

AN UNUSUAL STOP

Written by

Elicia Shreve

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, APPEARS AS THOUGH SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDWEST - JUST BEFORE SUNSET

A swirling doorway appears out of nowhere in the middle of the road. It glows brighter as a figure steps through, before disappearing behind her. CIRCE, a young woman in her early twenties, stands there looking around, briefly trying to figure out where she is. She is average in height and appearance, but stands confidently in the isolated road.

She starts walking forward, away from where she stepped through the portal, smiling as she takes in the sights around her. She is carrying what looks like a heavy camping backpack, but appears fresh and energetic, as if she is just getting started.

As she walks down the road, she stops in front of a large abandoned farmhouse.

CIRCE

Strange, something doesn't feel
right here.

She pulls open the gate, stepping onto the walkway. Her hands make a motion in the air, almost the shape of an "S" with some flourishes. The symbol flares up before fading, and she nods.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

Thought so, it's haunted. No wonder
I ended up out here. Can't sleep
here, not tired anyway, so looks
like I get to go hunting.

INT. FARMHOUSE - JUST BEFORE SUNSET

Circe opens the door, and walks into the hallway. She decides to set up a base of sorts in front of the living room fireplace, off to the side of the front door. She gets a fire going, and unpacks a flashlight, a sleeping bag, and a small lantern. As the sun goes down, she starts exploring the downstairs.

Circe finds an empty kitchen, a dining room with nothing in it, and a locked door she merely passes by.

CIRCE

Wonder what happened here?

The house is quiet except for the sounds that Circe makes as she opens and closes the cupboards and walks through the house. Every spot that can hold it is covered in years' worth of dust and cobwebs.

As she approaches the bottom of the stairs, she sees darkly stained wood. She kneels down, touching it, but it's dry. She can smell copper as she gets closer, and she wrinkles her nose slightly at the smell of the dried blood.

CIRCE (CONT'D)
Blood, someone died here.

A glow coming from the top of the stairs gets her attention, so she follows it.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPPER FLOOR - NIGHT

She opens the door with the glow behind it to find a little girl's bedroom. The glowing form of a child, a girl of about eight, lays in the bed, appearing asleep. Circe approaches it, but stops as she sees the shadow form of a large man entering the room.

As the shadow-man approaches the bed, Circe can clearly see the girl's face. She is forced to watch as the form appears to beat the child, her face in a silent scream, before the glowing form fades away.

As Circe returns to the hall, finding another door with a glow behind it, though dimmer this time, she starts racking her brain.

CIRCE
Looks like a residual energy
haunting, but something still
doesn't fit. Something feels wrong
about this whole place.

She opens the second door, this time a boy's room, she sees the glow is coming from the closed closet. As she reaches for the doorknob for the closet, she feels something behind her, turning just in time for the shadow-man to walk through her and cause the door to fly open.

CIRCE (CONT'D)
What the hell?

She shudders as she feels waves of anger, hatred, and evil pass through her with the shadow-man.

There's nothing she can do but watch as the form drags a small boy of about five from the closet, and proceed to beat him until his glow fades away as well.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

Not just energy, there's something else here.

INT. FARMHOUSE, FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Circe stands at the top of the stairs, looking down at the hallway where a woman's form faces up the stairs. Her glow is brighter than either of the children's and though there was no noise, she could tell what the woman was saying. As the woman speaks, the shadow-man manifests on the stairs.

MOTHER (SILENTLY MOUTHING WORDS)

What have you done? Where are the children? What happened?

Circe watches as the mother flinches away, as though something was being thrown at her head. The shadow-man lunges forward, hitting the woman hard in the head and knocking the woman to the floor. As he grabs her hair, trying to drag her up the stairs, she starts grabbing at anything in her reach. One hand manages to get a grip on something, and she clutches it to her chest as she's dragged kicking and screaming to the attic past Circe.

INT. FARMHOUSE ATTIC - NIGHT

As Circe watches, the shadow-man and the woman fight. He easily overpowers her, but Circe can see that the woman hurt the man when she fought back swinging wildly at his face.

The shadow-man fades after the woman's glow has done the same. Laying on the floor where the pair fought is what appears to be a diary. Circe picks it up and starts reading.

MOTHER (V.O.)

Wilbur has been acting strange since we moved into the farmhouse. He spends all of his free time in the basement. I caught him speaking some weird language into the hallway mirror last night.

Circe turns pages, then pauses to read more.

MOTHER (V.O.)

"We've been living here a year now. I thought we all just needed time to adjust, but I couldn't have been more wrong. Wilbur is not the same gentle man I married. He struck me for the first time a month ago, but his words were so cruel even before that. If it was just me, well, he's turning on the children now. We will be gone before he can think of hurting them. He can keep this house and whatever is so important to him down in that basement, but I will protect my children, even from their father."

Circe closes the book and leaves the attic.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Circe sits before the fireplace, looking through the diary once more before walking up to the locked door. As she places her hand on the knob, a symbol burns itself into the wood in front of her. Her eyes widen in recognition, but she returns to the living room.

