



Sample Pages from The House - Competition Length Version

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THE HOUSE

COMPETITION LENGTH VERSION

A HORRIFYING PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



The House - Competition Length Version
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Characters

25 individual/19 with some doubling

You can certainly have a smaller cast with actors playing parts in more than one story.

Liath: (AG) The Grey One. Our story guide and narrator for all the stories.
Unknown age. Unknown origin. Pronounced LEE-EH.

STORY ONE (1M/2W/9AG)

9 individual / 6 with some doubling

Lost: (W) The Lost Child.

Joey/Finley: (AG) They briefly experience the Lost Child first hand.

Caroline: (W) The Mother. Cruel and unmotherly.

John: (M) The Father. Blind to his wife's true nature. Not a good head for business.

Maid: (AG) Unable to work for Caroline.

Agency Manager: (AG) Owns the Agency that supplies Caroline with Maids.
Loves children.

Nosy One/Nosy Two: (AG) Nosy Neighbours with good hearts.

Doubling suggestions

INDIVIDUALS: Lost, Caroline, John

ONE: Joey/Nosy One

TWO: Finley/Agency Manager

THREE: Maid/Nosy Two

STORY TWO (5M/1W/1AG+Liath)

8 individual / 6 with some doubling

Don Juan Manuel: (M) A man of great power and great jealousy.

Elena: (W) Don Juan's wife.

Nephew: (M) Don Juan's unfortunate nephew.

The Grey One-Liath: (AG) Liath enters the story.

Police: (AG) A member of the police force.

Man x3: (M) Three unfortunate men who meet Don Juan.

Doubling suggestions

INDIVIDUALS: Don Juan, Elena, Nephew, Police, The Grey One (Liath)

ONE: Man (3) (Have the same actor play the three victims with different accessories - hat, coat, etc.)

STORY THREE (2M/2W/4AG)

8 individual / 7 with some doubling

Roderick: (M) A sickly young man.

Nish: (AG) A friend.

Madeline: (W) Roderick's sister. A sickly young woman. No lines.

Mom/Dad: (W/M) Nish's parents.

Cabbie: (AG) Does not want to get too close to the Usher house.

Ash: (AG) Roderick's valet. Mostly humourless.

Doctor: (AG) Madeline's doctor.

Doubling suggestions

INDIVIDUAL: Roderick, Nish, Madeline, Mom, Dad, Ash

ONE: Cabbie, Doctor

Gender Note

Some characters are identified as binary. You have permission to change the gender of any role. Feel free to have roles played by whomever fits the role best.

LIGHTS UP: A creepy soundscape and shadowy lighting establish the scene. All the tropes: the sound of wind, thunder and lightning. Echoey footsteps. A creaking door. Creepy music. The idea is that we are setting up a haunted house. It IS haunted. There is no question.

Blue light up on NISH. They are afraid.

NISH: I'm not afraid. Why should I be? It's a house. Four walls. A ceiling and a floor. Windows and doors. It's not looking at me. It's my imagination.

Everything turns red. Blackout. A door slams and it echoes. NISH exits as...

Blue light comes up on FINLEY. They turn to see a light come up on LOST.

FINLEY: Who are you?

LOST: (monotone) I can't find my mother.

FINLEY: What are you doing here?

LOST: I can't find my mother.

Everything turns red. A scream is heard. FINLEY and LOST exit as...

VOICE: (whisper) Murderer... you killed me... murderer.

A scream is heard. And then silence. All sound and all music stops. A white light comes up on the Grey One – LIATH (pronounced LEE-EH). They smile at the audience.

LIATH: Do you believe in haunted houses? Do you believe in ghosts? Do you believe ghosts make a place haunted? Or are houses evil to begin with? So many questions. It's an interesting thing to think about. Do you believe in evil? Not that it matters. I will tell you the truth: there are ghosts. There are evil houses. And there's nothing you can do to stop what's going to happen in any of them. Our first house holds "The Lost Ghost." A husband. A wife. And a child.

