

# Still Life with Iris

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In this multifaceted and highly symbolic play, Iris lives in the mysterious land of Nocturno, where people create their own worlds as they sleep. Each person has a particular job: there is the Thunder Bottler, the Leaf Monitor, and the Rain Maker. All are assigned to find the perfect example of their work, which they must send to their rulers, Grotto and Gretta Good, who live on the Island of Great Goods. Iris is sent as the “perfect” daughter, but she must leave her coat behind, for it holds all the memories of Nocturno within its folds. When Iris keeps one of the buttons, the memories of family haunt her, and thus begins her journey of self-discovery.

## *One Male and Three Females (and one nonspeaking part)*

In the first scene below, Iris comes before Grotto and Gretta Good, the rulers of the Island of Great Goods, looking for one of her shoes, which is missing. One of Good’s servants, Mister Otherguy, attend them. In the second scene, Iris encounters Annabel Lee, a young woman of the sea, who has been held captive for many years.



*The door flies open quickly, revealing Iris. She now wears an overlayer of clothing that is similar to the Great Goods — elegantly eccentric, very different than her Nocturno attire. She wears one very shiny shoe. The Goods gesture for her to take a step into the room. She does so. She stands stiffly, with a pleasant, forced smile on her face. The clock*

*chimes, once. For a moment, they all just stand and nod at each other. Finally, Iris turns to Grotto Good and speaks in as friendly a way as possible.*

IRIS: Hello. I’m Iris. What an odd place this is.

*(Grotto nods at her for a moment, then turns quickly to Otherguy.)*

GROTTO GOOD: My good, *she said something to me.*

*(Otherguy gestures for Grotto to respond. Grotto looks at Iris, looks at Gretta, looks back at Iris . . . then finally speaks, smilingly, definitively.)*

GROTTO GOOD: You are a girl.

IRIS: Yes.

GROTTO GOOD: *(Smiling throughout.)* And now you are here.

IRIS: Yes, I am.

GROTTO GOOD: And I am speaking to you.

IRIS: Yes, you are.

GROTTO GOOD: *(Still smiling.)* And now I am finished. *(Turns to his wife.)* Gretta?

GRETTA GOOD: *(Walks toward Iris, calmly.)* You must forgive my husband. He’s never spoken to a little girl before. You are the first one to ever arrive on Great Island.

IRIS: I see.

GRETTA GOOD: But, you are welcome here, Iris. More than welcome, you are *treasured*.

GROTTO GOOD: You will now be the greatest of our goods.

IRIS: Umm . . . thank you . . .

GRETTA GOOD: And?

IRIS: And where’s my other shoe?

GROTTO GOOD: Oh, my.

GRETTA GOOD: You are wearing the finest shoe under the sky. Have you *looked* at it?

IRIS: Yes, I have, and it’s beautiful — maybe the most beautiful shoe I’ve ever seen. But, still, one of them is missing and



the one I'm wearing really hurts my foot. Is there another pair I could wear?

GROTTO GOOD: Oh, my.

IRIS: They don't have to be as nice as these —

GROTTO GOOD: Oh, my.

IRIS: Just a little more comfortable, so I —

GRETTA GOOD: Iris.

IRIS: Yes, Mother Good?

GRETTA GOOD: There are no other shoes for you. We have only what's BEST on this island and to ensure the value and importance of each item, *we have only one of everything.* (To Otherguy.) Bring her something to drink. (Otherguy nods and brings a goblet, as well as a small, sealed glass container, on a tray to Iris.)

IRIS: One of everything — what do you mean?

GROTTO GOOD: Look around, Iris! Everything here is unrivaled in its goodness. Like, for example, our BOOK. Or this — our DRAPE. Or our CHAIR.

IRIS: You have only one chair?

GROTTO GOOD: Isn't it a beauty? (He brings it to her and insists she sit in it during the following.)

GRETTA GOOD: So, you see, Iris, that is why you have only one shoe.

IRIS: What happened to its mate?

GROTTO GOOD: It is now in the Tunnel of the Unwanted.

GRETTA GOOD: (Sees that Iris's drink is ready.) Oh, here we are. Thirsty?

IRIS: Very.

(Otherguy offers Iris the goblet. She takes it and looks in it — it is empty. Otherguy opens the sealed glass container. He tips it over and pours its contents into the goblet: one long, slow, perfect drop of water. The Goods nod approvingly, as Iris looks into the goblet.)

IRIS: What is this?

GROTTO GOOD: It's a perfect raindrop.

IRIS: This is all the water you have?

GRETTA GOOD: It's all we need. For, at daybreak, another perfect drop will arrive. There's a land near here where they work all night to see to our pleasure each day.

GROTTO GOOD: So, drink up!

(Iris looks at them, looks at the goblet, then drinks. She, of course, barely tastes it. As she swallows, the Goods sigh, audibly, blissfully.)

GRETTA GOOD: Perfect, isn't it?

IRIS: I guess.

GRETTA GOOD: Now, Iris, we've heard you have a gift for finding things. Is that true?

IRIS: I don't know. Maybe. I don't remember finding *anything*.

GROTTO GOOD: You'll help us find PERFECT THINGS for the Island, I'm sure. Now, we've prepared the best of the best for you —

IRIS: What exactly do you *do* here?

GRETTA GOOD: We enjoy our goods in the greatest of ways.

IRIS: Don't you work?

GROTTO GOOD: Certainly not.

GRETTA GOOD: But we are ever on the lookout for flaws. We mustn't let anything that is not the BEST invade Great Island. (Gretta sees the pouch that Iris wears.) Like *this* for example. What is the meaning of this old pouch?

GROTTO GOOD: And what's inside?

IRIS: A button. It belongs to a little girl I'm looking for.

