

MORTAL OF GRACE

A play in four acts

By Jeff Dunne

© 2017 by Jeffrey A. Dunne

CHARACTERS

MAYLA (MAY-luh)	Mayla is the faerie governess of Gwythonain. She should not look significantly older, however, than her charge.
GWYTHONAIN (GWITH-oh-nayn)	Gwythonain is the daughter of the faerie queen. She is young, but not a child.
EÓGAN (ee-OH-en)	Eógan is a young mortal (duine) who has lost his sister. He should be a little older than Gwythonain.
WYNNE (WIN)	Wynne is the mortal sister who died and is then returned to life through the Grace of Gwythonain. She is slightly younger than Eógan.
MORGAN (mor-GEHN)	Morgan is a ruling Tighearna (<i>CHEE-yearn-uh</i>), bitter, cracked, and turned cruel from the loss of his son. He is (made to look) very old in the early part of the show, but then younger later.
EGETH (AY-gheth)	Egeth is comhairleoir (advisor) to Morgan. Could be any age, but older is better.
KEIGHLYN (KEY-len)	Keighlyn is a Scottish-raised fae-souled human, grandson to Wynne and spiritual heir to Gwythonain. He is around the same age as Mayla.
DÍLIS (DEE-lish, in case one is curious – name never spoken)	Dílis is a loyal guard and servant of Morgan, and later comhairleoir as well. Could be any age.

SETTING

This play takes place in ancient Ireland.

ACT I

Scenes 1-10 Wynne's gravesite

ACT II

Scene 1-4 Audience chamber
Scene 5-6 Wynne's gravesite
Scene 7 Audience chamber

ACT III

Scene 1-6 Audience Chamber

ACT IV

Scene 1 Bogs of Lullymore
Scene 2-5 Wynne's gravesite

ACT I

SCENE 1

(There is a young man sitting at the grave of his little sister. He is speaking, but we cannot hear him. As the scene begins, we see two faeries, Gwythonain and Mayla, walking through the woods.)

MAYLA

We should return. Already I can barely remember our path.

GWYTHONAIN

I remember it well enough. And I tire of seeing the same trees all...

(They stop, having noticed the young man. He cannot see or hear the faeries, however.)

What is that?

MAYLA

I think... Could it be? No.

GWYTHONAIN

What?

MAYLA

I think perhaps it is... one of the daoine (*DEE-nuh or DAY-oh-EEN – see notes at back of script*).

GWYTHONAIN

Is it? I would see him more closely.

MAYLA

The queen left very strict—

GWYTHONAIN

My mother isn't here. And you wouldn't... Besides, there's no harm to look.

(The faeries approach the man, Gwythonain closer, Mayla hanging back. As they approach, we hear the man speaking.)

EÓGAN

...and mother still worries. She talks less and less each day. And each day I plead with her to come, but she will not. Always for some new reason.

GWYTHONAIN

To think, a mortal. The lore paints them hideous and deformed, but this one is not.

MAYLA

Gwythonain! Come away.

EÓGAN

Today it is her legs, and how they pain her.

(Over the next lines, Gwythonain studies Eógan, even waving a hand before his face.)

GWYTHONAIN

(Slightly overlapping Eógan's last and next lines)

You worry too much.

EÓGAN

Just as yesterday is was her feet.

GWYTHONAIN

He cannot see us.

EÓGAN

But I know the truth of it, even if she cannot face her own heart. She is alone. I think she barely hears me anymore.

MAYLA

Come away, child. You—

(Gwythonain has reached out and touched Eógan ever so lightly on his head. He thinks it is a fly that he attempts to brush away.)

Gwyth! You mustn't!

(Gwythonain brushes his hair again, and giggles. Again, Eógan bats at the annoyance, this time turning his head to look, and then back. This amuses her even more.)

GWYTHONAIN

Oh, hush. It is harmless play.

EÓGAN

I think that tomorrow I—

(Gwythonain taps him on the shoulder and jumps back. Eógan is startled. He jumps up and looks around for the source, but he cannot see her.)