During the above, LOST has slowly entered to come and stand beside LIATH. LIATH remains on stage for the whole play, watching the action.

LOST: I can't find my mother.

LIATH: You see, the child was found after a week in the back bedroom on the first floor. Abandoned. Frozen.

LOST: I can't find my mother.

There is the sound of a gunshot and a scream.

VOICE: (echoing) Get to your room!

LIATH: The house has never been able to shake the cold. Or its reputation.

During the above JOEY has entered. Lights up on JOEY.

JOEY: I was upstairs. It was super cold for September. It might have even been the first frost that night. I was watching the sunset out the window when –

Vague scritchng noises, like rats in the walls. JOEY follows the noise as it moves around the room.

JOEY: Hello?

The scritchng noises continue. It gets louder.

JOEY: Hello? Who's there?

There is the sound of a creaking door and a rush of wind.

JOEY: Oh! It's so cold. Who's there?

There is the sound of a door slamming shut. It echoes. There is the sound of a gunshot. A scream.

During the above FINLEY has entered. Lights up on FINLEY. JOEY exits.

FINLEY: I was doing the dishes. All of a sudden everything went cold. I could see my breath, inside the house.

LOST: (stepping forward) I can't find my mother.

FINLEY: Who are you?

LOST: I can't find my mother.

FINLEY: What are you doing here? You look frozen.

LOST: I can't find my mother.

There is the sound of a gunshot. A scream.

LIATH: People couldn't take it. So. What happened?

VOICE: (echoey) Get to your room. Do you hear me? Get out of my sight!

A door slams.

VOICE: (echoey) No, no, no, no!

There is the sound of a gunshot. A scream.

LOST: I can't find my mother.

The mood changes abruptly. Full light. Happy loud party music. The sound of a party erupts onstage. CAROLINE enters, moving as if weaving through a crowd, greeting.

CAROLINE: Hello! Hello! Thank you for coming. Hello, hi, how are you? Thank you I do look marvellous. I only wear New York. There's nothing in Boston that even comes close to being acceptable. (calling to her husband, who has just entered) John, open up another bottle of champagne!

JOHN: Anything for you, my love!

The music swells and then fades as CAROLINE crosses to JOHN.

CAROLINE: (to JOHN) Do you really have to leave tonight?

JOHN: I do. And don't worry if you don't hear from me. I'll be in meetings day and night, it's going to be very intense. I'm not even sure when I'm coming home.

CAROLINE: (laughing) I will wait with bated breath till your return!

JOHN: Wait till you see the presents I bring back. Something beautiful for my beautiful lady.

CAROLINE: Oh, how sweet. John, you do too much for me.

LOST moves forward. LOST is always in "ghost" form, but both JOHN and CAROLINE speak to her and react to her as normal.

JOHN: (kneeling, talking to LOST) And something shiny for my little princess. Or a doll? How about that?

CAROLINE: (harsh) Don't spoil her. She doesn't need anything.

JOHN: Nonsense! Little girls are meant to be spoiled.

CAROLINE: Your skirt is so dirty. What did I tell you about staying clean? Go to your room!

A door slams.

LOST: I can't find my mother. (*wanders away but not far*)

LIATH: The husband, who seemed so intent on telling the wife not to worry, disappeared.

JOHN: (*exiting*) Don't worry if you don't hear from me...

CAROLINE begins to pace. LOST watches.

LIATH: Rumour has it that he skipped town with company money. Weeks went by and the wife had no idea what happened. Which mostly explains her behaviour...

MAID: (*entering*) Good morning, Ma'am. Would you like toast with your eggs?

CAROLINE: (*irritated*) Of course I want toast. I always want toast. Are you stupid?

MAID: Have you heard from Mr. Stoope, Ma'am?

CAROLINE: What?

MAID: Have you heard from him? When is he coming home?

CAROLINE: You're fired. Don't finish the day.

