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† **Gretchen** †

Gnome Female

Age: 300

Occupation: Spiritual Medium

Physical Description: Imagine a stumpy tree with gnarled branches. Now imagine it decorated in spring flowers. That's Gretchen. This little gnome has not aged well. For most of her life, she's guzzled alcohol and sleeping cocktails once the sun goes down. It's the only way she can rest at night.

To counter the misshapen appearance of her crooked little body, the sallow-eyed gnome dresses extremely well. In her line of business, appearance matters, and to overcompensate for the many years of substance abuse that's ravaged her body, she buys the most expensive clothes available, mostly with bright colored patterns or high contrast color schemes (she likes to stand out from the crowd).

During a typical reading with a client, she often holds their hands as she talks to them. Because of this, she keeps her knotty hands impeccably clean at all times. Clean hands are somewhat of an obsession for her.

Strengths: She can communicate with the dead. They're all around her, twenty-four hours a day, incessantly whispering. Even at night when she's trying to sleep, they talk to her (apparently, the dead don't know the difference between night and day, and when they should let the living rest).

The dead know the future, and since Gretchen can speak with them, she knows other people's futures, and pasts. Gretchen uses this knowledge to forewarn clients of impending doom. Sometimes, even the smallest of decisions have

cataclysmic consequences, and with a little guidance from Gretchen, she can help her clients avoid monumental mistakes. More than once she's saved the life of an individual (or one of their family members). But not everyone wants life advice. Most just want to know how to make more money or where they can find a profitable venture.

Gretchen doesn't reveal everything she learns during a reading. Some news, such as an inevitable death or underlying sickness that cannot be cured, she will not reveal. Experience has taught her that some things are better left unsaid.

Sometimes the spirits talk about people she doesn't even know. Every once in a while, they will provide information that could save a person's life but Gretchen will keep such information to herself. She doesn't feel obligated to warn anyone, especially if they haven't paid for guidance. She's tried in the past to warn people she's never met about some future calamity, and each time she has been met with extreme hostility, even when her predictions proved to be accurate. So, she keeps her premonitions to herself and her paying clients, and lets disaster strike everyone else she's gleaned foreboding information about.

Occasionally, the ghostly whispers reach intolerable levels. This is almost always the result of her proximity to a particular person, such as when she's near the notorious Captain Hardwick. The spirits flock to the captain because of the amount of carnage he's associated with, and whenever he's near Gretchen, they nearly overwhelm her with chatter.

She's tried on several occasions to speak to Hardwick with the hope that she can help some of the spirits that follow him finally rest, but he always shuts her down, telling her to be quiet. She even tried to blurt out messages as he passed by her on the street one day. Hardwick moved so quickly that she didn't have a chance to react, and she found herself terrified as he clamped a firm hand over her mouth and stared down into her eyes. That got her attention and she stopped talking. While he gripped her face with one of his massive hands, he raised a finger to his lips as if to say *shhhh* and said, "Be quiet, woman. I have no use for the dead." Despite being over two-hundred years his senior, he tousled her hair like a child, released his grip and walked away. The soldiers in his patrol snickered to themselves as they fell in line behind their captain. She's never forgotten the incident. From that day onward, she avoids Hardwick, mostly because if he's not around there are fewer spirits to contend with, and partly because she doesn't want to be humiliated like that again.

Weaknesses: Gretchen is a thief, plain and simple. She's developed strong ties to the best home burglars in the city – a set of halfling twins named Jax and Thrax. The three of them meet discreetly at least once a month to discuss potential work. She keeps company with several highway robbers as well.

She's honest with the vast majority of people, allowing legitimate communication with recently deceased members of families and surviving loved ones, but every once in a while she'll gain a piece of information about someone that she won't reveal and she'll use that to orchestrate some form of heist. Because of her ability to commune with the dead, she can foretell with significant accuracy the upcoming events in a person's life, including when they travel for extended periods of time. This is particularly useful knowledge when she knows the client is wealthy. This type of information usually comes as a byproduct during a reading. She will tell the client what they so desperately want to know, of course, but she'll also keep excellent notes should she learn they will be traveling and leaving their home unoccupied for more than a few days. That's when she'll inform her accomplices and let them know the best time to burglarize a home. And if the home is guarded while they are away, she'll plan a highway robbery instead. Obviously, she can't do this with every client because the crimes would lead back to her. She's very selective about her targets. In fact, she is so selective that she and her team of thieves only make three or four big scores a year based on information she gleans from her spiritual readings.

She knows fine wine from the cheap stuff and will gladly trade spiritual advice for high quality alcohol of any sort. The local alchemist in town, Grimmel, often trades sleeping potions for readings with Gretchen. She drinks at least one sleeping potion every night, so she knows Grimmel rather well, and visits his guarded estate within the city at least twice a month.