GWYTHONAIN

You see? His eyes cannot pierce the Grace.

(Mayla stares at her until...)

Very well. We will return.

(The faeries begin to head off as the lights fade.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

(Again, Eógan is sitting at the gravesite, talking but we cannot hear. Again, the faeries approach.)

MAYLA

Please!

GWYTHONAIN

Stop your meithering. I told you, if you do not wish to stay—

MAYLA

Don't speak such foolishness. You know I cannot not leave you.

(Gwythonain turns around. She appears to be annoyed, but then suddenly it breaks and she is joyful, and hugs Mayla.)

GWYTHONAIN

Oh, Mayla. I know. And I love you! You know that I love you, do you not?

MAYLA

If you loved me, you would not give my heart such grief.

(Just as we think she might truly be upset, she smiles warmly and hugs Gwythonain back.)

GWYTHONAIN

Come then. I would hear what our duine (*DIN-uh or doo-INE – see notes at end of script*) is saying today.

(Lights go down as they start to move towards Eógan)

ACT I

SCENE 7

(Gwythonain stands next to the grave. Facing her, and rather speechless, is Eógan's sister. She is dressed in dirty clothes, and holding Gwythonain's pendant, which she wears around her neck. They are staring at each other as Mayla rushes up. She looks in surprise, and slight horror, at the two, then walks up to the sister and opens her fist to see the pendant. Shocked, she looks at Gwythonain.)

MAYLA

Oh, child, what have you done? What have you done!?!

(Lights dim for just a moment, and then come back up on basically the same scene a few moments later as Eógan enters.)

EÓGAN

Arienh! I cannot tell you how much—

(Eógan stops in his tracks as he sees his sister. After a moment, he recovers and rushes to her.)

Wynne? Wynne! But you're... you were...

(He turns to Gwythonain.)

You? You have brought my sister back? How? Will she...?

GWYTHONAIN

You are happy?

EÓGAN

Happy? I am happy beyond words! This is a gift beyond imagination!

MAYLA

(With fear and some reproach...)

Indeed it is.

(But only Gwythonain can hear her.)

GWYTHONAIN

Then it is a gift for both of us.

(Eógan embraces her in passion and gratitude, as the lights fade.)

ACT II

SCENE 1

(It is a small audience chamber in the dun (a fort) of Tighearna Morgan (mor-GEHN). He is an old man, frail, and sitting in a large chair. Egeth (AY-gheth) is by the door, having just escorted someone out.)

MORGAN

I tire.

EGETH

(Looking out...)

There are seven more, Tighearna. What is your desire?

MORGAN

Send them away. They can retur—

(Wynne has burst through the door and into the chamber. Despite simple clothing, she is radiant – clearly the same woman as before yet at the same time not. She is the picture of health and beauty.)

WYNNE

Tighearna! I have waited four days, and will be delayed no longer!

EGETH

My apologies, lord. She will be taken away at once. *(He turns to call out the door.)*
Guards!

WYNNE

I ask only a simple boon for a woman who has lost everything in your name.

EGETH

Silence, wench! You will not address the Tighearna.

(He grabs and restrains her.)

MORGAN

Your dreach (*DREECH*) is familiar.

WYNNE

It should be. You have dismissed me once before.

MORGAN

Yes. Yes. Yes, I did.

(He gestures to Egeth, who gestures for the guards outside to hold.)

In a camp of battle, I dare say.

WYNNE

It was.

MORGAN

When we fought the bastard Fearghus, may his black heart burn in Hell forever.

WYNNE

That was the war. The first of so many.

MORGAN

And you... You were with child.

WYNNE

(Suddenly nervous at the clarity of his memory.)

Your lordship rememb—

MORGAN

Where is your husband now?

WYNNE

There is none, nor has there ever.

MORGAN

A fraochÚn (*FRU-schoon*) off the streets.

(Egeth laughs.)