MAID: Ma'am?

CAROLINE: Get out! Get out of my sight!

There is the sound of crashing cutlery and plates – as if CAROLINE has thrown something at the MAID. The MAID runs off. LOST moves to stand beside CAROLINE.

LOST: I can't find my mother.

CAROLINE: Look at you with your stupid sad face. You won't get any pity from me. If you're hungry, you'll earn your supper. The dishes need doing. If you want to eat, get to work. What are you standing there for! Go!

There is the sound of a door slam.

LOST doesn't move. The AGENCY MANAGER steps forward.

AGENCY MANAGER: Mrs. Stoope, I'm sorry you're having trouble keeping staff.

CAROLINE: It doesn't matter. That's why I'm here. I don't need anyone for a while. I'm going to... I'm going down south to spend some time... with my mother. While things are... while things settle down here.

AGENCY MANAGER: Oh, your daughter will love to see her grandparents. Won't that be wonderful.

CAROLINE: What? Oh. Yes. She will. And when I get back, I'll be going with a new agency.

The AGENCY MANAGER exits. CAROLINE crosses downstage and stands, staring out at the audience. LOST stands behind her mother, staring at her. On the other side of the stage, two NOSY NEIGHBOURS enter.

NOSY ONE: How long has she been gone?

NOSY TWO: Weeks.

NOSY ONE: Good riddance.

NOSY TWO: Heavens!

NOSY ONE: I know, I know. It's not very neighbourly. But there is a mean streak in that woman. That's all I'm saying. She barely said hello to me when we passed on the street. Did she ever greet you with the smallest of pleasantries? Did she ever invite you in for tea?

NOSY TWO: No. But still.

NOSY ONE: I'm not surprised her husband skipped town.

NOSY TWO: Heavens!

NOSY ONE: Am I wrong?

NOSY TWO: Still! *(beat)* You know, I'm sure it's nothing...

NOSY ONE: What?

NOSY TWO: It's nothing. *(beat)* I thought I heard crying. Last week. It's nothing.

NOSY ONE: In the house?

NOSY TWO: It was probably the wind. It couldn't have been... no. I'm being ridiculous.

NOSY ONE: What did it sound like?

NOSY TWO: It couldn't be what I think it is. It must have been the Bissel's little girl. She wasn't feeling well last week.

NOSY ONE: You heard a child crying.

NOSY TWO: It isn't what I think. She went with her mother. Didn't she?

NOSY ONE: Of course she did.

Ghostly creepy music begins to play. LOST moves to stand beside CAROLINE.

LOST: I can't find my mother.

NOSY TWO: Should we check? *(they silently talk to each other)*

CAROLINE: You will stay in this room until I get back. Am I clear? And don't make any noise. Understand? Don't make a single sound.

CAROLINE exits. LOST watches her go. There is the sound of a door creaking opening. NOSY ONE and NOSY TWO turn around as if entering the house.

NOSY ONE: Little one. Little one, where are you?

NOSY TWO: It's so cold in here. Why is it so cold?

LOST: I can't find my mother.

NOSY ONE: Oh no. Oh no!

The two drop to their knees as if over a little body. LOST watches them.

LOST: I can't find my mother.

NOSY TWO: She's frozen solid.

NOSY ONE: Wake up. Wake up!

There is the sound of a door slam. JOHN enters.

JOHN: Hello? Hello? Where is everyone?

NOSY ONE: *(standing)* Now you show up? Now you do?

JOHN: What's the matter?

NOSY TWO: (*standing*) Where's your wife?

JOHN: What?

NOSY ONE: Don't you know? Don't you know what she's done?

JOHN: ("*seeing*" the body) My princess! What did she do!

*Door slams. JOHN runs off with the NOSYs following.
There is a narrowing light on LOST.*

LOST: I can't find my mother.

CAROLINE: (*offstage, echoey voice*) No, no, no, no! John! Please, no!

