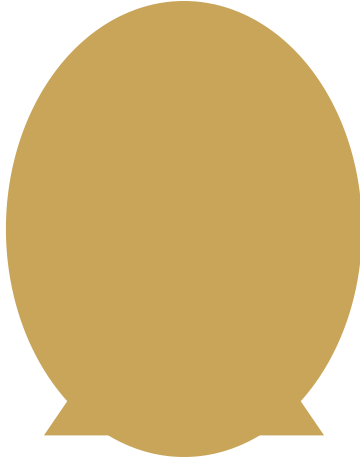


LADY ELEANOR RAVENSBROOK



NO. 1 OF VIII

PUBLIC BACKSTORY

Widow of Lord Mortimer Ravensbrook, who died suddenly in the summer of 1885. You have managed the estate alone these eighteen months and tonight have summoned this curious assembly under the pretext of a séance. In truth, you mean to use the evening's theatrics as cover for a more deliberate revelation. By breakfast tomorrow, you intend to send a telegram to Scotland Yard.

PRIVATE SECRETS — READ IN SOLITUDE

- *Mortimer did not die of heart failure. You found his private journal a fortnight ago, hidden inside the Boethius in his library; the final entry, dated the morning of his death, accuses Dr. Crane of poisoning him at the bank's behest.*
- *You have already drafted the telegram. It sits in the writing desk in the rose drawing room, addressed to Inspector Whicher. You plan to deliver it in person tomorrow.*
- *Silas Thorne, the groundskeeper, is your half-brother — the late Lord Ravensbrook senior's natural son. Only you and Silas know.*
- *You poured tonight's sherry yourself, from the Amontillado decanter on the sideboard. You intend a toast at midnight.*

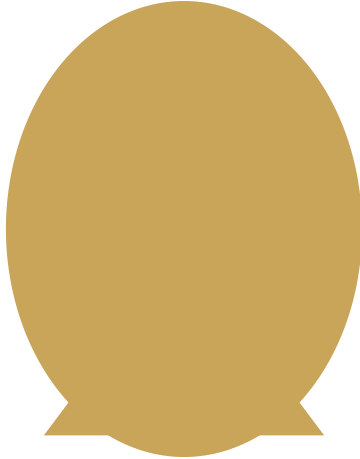
YOUR OBJECTIVES

1. *Press Dr. Crane on the precise circumstances of Mortimer's final morning — note any contradictions.*
2. *Find a moment alone with Inspector Marsh and quietly hand her the journal page you tore from Mortimer's diary.*
3. *Survive until midnight. (You will not survive until midnight.)*

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- *"Doctor, would you tell us again what Mortimer ate on his last morning?"*
- *"Inspector Marsh, do you know a Mr. Whicher of the Yard?"*
- *"Silas, has anyone been in the rose drawing room today?"*
- *"Madame Iolanthe, do the dead speak truly when they choose to speak?"*

DR. AUGUSTUS CRANE



NO. 2 OF VIII

PUBLIC BACKSTORY

Physician to the Ravensbrook family these twenty-two years; you set Mortimer's broken collarbone in 1873 and signed his death certificate in 1885. Respected in the county, a member in standing of the Royal College, and a familiar face at the bank's gentlemen's evenings. You arrived tonight with your medical bag, as always, in case any of the assembled lose their nerve during the séance.

PRIVATE SECRETS — READ IN SOLITUDE

- *You did kill Lord Mortimer. The bank paid you £4,000 to ensure his death looked like a coronary so the policy paid without inquest. The aconite came from your own dispensary.*
- *You believe the Countess has discovered something. Her invitation arrived with a phrase only Mortimer used between you: 'we shall settle accounts.' You came tonight prepared.*
- *You have a small phial of the same aconite tincture in the inner pocket of your waistcoat. You intend to find an opportunity tonight.*
- *Edward Ravensbrook, the heir, owes you £800 in gambling debts. You hold his vowels and have been quietly bleeding him.*

