The Dead Rising

On Halloween night, three friends learn the story of Mercy Brown—a real-life vampire. Inspired by a true story.

**CHARACTERS**

**2013 CHARACTERS**

*Narrators 1, 2 & 3

*Ben, 13

*Amy, 13

*Rob, 13

*Mrs. Frankel, an elderly resident of Exeter

*Lena, a teenage resident of Exeter

**1892 CHARACTERS**

*George Brown, Mercy’s father

*Dr. Metcalf (Dr. M), Exeter’s town doctor

Edwin Brown, Mercy’s older brother

Townspeople: Wilson, Cora, Horace, Ethel

Circle the character you will play.

*Starred characters are major roles.
SCENE 1
EXETER, RHODE ISLAND: HALLOWEEN 2013

N1: Three friends ring a doorbell. An elderly lady opens the door.

BEN, AMY & ROB: TRICK-OR-TREAT!

MRS. FRANKEL: Well, aren’t you all adorable? Ooh, a spooky vampire! What a handsome ghoul you are.

BEN (removing vampire teeth): Thanks, ma’am.

MRS. FRANKEL: And what are you, missy? Some kind of disco singer?

AMY: Uh . . . 1980s pop star.

MRS. FRANKEL: And oh, boy! It’s “The Iron Man”!

ROB: Just “Iron Man,” actually.

MRS. FRANKEL: You can each take one piece of bubble gum, OK? Don’t stay out too late!

BEN, AMY & ROB: Thanks.

N2: The friends walk back to the street.

BEN: One piece of gum? Seriously?

N3: They watch as a mother drags a screaming toddler dressed as a pumpkin to the next house.

AMY: This is totally lame.

ROB: Want to go see a movie?

AMY: Sure, yeah. Looks like rain anyway.

N1: They hear a distant rumble of thunder.

N2: Walking ahead of them is a teenage girl in a plain, white dress. As the thunder sounds, the girl drops something shiny onto the sidewalk.

N3: Amy picks it up. It’s a silver bracelet with a single charm: the letter L.

AMY: Hey! You dropped your bracelet!

N1: The girl turns around. She has very pale skin, black hair, and deep-blue eyes. Amy hands her the bracelet.

LENA: Thank you . . . I like your costumes.

BEN: Uh, thanks. I’m Ben, and this is Amy and Rob.

LENA: My name is Lena.

ROB: Are you from Exeter? I don’t recognize you.

LENA: I’ve lived here forever.

AMY: So what’s your costume?

LENA: I’m Mercy Brown.

ROB: Who?

LENA: She lived here more than 100 years ago, and she was a vampire—at least, some people thought so.

AMY: A vampire? You mean like Ben?

N2: Amy smiles and tugs on Ben’s vampire cape.

LENA: No. It was said that Mercy’s spirit rose from the dead to feast on the living.

BEN: Gross.

LENA: She’s buried here in town. In fact, I’m on my way to visit her grave. Do you want to come along?

ROB: Well, actually, we are going to a movie.

Tuberculosis (TB) has been infecting humans for thousands of years. It is a vicious and terrifying disease that causes weight loss, night sweats, fever, and a bloody cough. By the 1880s, TB was killing one out of every seven people in Europe and the United States.
As they listen to Rob read from his phone, the friends continue to follow Lena. The night has grown dark and misty.

ROB (reading): “Consumption is now known as tuberculosis. The disease is caused by a bacterium that usually attacks the lungs. Highly contagious, it was once the leading cause of death in the United States, responsible for nearly a quarter of all deaths by 1800. Scientists discovered the bacterium in 1882, but news was slow to reach rural areas.”

BEN: So the cause was known, but they hadn’t heard about it in Exeter?

ROB: Well, it says here a cure wasn’t developed until the 1940s, so knowing the cause wouldn’t have done Mercy any good anyway.

AMY: So, wait. What do vampires have to do with—

LENA: Mercy’s body was placed in the family crypt until spring because the frozen ground made digging a grave impossible. Meanwhile, it seemed that Edwin was soon to follow his sister . . .

SCENE 4

EXETER: MARCH 1892

N1: George sits by his son’s bed. Edwin’s cough is bad.

GEORGE: There’s really nothing you can do, Doctor?

DR. M: There is no cure for consumption. Even the cause is debated.

GEORGE: Yes, I know. That’s what they told me a decade ago, when consumption claimed my wife, and again months later when it claimed my eldest daughter. Doctor . . . what have I done to deserve this?

DR. M: I offer my deepest condolences.

GEORGE: She’s so frail; her body has wasted away.

