instead of dwelling in past. Then she tries to be happy.

\*

The countryside house was last call for Lasse and Lene. Last call for the two of them. They had searched and searched without any luck. With the two of them drifting apart and Liv growing from an infant to a little girl something different and new had to happen. They were desperate.

This was supposed to save them. That was what they needed in a time when Lene felt lost at her most. She felt alone - it seemed like Lasse's dreams and wishes were controlling everything.

This was supposed to be her opportunity to say out loud what she actually wanted - not to keep silent, just hoping for him to guess her innermost needs. This was supposed to make sense of the vows they said in front of the priest, the world and the holy lord.

It was Lene who one late night at the computer discovered the house. At first she didn't find it that special. But the photos on the screen made an impact on her. They planted the seeds to dream - a dream of something different, something new.

When they finally came to see it with their own eyes there was no turning back. After only a few minutes with the scenery all around him even Lasse - who was skeptical and hard to persuade - was convinced. The spring sun shined through the windows and Liv was running around, filled with a childish joy. Lene has missed that joy so often since.

They were supposed to stay out here - to live, to grow old. Out here, Liv was supposed to grow up and be filled with happy memories. Out here, they should live, just the three of them, as a happy family - Mom, Dad and Liv.

And out here, everything did turn out completely different than any of them ever expected.

\*

Tonight it is midsummer - first night of three with the summer light at its maximum.

Lene's heart suddenly beats fast. Does Liv expect something special for tonight? Does she at all remember what tonight it is? It is the first night of midsummer, the five-year anniversary of the night of Lasse's death. It's the night - by tradition - to remember the dead, light up candles and

cook for those who are departed. It is the night to sing by the grave, to laugh and perhaps even to cry a bit.

At least that is what they have been doing every year at midsummer since Lasse passed away. That is what has brought Liv and Lene together. This is what helped them to share memories and to be able to talk to each other - at least for this one day a year. This is what helped them to forget loneliness and the unbearable facts of life, making them actually laugh, smile and approach each other in the shared memory of what they once had.

But the past year it seems like everything has changed. With Lene beginning to see a way through the fog of sorrow, it feels like Liv has been drifting even more apart. Like - now with Jesper in game - there is no more room for memories or to speak openly about the pain. And it feels like there is no more room for the two of them to share anything.

Thinking of that makes Lene shiver, it makes her cold. What kind of mother and widow has she turned into? Has she become someone who seeks the easy way out by just following her heart's momentary crush? The fact that the new man in the house doesn't appreciate grief and tears for someone other than him, does she really let that control her? Has she really turned into someone who forgets how to comfort Liv, the most important person in the entire world?

She takes a deep breath. Yes, of course - at least tonight - everything will be like it used to be, she tells herself, trying to comfort her beating heart against her fear of neglect.

\*

Liv is upstairs, in her room as always, hiding behind books, screens or closed eyes.

They have hardly spoken today. They almost never speak anymore. They live in the same house, but it is a house where thoughts, dreams

and emotions are kept behind closed doors and never shared. It is house where grief and the past is no longer shareable.

But has it ever been different? Hasn't Liv always been hard to reach - at least for Lene? She hides behind a hard shell that prevents for Lene to break through.

Lene remembers being full of jealousy when watching Liv and Lasse play, having funny conversations with each other. Liv used to tell her father stories about her imaginary friend, known as Friendly Ghost - a funny and nutty friend doing silly things and who knew all of Liv's secrets. How often did Liv and Lasse laugh, giggle and whisper quietly while Lene sat by herself, feeling all alone?

\*

Jesper changed everything for Lene. He wanted to guide her, to help her move on, open her eyes for a new life and a new love, he said.

She really wanted him to do so, she said. And suddenly she was able to love and laugh again, suddenly she was able to look just a bit forward. Jesper allowed the fog to clear a bit, revealing glimpses the sun on the other side.

But oh, it did also hurt, allowing herself to love again - to look in the eyes, tell him about her inner most feelings. And all these sleepless nights, she lay next to Jesper with a throbbing heart, fearing she had done something unforgivable.

When he pushed the doorbell for the first time and entered the house it felt strange. When he spend the night for the first time it was weird. And when he got his own key it felt almost wrong. But he really was supposed to be here. With him in the house it felt nice, safe and comforting. She needed him so much.

They made love, drank wine and talked all night. And for a long time they were silent

together, just staring in each others eyes, feeling how affection and love overwhelmed them - regardless of how much she tried to fight it.

