

Crossing Over

*A play by
Laura Mazzuca Toops*

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SYNOPSIS

Six current-day ghost hunters set out to find the truth in the murder legend of Vinney Keller, a naïve teenager who was found dead in her farmhouse cellar in 1903. Historical opinion places the blame on the Keller's hired hand: Enos Patchett, a lumbering, illiterate man in his 40s, who was with the Keller family for years. But there were other suspects as well. The ghost hunters hope to contact Vinney's spirit to find out the real story. But for some of the hunters, truth is secondary to hyping their methods and results to increase their media popularity and TV opportunities. Soon the hunters find themselves mired in miscommunication between the living and the dead, the literal ghosts of the past who are determined to set the story straight.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

"Crossing Over" was originally produced as a one-act play in September 2021 at Beatniks on Conkey, Hammond, IN.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 5 w)

ROSE: Ghost hunter, true believer in the paranormal, in her 50s.

KATIE: Rose's 17-year-old daughter, a non-believer who's only there to indulge her mother.

LUCY: Head ghost hunter with major attitude, a true, fanatical believer who is very convinced of her own "psychic powers." In her 40s.

GINA: Ghost hunter, Rose's best friend, in her 50s.

BRIAN: Ghost hunter, the paranormal group's gadget guy, in his 40s.

DEREK: In his 40s. Ghost hunter, pedantic, self-proclaimed "demonologist" and opportunist.

LAVINIA KELLER: A 16-year-old naïve farm girl from 1903.

ENOS PATCHETT: The Keller's hired hand in his 40s. A big, lumbering man, illiterate, who has been with the Keller family for years.

Note: All characters except Katie, Vinney, and Enos can be gender neutral and differently aged.

SETTING

Place: A farmhouse in rural Iowa.

Time: Current day.

SET

Century-old farmhouse, run down. Victorian sofa at USC, behind the sofa is the projection of a window with the silhouette of a large tree. A round table and four chairs at DCS. DSL is an armchair and trapdoor to the cellar. The stairs to the cellar are offstage L.

ACT I
Scene 1

(In the darkness, we hear the rhythmic slap of a jump rope on the floor, and then the chant of young children:

*Vinney Keller, dressed in yeller
Met her sweetheart in the cellar
Enos Patchett, took his hatchet,
Killed them both and now will catch it.
Chop chop chop. Run, Enos, run!
How many miles did he run?
10, 20, 30, 40, 50...)*

(AT RISE: SPOTLIGHT up on Victorian sofa at USC, where ENOS is sitting. Behind the sofa is the projection of a window with the silhouette of a large tree. Armchair at DSL, round table and four chairs at DCS. Full lights come up, spotlight down. Lighting suggests sundown. BRIAN enters, weighed down with A/V equipment, carrying a walkie-talkie.)

BRIAN: *(Into walkie-talkie.)* Check. We'll establish the surveillance center in the old kitchen. As soon as we're fully operative, we'll take a base reading in each room. You copy?

DEREK: *(OSV.)* Yeah, Brian. I copy. Do you have all the equipment? Did you remember to pack the EMF meters?

BRIAN: *(Into walkie.)* Of course, I got the EMFs. I mean, copy. Of course, I got the EMFs. Over.

DEREK: What about the thermal imaging cameras? Do you have those, too? All four of them?

BRIAN: Copy. Of course, I got the cameras. Over.

DEREK: EVP recorders?

BRIAN: Copy. Yes, I have the EVP recorders! Why do you keep asking?

DEREK: *(OSV.)* Well, you forgot two of the four EMFs last time.

BRIAN: Copy. Well, weren't you supposed to be bringing the EMFs last time? You're a part of this team, too, aren't you?

Crossing Over

- 5 -

BRIAN: *(Cont'd.)* Why do I always have to be the guy to bring everything? *(Pause.)* Over.

DEREK: *(OSV.)* Because, Brian. Because you're the tech guy, and I'm the clairvoyant. I connect with the spirits; you capture them on video and audio. We all have our roles. Some more important than others.

BRIAN: Uh – copy that. *(A beat.)* “More important”? What the heck is that supposed to mean? Over.

DEREK: *(OSV.)* Just that an investigation isn't much good if nothing paranormal happens, right? And I'm here to make sure that it does.

BRIAN: Copy. But who's gonna believe that anything happened if we don't record any evidence? Over.

(DEREK entering, speaking into walkie talkie. Stands directly next to an oblivious BRIAN.)

DEREK: You can stop using the walkie now. *(Beat.)* Over.