The constant presence of the dead is Gretchen's number one occupational hazard. They never shut up. Their incessant chatter makes it difficult for her to sleep, and over the years Gretchen has resorted to drunkenness and sleeping potions to drown out their ghostly whispers. Five or six shots of hard drought before bedtime along with a slug of sleeping elixir is just the right concoction to allow her to sleep peacefully until morning. Keep in mind she only weighs about fifty pounds, and that amount of alcohol would slide most gnomes straight into a coma.

She does not view her alcoholism and sleeping potion addiction as problematic. It's just a part of life, and she accepts their use as the most potent solution to drown out the ghosts who pester her when she's trying to sleep.

Personality: Gretchen puts on her friendly face whenever she shuffles out the front door of her home. She gives unsolicited, simple advice to acquaintances and friends and even random people on the street because the spirits are always alongside her and communicating with her, revealing information about the future of individuals who are in her immediate surroundings.

It's not uncommon for Gretchen to foretell daily events to people at the inn while she's eating breakfast. However, this type of advice is never too important in a person's life, but more for entertainment purposes. She's very careful not to reveal unsettling news to people she doesn't know. She doesn't want to upset or cause undue stress to complete strangers. Happy advice, when freely given in small doses, produces friendly gossip and keeps the townsfolk talking about her in a positive manner. Basically, it's good marketing for her business.

Stealing is only one aspect of Gretchen's darker side. If she can foresee a physical encounter, such as someone breaking a leg or a startled pony trampling an old man, she'll arrange her day accordingly so she can be present when the event takes place. She enjoys spectating. She's witnessed murder, beatings, kidnappings and all sorts of violent encounters. There's a dark aspect to her personality, for sure. Gretchen is a voyeur for violence. Because of her seemingly coincidental presence at bad situations, she's developed a bad luck reputation. Some people who know her will simply leave the area altogether if she arrives because they anticipate some tragic event will occur.

Family: Communicating with the dead is a family tradition for the women in Gretchen's family. She has three cousins and several aunts who are also in the business, but not within her city. Each family member who takes up the calling establishes her own shop in a city unoccupied by fellow family soothsayers.

It's considered bad taste to use one's abilities for nefarious purposes, so the fact that Gretchen steals from a few of her clients every year is something she keeps entirely to herself. No one in her family knows that she sometimes deliberately speaks with the dead in order to rob the living, and certainly nobody in the city knows this either (except, of course, her thieving accomplices). Gretchen is

exceptionally careful about organizing home burglaries. She knows if word got out that she is the architect of several per year, her business would be ruined.

Every fortune teller in the family uses the same crest for their business. From one city to the next, they help each other tremendously by using the same symbol on their front door. They even wear a matching patch stitched into their clothing, much like a franchise.

The dead started communicating with Gretchen when she was a little girl, so other family members knew she would take up the calling one day. As with other members who previously learned the trade, she spent several months a year with different family fortune tellers, traveling from one city to the next to learn how they ply their craft and earn a living. When she finally decided to go into business for herself, she picked a city and moved there. The other fortune tellers in her family pooled their money and gave her a substantial amount of starting capital.

Gretchen has a niece named Penny who can also communicate with the dead. She's young, in her mid-twenties, and she's currently staying with Gretchen for the next few months in order to develop her skills. While the dead who visit Gretchen come from all walks of life, she doesn't have much control as to who visits. Penny's form of communication with the dead is slightly different. She can stand before any grave and call forth the spirit of the person buried there. It's a unique method of communicating with the dead that no other relative can perform. In some ways it's limited because very few spirits randomly visit Penny throughout the day. But it's also very direct because she can target exactly the person she wishes to commune with. When she finally masters her skill, she will be able to charge substantial fees for her services, unlike Gretchen who must keep her prices modest as she is not entirely sure if she can communicate with the specific spirit her clients wish to speak to. Someday, perhaps in three or four years, Penny will establish her own business in a not-too-distant town, and Gretchen will freely donate a small amount of gold to help her get started.

Acquaintances: Gretchen is friendly with just about everyone in town. She has a solid reputation for providing accurate life and financial advice by means of communicating with the dead. As with any business dealing with spiritual matters, not everyone thinks highly of Gretchen's ability. Some accuse her of performing dark magic and believe she's in league with evil spirits. She steers clear of those people and sticks to the parts of town where she's developed friends over her many years of service.

Goals: Gretchen doesn't have too many big goals remaining in life. She lives better than the other fortune tellers in her family, mostly because she established herself in town at a much younger age than the others (she started when she was nineteen). She has plenty of money saved, and plenty of favors owed to her. Financially speaking, she doesn't need to work ever again.

If Gretchen has any goals, it would be to continue to organize a few profitable robberies per year with her thieving pals. She provides the information, they do the work, and the team splits the profits. She derives great satisfaction from a successful theft. She enjoys sitting at the table with her criminal partners and dividing up the loot.

Occupation: Spiritual Medium, life advisor.