That is why Lene was a bit hesitant when she first asked him to come inside, welcomed him, made him enter the house, showed him the garden and the way to her bed. She also showed him the grave, the tombstone and the flowers. And at that moment she cried for the first time in front of him.

Jesper was scared, she sensed clearly - he was scared by her grief and love for someone else than him, for someone who once was there.

And Jesper is still scared. He obviously fears what used to be before him. He can't understand how it feels and how it was - and he never will understand. And Lene wants to spare him. She just want to give him what he needs - like she needs him.

She needs light, life and love. Like she also needs to to feel her loss, death and the connection to Lasse.

## DEAR PLAYER

In this game you'll play Lene, a middle-aged woman who finally - five years after the death of her husband - is beginning to regain her way in life. Jesper, her new partner, has recently moved into her house in the countryside - a house she bought with her now departed husband, Lasse. In this house she lives together with her teenage daughter Liv, and now with Jesper as well.

In the years following Lasse's death Lene and Liv has been drifting more and more apart. Lene is haunted by guilt, not being able to help her daughter through the hard times of grief - mainly because Lene herself has been way too miserable and hurt to be seriously able to help and care for Liv. Instead Liv - that poor girl - has had to find her own way through the darkness.

In Jesper, Lene seems to finally have found an anchor in life. He gives her love, care and a new focus in her everyday life. That makes it easy for her to let go and be overwhelmed by falling in love, just ignoring the pain and her loss.

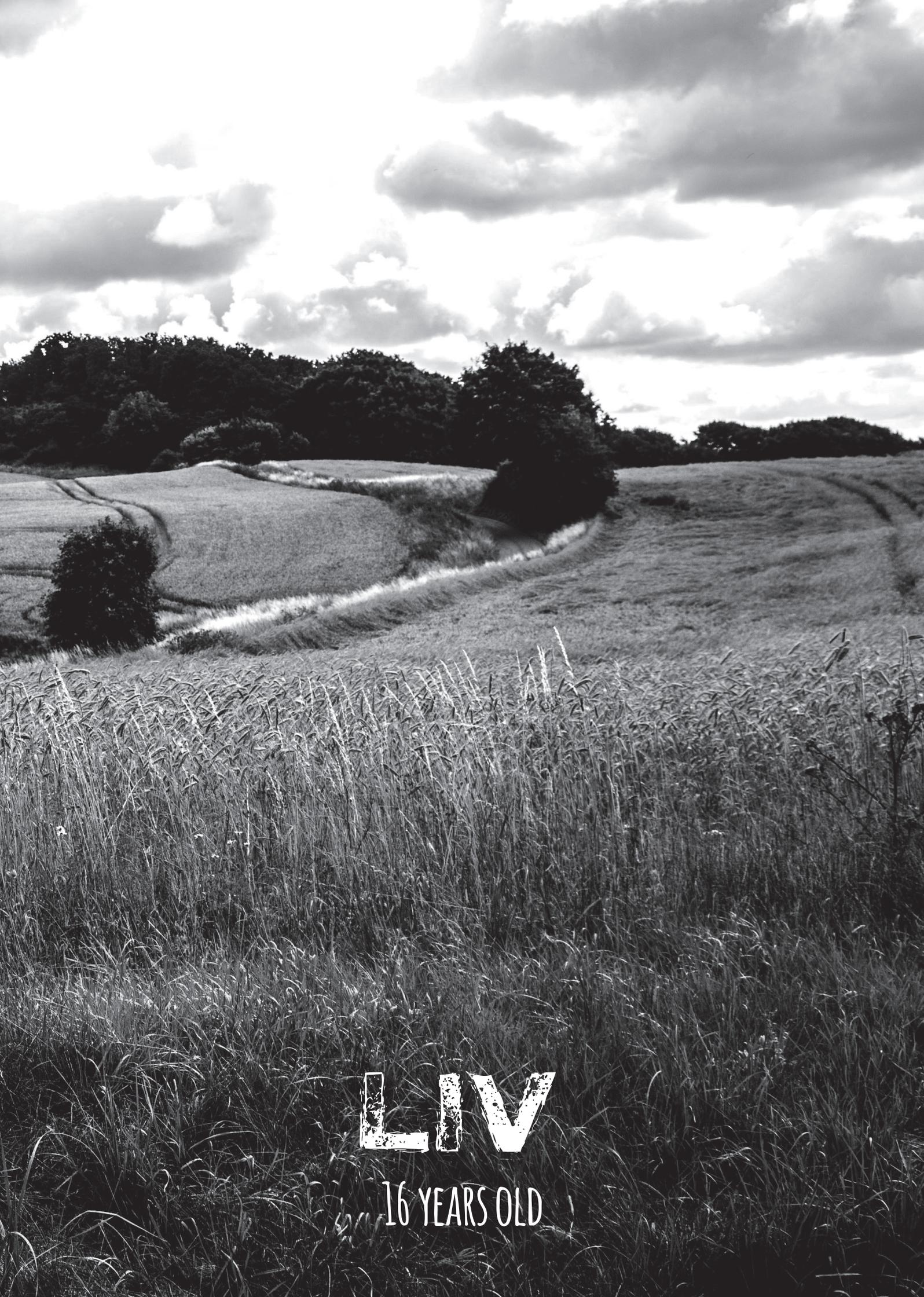
How Lene manages to balance her past, her love and her responsibility as a mother is very much up to you. That delicate balance is the focal point for you in the game. Will you allow yourself to lose control in the feeling of overwhelming love, will you embrace yourself in guilt, or will you accept your responsibility and manage to become who you want to be while at the same time being able to support the ones you love?