BRIAN: Why? How else am I gonna – *(Looks up to see DEREK.)* Uh. Over.

DEREK: And out. You know, I really do find the concept of walkie-talkies a bit of an anachronism considering we all have smart phones.

BRIAN: Sometimes we can't get a phone signal out in the middle of nowhere. And we're out in the middle of nowhere right now. You gotta have walkies on an investigation. They're part of the tech tools.

DEREK: If you say so. *(A beat while he looks around the place, taking it all in.)* Well. It took us awhile to finally get access to this place, but I'm beginning to think it might have been worth the wait. The Keller murder house. Quite a coup, getting us in here.

BRIAN: *(As he's unpacking and setting up equipment.)* Yeah, you're welcome.

DEREK: Credit where credit is due, my friend. Apparently, this place is in high demand, and very paranormally active. In fact, our findings tonight could pay off big time.

BRIAN: Maybe don't mock my connections next time.

Crossing Over

- 6 -

DEREK: How was I supposed to know that the nephew of the owner of this place was part of your weekly Dungeons and Dragons group? I mean, what are the odds?

BRIAN: There's a lot you don't know about us adventurers. Don't underestimate us. Maybe show some respect.

DEREK: I promise you that in the future, I will accord the members of the DnD universe all the respect they so richly deserve. So where are the Three Weird Sisters, anyway?

BRIAN: Who?

DEREK: The girls, Brian. Wait. Don't tell me. In the immortal words of our fearless self-proclaimed leader – "I'm having a vision!" *(Puts hands to forehead as if getting psychic message.)* Ah, I can see it as if it's right in front of me. I – I see – Gina taking about 10 potty breaks -- Rose stopping at the closest gas station to pick up snacks -- and Lucy's GPS crapping out.

BRIAN: I don't know why you're making fun of Lucy and her visions. You have almost as many visions as she does.

DEREK: That's because we're both acutely attuned to the invisible realm of the spirits.

BRIAN: All I know is, the equipment doesn't pick up a whole hell of a lot when you guys claim something is happening. *(HE peers out window.)* Hey, looks like Rose and Gina just pulled up.

(Commotion OS as ROSE, GINA, and KATIE enter, hauling backpacks and rolling suitcases. They put their gear down and slowly walk around, getting a "feel" for the place as BRIAN continues to set up equipment and DEREK watches bemusedly. Katie stands off to the side with her cell phone, texting and taking selfies as she tosses off her lines. Everyone is walking around, next to, and sometimes into, ENOS.)

ROSE: *(Awestruck, looking around.)* Oh my god, how exciting! I can't believe we're actually here. I've been reading about this ever since I was a kid! The Keller murder house!

Crossing Over

- 7 -

GINA: I know! From everything I've read about this place, it's supposed to be really active. I bet we get some good evidence tonight.

BRIAN: Hi, Gina.

GINA: Oh, hi, Brian. How are you?

BRIAN: Remember when we were at Ashmore Estates, and you were asking me what I thought were the best EMF meters? And I told you it had to be the REM Pod 2? Well, I did it.

GINA: Did what?

BRIAN: Went ahead and bought it. The REM Pod 2. Top of the line. It's like the Tesla of EMF meters.

GINA: Oh – that's nice. Hi, Derek. How was your drive in?

DEREK: Miserable. Four hours of roads under construction, and another hour so far off the grid that my navigation kept putting me into a corn field.

BRIAN: *(To GINA.)* It's a lot bigger than it looks on TV. And it has automated temperature deviation detection, too. ATDD. Want to have a look at it?

GINA: *(Puzzled.)* What?

BRIAN: The new REM Pod 2. It's the same model that Zak uses on "Ghost Adventures." It's still in the box.

GINA: Well – that's nice, I guess.

BRIAN: I mean, I can take it out and show you, if you want to have a look at it.

DEREK: For god's sake, Brian, can't you see you're scaring the woman? Not everyone knows what the hell you're talking about when you get on one of your tech jags. Down, boy, down. *(To ROSE.)* Is the queen bee here yet?

ROSE: Oh, you know Lucy. Had to get her Starbucks fix and stop for directions.

DEREK: Wait. Her GPS crapped out?

ROSE: *(Impressed.)* Yeah! How did you know?

DEREK: *(Smiles smugly.)* Clairvoyant. Remember?

BRIAN: *(To himself.)* Just like her GPS crapped out the last two times we went out of town for an investigation –

GINA: Speaking of which, are you getting any vibes here? I got the chills the minute I walked in.