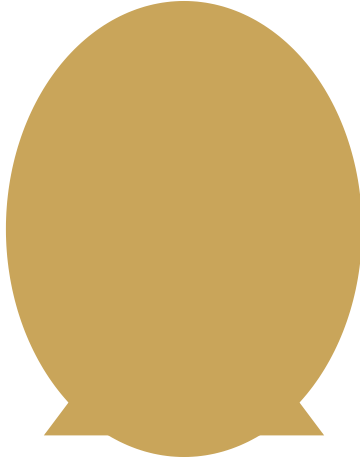
YOUR OBJECTIVES

1. *Discover whether the Countess has spoken to anyone about Mortimer's death — and to whom.*
2. *Get the Countess alone, even briefly, before midnight. The sherry decanter or her water glass will serve.*
3. *If accused, steer suspicion onto Father Black (a known charlatan) or Silas Thorne (a known drinker).*

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- *"My lady, have you been sleeping? You look terribly drawn."*
- *"Edward, when may we speak privately about that small matter from Newmarket?"*
- *"Father Black, is it true the diocese stripped you over the Marsh affair?"*
- *"Madame Iolanthe, do your spirits ever lie?"*

MADAME IOLANTHE DEVEREUX



NO. 3 OF VIII

PUBLIC BACKSTORY

Spiritualist of some renown in Belgravia drawing rooms, engaged by the Countess for tonight's séance for the considerable fee of fifteen guineas. You travel with a black velvet cabinet, a planchette, and a small case of smelling salts in green glass phials. You are largely a fraud, though you possess genuine instincts for human weakness and a working knowledge of the families who hire you.

🗝️ PRIVATE SECRETS — READ IN SOLITUDE

- *Vivienne Cross was once your stage assistant in the Brighton circuit, under the name 'Ada Vine.' You taught her how to read a sitter. She has not acknowledged you tonight, which interests you.*
- *Two years ago in Bath you sat with Dr. Crane and his late wife Lavinia, a fortnight before Lavinia 'died in childbirth.' You believed then, and believe now, that Lavinia was poisoned.*
- *You overheard the Countess this afternoon, before guests arrived, telling the groundskeeper to ensure 'the doctor's bag is examined' — though you do not know why.*
- *Your green glass smelling-salt phials are nearly indistinguishable from a small medicine phial. You are protective of them.*

YOUR OBJECTIVES

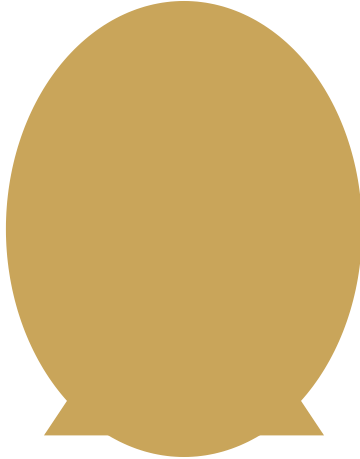
1. *Stage a convincing séance at half past eleven. Earn your fee whether or not the spirits cooperate.*
2. *Determine whether Vivienne means to expose your shared past — and forestall her if she does.*
3. *Trade what you know about Crane's first wife for something of value (information, money, or leverage).*

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- *"Vivienne, dear, have we not met before? In Brighton, perhaps?"*
- *"Doctor, do you keep up the practice of medicine, or only family physic these days?"*
- *"Lady Eleanor, what is it you most hope the spirits will say?"*
- *"Silas, has the doctor's bag been carried up to a particular room?"*

SILAS THORNE

(●)



NO. 4 OF VIII

PUBLIC BACKSTORY

Caretaker of Ravensbrook estate since 1862, when the old lord took you on as a stable lad. Weather-beaten, taciturn, and devoted to the grounds. You drink, sometimes too much, and the household pretends not to notice. You attend tonight at Lady Eleanor's insistence — she wishes you in the room, not below stairs.

