

Ghosts

The Lovers

On a shady Roman street, the old people tell a story that's been told a hundred times: A girl lives with her father, tucked away in a little house near the piazza. She makes barely enough to live on, but dreams of grander things. When a young man appears, handsome and a bit of a mischief-maker, of course they fall in love with each other. He makes deals and borrows in a devil-may-care way, so she's told not to see him. But they steal away nights to meet each other and whisper about a misty future full of money and glamour.

The young man has a rival, bitter over a card game or jealous of his lover's affection. It's enough to sell him out: enemies in the militia or police or mafia are only too happy to take care of the uppity kid. The woman tries to warn her lover, but his enemies grab her. They put her in the window as bait, hold a gun to her back, and warn her, "one wrong move..."

She feels the men around her tense. Her lover strolls down the street towards her window. She shouts a warning, and the gun at her back goes off. The young man, in a haze of surprise, confusion, and grief, charges to attack his enemies. And then they shoot him dead, too.

The same story—The Lovers, their Betrayer, their Enemy, their death—has played out so many times in this corner of Rome that one tragedy seems indistinguishable from the next in the old peoples' telling. The story has worn a groove in these streets so deep that even other ghosts find themselves sucked in; dozens of spirits have now been mixed and muddled into two desperate, searching consciousnesses that can't help but reach out for each other. Over and over again, the amalgamated spirits invade another young couple who resemble them in life, in love, in debt, and in danger. The ghosts reenact their tragedy over and over, trying wretchedly to make it come out *different* this time. But the same ending creeps up on them again and again...

General Difficulty: 5/3

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 7, Social 6, Mental 8

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Persuasion 9

Notes/Other Traits: The Lovers feed on their narrative going "right." Romantic gestures like exchanging rings or vowing to never be parted leaves their victims literally breathless as The Lovers feast, dealing superficial damage to Willpower equal to the margin of failure on a Composure + Resolve roll where the difficulty is the current Danger. The Lovers can only feast once per act of love or infatuation. Friends and

relatives trying to keep The Lovers apart fit right into the story, too: emotional confrontations and attempts to separate the two cause superficial damage to Health to everyone around the young couple. The damage equals the margin of failure (if any) on a Stamina + Resolve test against the Danger as The Lovers siphon off their energy.

The Lovers may claim up to two hosts, but a new host must be impaired with no empty boxes in their Willpower tracker. The Lovers will not claim a second host that does not have a romantic attachment to (or infatuation with) the first host, and the Lovers refuse to claim a host without any active romantic desires at all.

The Lovers can Command (8) victims beyond their two hosts, although they use this ability sparingly.

Like many ghosts, The Lovers stay Invisible much of the time. They can't be harmed physically, but their victims' bodies very much can. Supernatural methods like Endowment Edges affect them.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- The Lovers inhabit two sweethearts, forcibly reenacting their parallel stories to achieve the “good ending” they’re sure is waiting. Unfortunately for their victims, the ghosts unconsciously sabotage themselves at every turn, finding any reason to keep moving down the predetermined path. Going off-script is an alien concept to them.
- If their narrative starts without one of the secondary roles of Betrayer and Enemy already filled, The Lovers unconsciously “cast” and Command people who they feel fit the roles. Hunters fit all too well into either, especially if they threaten to separate the victims.
- The Lovers’ spirits take advantage of their two new hosts to manifest and reunite with each other briefly. Their manifestations flicker weakly,



uncoordinated and oddly out of temporal synch with each other: A World War II-era man might fall into the arms of a Renaissance woman, or an ancient Roman man hug a woman dressed in *Risorgimento* style. As the possession continues, the spirits manifest for longer bursts. Just before the final tragedy, the spirits can manifest completely and at will if the Danger is 4 or higher. They cannot remain Invisible if the Danger is 5.

Appearance: The Lovers' victims simply look like themselves most of the time. But bits of the jumbled ghosts begin to bleed through, much to their friends' confusion: darker hair, strange clothes, ancient jewelry, old-fashioned mannerisms. Although they're faint and hard to see at first, the victims' shadows split into multiples and darken as the ghosts get stronger.

In Stories: As more tragic souls slip into the couple's grasp two by two, The Lovers grow more desperate and self-obsessed. Their increasingly fragmented sense of self makes them block out the outside world and latch on to each other ever more violently.

The fragmentation, though, can be an unexpected blessing. Hunters researching The Lovers or the local tales of lost love carefully can identify some of the ghosts within the morass, picking them out by dress or speech patterns. Calling out to individual spirits destabilizes The Lovers a little, like pulling bricks from a tower's foundation. It's enough to draw their attention away from their obsessive march toward death, just for a minute. In these moments, glimpses of The Lovers' past lives bleed through. The sights and sounds of the neighborhood through the centuries mingle with the modern streets.

The Hunters can exorcise The Lovers, although the number of ghosts trapped within them makes that exorcism difficult but not impossible. Unlike so many ghosts, a peaceful solution is obvious: successfully changing The Lovers' story breaks the cycle. But The Lovers' worst enemy is themselves.

Encountering The Lovers

- An associate of the Hunters calls in a panic: their niece suddenly started acting strangely. At first, they thought it was just adolescent excitement over her new boyfriend (bad news, in their opinion), but

then things got weird. Sometimes her face looks like a stranger's. She hears and sees things no one else can perceive. Worse, sometimes others *do* hear invisible hooves on cobbles or the faint strains of old music outside. And now her boyfriend's acting strange, too...

- While researching other threats, the Cell spots an online post describing a mysterious neighborhood in which numerous similar tales of love and loss occur. The poster points out a recent social media video from the same area: a young man in an argument with his lover swears that he felt a chill as his lover's face split and darkened momentarily. The poster is not close enough to look into this, but the Cell certainly is.
- The Hunters notice an ad tacked to the wall in a shabby café: EXORCIST WANTED. The number at the bottom belongs to Maria Agani, a local grandmother. She believes her youngest granddaughter is possessed, but no one, even her priest, believes her. Maria knows how the story her granddaughter's caught in usually ends, as she's told the tales herself, and she's desperate to prevent it at any cost.

Additional Dangers and Victims

- Although The Lovers drive their young hosts' actions, they don't strike randomly. They fixate on couples in situations like their past iterations. The Enemies that threaten the young couple are probably very real: mafia looking to collect a debt or a stolen item; police angry over an unpaid bribe. They'll be very displeased at a bunch of strangers poking around someone they're hoping to disappear quietly.
- The Betrayer from the last iteration of The Lovers' story lives quietly in a sheltered corner of the neighborhood. Forced into his role by The Lovers, Matteo Testa's lived the last 40-odd years in seclusion, religiously attending anger management groups and avoiding relationships altogether to quell the alien rage that made him sell out his best friend.