ROSE: Here she is. Lucy, what are you getting vibe-wise?

Crossing Over

- 8 -

(LUCY enters dramatically from SR, dropping her bags of equipment and staring around as if listening to something.)

LUCY: Sssshhh! *(SHE walks around the set, rubbing her fingertips together as if feeling fabric.)* Wow. It's bad. It's really bad. Don't you feel it? The air seems — dense.

(At the sight of LUCY, ENOS perks up, rises, and begins to follow her around, hoping she can sense him.)

GINA: Yeah. I feel cold. And a tingling in my hands and feet.

LUCY: Brian, we're gonna need those EMF meters.

BRIAN: I got 'em. Six Trifield TF2 EMF meters, check. Oh, and I got a new REM Pod, too. I finally went ahead and bought it.

DEREK: *(To himself.)* For the love of god --

LUCY: And the thermal imaging cameras.

BRIAN: We got four FLIR thermal imaging cameras with four tripod mounts, each with four double-A batteries for a total of 16 double-A batteries, check.

LUCY: EVP recorders?

BRIAN: Six Sony hand-held voice recorders, each with two double-A batteries for a total of —

LUCY: I get it, Brian, we got batteries. And if you say "check" one more time, I'm gonna put my foot up your ass.

(ENOS stands behind LUCY, waving his hands around and trying to get her attention. She is oblivious to his presence.)

BRIAN: Dude, this is supposed to be a scientific investigation. To get evidence, we need equipment. To run the equipment, we gotta have batteries. And extras, in case we get battery drain. You of all people should know how important it is to have enough batteries.

(Disgusted by his inability to "reach" LUCY, ENOS crosses over to BRIAN's equipment bag and begins poking around.)

LUCY: OK, but it's your job to make sure we have enough batteries. Otherwise, why do we even have a tech team? Why not just have sensitives, empaths, and mediums?

BRIAN: Dude, I *am* the tech team. I do the best I can.

DEREK: Tech, tech, tech. Who cares? I'm more concerned about the important stuff. Did you bring my trigger objects?

BRIAN: *(Rummaging in backpack, as he removes them.)*

Trigger objects, check: One King James Bible, one statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, one copy of the Koran, one crucifix, one menorah, one teddy bear, one creepy doll, one beach ball, and -- an extra-large bag of Doritos Cool Ranch chips?

(ENOS shadows BRIAN, picking up and examining each item as Brian puts it down, then quickly replacing it before Brian can turn around and catch him doing it.)

ROSE: Oh, those are mine. How'd they get in there?

(Takes chips, continues walking around, eats a few, then puts the bag down on the table. Following behind her, ENOS tries to get a response from ROSE. Failing, he waits until Rose's back is turned, then moves the bag of chips to the seat of the armchair.)

ROSE: *(Cont'd.)* Wow, guys, they weren't kidding. This place is creepy as hell. I can't believe we were finally able to get in here. Thanks again for the connection, Brian.

GINA: It took us long enough. I don't think the owner is really that thrilled about having paranormal teams in. It's almost like he's afraid something bad will happen!

(ENOS now moves to GINA, and as he did with LUCY, tries to "contact" her by standing next to or behind her and waving his hands. Gina doesn't react. Enos turns away, disappointed.)

KATIE: The extra 20 you slipped him didn't hurt.

Crossing Over

- 10 -

GINA: And that caretaker guy gives me a bad vibe, too. He has that same look in his eyes that all haunted people have – like he’s seen too much.

KATIE: If the booze on his breath is any indication, I think the word to describe his eyes is bloodshot.

LUCY: Will you all stop jabbering? I’m trying to sense something! (*Glances at KATIE.*) What’s with the kid?

(ENOS’ attention is suddenly drawn to KATIE; he walks over to the teenager and repeats his previous attempts for contact. Katie becomes suddenly uneasy, zips up her hoodie, and moves to a different location on stage. Intrigued with his ability to make a connection with Katie, Enos follows her.)

ROSE: Oh, I told you she was coming, remember, Lucy? She’s headed off to college in a month, can you believe it? She always wanted to investigate with us. I hope you don’t mind that I brought her along. She won’t be any trouble. (*ROSE turns back to the table for the bag of chips, confused that it’s gone.*)

LUCY: OK. Well, hopefully after tonight she’ll have some good stories to tell her friends in the dorm. What do you think, Derek? This place feels really active to me. I bet we get some good evidence. What are you sensing?