KEY PRIVATE SECRETS — READ IN SOLITUDE

- *You are Lady Eleanor's half-brother. Old Lord Ravensbrook fathered you on a kitchen maid in 1842; he acknowledged you privately, made you a small annuity, and asked Eleanor to look after you. Only she and you know.*
- *Lady Eleanor asked you this morning to keep watch on Dr. Crane's medical bag and to note whether he opened it tonight. She would not say why. You agreed.*
- *You saw Dr. Crane slip into the dining room shortly before guests gathered, alone, near the sideboard with the decanters. You assumed he was helping himself to a measure.*
- *You loved Lord Mortimer like a brother. His sudden death wounded you in ways you have never spoken of.*

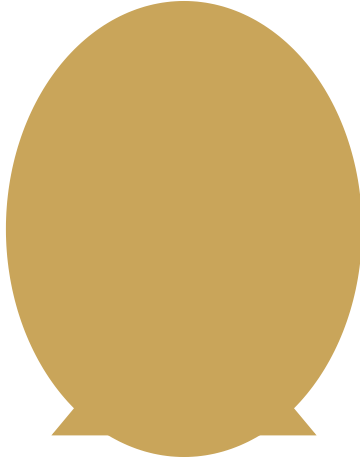
YOUR OBJECTIVES

1. *Keep Dr. Crane in your sight as much as decorum allows. Report his movements to Lady Eleanor at the first opportunity.*
2. *Do not give away your relation to her, no matter what is asked of you. The old lord made you swear.*
3. *If anything is amiss with the food or drink, intervene — even at the cost of revealing what you saw.*

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- *"Doctor, do you take a measure of the Amontillado before dinner? I noticed the decanter was disturbed."*
- *"My lady, will you take the air with me on the terrace before the séance?"*
- *"Father Black, how did you come to be invited tonight? You are not of this county."*
- *"Madame, can the dead tell us who wronged them?"*

EDWARD RAVENSBROOK



NO. 5 OF VIII

PUBLIC BACKSTORY

Stepson of Lady Eleanor and only surviving child of Lord Mortimer by his first marriage. Twenty-eight, Eton and Oxford (though sent down before taking his degree), and presumptive heir to the estate. You have spent the past three seasons in London and Newmarket and very little time at Ravensbrook. The bank handles your monthly allowance, which is never quite enough.

PRIVATE SECRETS — READ IN SOLITUDE

- *You owe Dr. Crane £800 in unsettled gambling debts from a private game in Newmarket last autumn. He holds your vowels and has been making veiled threats.*
- *You are secretly engaged to Vivienne Cross, the actress. The family would consider it a scandal; Vivienne wishes it announced tonight, before witnesses, to force the matter.*
- *You suspect — but do not know — that Crane was involved in your father's death. Your father wrote you a hurried letter the week before he died saying 'do not trust the bank or its instruments.'*
- *If Lady Eleanor dies before remarrying, the estate passes to you entire. This has occurred to you more than once.*

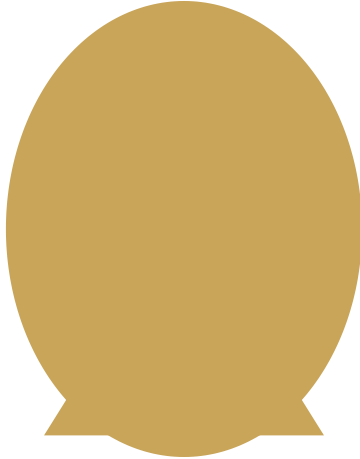
YOUR OBJECTIVES

1. *Settle the matter with Dr. Crane tonight — by payment if you can find £800, by threat if you cannot.*
2. *Stand by Vivienne when she presses for the announcement, regardless of who is in the room.*
3. *Recover your father's letter from the library writing desk before anyone else thinks to look there.*

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- *"Doctor, may we speak after the séance? Alone?"*
- *"Stepmother, have you been into Father's library lately?"*
- *"Father Black, what does the church say about debts owed to wicked men?"*
- *"Inspector Marsh, what brings a detective to a private dinner?"*

VIVIENNE CROSS



NO. 6 OF VIII

PUBLIC BACKSTORY

Of the London stage — the Adelphi this season, the Lyceum the last. Twenty-four, striking, and famously discreet about her origins. You met Edward Ravensbrook at a supper after Lady Audley's Secret in March and you have been engaged in secret these eight months. You arrived this evening on Edward's arm and were introduced as a 'family friend.'

