Genre Apprentice

**Context: During the 1600s, legend has it that the daughter of the chief to the Setauket tribe fell in love with an English settler, only for their affairs to be forbidden by the princess’s father. Heartbroken from their separation, she stabbed herself in Lake Ronkonkoma. The extremely high death rate in the lake, an overwhelming majority of males, is supposedly because the princess’s spirit drowns them to fill the void of her love. Most frequently at dusk, her body is said to be seen along the surface of the lake. A family of six recently moved to Long Island, New York, the location of the infamous lake, where they learn about the legend of the princess through a series of tragic events. The first to explore Lake Ronkonkoma is Evan, the oldest of the family, who is oblivious of the legend.**

. “Lake Ronkonkoma.” He mumbled, reading the fading letters on the wooden sign aloud. Without faltering, he hopped on his bike and pedaled along the unpaved gravel. The autumn breeze had gone astray—the air was stagnant and eerily motionless, without a ripple or any sort of undulation in the water, like a clear curtain draped over a murky abyss. Stimulating a burning glow in the navy sky, the sun sank, leaving the crescent moon to supply light, while scattered trees of red and yellow leaves shadowed the lake. The lake was desolate, yet emanated such a sublime feeling that no being would want to disturb the lake’s tranquility.

“Gosh, nobody’s been here for a million years!” Evan mumbled to himself as he ran his fingers over the crooked wooden seats of a picnic table. The humidity clung to his skin like a thin bed sheet, and small drops of moisture framed his face. He removed his flannel and jeans, then waded into the chilling water, creating a lone ripple that soared outwards into distances beyond his vision. Against the waves, a small piece of bark washed up directly to him—the only fragment within the untarnished water. It read: *My darling, we will meet again. I will do anything to find you—to find love.*

The breeze began again. Dancing around the water, the tall trees surrounding Lake Ronkonkoma swayed, yet the lake itself remained placid and still. The impenetrable fog caked Evan’s surroundings; the glistening moonlight only accentuated the blur. His vision hazy, a spark of panic dwelled inside him.

The mist, atop the water’s surface, swayed in circles, growing upwards to form a heap of fog in the distance. Cascading downwards, the tiny droplets neared Evan, enticing him closer. Misty pirouettes stifled his breath as the mystifying vapor rushed into the distance, relaxed, and formed the figure of a lady who stood in the haze—grotesquely beautiful, ethereal. The woman raised her hand slightly, the mist dramatically shifting to maintain her form, and warmly motioned for him to come closer. Muffled with confusion, Evan remained motionless but nevertheless was dragged out farther. Her face was structured smoothly, cradling the ripples of the water, yet her features were sharp, with black eyes that seemed so hollow yet overflowing with lonesomeness and desperation.

 Noticing the tenderness of the woman, Evan spoke sensitively: “Who are you?”

The lady gave a soft smile, oddly consoling him. She spoke as smoothly as the water surrounding her as she said, “I’m the Lady of the Lake.”

Her face remained amiable as she pleadingly whispered, “I have lost my true love. I don’t think I will ever find him again, either. Please, will you help me find love?”

Find love. Her words rang throughout his mind, but didn’t settle. The young man glanced at her face—aching, dejected—and felt her internal misery strike him in a whirlwind of agony.

Sympathetically, he nodded slowly.

*Thank you*, she mouthed, inaudibly.

Dense mist fell from her arms and entangled Evan, as if to embrace him, staggering his breath. And as he delicately sunk into the dark depths of the lake, he didn’t fidget or flail. Rather, he subsided in the embrace of the Lady of the Lake.