DEREK: Oh, this house is most definitely active. Extremely active. Not only with human spirits, but elementals and maybe even a presence that might be -- demonic.

BRIAN: (*To himself.*) Here we go.

LUCY: That’s my gut feeling, too! Looks like you and I are on the same wavelength. As usual, right?

DEREK: We do tend to be sympatico when it comes to the paranormal. (*THEY laugh together snarkily.*) What’s your initial take on the case?

LUCY: (*Long pause as she walks around.*) Well, I know you like to do a lot of historical research on these locations. But I prefer to go in blind, and just learn about what happened through visions and spirit communication. (*A pause to “sense” something.*) And yeah, I’m sensing multiple presences. Some may be demonic.

Crossing Over
- 11 -

LUCY: *(Cont'd.)* And all of them have been here a long, long time.

ROSE: Are you getting any details about who the spirits might be?

LUCY: I'm definitely getting the feeling that the killer is still here. Still hanging around the scene of the crime, like the creep that he is. Maybe even hiding somewhere in the house. Brian? Make a note for us to sweep all the places like closets and storerooms with the EMF meters. Maybe even put some recording devices there, too. He could be anywhere.

(Another dramatic pause, as EVERYONE looks around. ENOS walks over to LUCY and stands right next to her; she is oblivious.)

BRIAN: Scan closets and storerooms. Check.

LUCY: Wow. The atmosphere here is really, really dark, don't you think, Derek? It reminds me of when we were at the Villisca axe murder house, remember? The victims and the killer were still there. But there was something else. Something clearly inhuman. Remember when that demon called me out the first five minutes we were there?

GINA: I'm getting the same feeling I got at Hannah House. Like somebody is always watching. But you turn around and there's nothing there.

(ENOS creeps up behind HER and makes a motion toward her back. She is oblivious.)

ROSE: I'm getting the feeling like I got at Mansfield Penitentiary where the floors felt uneven. Like walking on the deck of a ship!

KATIE: Well, *I'm* getting the feeling that it's gonna be a long, dull night. I can't believe I passed up two parties and a concert to come out here and do this.

ROSE: "Enos Patchett, with a hatchet, killed them both." What a creepy, classic story. What did you find out in your research about the place, Derek?

Crossing Over
- 12 -

DEREK: Well, I have a theory about Enos Patchett.

BRIAN: *(To himself.)* Let me guess. It begins with a D.

(ENOS sits back down on the sofa, expectantly listening to DEREK's monologue.)

DEREK: I've done quite a bit of research about the actual murder. And not just the event itself, but the history of the Keller family, as well as Enos and the Patchetts. Do you know that Enos's family originally came from Massachusetts? In fact, not very far from – Salem?

BRIAN: *(To himself.)* Wait for it. Here's the windup –

DEREK: My theory is that his great-great-grandmother, Hepzibah Patchett, was involved in witchcraft and sold the souls of her male descendants to the devil!

BRIAN: *(To himself.)* And there's the pitch.

(Silently scoffing, ENOS gets up off the sofa and heads over to KATIE again.)

GINA: Really, Derek? The devil? I mean, *the* devil? Satan himself? Unless we made contact and that was the name he used, wouldn't it be more likely to just be one of the lesser demons?

BRIAN: Yeah, you'd think a guy as busy as the Prince of Darkness would know how to delegate.

DEREK: Well, my business card does say "demonologist," you know. Surgeons gotta cut. Demonologists gotta – well, find demons.

LUCY: Don't *ever* underestimate demons, guys. They're as manipulative as hell. Don't you remember when we were investigating at the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood and that demon disguised as Kim Kardashian just marched through the lobby?

BRIAN: I'm pretty sure that actually was Kim Kardashian.

DEREK: That's right, Lucy. It's common for demons to try and lull you into a false sense of security – pretending to be sweet little kids, kindly old women --

BRIAN: ... or celebrities with a lot of plastic surgery --

Crossing Over

- 13 -

DEREK: Next thing you know, boom! You're possessed. And then what are you gonna do?

BRIAN: Personally? I'd sic 'em on those car warranty phone call scammers. Those bastards bug the hell out of me.

ROSE: I wonder how the murder actually happened. I mean, they just found Vinney's body in the basement, right?

DEREK: Yes. All the newspaper accounts of the time say she was found dead at the bottom of the cellar steps with a broken neck.

(As they're talking, ENOS begins to gently push KATIE toward DSL. Under his guidance, Katie moves slowly in that direction, rubbing her arms as if cold.)