*There is the sound of a gunshot. A scream. A second
gunshot.*

LIATH: And now the little lost one is without a mother, a father, or
indeed her very life itself.

LOST: I can't find my mother.

LIATH: She endlessly wanders, making things so, so cold, looking for
the one who did her wrong.

LOST: I can't find my mother. (*beat*) I can't find my mother.

LIATH: I love a haunted house. You might say, I'm connected to them. I
love the way they creak and moan. (*the sound of a sorrowful moan*)
Yes, just like that. A house lets you know if it doesn't want you
there. Houses have memories. A house breathes. Is that a ghost's
doing? Who's to say. Every town in every country has at least one
haunted house. What would we do without something to fear?
Shall we visit another? What happened in the house of Don Juan
Manuel?

*Lights change. Traditional Mexican folk music plays. A
bilingual version of this story is included in the longer
version of The House.*

LIATH: The house of Don Juan Manuel stands in Mexico City. In its
time, it was a beautiful house. Large and expansive with a tall wall
surrounding the property. To this day, even in its dilapidated state
it is a much larger house than those that surround it. It's hard not
to look at the house. It pulls you in. In its day it was a house with
power. For Don Juan was a powerful man. A powerful man with
one significant flaw.

DON JUAN and ELENA enter arm in arm.

ELENA: Oh Juan, look how the sun sparkles on the fountain. What a beautiful day!

DON JUAN: It's not half as beautiful as you, my beautiful wife. How lucky am I?

ELENA: My darling, you're so kind.

DON JUAN: Nothing would please me more than to admire your beauty every day. What are you doing this morning?

ELENA: I wanted to go to the market. It's so lively in the fall.

LIATH: Don Juan was a jealous man. And the last thing he wanted was anyone looking at his wife.

DON JUAN: Certainly you could do that. But I would prefer you didn't. We have people to go to the market. I think you should stay inside our walls. Sit in the garden or by the fountain if you want to enjoy the day. All right?

DON JUAN moves downstage and poses as a man of power. ELENA moves to stand beside LIATH.

LIATH: Don Juan was a rich man in a position of power.

DON JUAN: With power comes responsibility.

LIATH: With power comes unhappiness. There are those who were unhappy Don Juan had so much power.

ELENA: His wife Elena was beautiful.

LIATH: Did those people whisper stories into Don Juan's ear about infidelity? Who knows.

VOICES: *(Individuals, whispering, repeated, do not do this in unison, everyone picks a different sentence to say at the same time. A wave of voices.)* She must be cheating on him. She must be cheating. She must be.

DON JUAN hears the voices and is clearly disturbed.

LIATH: So many voices.

VOICES: *(Individuals, whispering, do not do this in unison, everyone picks a different sentence to say at the same time. A wave of voices.)* There was a man at the door the other day. Who was she speaking to in the living room? She must be cheating on him. She must be.

The VOICES cut off as ELENA moves to stand beside DON JUAN.

ELENA: Good morning, my darling.

DON JUAN: (*curtly*) Good morning. What are you doing today?

ELENA: I was hoping to go to the park. Everything is so green.

DON JUAN: The park. And who are you meeting in the park?

ELENA: No one. I just wanted to go for a walk.

DON JUAN: You will stay here.

*ELENA moves to the side. DON JUAN starts to pace.
The NEPHEW enters and waits beside ELENA.*

LIATH: Jealousy is a powerful creature.

NEPHEW: (*moving to DON JUAN*) Don Juan's jealousy grew so much that he asked his nephew to come from overseas.

DON JUAN: I want you to watch Elena every second. Understand?

NEPHEW: Of course. (*moves to stand beside ELENA*)

LIATH: But it wasn't enough.

DON JUAN: She must be cheating on me. I need proof. I know she is unfaithful.

LIATH: Who will he ask for this proof?

DON JUAN: If my enemies knew what I was thinking...

LIATH: Who will he ask? Perhaps he needs to go down to the Salgado.