DR. M: Your son, Edwin, how is his health?

GEORGE: More sorrow! His consumption has only gotten worse. Oh, Doctor, what will I do?

SCENE 3

EXETER: HALLOWEEN 2013

LENA: Mercy died later that night.

BEN: What’s consumption, anyway?

ROB: I already Googled it.

In the 19th century, drinking brown sugar with water, bloodletting (surgically draining blood), and horseback riding were thought to cure consumption. Today it is treated with antibiotics.
that Edwin’s sickness is caused by certain . . . spirits.

**GEORGE:** Spirits?

**CORA:** Evil spirits of the dead, come to feast on the blood and flesh of the living.

**GEORGE:** That’s absurd!

**HORACE:** There is a very old remedy that we believe could save Edwin.

**GEORGE:** What sort of remedy?

**N1:** They whisper. Edwin hears only a few words.

**ETHEL** *(whispering):* . . . body . . .

**WILSON** *(whispering):* . . . blood . . .

**CORA** *(whispering):* . . . fire . . .

**HORACE** *(whispering):* . . . drink . . .

**N2:** When they finish, George stands abruptly.

**GEORGE:** LEAVE MY HOME! NOW!

**CORA:** George, please—

**GEORGE:** How dare you propose such a thing!

**WILSON:** It’s your only chance.

**ETHEL:** What have you got to lose?

**HORACE:** Your refusal puts the whole town at risk!

**GEORGE:** OUT!

**N3:** The townspeople leave and George returns to Edwin’s bedside.

**EDWIN:** Father, I heard something about a remedy. What did they say?

**N1:** George whispers into his son’s ear.

**EDWIN:** What if it works?

**GEORGE:** You’re not suggesting—

**EDWIN:** It is horrible, I know, but *(coughs violently)* . . . what if it works?

**N2:** Father and son talk late into the night.

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**SCENE 5**

**EXETER: HALLOWEEN 2013**

**ROB:** Wait—what was the remedy?

**AMY:** It must have been something awful.

**LENA:** We are here.

**N3:** The friends hadn’t even noticed that they had reached the gates of Chestnut Hill Cemetery. A white church stands among many old, cracked tombstones.

**BEN:** I forgot how creepy this place is.

**SCENE 6**

**CHESTNUT HILL CEMETERY: MARCH 17, 1892**

**N1:** Lit by candles, the townspeople huddle around two coffins—those of Mercy’s mother and sister. They have just dug up the coffins.

**N2:** Dr. Metcalf opens the lids and peers inside. A foul stench fills the air.

**DR. M:** Nothing but bones and dust.

**ETHEL:** We must check Mercy. She’s still in the crypt.

**N3:** Two men open the crypt and pull out Mercy’s coffin. Dr. Metcalf lifts the lid.

**WILSON** *(gasping):* She hasn’t rotted a bit!

**CORA:** Her position has changed. She’s been moving.

**TOWNSPEOPLE:** Check the organs!

**N1:** Dr. Metcalf takes a *scalpel* from his medical bag. He cuts open the corpse and removes the heart and liver.

**HORACE:** If there’s blood, we’ll know for sure.

**TOWNSPEOPLE:** Cut open the heart!

**N2:** Dr. Metcalf slices into Mercy’s heart.

**DR. M:** Oh, dear. Blood.

**ETHEL:** So it’s true!
TOWNSPEOPLE: It’s true!

ETHEL: Mercy rose from death to feed on her brother!

N3: The townspeople light a fire on a nearby stone and place the heart and liver into the flames.

TOWNSPEOPLE: Burn! Burn!

N1: They watch as the dead flesh disintegrates, their wild faces lit by the orange blaze.

TOWNSPEOPLE: Kill the spirit! Burn the organs!

HORACE: Collect the remains. We will mix them with water and feed them to the boy. Edwin will drink the ashes of his sister’s organs—if he wants to live.

SCENE 7
CHESTNUT HILL CEMETERY: HALLOWEEN 2013

BEN: I think I might be sick.

AMY: You ate too many candy bars.

ROB: Mercy had been dead only a few months—that’s why there was still blood in her heart. And the cold weather probably slowed decomposition.

BEN: Thanks, Dr. Metcalf.

LENA (pointing): There it is.

N2: Mercy’s grave is covered with offerings: flowers, notes, candies.

What does this article reveal about how outsiders viewed the vampire rituals in Exeter?