ROSE: Well, the old jump rope rhyme says that Enos killed Vinney's boyfriend, too, but there wasn't a boyfriend, right?

DEREK: That's right. According to the records, only Vinnie Keller was found dead. There's no evidence of anyone else being on the scene – no boyfriend, no neighbor, none of the Keller family. Only Enos, apparently.

GINA: I guess we'll never really know what happened to her.

LUCY: Oh, after tonight, I guarantee that we *will* know. I'm already feeling intense waves of dread and foreboding. The spirits are all around us, right now. We just have to wait for them to make their presence known.

(LUCY and DEREK exchange meaningful glances.)

BRIAN: *(Grabs some equipment.)* Well, while we're waiting for that to happen, I'm gonna go check out the attic and the basement with the laser grid and try and get some EVPs with the parabolic mike and — *(Still talking as he exits SL.)*

(LUCY and DEREK move off together toward SR, away from everyone else. They converse in stage whispers. KATIE looks up from her phone, observing them.)

LUCY: *(Sotto voce to DEREK.)* You ready to go?

DEREK: I most certainly am.

Crossing Over

- 14 -

LUCY: The girls are clueless. Think Brian suspects anything?

DEREK: I highly doubt it. I find techies to be extremely obtuse about everything besides their tech equipment. And Brian is even a little more obtuse than the average techie.

LUCY: We gotta give them their money's worth, you know. I mean if we want to get *our* money's worth.

DEREK: Don't worry. For ten grand, I can assure you things will happen.

LUCY: Well, I know I can handle it. I hope you're up to it.

DEREK: Oh, I have a pretty good idea of what to do. You know, I've taken a couple of improv classes back in the day. I can "yes, and" with the best of them. And if we come up with any real evidence, so much the better.

LUCY: OK. Watch me work. *(Moving toward the sofa, frantically waving her hands over the area.)* Here. Ohmygod, guys, it happened right *here*. *(Starts choking.)* I -- I -- my *throat*! I feel -- *(Cough cough.)* like there are these big cold *hands* wrapped around my windpipe! He did it right here on this spot!

(While she's talking, ENOS is making dismissive gestures at LUCY and pointing to the floor at DSL. KATIE follows his gestures, staring at the floor.)

KATIE: Hey, this is kind of weird. Did you guys notice this? Check it out. Looks like a trap door. Does this lead to the cellar? *(Indicates with her feet a spot DSL, then leans down as if looking closer.)* Huh. Looks like it's nailed shut. Is there another way to get down there? Maybe she died down there.

LUCY: No, she didn't. She died right here!

KATIE: But how do you know for sure?

(ENOS nods emphatically.)

LUCY: *(Indignant.)* Excuse me?

ROSE: Katie, remember, Lucy is a psychic and a clairvoyant. She can sense and see things that happened, even if it was hundreds of years ago.

Crossing Over
- 15 -

DEREK: *(Jumping in.)* Well, I can sense things, too, but I'm generally better at sniffing out non-human presences. I have to admit that Lucy is unequaled when it comes to discerning human spirits of the dead.

(HE and LUCY exchange meaningful glances.)

LUCY: Well then, I'll leave it to you to connect with the demonic realm, but – Oh my god. Wait -- I'm -- having a vision! I can see it clear as day. It's July, hot as hell. I see Enos. He's wearing dirty overalls, a straw hat, and a red neckerchief. *(ENOS, who is not dressed like this, shrugs.)* Vinney is looking out this very window, just catching a breeze. He sneaks up behind her and chokes her! And then – he drags her body across the floor – opens the cellar door – and throws her down the stairs! And then the cowardly bastard rans away!

(LUCY crosses over to the armchair and emphatically sits down, crushing the bag of chips Enos put there. Then she pulls the crumpled bag from under her butt, puzzled. Meanwhile, ENOS reacts to her recitation in the background, miming disagreement, then disgust.)

KATIE: Oh, come on. How do we even know the hired hand is the killer? It could have been someone else. Wasn't she supposed to be down in the cellar -- with her feller? Maybe he did it – whoever he was.

DEREK: I do have a theory about another possible suspect.

(ENOS leans forward, listening intently.)

BRIAN: *(OSV.)* Of course you do.

DEREK: *(Reading from his notes.)* According to the 1900 U.S. Census, the Keller family was comprised of one Otto Keller, widower, age 55, the paterfamilias; Hans and Fritz Keller, ages 8 and 11, his sons; and Lavinia Keller, 13, his daughter. Enos Patchett, 33, was also listed as a member of the household, as "farmhand."

End of Freeview

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