WYNNE

If I am, then it is by your hand!

MORGAN

Oh, I think I would remember that night.

WYNNE

You, who would take every man of courage or strength, and send them to die in your name! You'll take no more from me!

MORGAN

And is that why you impose yourself here, a whore come to exact some beagán (*BEH-gahn*) of justice for a lost father? Do you think I care one—

WYNNE

It was my brother you stole, and I am no fool to seek justice. Only—

MORGAN

Brother? (*He laughs.*) That was three wars and fifteen years past, and you can be no more than...

(He stops suddenly, realizing that she has not aged at all. He advances to her suddenly, takes her face in a hand and turns her head back and forth.)

How is this? You have aged not a day in fifteen years. Not a day! If anything, dare I say you look more fair now than... How. Is. This. Possible!?

WYNNE

Until I see my Eógan or his grave, you'll have no answers from my lips.

MORGAN

My dear child, when I am done with you, you will scream every truth you have for the barest hope that I will let you die.

(Morgan motions, and Egeth drags her off as the lights go out.)

ACT II

SCENE 2

(Morgan is in the audience chamber when Egeth enters.)

MORGAN

What news?

EGETH

She no longer heals.

MORGAN

Then it is as I thought. She is no Sídhe (*SHAY*) or faerie. It is the pendant that carries this draíochta (*dray-OCH-ta*).

EGETH

And Tighearna?

MORGAN

Yes?

EGETH

Without this charm, she seems to feel more pain. I took the liberty of discussing her past while they applied the coals to her feet.

MORGAN

I have no patience for this, Egeth. Speak your findings.

EGETH

She claims that through the magic of this amulet, she was risen from death.

MORGAN

What?!

EGETH

Oh, yes. A gift from the déithe (*DEY-heh*) themselves.

MORGAN

Gods or no, I care not! Have Bevyn's (*BEH-vin*) body brought to me here at once.

EGETH

Already they are opening the tomb.

MORGAN

See to it with your own eyes!

EGETH

At once, Tighearna!

(Egeth rushes off. When he is gone, Morgan holds up the pendant and stares at it.)

MORGAN

At last, my son, you will tell me with your own voice what namhaid (*NAV-ed*) took you from me. And we... will... have... justice.

(Lights out.)

ACT II

SCENE 7

(Morgan is in the audience chamber when the lights rise. He is now a vibrant man in the prime of life, and is surrounded by every luxury – rich food, beautiful women (if available), etc.)

MORGAN

Next!

(Keighlyn enters the chamber. As he walks in, a gem belonging to Morgan begins to glow softly, its brightness growing the closer Keighlyn gets to it. The Tighearna sees it instantly, but is subtle about it.)

Come in, traveler. What brings you to this hall?

KEIGHLYN

I travel upon a quest.

MORGAN

Yes. I know this already. A quest as relates to me.

KEIGHLYN

Aye. But how—

MORGAN

You do not rule for as long as I without coming to value the importance of... awareness. My eyes are everywhere, Keighlyn, son of Galvyn, and many ears have listened as you walked my streets, taken ale with my people, asking your... unassuming questions.

(He stands, then turns slowly around as if on display to Keighlyn.)

Am I everything you expected?

KEIGHLYN

A fair bit more, I would say.

MORGAN

And more upon that, you'll find. Well. Your time for subtlety has gone and passed. You are in search of something, and your presence before me heralds that you are ready to claim it.

KEIGHLYN

I am, Tighearna.

MORGAN

Then claim it.

(Morgan sits with a flourish.)

KEIGHLYN

What I seek is nothin' more than a simple knowin'. I ask only to research in the war records of the Immortal Lord.

MORGAN

Why would you ask this? You are a bard, or some vagabond canter of history?

KEIGHLYN

Nay, sir.

MORGAN

Then why? Have you even the knowledge of letters?

KEIGHLYN

I dinna—

MORGAN

Then why? I would have your reasons before I make my judgment.

KEIGHLYN

I seek to learn the fate of a man once in your service.