During the game you'll be asked to tell about the past. You'll be asked to tell about life when Lasse was alive, as well as after his death. You will tell about the memories, about reality and about the loss - and you'll be asked to tell about feeling powerless, the struggle for everything to make sense and the attempt to make this new life work.

You'll also be asked to tell about falling in love, about hope and about the past that keeps on knocking. Take a while to think about how you - by playing Lene - will try to handle all these expectations and emotions and all that responsibility that hangs on her shoulder. And you may also think a bit about how she will react if everything one day suddenly becomes possible once again.

## KEYWORDS

- ◇ Loves Lasse who is dead and Jesper who is alive - and feels like she is betraying Lasse by being in love with a new man.
- ◇ On her way to find peace and a way of put her sorrow by being with Jesper.
- ◇ Has been too kept up in her own grief - feels like she has neglected Liv. Is there a way to once again to become close with Liv.
- ◇ Wants everything - her grief, her new love, her daughters affection and intimacy.
- ◇ She often felt stuck and dominated by Lasse - and still she misses him so much.



LIV

16 YEARS OLD



# LIV

What a name, Liv - Life - when you most of all just want to die. Just close your eyes, disappear, never to wake up again. Like he did. Just leave everyone else behind.

She just wants to sit in her room, stare into the empty screen, stare into emptiness. Here, in her room, no one expects anything from her.

Liv stares at her screen. An empty feed. A social world not available. A world normally full of temptations and inputs, but for her it is just empty, empty, empty. A world where no one answers, where no one says anything.

\*

Where are you? she tweets. #areyououtthere #whoareyou #whereareyou

She knows she should be outside - or at least look out the window. She should enjoy the warm summer evening outside. She's ought to be outside in the garden which Jesper has been taking such good care of. She should be watching the light of the late evening sun break through the barley - enjoying how the beams of light play with the straw, listen to the humming insects, and experience the wonders of midsummer.

Silence, no answer. Not this time either. Never any answers. Just emptiness, silence and loneliness. Exactly like it must be in the grave. In her father's grave. In her own?

Come on @friendlyghost, you must be out there.

But Liv doesn't care. No one is supposed to tell her what to do, how to act, and how to feel. Least of all Mum. The house is just a shell they share. It is just a base to live out of - not a community with obligations, demands, or any stupid ideals of family ties.

She sighs, sips her coffee - a pitch black coffee keeping her awake. She doesn't want to sleep which seems strange because she tells herself she wants to die. But sleep is not freedom, is not silence, is not that comfort and grace she longs for.

It's too bloody late for things like that, she writes and posts, sending it out into an

empty space - on Twitter, on her lonely blog. As usual no one answers. On Facebook she has no friends. Her newsfeed is silent like the grave.

Yes, exactly: Silent like the grave. Like the grave her father at this moment is busy leaving ... Silent like the grave that Liv in her most death romantic moments longs for.

\*

Liv can't remember the first time they went to see the house.

But she has heard the story many times. The story about her in her girly dress, joyfully running around to see the house that should later be the home of her, Mum and Dad. The story of her, seeming happier than ever as she entered room after room full of excitement, impatiently wanting to run to the next one right away.

Back then the house was new and exciting. Now, it is just her home. Now, it is just a place in which she lives - in which it feels like she always has lived. It was here, in this house, where Dad suddenly wasn't around, leaving Liv and Mum behind. It was a house first filled with life, then by weeping and emptiness. And then, lately, just by silence.