DON JUAN: I must go to the underground. I must find...

LIATH: Who will he ask? Someone with a smile and without a shadow.

DON JUAN: I must find the Grey One.

LIATH: (*with a smile*) Why... that's me.

*Creepy music plays. ELENA and the NEPHEW exit.
DON JUAN crosses to LIATH.*

DON JUAN: Hello?

LIATH: Hello, Don Juan Manuel. How can I be of service?

The two sit.

DON JUAN: You're the only one who can help me. There's no one else.

LIATH: If you think so, I'm happy to do what I can. What do you desire?

DON JUAN: I must know who my wife is having an affair with.

LIATH: And what will you sell for this information? Will you part with your most important asset?

DON JUAN: What's that?

LIATH: Your soul, of course.

DON JUAN: My soul?

LIATH: There are those who are very interested in gathering that precious cargo.

DON JUAN: I... (*makes a decision*) Yes. Yes, I will. I must know.

LIATH: The deal is done. (*they shake and a sound is made*) And what will you do when you have this information? What will you do when this man reveals himself?

DON JUAN: I will enact my revenge.

LIATH: And so it shall be. (*a sound is made*)

DON JUAN: What do I have to do?

LIATH: It's very simple. Step outside of your house at eleven o'clock. Stay in the dark corners of the night. The first man you see, kill him. He is the one, the cause of your jealousy.

DON JUAN: I will do it.

LIATH: And so, Don Juan stepped out of his house and into the dark corners of the night.

A MAN crosses the stage.

DON JUAN: Excuse me, do you know the time?

MAN: Yes, it's eleven o'clock.

DON JUAN: Then you are a lucky man.

MAN: How so?

DON JUAN: You know the exact time of your death.

DON JUAN raises a fist as if holding a knife. At the same time, a distorted scream plays and the lights pulse red before returning to the previous light. During the light pulse, DON JUAN strikes as if plunging a knife into the victim's chest.

DON JUAN runs to LIATH. The MAN emotionlessly sits up and stands off to the side. If you're doing this with one actor playing all three MAN characters, he changes an element of clothing to become the next victim. The goal is to not steal focus.

DON JUAN: I did it. I did it.

LIATH: I am so sorry.

DON JUAN: What?

LIATH: You killed the wrong man.

DON JUAN: What?

LIATH: I'm so sorry. *(with a smile)* You'll have to do it again.

DON JUAN: Again? You want me to kill another man.

LIATH: Why, yes. It's critical that you enact your revenge. That's part of the deal.

DON JUAN moves away. The MAN crosses the stage.

LIATH: And so, the next night Don Juan stepped out of his house.

DON JUAN: Excuse me, do you know the time?

MAN: Yes, it's eleven o'clock.

DON JUAN: Then you are a lucky man.

MAN: How so?

DON JUAN: You know the exact time of your death.

DON JUAN raises a fist as if holding a knife. At the same time, a distorted scream plays and the lights pulse red before returning to the previous light. During the light pulse, DON JUAN strikes as if plunging a knife into the victim's chest.

DON JUAN runs to LIATH. The MAN emotionlessly sits up and stands off to the side. If you're using one

actor, he changes an element of clothing to become the next victim. The goal is to not steal focus.

DON JUAN: I did it.

LIATH: I am so sorry.

DON JUAN: How could it be the wrong man? He was the only one there at the right time.

LIATH: And yet he was. You'll have to do it again.

DON JUAN: If you could point out the man, then I wouldn't kill an innocent.

LIATH: I must leave now. But if... when... I return after the deed, then you will know you have enacted your revenge.

DON JUAN: And if you don't appear?

LIATH: Then you'll have to do it again.

DON JUAN: You've tricked me!

LIATH: Have I?

DON JUAN: I refuse to do this anymore. I won't do it.

LIATH: You have sold your soul. You will do exactly as I tell you.

DON JUAN: And if I don't?