MORGAN

What man is this, and what matter is he to you?

KEIGHLYN

He was uncle to my father, and his name was... *(Keighlyn pauses ever so slightly, and is now studying Morgan intently to see his reaction...)* Eógan.

MORGAN

(He studies Keighlyn for a long moment, then...)

Why does that not surprise me?

KEIGHLYN

Then you ken his fate.

MORGAN

I know enough. I will consider your request, and we shall speak again upon the morrow. For tonight, you will be my guest.

KEIGHLYN

I hae lodgings already in your fine town.

MORGAN

Not anymore. Until we speak again, you will be my guest – just as your father’s mother was those years ago. Guards! Take him to the dungeons!

(Lights black out as the last line is finishing. In that instant, we should just catch a smile on Keighlyn’s face that hints that he knew this would happen. The light from the gem blinks out a moment later.)

ACT III

SCENE 1

(Morgan is in his audience chamber. Keighlyn is brought in, manacled, by Dílis. Morgan's gem glows at Keighlyn's presence, and the lord considers the prisoner for some long moments while he eats.)

MORGAN

Good morrow, faerie. How have you fared this past week?

(Keighlyn just stares at him.)

What? Have you never seen food nor drink before?

KEIGHLYN

(Coughing and weak)

Nay this past week, Balor-spawn.

MORGAN

Balor-spawn? You'd name me demon? Tsk tsk, it is not wise to disparage your host.

(Keighlyn coughs again. Morgan studies him for a moment, then turns to Dílis.)

Give him drink. I'll not let this creature's noise interrupt my morning.

(Dílis brings Keighlyn a goblet.)

KEIGHLYN

(After drinking...)

Please pardon my inconsiderate suffering.

MORGAN

I will come directly to the reason you stand here. You will tell me where I may find your cómhla.

KEIGHLYN

Ya' ken of the cómhlaichean (*cum-LAYTH-en*).

MORGAN

I know many things that you would secret. And you will tell me more!

KEIGHLYN

I dinna think that's—

MORGAN

(Flying into a flurry.)

YOU WILL OBEY ME!

(Keighlyn stands silent, composed. Despite chains, he is calm and in command of the moment.)

You will answer my questions! You will do my bidding! Or you will die in agony like the others before you!

KEIGHLYN

So do you confess. You are he they call Fae Bane.

MORGAN

Fae Bane? Is that what you name me? This mantle I'll wear with pride. You... pathetic... A twisted race best cleansed from this world! Weak! *(He gets control of himself, but barely.)* Fae Bane? You call me this after three? What, I wonder, will you name me once I've ended ten of you. Or a hundred.

KEIGHLYN

Why do ya' pour your hatred upon my brow? I've done—

MORGAN

SILENCE! I will have nothing from you but answers. You were wise not to approach me with your trinket. This *(he taps the glowing gem)* would have told me of your presence, visible to my eye or not. But you are here now, and here you shall remain until your end. Whether you live as honored guest or suffer as a punished dog... *that* is the choice that lies before you now.

KEIGHLYN

Well... both sound nice. I'll need to ponder—

MORGAN

(Morgan punches him.)

You would play the fool? See what countenance that brings. We both know it lay within your grasp to return my son to me, so I ask again – where is your cómhla?

KEIGHLYN

I dinna ken why ya' care. Whut would a fourth do that the three ya' hae now canna?

MORGAN

ANSWER MY—

KEIGHLYN

I'LL ANSWER YER DAMN QUESTION... *(returning to a normal voice once Morgan has stopped shouting...)* when ya' tell me that.

MORGAN

(Considers, trying to see if there is some trick, or if he is missing something.)

You offer your word?

KEIGHLYN

Aye.

MORGAN

Very well. I do not have three. When the last two faeries died, their còmhlaicean vanished with them. This... *(he takes out the pendant and holds it in his hand...)* Only this one remained.

KEIGHLYN

And why do ya' not just use that then?