On one hand, the house feels totally different now that Jesper has moved in. And still, on the other hand, it feels exactly the same.

\*

Tonight it is midsummer. The night Dad died five years ago.

This seems to be the only night throughout the year where the two of them, Liv and Mum, are able to reach out for each other. It is the night where Mum makes space for her and takes time to allow Liv to be sad too - where Mum actually sees her, where they actually share some kind of connection.

Liv's certain that Mum expects something special from her tonight. Mum expects tears, family unity, hand holding and perhaps some nice food. She also expects a walk to the grave in the far end of the garden, quietly hugging while lost in memories, looking silently at the grave. Perhaps she expects to put down some flowers - like they would make any difference, Liv thinks.

And they are supposed to read the words on the tombstone over and over again: "In memory of Lasse, loving father and husband."

Soon Mum will enter the room, then perhaps sit awhile on the bed. She will ask Liv to come downstairs, ask if she would sit with her for a while to remember Lasse. After all, that's what they use do to.

And Liv will come downstairs. That will make Mum happy. Mum will actually need her for a while. Then Liv can help and be a real support for Mum. Then it will - for a while - be just the two of them. The two of them ... and Jesper, of course.

How the hell is Jesper supposed to fit into all this? Is he supposed to wallow in death and sorrow too, when he is the newcomer who has moved in to make Mum happy again?

\*

Mum always says how nice it is that she and Liv have each other. But that is god damn nonsense. They don't have each other at all. For fucks sake, they don't. Mum doesn't have Liv - and Liv only has herself.

Liv really wants to help her mother, but she doesn't know how to do it. She can't figure out how to act that will please Mum and how to make her as happy, or at least less sad - how to make her become the mother she used to be and still should be.

But Mum has Jesper now. That is good for her. He is kind to her. He loves her. He wants to do everything for her. He will do anything to make her forget the grief and all the tears - tears that she and Liv has been sharing as their only connection for so long.

But what will Jesper do for Liv? Does he notice her at all? Does he care? Isn't she just an obstacle for his and Mum's love?

Could he really one day be like Dad? Could he one day be the one to talk to, to laugh with and to share dreams with?

\*

When Liv was a kid she had Friendly Ghost. It was a silly idea of an invisible ghost, living in the house, and who were always there for her. He was nutty, made a lot of fun, and the stories about him always made Dad laugh.

Even though she was completely aware that there was no real Friendly Ghost, she found comfort in thinking of him. It almost felt like she could talk to him. It felt like he could comfort her in hard times and when Mum and Dad didn't understand her.

She often worried that Mum and Dad actually thought she actually believed in the ghost. But even so it was fun to pretend to believe in him for real. She loved watching Dad's reaction when she told him about the ghost, loved to watch his concern about her disappearing into her fantasy world. And she loved to watch him capitulate and in the end join play without reservations.

No, there was no ghost. She was completely aware of that. And Mum and dad knew too. But anyway it felt like everybody somehow really wanted the ghost to be real. Like everything would be more exciting, more alive, and more mysterious if ghost friends actually were real.

If only there was.

If only there was a Friendly Ghost

If only ... there ... was .... she often writes on Twitter. #ifonlytherewas #ifonlytherewere-answers

Where are you @friendlyghost?

## DEAR PLAYER

In this game you'll play Liv, a teenage girl trapped in grief and loneliness after her father died five years ago. She lives in a house far out in the countryside with her mother Lene and Lene's new partner Jesper who moved in recently.

But after Jesper's arrival in Liv's life everything has changed. Lene now hides her grief and makes her love for Jesper take control instead. Left behind is Liv, lonely, hoping to be noticed, loved or at least just to be comforted once in awhile. Liv cries out her loneliness on social media but no one answers her. She doesn't even have one single friend out there in the digital world and she never gets any answers - everything is just silent.

How Liv feels about Jesper is very much up to you. Does she hate him because he drags her mother's attention? Or does she love that difference he does for Mum? Does she see him as a threat against the small closed world in which Liv and her mother have been living for so long? Or is he a potential new father figure and friend, who she very much longs for?

During the game you'll be asked to tell about the past. You'll be asked to tell about their life when Lasse was alive, as well as life when he had passed away? What kind of life did they live? How did it change? Everything wasn't necessarily good in the past - and wasn't necessarily dark and grey when Lasse was gone.