Circe pulls her backpack in front of the fireplace, before kneeling beside it and clearing a spot in front of her. She opens her back pack, laying out a small embroidered cloth. The embroidery glows, emitting a soft light as she spreads it out in front of her.

She pulls a messenger bag out next, setting it beside her, as well as a small jewelry box which is set in front of her.

Finally she pulls out a canteen, which she sips from before closing her eyes and meditating briefly. Circe opens the jewelry box, reaching in and pulling out a gold and jade necklace with the flowers of an amaranth plant woven into the chain.

She puts the necklace around her neck before opening the messenger bag. She starts pulling out various plants and stones one at a time.

CIRCE

Jet and asafoetida as a last resort.

She sets them on the cloth, adding a handful of gold flakes before twisting the cloth around them and tying it. She sets it on the stone in front of the fireplace.

She returns to pulling items out of the bag, starting with a gold plate which she sets each item on.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

Nine herbs to free this house. Rue for protection. Osha for luck and power. Angelica to purify and protect the children. Copal to dispel evil. Agrimony to banish evil and deflect hostile magic. Asphodel to release the spirits bound here. Cacao to calm the restless spirits. Garlic for protection and to amplify the others.

She finally pulls a bottle of oil out of the bag.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

Finally, Anise oil to banish the demon inhabiting this place.

She pours the oil over the herbs and lights a candle. She stands, picking up both and approaching the basement door. As she approaches the door, the symbol and her necklace both begin to glow. Balancing the things she's carrying, she reaches for the handle again, and as she makes contact with the metal, there's a bright flash of light.

When the light fades, the symbol is gone, and Circe is able to easily open the door.

INT. FARMHOUSE BASEMENT - NEAR DAWN

Circe descends dubious looking wooden stairs that creak and groan with each step she takes. The light of the candle and her glowing necklace are the only sources of illumination.

In the dim light, she can tell the center of the floor is bloodstained, with a mummified male body laying in the middle of the stain. In front of the body is a menacing looking book. Hissing voices, words indistinguishable, start echoing in the basement as Circe approaches the book.

CIRCE

"You have no claim over me demon.
Leave this place Aeshma, there is
no more blood for you here.

As Circe sets the plate in front of the book, winds start buffeting the room and her, the house shaking around her.

She shrugs it off and places the flame of the candle to the herbs, setting them to smolder and smoke.

An ear-shattering shriek of rage floods the room, but Circe appears unaffected.

In the shadows outside the circle of the candle light, tentacles start reaching for Circe. Her necklace glows even brighter, and as the tentacles get within mere inches of touching Circe, they disintegrate before they get to her.

As the smoke starts filling the room, a dim glow starts to form in front of Circe. The spirits of the mother and children appear before her, and Circe starts to shout out a warning as the shadow-man does as well.

As the smoke from the herbs touch the shadow-man, the shadows fade and slip away, revealing the glowing form of the father, who rejoins his family. As they join hands, Circe smiles at the mother's silent thank you, before their forms fade completely.

Another ear piercing shriek of rage and hate fills the room.

Circe's face twists into one of disgust, anger, hate, and fear as she begins a mental battle. The room is filled with the smell of offal, blood, and burnt flesh. Circe's eyes narrow, and determination starts to fill her face as the mental battle continues. She takes deep gulping breaths of the smoke coming from the herbs, and slowly her face calms, even forming a smile.

The demon Aeshma manifests in front of her, just outside the circle of light. It is a small hairy creature, and it appears unnatural and evil. Its voice is rough and gravelly, filled with rage and hate for the woman in front of him.

AESHMA

This place is mine. I was summoned.
I came. I claimed.

Every movement dragged the creature's ragged fingernails across the cement floor.

CIRCE

No longer. This home is free. You have a choice demon. Leave this place of your own free will and return to your realm willingly, or you will be forcibly dispelled, painfully scattered. Who knows how long it will take you to reform, if you even end up all in the same realm."

The demon screeches, flinging dozens of shadow tentacles at her from all sides, but uselessly, as they all disintegrated the second they touch the light from her necklace.

Circe merely takes her candle, and not turning her back on the demon, starts to back up to the stairs.

It hissed threats defiantly at her.

AESHMA

You think you've won!? I'll just come back!

CIRCE

Your time in this place is over.

She finally turns her back on him in order to climb the stairs, returning to the living room.

She returns everything except for the small bundle on the fireplace stone to her backpack. After putting her backpack on and getting it situated, she stokes the fire, ensuring it will burn well into the day.

With that, she walks to the door with the small bundle in her hand, and as she opens the door to the outside, she tosses the bundle into the fire, steps through the door, and closes it behind her.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SUNRISE

Standing at the end of the walkway, she turns and watches the house for a few moments. Through the grimy window, she sees glowing smoke start to fill the house, and faintly hears the enraged shrieks of the demon.

Satisfied that the demon would leave, one way or another, Circe walks into the road, starting the direction she was walking when she discovered the house.

A wave of her hand, palm away from her head straight down, and a portal appears in the road a short distance in front of her. She steps through, disappearing, before the portal closes behind her.

THE END