MORGAN

I believe its power to have faded. It returned the woman Wynne, who you claim as grandmother, but no more will it do.

KEIGHLYN

Did ya' no try—

MORGAN

Enough! I have answered your question in a fullness beyond need. Now tell me. Where is your còmhla?

KEIGHLYN

(Thinking, assessing, and then as if resigned.)

Aye. I gave mae word. You'll find mae còmhla... hanging 'round your neck.

(Morgan lifts it again and stares at it, then at Keighlyn, thinking, thinking.)

Poor wee Tighearna... you ken now that ya' asked the wrong question.

MORGAN

You... insufferable creature! No more games will I play with you! You shall tell me all you know by knife and fire!

(Keighlyn starts to laugh.)

You think I jest!?

KEIGHLYN

You're a worm of a man, Tighearna Morgan, with the brains of toad. You'll nay torture me.

(A deep fury builds within the Tieghearna, and we think he is about to kill him, but suddenly Morgan breaks into a loud, bitter laughter.)

MORGAN

You are a clever creature, Keighlyn son of Galvyn. You think to win a painless death with your clever tongue—

KEIGHLYN

This is nay trickery, Immortal Toad. Are ya' so daft that you nay ken where ya' stand?

(Morgan weighs this for a moment, then decides he can afford the luxury of patience.)

MORGAN

Very well, Fae. What enlightenment should I have sought?

KEIGHLYN

Oh, Toad, that is nay how it's to be. Tit for tat, as they say. First you'll answer this: What was the fate of Wynne?

MORGAN

You wish to know what became of your grandmother?

KEIGHLYN

Aye.

MORGAN

That I will share without hesitation. She died no peaceful passing, nor quickly. While she wore the cómhla, we bathed her in acid and fire while she screamed and

begged for death. And when the healing gave her skin anew, we bathed her anew. Again. And again. And again!

(Keighlyn is enraged, but let's little of it show. After a moment, he smiles at Morgan.)

KEIGHLYN

And?

MORGAN

And what?

KEIGHLYN

I asked her fate, and you told me only of torture.

MORGAN

She died!!

KEIGHLYN

That I ken, but how? That was mae question.

MORGAN

You think this will bring you a semblance of peace?

KEIGHLYN

Will you tell me or nay?

MORGAN

Why should I care? Well, then, once we learned the magic of the cómhla from her bleeding lips, we took it in our hopes to return my son. Whilest we tried, her feet were covered in burning coals. And that is how she died.

KEIGHLYN

And you think to repeat her torture upon my body.

MORGAN

Save for the end. For you, you Fae abomination, there will be no death. Only pain.

KEIGHLYN

You hae kept your bargain, an' so do I. Whut ya' didna ask, is that whut ya' need most, yet dinna ken – how to *use* the cómhla to return your lad. Aye, that's right. You're fool toad, and ya' ken not whut ya' don't know. You'll nay harm one hair upon me,

MORGAN

You think that so.

KEIGHLYN

I know it so. The other Fae didna tell you whut ya' sought, did they?

MORGAN

No.

KEIGHLYN

But ya' knew more than to make twice the same mistake, aye? But still they died.

(Morgan is shaken. He is realizing there are more questions to be asked, and is suddenly unsure.)

They didna die of pain. They chose to end themselves. And now ya' ken why you'll nay touch me. Because if I will maysel to die, and I can... then you die with me.

(Morgan looks down at the pendant, and worry overcomes his face.)

Aye, toad. Like it or nay, you're bound to me.

MORGAN

You lie!

KEIGHLYN

Ya' ken better than that. I canna lie.

MORGAN

This cómhla did not fade with your mother. It will not fade now.

KEIGHLYN

It didna fade because when she died, it passed to her son. When my da died, so the cómhla passed to me. But I hae no son nor daughter.

MORGAN

Then all hope is lost.

KEIGHLYN

Oh, I wouldna say that.

MORGAN

But this cómhla cannot return the dead.