If it fits the story and your interpretation of Liv you can also tell about what she writes online in that empty digital world she spends a lot time in. What kind of hashtags does she use? What is it that she so desperately is looking for out there? Does she call for Friendly Ghost? Use social media to tell about the silent, inner life that otherwise would be hard for you to express. Use it to give information to the other players about Liv's emotions and to put relevant information into play.

## KEYWORDS

- ◇ Lonely, hungers for close contact with adults.
- ◇ Will do much to make her mother happy - but she feels neglected by her too.
- ◇ Mum is happy and in love after Jesper has moved in to the house. But does Liv see him as a threat or new father figure?
- ◇ Cries for attention and care in social media.
- ◇ Misses her old imaginary friend Friendly Ghost who would - even though he was pure fiction - comfort her and listen to her.



JESPER

APPROX. 45 YEARS OLD



# JESPER

“In memory of Lasse, loving father and husband.”

That is what the tombstone in the far end of the garden says - down behind the cherry trees, the tall grass and the raspberry bushes, filled with swollen, sweet and sour red berries.

Jesper doesn't like to come down here. Just the thought of this place gives him the creeps - even now in the summer heat. Normally he would never cross the high-grown grass and the humming insects to visit the cross and tombstone that symbolizes all that he wants to help Lene and Liv to forget about.

This place he avoids - even when he spends hours trying to take care of that wild growing garden, a garden he now is responsible for after moving in.

But right now he is actually here by the grave, looking anxious at it. With the low beams of evening sun almost blinding him and making the cross a dark silhouette against the orange sky, he ponders how the midsummer celebration will go.

In his hand he holds a tiny yellow flower, picked from the field next to the garden. He lifts it up to catch some early sunlight, studying it a short while, before slowly putting it down on the grave.

“Please leave us alone,” Jesper whispers, while putting down the flower, “Leave them alone. Stay away from us. They don't need you anymore - they need you to stay away. If you really love them, please do so - for Lene's sake, for Liv's sake. Now they need me instead.”

\*

It felt almost like a violation when Jesper entered the house in the countryside for the first time. For quite a while he just stood there, observing the sun hitting the tree crowns, the long blades of grass and the dirty windows. He noticed how silent it all felt out there. He felt a sense of infinity - but also the presence of death and an unbreakable love he was now on his way to push aside.

And Lene was quite hesitant when she welcomed him, told him to come inside, showed him inside the house, out in the garden and up to her bed. She also showed him the grave, the tombstone and the flowers. They were freshly cut, he noticed.

They made love, drank wine and talked all night. And they were silent for a long time, just staring into each other's eyes, sensing love or whatever it was that came on like a silent tsunami, flooding them with no way to escape.

And it was all good, Jesper convinced himself. Nothing could threaten him now - not after

years of loneliness when he finally had met the woman meant for him. This was how it was meant to be, he kept telling himself. He told himself over and over again to accept Lene for all what she was - told himself that her grief and tears were a part of her, a part he would love forever.

He wanted to help her to move on and he wanted to lead the way - to open her eyes to a new life and a new love.

She really wanted him to do that, she said.

\*

He really hates this house.

Or maybe he doesn't hate it. 'Hate' is a really strong word, he thinks. He doesn't hate the house itself - only what it represents. He hates what it has done to her, the grief and pain she has suffered in it.

On the other hand, summer out here is so beautiful - especially now at the time of mid-summer with the sun high in the sky and the bright summer nights. It is so pretty with the orange beams of evening sun breaking through the barley, while the blades of grass rocks in a light breeze, and when the insects hums.

But even when Jesper gets carried away, starts to enjoy the house, and does what is in his power to reclaim it, his eyes catches glimpses of the grave in the far end of the garden. Then the feeling of alienation rises. Even now when he can officially call the house his home, that feeling gets too strong.

Then the memory of Lasse feels like a haunting ghost, threatening to ruin all aspects of happiness that Jesper has come to bring.

\*

When Lene told Jesper about Lasse for the first time it was too late to back out. Jesper was

already too much in love. He should have been pushed away by her mysterious character, her melancholy eyes and her evasive answers when asked about her innermost feelings - but instead it had the opposite effect. He wanted to know more about her, penetrate her hard shell, try to break through to that frightened person hiding behind all these defences.

And he wanted to protect her. He wanted to help her, carry her away from sadness and into the light. He wanted to make her happy. He wanted to possess her, to know every corner of her mysterious mind in detail.

