

January 19, 115 PFD
Doctor Carl Morrow leaned close to the face of his patient, secured to the bed with leather straps a quarter inch thick and metal buckles reinforced beyond what might have been necessary for even the most robust and difficult of his patients. For Perdita, they were significantly thicker and stronger than would ever have been required. Especially now, given her comatose state these past months, unmoving save the subtle trembling of her lower lip as she'd gibber incoherently in the vast depths of her endless dreams. His eyes, just inches from her flesh, watched a ray of sunlight fall upon the side of her face and gently warm her dark skin. "Ooooh," he whispered in awe as the line of her forehead and nose took on the glow spilling through the narrow window several feet beyond the bed. He ran his index finger down her face, between her eyes and along the bridge of her nose, tracing the sunlight that irradiated her flesh. "Perdita Ortega," he said in a whisper. He had a tendency to over-annunciate his words, and small droplets of spittle struck her earlobe and cheek as he punctuated the sounds. "So much rest time," he said, still gently stroking her facial features with the tip of his finger. It neared the tip of her nose. "Beauty sleep? Rest for the wicked?" He chuckled. His finger slid down the base of her nose and across the depression above her upper lip. "You've had both, dearest. More beautiful than any might desire. More wicked, too." His fingers traced the contour of her lips. "We're all wicked, aren't we?" His fingers tapped their way back up her face, striking with each word as he quietly said, "The monsters hidden here," and with the final word he tapped her forehead. "All those little monsters trapped in here. Busy, busy, busy." All the monsters in here. Time meant nothing to Perdita. To Dr. Morrow, she had been there for over five months. To her, she had just arrived. The voice of a boy, a student lost at Kythera, struggled to speak to her again. But she couldn't hear him well. She was floating in a pool of dark water. Just her nose and lips rose above the surface. Her eyes couldn't see through the dark substance, turning the light from above a strange indigo. "The truth," she heard the boy say. "Don't say it," another voice, even more faint, said in the indistinct darkness above her. An older voice, conveying wisdom in its words, said, "She can handle it. It's why she's here." "She's here because she's dead." "They're all dead." "No, not yet. Not dead." "There's no escaping Malifaux," another said as Perdita struggled to lift herself from the pool, to hear more clearly. What's the truth? she asked. "Don't tell her," the distant voice urged. "She's not ready. Doesn't know where she is." "None of them do." "Where am I?" "Dead." "No she's not." "She's here, isn't she?" "Not exactly." "Then where is she?" "I'm telling you, she's dead." What's the truth?! she managed to scream in the darkness of her mind. She couldn't speak to them the way she wanted to. Didn't understand where she was or how she had come to be there. The voices tried to show her what she needed to know, but they didn't know how to speak to her, either. They spoke over each other and contradicted

one another. The voice of that young man, a student that went to Kythera on an expedition and never returned, his voice was stronger than the others. It rose above theirs to speak to her more conversationally about what they discovered at Kythera. He explained where she was. He explained what she was. The others were right. She wasn't ready for the truth. It's not that she didn't like it. She couldn't accept it. His words were a revelation to her explaining what he had seen at Kythera – what they had all seen. It's the truth that had driven them mad. It's the madness that had led to them tearing into one another, ripping one another's flesh right off of their bodies. "The little monsters are dancing in here," Dr. Morrow whispered. "Busy, busy, busy." He inhaled sharply, smelling her hair. It hadn't been washed in weeks. He didn't mind. She was intoxicating. "We all have those monsters we try to hide, don't we

Ms. Ortega? Try to keep them out of the public eye. Try to keep them under wraps, as it were. Sometimes our monsters are harder to control than others.” Lucius Matheson stepped out of the shadow behind the doctor. He was silent in his movements and when he said, “Some monsters are more palpable than others,” the doctor screeched and knocked his teeth against Perdita’s cheek when he jumped. He stood and spun in a movement, and the Governor’s Secretary was uncomfortably close. He fidgeted with his lab coat, pulling it taut in the front and buttoning it severely and quickly. “Some are more real than you realize,” he added quietly. Doctor Morrow smiled faintly and laughed uncomfortably. Sternly, Lucius said, “Leave us.” The doctor didn’t argue, excusing himself without a word. Matheson loomed above the comatose body of Perdita, staring intently. “We have need of you,” he said to her, his voice dry and wispy. He pressed his open fingers down upon her face, spanning the breadth of her skull. He pressed violently, squeezing painfully. A soulstone was crushed in his other hand, the milky white vapors entwining his arm before he could redirect its powerful influence. “Awaken!” he commanded and his voice boomed. Her eyes snapped open. The orbs were ashen gray, dull, reflecting no light, though thin bands of silver and purple swirled in their depths as if they were dark pools without end. Far from the city where the Red Cage had fallen those many months ago, tearing a rift in the fabric separating this world from the aether, releasing the purple wave that had become known as The Event and left her asleep to the world, a cry came up from the unexplored depths of the hole that stretched for miles beyond the point of impact. It was angry and shrill and foreign to all people that had ever walked upon Malifaux’s soil. The beast flew out of the pit on wings that stretched wide on thin membranes of flesh stretched between long bony fingers that protruded beyond the reptilian inbarbed hooks. Its body stretched longer than a fullgrown stallion, but it was more like a great panther. It screeched again. Though too far away for her to hear, Perdita jerked upright, pulling at the straps holding her down. “It’s coming for me,” she said. Bands of purple and silver swam in the depths of her gray eyes. The creature shrieked again. Purple and silver bands crisscrossed through its ashen eyes. It knew where she was. It could find her anywhere. With a snap of its wings, it caught a draft, ascending on a course that led straight for Perdita.