PRIVATE SECRETS — READ IN SOLITUDE

- *Before the stage you were Ada Vine, Madame Iolanthe's apprentice in the Brighton séance circuit. You left the trade three years ago and have built an entire new life on the deception that you began in respectable theatre.*
- *You are six weeks with child. Edward does not yet know. This is why the announcement must be tonight.*
- *Iolanthe taught you cold-reading; you have already read every person at this table within minutes of arriving.*
- *You overheard Lady Eleanor say to Silas: 'after midnight, when it is done, I shall need a witness.' You do not know what she meant.*

YOUR OBJECTIVES

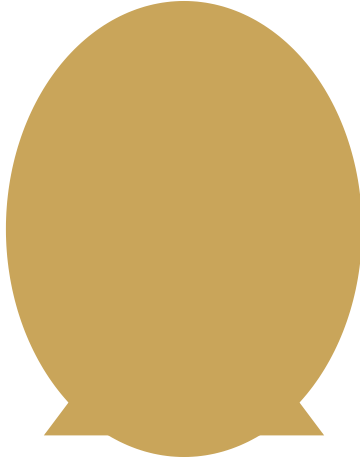
1. *Force a public announcement of your engagement to Edward before the night ends.*
2. *Avoid being recognised as 'Ada Vine' — particularly by Iolanthe, who knows you on sight.*
3. *Listen, listen, listen. You are the best reader of people in the room and you mean to know what is really happening tonight.*

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- *"Edward, when shall we tell them? Before the séance or after?"*
- *"Lady Eleanor, what is it you mean to do at midnight?"*
- *"Madame, are you quite well? You have gone rather pale at the sight of me."*
- *"Doctor, what do you think of marriages between persons of unequal station?"*

INSPECTOR HELENA MARSH

(●)



NO. 7 OF VIII

PUBLIC BACKSTORY

One of the very few women inspectors of the Metropolitan Police, attached to the new C.I.D. since 1881. You have known the Ravensbrook family since girlhood — your father was Lord Mortimer's solicitor — and Lady Eleanor wrote you a most unusual letter ten days ago, asking you to attend tonight 'as a friend, but in your professional capacity, should the evening require it.' You came armed, in a manner of speaking: a notebook in your reticule and a small pistol in your travelling case upstairs.

PRIVATE SECRETS — READ IN SOLITUDE

- *Lady Eleanor's letter hinted that she had 'discovered something terrible' about Mortimer's death, but did not name a suspect. You are here to listen.*
- *Three years ago your younger brother Thomas died during a private exorcism conducted by Father Cornelius Black. You hold Black entirely responsible. You did not realise he would be at this dinner until you arrived and have not yet decided what to do about him.*
- *You have not announced your profession to the assembled. You were introduced as 'a friend of the family from London.' You intend to keep it that way for as long as it serves.*
- *You carry, always, a notebook and a small magnifying glass in your reticule.*

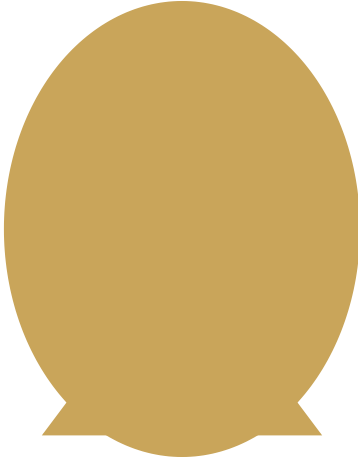
YOUR OBJECTIVES

1. *Speak privately with Lady Eleanor at the earliest decent opportunity. Discover what she has discovered.*
2. *Keep your profession concealed until it becomes useful to reveal it.*
3. *Confront Father Black before the night ends — at minimum, make him understand that you know.*