1892, 20 March:

The shocking case of exhumation in one of the border towns of this state last week is, after all, only a rather more than usually striking illustration of a truth which cannot be denied, that the amount of ignorance and superstition to be found in some corners of New England is more than surprising to one who comes into contact with it for the first time. There are considerable elements of rural population in this part of the country upon which the forces of education and civilization have made scarcely any impression.

BEN: What happened to Edwin? Did he drink the ashes?

LENA: He did, but still he died less than two months later. His grave is right here, next to his sister’s . . .

SCENE 8
CHESTNUT HILL CEMETERY: MAY 1892

N3: Dr. Metcalf and George stand by Edwin’s grave.

GEORGE: How did you let me go through with it? I defiled the remains of my wife, my daughters—all for nothing.

DR. M: Not for nothing. It was for the good of the town.

GEORGE: Newspapers are calling us ignorant and uncivilized, saying we believe in vampires! We’ve disgraced ourselves.

DR. M: It is unfortunate.

SCENE 9
CHESTNUT HILL CEMETERY: HALLOWEEN 2013

LENA: George lived in sorrow until 1922.

BEN: So the ritual didn’t work?

LENA (becoming intense): Mercy was not a vampire. The people just didn’t understand the disease. They were afraid, and they acted out of panic. But their ritual had an unintended result. Opening the body and burning the organs released Mercy’s spirit, dooming her to wander sad and alone for all time—

N1: Lena is cut off by a bad coughing fit.

ROB (laughing): Spooky ending! Hey, are you OK?

N2: Lena doesn’t answer. She solemnly approaches the grave and leaves her “L” bracelet on top.

BEN: I’m going to leave something for Mercy too.

N3: Ben places his plastic vampire teeth on the grave. Rob leaves his Iron Man mask.

What does this article reveal about how outsiders viewed the vampire rituals in Exeter?

N1: As Amy approaches to leave her 1980s studded bracelet, she notices the name on the grave.

AMY: “Mercy L. Brown.”

N2: Amy gasps.

AMY: “L”!

N3: She spins around, but the mysterious girl in white has disappeared.

N1: With a loud burst of thunder, rain begins to fall, as the three friends stand in a stunned silence above the grave of Mercy Lena Brown.
Was George Crazy?

I thought so. But then I learned better. **BY KRISTIN LEWIS**

When I learned about the vampire panics in New England, I knew we had to do a story about them in Scope. I was fascinated—but also grossed out—by the thought of people digging up their relatives and burning their organs. It seemed like something out of a creepy Edgar Allan Poe story, not something that happened in real life. To be honest, I thought the people of Exeter must have been nuts. How could they have been so **irrational**?

I was particularly puzzled by the story of George Brown. Why would a father allow his family to be dug up from their graves just to satisfy his crazy neighbors? Was it a case of peer pressure gone wrong?

Then I came across Michael Bell. Bell is a folklorist who has dedicated his career to studying all things vampire. Bell totally changed my perspective. In his amazing book *Food for the Dead*, he makes the case that it’s unfair to judge our ancestors for their sometimes misguided ideas.

“It’s easy to be **lulled** into the belief that we are smarter than our ancestors, simply because we have access to the vast store of knowledge that has been assembled over the past century,” he writes.

In other words, just because we know more doesn’t mean we are more intelligent.

The fact is, tuberculosis, or consumption as it was known then, was a terrifying and mysterious disease that was killing people left and right. Exeter’s population was already small; many residents had died in the Civil War. Now a consumption outbreak was striking down those who remained. “They had attended too many funerals, seen too many die before their time,” Bell writes. “Nobody could do much to stop it.”

People were desperate. Those who came down with consumption were shunned by their friends and neighbors. Many were fired from their jobs or kept out of public places. Someone with consumption might not even have been able to get a haircut!

Today we know that the disease is caused by bacteria. But the people of Exeter didn’t know that. They had never even heard of a germ. What they did have were their stories and traditions—folktales that had been passed down for generations about how fire was cleansing and disease was an evil spirit. And they had their vampire-killing ritual, which had been practiced throughout New England for centuries.

Can we really blame George for what he allowed? What would you have done in his shoes? Says Bell: “George wanted to save the last **remnant** of his family. How could he face the guilt if he said ‘no’ and the **epidemic** continued?”

**WRITING CONTEST**

In “Was George Crazy?” Kristin Lewis asks, “Can we really blame George for what he allowed? What would you have done in his shoes?” Write two paragraphs answering her questions. Draw on the play as well as the essay in your answer. Send your response to **MERCY CONTEST**.

Five winners will each receive *Mercy: The Last New England Vampire* by Sarah L. Thomson. See page 2 for details.