KEIGHLYN

Aye, it canna, nor could it ever. It was the Grace of the Fae, not the cómhla, that returned Wynne.

MORGAN

What Grace is this?

KEIGHLYN

The Grace in me.

(Lights out.)

ACT IV

SCENE 1

(Keighlyn stands in the bogs of Lullymore staring at the mummified corpse of Eógan that lies on the ground. He bends over, picks up a hand to look at a ring on the finger.)

KEIGHLYN

Ugh. *(Holds his own nose, and studies the ring.)* Well, that's the ring all right. Either you're Eógan, or this will be the biggest, smelliest mistake in the history of the isles.

(Keighlyn bends down, and places the pendant over Eógan's head. He then places his hand on Eógan's heart, and the lights fade to black.)

ACT IV

SCENE 2

(We see Wynne's grave, and Mayla sitting next to the lump of vines that was once Gwythonain. Keighlyn and Eógan enter, but stop away from Mayla. Eógan still does not look overly healthy, but certainly better than the mummified corpse he was before.)

KEIGHLYN

Is it as ya' knew it?

EÓGAN

It is. The trees are bigger.

KEIGHLYN

That'll happen over sixty years.

EÓGAN

Sixty...

KEIGHLYN

Perhaps more.

(Mayla rises and goes to them.)

MAYLA

Keighlyn?

KEIGHLYN

I came here almost ten years past now.

MAYLA

(With a gasp, she recognizes...)

Eógan!

EÓGAN

It is good to come home.

MAYLA

My lady! Look, my lady! You're Eógan-duine! He has returned!

Did you hear something? EÓGAN

Maybe. KEIGHLYN

(Mayla has approached Keighlyn, and reach towards him.)

MAYLA
You lovely duine. You lovely, foolish duine.

EÓGAN
There are faeries in these woods.

(Mayla touches Keighlyn's face, and he brings his hand up to touch hers even though he cannot see her.)

KEIGHLYN
(Smiling)
You don't say.

EÓGAN
I met one. I did, and we fell in love.

KEIGHLYN
Didya now?

EÓGAN
She was the most beautiful creature ever I laid eyes upon.

KEIGHLYN
Aye. *(Still holding Mayla's hand...)* Well, ya' ken what they say...

EÓGAN
What is that?

KEIGHLYN
If e'er ya' find beauty like that... ne'er let it go.

MAYLA
Keighlyn.

EÓGAN
You're a wiser man than I.

KEIGHLYN
Luckier, maybe. Nay wiser.

MAYLA
Oh, Keighlyn.

(Mayla draws her hand away and steps back...)

KEIGHLYN
An' maybe nay luckier at that.

EÓGAN
What do you mean?

(Mayla takes off her pendant. Eógan jumps back in surprise.)

KEIGHLYN
Nothing. Ne'er mind—

EÓGAN
(Recovering...)
Arienh! *(Then recognizing that it is not her.)* Forgive me, lady. I thought you...
were another.

MAYLA
(She stares at Keighlyn a long moment, then looks to Eógan and points at the vines...)
There she lies, Eógan-duine.

EÓGAN
Eógan-duine. How do you...

MAYLA
She was my lady before she was yours.

EÓGAN
I don't understand.

KEIGHLYN
This lady was governess to the faerie Queen's daughter, to your Arienh.

EÓGAN

And whence she now, my Arienh? I would go to her, wherever she is.

KEIGHLYN

Eógan, it is as the lady—

EÓGAN

Think not to spare my feelings. I am glad she has found other life, other happiness, and I would not alter it. I merely wish to look upon—

KEIGHLYN

Eógan!

MAYLA

My lady never left this place. She swore to wait upon your return, and that she did. There she rests, and has since you departed.

(Eógan rushes to the vines, and pulls them away. Under, Gwythonain is gone. All that remains is the wooden flower that he gave her. He picks it up, looks at it, then at Keighlyn and Mayla, and then – softly weeping – slowly crumples to the ground where Gwythonain waited. The lights fade.)