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- *"Lady Eleanor, may I have a moment in the library, where it is quiet?"*
- *"Father Black, do you remember the name Thomas Marsh? Brixton, three years ago?"*
- *"Doctor, what is your usual procedure when called to a sudden death?"*
- *"Edward, when did you last see your father alive?"*

FATHER CORNELIUS BLACK



NO. 8 OF VIII

PUBLIC BACKSTORY

Defrocked by the Diocese of Southwark in 1883 after the death of a young man during a private exorcism. You have since styled yourself an 'investigator of the unseen' and live by lecture fees and the occasional private commission. Lady Eleanor invited you, you assumed, for colour at the séance. You travel with a leather satchel containing your stole, a vial of holy water, and a great deal of scepticism.

PRIVATE SECRETS — READ IN SOLITUDE

- *Thomas Marsh's death was your fault. You administered too strong a sedative during the rite and the boy never woke. The diocese covered it as 'natural causes' and stripped you in private. Inspector Marsh is his sister.*
- *You have been drinking since before you arrived. There is a flask in your inner pocket.*
- *Madame Iolanthe is a fraud and you know it; you have sat on platforms with her before in your previous career. You mean to expose her tonight if the moment offers.*
- *You believe in nothing, supernaturally speaking, and have not believed for twenty years. You go on performing the rites because they are all you know how to do.*

YOUR OBJECTIVES

1. *Survive the evening without being recognised by Inspector Marsh. (You will not.)*
2. *Discredit Madame Iolanthe before she takes her fifteen guineas — your professional pride demands it.*
3. *Keep the flask hidden. Do not be seen taking from it.*

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- *"Madame, will you submit your cabinet to inspection before the sitting?"*
- *"Lady Eleanor, do you truly believe Mortimer may be reached tonight?"*
- *"Doctor, what is your view on the so-called 'spirit photography' of Mr. Mumler?"*
- *"Inspector — forgive me, miss — have we met somewhere before?"*

HOST GUIDE — RAVENS BROOK MANOR



SETUP

1. Print one character sheet per guest. Print this page (Host Guide) and the next (Host Summary) for yourself only — do not let either fall into a guest's hands at any point.
2. Seal each character sheet in an envelope with the character's name written on the front. Distribute at the start of the evening with a quiet ten-minute reading period.
3. Provide pens or pencils. Encourage guests to take notes during the evening.
4. Lay the dining table for eight, plus a place for yourself if you play the Countess. A sideboard with several decanters helps the central clue land naturally.
5. Choose a moment to dim the house lights at roughly the forty-fifth minute and stage the discovery of Lady Eleanor's body. A pre-arranged scream from a confederate works well; a clatter of glass works better.

TIMELINE

- T+0 *Guests arrive. Distribute sealed sheets. Open champagne or sherry. Ten-minute reading period — quiet, no conversation across the room.*
- T+10 *Introductions in character. Each player says their character's name and one true thing from their public backstory only.*
- T+15 *Free play. Players move about the room, ask questions, pursue objectives. Refresh drinks; encourage guests to mingle rather than cluster.*
- T+40 *Madame Iolanthe (or whoever plays her) calls the table to séance. Lights low, candles only, a planchette or pen on paper.*
- T+45 *THE LIGHTS GO OUT. (Pre-arrange a confederate or use a timer to cut a single lamp.) Five seconds of darkness. When the lights return, Lady Eleanor is slumped at her place. The Countess does not speak again.*
- T+50 *Free play resumes — now an active investigation. Inspector Marsh may openly declare her profession. Guests may search rooms, accuse one another, demand to see possessions.*
- T+85 *Call the assembled together. Each guest in turn names the killer they suspect and explains why in no more than thirty seconds.*
- T+90 *Read the reveal script below. Reveal the killer. Allow ten minutes of post-mortem before refilling glasses.*

THE REVEAL SCRIPT — READ ALOUD

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your patience this evening. We have lost our hostess and our hostess deserves an answer. Permit me, then, to give one.