But Jesper would soon realize that she was impossible to possess or to know all about in detail. He would soon realize that there was a part of her life he would never fully be a part of.

He hated it, and he loved it. But most of all, he feared it. He feared he would never fully be hers.

\*

It is the same thing with Liv, Lene's teenage daughter whose mysterious eyes watch Jesper, often in silence. What is it these eyes are trying to tell him? Is it a message of loneliness, indifference or maybe even hatred?

Jesper is quite sure he loves her. He has to love her. She is a part of it all. If he loves Lene, he has to love Liv too - that is clear to him. And he actually really wants to love her.

But it is not easy. Even though she inhabits the same house, she lives her own silent life. Most of the time she just sits in her room, hiding behind books, screens and often closed eyes. What is it she wants in the silence? What is it she hides?

There is something scary about her, Jesper often thinks. But he has to break through to her. He must cut down the entangled wood, scale

the thorns and rescue the sleeping princess from her sleep. He knows if Liv is happy, then Lene will be happy too.

\*

Jesper slumbers for a while on the couch in the living room. He feels the sun warm his hair. Outside the grasshoppers make noise. He really needs this moment of relaxation, after spending hours in the garden trying to take care of it - a garden that was totally overgrown when he moved in.

He also senses Lene looking at him. She observes him. He wonders what she is thinking about. What does she want from him? Is it pure love? A future? Something different from the emptiness she has been trapped in for so long?

She has been visiting the grave - he is certain of that. She never tells him anything about her visits down there. She wants to protect him by not telling - he knows that. But somehow it is like she makes it worse by her consideration. Somehow it is like these missing words just make everything darker.

On the other hand, he really doesn't want to hear about it - no words about the grave or death or grief. Not tonight either. He doesn't want to hear about tonight being the first night of midsummer - the night to remember the dead, to invite their souls inside, to pretend that they are alive. The night to remember *him* and his death five years ago.

The thought makes Jesper cold. He shivers, he really doesn't like it. Why can't they just leave it behind instead of wallow in their sorrows. Please let it go away. Please find happiness and a future instead - forget what used to be and what never will come back no matter how much you keep dwelling on it.

All these rituals are just empty symbols, he thinks.

"Please leave us alone," he whispers looking shortly out the window towards the far end of the garden.

## DEAR PLAYER

In this game you will play Jesper, a middle aged man who recently has moved into the countryside house of his partner Lene and her teenage daughter Liv.

In Lene, Jesper has found the woman he is meant to be with and he will do anything for her. Her happiness is the most important thing in the world for Jesper. Or to be more accurate: Their happiness together is the most important thing. Well, to be honest, perhaps it is actually Jesper's own happiness that is most important thing.

Lene is burdened by grief after her husband Lasse - Liv's father - died five years ago. That loss is still present even though Jesper does everything in his power to make Lene happy and tries to give her all the love she needs from him. But maybe Jesper doesn't really understand how an important part of her this grief is. Maybe without it she wouldn't be the Lene he knows and loves.

Jesper is scared of Lasse even though he is dead. He is scared of all what Lene's departed husband represents. For Jesper the incomprehensible feeling of loss and grief is a threat. He fears never to be able to get Lene's full attention and love.

How Jesper manages to handle this fear is the main question for you in this game. The focal point of the game is how much he will try to help and comfort Lene and how much he will do for her - and if it is possible for him to do enough for her to live up to his own ideals. How deep is his love? How much will he sacrifice? Who shall live and who shall die?

During the game you'll be asked to tell about the past. You'll be asked to tell about Jesper's and Lene's relationship. Tell about how their love evolved when they first met - what kind of secrets did Jesper have a hard time digging into? Tell about his fears, his hatred and his wishes for the future.

You'll also be asked to tell about loneliness and uncertainty. How does it feel not to be able to reach the ones you love? Tell about longing for love and the fear that it all might disappear.

Think a bit about how it must feel to be Jesper. How does it feel to feel insufficient and how much fear does that evoke?

And finally you may think a bit about how it will feel if the one you fear the most suddenly appears in front of you.

## KEYWORDS

- ◇ Wants to do all in his power to make Lene - and Liv aswell - happy. He is sure he can help them move on and get through their grief.
- ◇ Fell in in love with Lene's complex mind - but he also fears it.
- ◇ Fears departed Lasse and that loss Lene still feels after his death. Is it alright to be jealous of a dead man?
- ◇ Wants to get closer to Liv but has a hard time understanding her. Does she hate him or could he be a new father figure in her life? And what would Lene think of that?