GROTTO GOOD: There are no other girls, Iris. You're the only one here.

GRETTA GOOD: Mister Otherguy, show Iris her toy box.

(Otherguy raises the lid of the toy box, as Iris continues to stare at Grotto.)

IRIS: There's no one else to play with?

GRETTA GOOD: We're still searching for a little boy.



GROTTO GOOD: One who's perfect — like you.  
IRIS: You brought me here because you think I'm perfect?  
GROTTO GOOD: Of course we did.  
IRIS: I'm not perfect.  
GRETTA GOOD: *(After a quick look at Grotto.) Really?*  
IRIS: Not perfect at all.  
GROTTO GOOD: Very well. Tell us something you've done that *wasn't perfect*. Some day when you did a bad thing. Something from your *past*, Iris.  
*(The Goods look at her.)*  
GROTTO GOOD: Well?  
*(Silence. Iris thinks.)*  
IRIS: I can't think of anything.  
GROTTO GOOD: You see!  
IRIS: But, I know I'm not —  
*(The Goods leave happily, in a flourish, saying —)*  
GROTTO GOOD: Enjoy your toys, Iris!  
GRETTA GOOD: And if you find anything that is not the BEST of its kind —  
GROTTO GOOD: We'll discard and replace it immediately!  
GRETTA GOOD: A great good pleasure to meet you!  
GROTTO GOOD: A great good pleasure, indeed!  
*(Music, as lights pull down to isolate Iris near the toy box. The face of the clock remains lit, as well. Mister Otherguy lifts something out of the toy box: a doll encased in glass. On the side of the glass is a small lock. The doll is dressed identically to Iris. Otherguy holds the doll out to Iris. Iris looks at him . . . then takes it from him. She looks at the doll, then tries to open the lock to take the doll from the case — but it won't open.)*  
IRIS: It's locked. How can I play with her if she's locked inside?  
*(Mister Otherguy simply shrugs and exits.)*



*Annabel Lee, a young woman of the sea, appears. She wears a tattered gown of dark blues and greens and the boots and belt of a pirate. Her belt holds a small telescope. Her hair is entwined with seaweed. And, most prominently, she has a long chain (or rope) attached to her wrist, or ankle, with a large padlock, which leads far out into the sea, offstage. Iris stares at her, amazed.*

ANNABEL LEE: *(As she enters.)* In a kingdom by the sea. Have you never seen an Annabel Lee?  
IRIS: Never. How did you —  
ANNABEL LEE: For years I've been locked away — held against my will — but now you, Iris, you've set me free.  
IRIS: How?  
ANNABEL LEE: By loosing these chains that bind me to the sea.  
IRIS: But how did you get here?  
ANNABEL LEE: Through your wishing, I assume. What else could it be?  
IRIS: I did wish for someone to play with. And I wished for someone to help me get across this water.  
ANNABEL LEE: And I wished I would find my ship.  
IRIS: You have a ship?  
ANNABEL LEE: *(Looking through her telescope.)* It's what I'm searching for, and my ship is searching for me.  
IRIS: How do you know?  
ANNABEL LEE: I listen at night, locked away, in my kingdom by the sea.  
And as the waves crash and fall —  
I can hear in the squall —  
My ship's voice calling to me —  
IRIS: What does it say?

ANNABEL LEE: For the moon never beams without bringing me  
dreams  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And the stars never rise, but I see the bright eyes  
Of my captain, Annabel Lee.  
IRIS: *(Smiles.)* Your ship really calls out to you?  
ANNABEL LEE: I'm so close to finding it, Iris. It's just out of reach.  
IRIS: I see a picture like that, sometimes. A picture of a room.  
But I don't know where it is.  
ANNABEL LEE: What have you been using to navigate with? Have  
you been using the stars?  
IRIS: There's more than *one*?  
ANNABEL LEE: Of course there are. Look.  
*(She hands Iris the telescope, and Iris looks through it at a  
sky full of stars.)*  
IRIS: Oh, my. From the palace of the Great Goods, you can only  
see *one* star.  
ANNABEL LEE: Why is that?  
IRIS: It's the best one. They chose it.  
ANNABEL LEE: There's no best in stars. They're like the waves  
upon the sea. A multitude of many; far as the eye can see.  
*(Shakes the chain with her arm.)* Now, if you'll free me from  
this, I'll find my ship and together we'll sail away.  
*(Iris goes to her and tries to pry the lock from Annabel  
Lee's arm.)*  
IRIS: It's locked shut. Maybe we could cut the chain.  
ANNABEL LEE: It's too strong — I've tried.  
IRIS: *(Looks closely at the lock.)* Then we have to pick the lock.  
We need something long and narrow and flat. *(Iris looks  
around, but sees nothing that will work.)*  
ANNABEL LEE: Maybe something in your pouch?  
IRIS: *(Showing her.)* All I have is this button. *(Still looking.)*  
There must be *something* we can use.  
ANNABEL LEE: *(Looking up to the sky.)* I think I know what it is.

IRIS: You do?  
*(Annabel Lee nods.)*  
IRIS: What is it?  
*(Annabel Lee sits, leaning against the shell, looking up at  
the stars.)*  
ANNABEL LEE: The same thing that brought me here to you.  
IRIS: But that was me — wishing.  
ANNABEL LEE: Exactly. *(Gestures for Iris to join her.)* C'mon Iris.  
Your wishes will be our vessel. And the stars will be our  
map. And with courage and faith as our captain and mate,  
the ship I've lost and room you seek may fall into our laps.  
*(Annabel Lee begins to hum "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,"  
softly and beautifully. After a moment, Iris sits next to her  
and joins her. They whistle/hum the song together, happily.)*