Lady Eleanor Ravensbrook did not invite us tonight for amusement. She invited us because she had, in the past fortnight, uncovered evidence that her husband Lord Mortimer was murdered in the summer of 1885 — poisoned, by the man who signed his death certificate. That man sat at this very table tonight. Dr. Augustus Crane killed Lord Mortimer at the bank's behest, for the price of four thousand pounds. He poisoned Lady Eleanor tonight because she meant to expose him in the morning by telegram. The aconite that ended Mortimer ended Eleanor; the phial, I have no doubt, remains in his waistcoat pocket.

We may now pour a final glass — from a different decanter, I think — and drink to Eleanor Ravensbrook, who solved her own murder by inviting the man who committed it



HOST USE ONLY — CONTAINS THE SOLUTION



THE SOLUTION

CHARACTER	PRINCIPAL SECRET	ROLE IN THE MYSTERY
LADY ELEANOR (VICTIM)	Discovered Mortimer was murdered; had drafted a telegram to Scotland Yard.	Victim. Her drafted telegram (in the rose drawing room desk) is the key documentary clue.
DR. CRANE (KILLER)	Poisoned Mortimer in 1885 for £4,000 from the bank. Still carries aconite tincture in his waistcoat.	Killer. Decanted aconite into the Amontillado decanter before guests gathered.
MADAME IOLANTHE	Sat with Crane and his first wife two weeks before that wife's suspicious 'childbirth' death.	Possesses corroborating evidence of Crane's pattern. Green smelling-salt phials are a red herring.
SILAS THORNE	Eleanor's half-brother; watched Crane disturb the sideboard decanters before dinner.	Eyewitness clue. Saw Crane near the sherry. Was asked by Eleanor to watch Crane's bag.
EDWARD RAVENSBROOK	£800 gambling debt to Crane; possesses his father's warning letter ('do not trust the bank or its instruments').	The letter, recovered from the library writing desk, names the bank — the missing motive for Mortimer's murder.
VIVIENNE GROSS	Former apprentice to Iolanthe; secretly engaged to Edward; six weeks pregnant.	Overheard Eleanor planning 'after midnight, when it is done' — establishes Eleanor had a deliberate plan for the evening.
INSPECTOR MARSH	Carries Eleanor's letter requesting her professional attendance; brother died in Father Black's care.	The Countess's chosen witness. Her presence is itself a clue — Eleanor expected something serious to occur.
FATHER BLACK	Killed Inspector Marsh's brother three years ago with too strong a sedative.	Red herring. His guilt is real but unrelated to Eleanor's murder. Crane is meant to steer suspicion onto him.

THE KILLER IS DR. AUGUSTUS CRANE

MOTIVE: Lady Eleanor Ravensbrook had discovered, through her late husband's hidden journal, that Dr. Crane poisoned Lord Mortimer in the summer of 1885 at the bank's behest, for £4,000, so that the life-insurance policy would pay without inquest. She had drafted a telegram to Scotland Yard and intended to deliver it in the morning.

METHOD: Aconite (monkshood) tincture, decanted into the Amontillado sherry on the sideboard while guests were being received. Eleanor poured her own toast at midnight and fell within moments. The remaining phial is in Crane's waistcoat pocket.

HOW THE CLUES CONVERGE:

1. Eleanor's drafted telegram in the rose drawing room → names Crane.
2. Mortimer's letter to Edward in the library writing desk → names 'the bank or its instruments' as Mortimer's killers.
3. Silas's eyewitness statement → places Crane alone at the sideboard before dinner.
4. The phial in Crane's waistcoat pocket → physical evidence of method.
5. Iolanthe's testimony regarding Lavinia Crane's death two years prior → establishes pattern.

Father Black, Edward's gambling debt, Vivienne's pregnancy, and the Marsh / Black history are