LIATH: The punishment for not doing so, is far worse than you could ever imagine. Will you risk that, Don Juan Manuel?

DON JUAN: *(pausing before speaking)* No. *(moves away)*

LIATH: And so Don Juan began his march of death.

LIATH knocks on a surface to simulate knocking on a door. A member of the POLICE steps forward.

POLICE: Don Juan, I must tell you, there has been another murder on your doorstep.

DON JUAN: *(little emotion)* How awful.

POLICE: You must be careful. Do not leave your house at night. *(moves away but doesn't exit)*

DON JUAN: *(to self)* If only I could...

LIATH: Don Juan began his descent into madness. The trap was set and never-ending.

The MAN crosses the stage.

DON JUAN: Excuse me, do you know the time?

MAN: Yes, it's eleven o'clock.

DON JUAN raises a fist as if holding a knife. At the same time, a distorted scream plays and the lights pulse red before returning to the previous light. During the light pulse, DON JUAN strikes as if plunging a knife into the victim's chest.

DON JUAN turns away. The MAN emotionlessly sits up and stands off to the side. He changes an element of clothing to become the next victim. The goal is to not steal focus.

LIATH: And the one without a shadow never returned. Every night Don Juan stepped out of his house.

DON JUAN: *(turning)* Excuse me, do you know the time? *(raises a fist as if holding a knife and then freezes)*

LIATH: Until one morning...

LIATH knocks on the door simulating a knock at the door. The member of the POLICE steps forward.

POLICE: *(gesturing as if to a body)* Don Juan, is this your nephew?

DON JUAN: *(falling to his knees)* Oh no!

The POLICE moves away but does not exit.

LIATH: In his thirst for revenge, Don Juan had killed someone he truly loved.

DON JUAN: I must confess. I must repent for what I have done.
(standing) I will pray for forgiveness on the steps of the cathedral.

Everyone involved with the story now becomes the GHOSTS of the house. They all (including extras from other stories) enter move to form a semicircle around DON JUAN.

GHOSTS: *(whispered)* Murderer... murderer... *(continuing underneath)*

LIATH: But try as he might, Don Juan could not leave the house.

The GHOSTS grab DON JUAN, who begins to struggle. The lights change to red. A heartbeat begins and continues underneath. DON JUAN struggles against the GHOSTS, who do not let go.

DON JUAN: (*struggling*) I must pray for forgiveness! I must confess!

GHOSTS: (*whispered*) You killed me... killed me... (*continuing underneath*)

LIATH: Every time he tried, a force held him back.

The gong of a loud church bell is heard.

GHOSTS: (*whispering, individuals, do not do this in unison, a wave of voices saying different sentences*) You killed me. Murderer. No forgiveness for murderers. You killed me. Murderer. (*continuing underneath*)

LIATH: Don Juan's victims had joined him in his home.

DON JUAN: No! Let me be!

GHOSTS: (*continuing*) No forgiveness for murderers. You killed me. Murderer. (*continuing underneath*)

LIATH: Hour after hour Don Juan tried to leave.

DON JUAN: I must repent!

LIATH: And time after time he was stopped.

GHOSTS: (*continuing*) You killed me. You killed me. Murderer. (*continuing underneath louder and louder*)

DON JUAN: It's not my fault. I must repent! Let me be! Please let me be!

The GHOSTS descend on DON JUAN until he can't be seen. There is silence and everyone freezes.

LIATH: What happened next, no one was there to see. But Don Juan was found swinging from the branches of the house's big oak tree.

The GHOSTS move to stand staring out to the audience with malice. DON JUAN slowly and without stealing focus exits.

LIATH: And no one died on the doorstep of Don Juan Manuel ever more.

VOICES: (*whispering*) You killed me. Murderer. You killed me. Murderer.

LIATH: And no one could stay in the house. For those who tried never found a moment's peace. The victims of Don Juan took up the corners of this large and expansive home. They walk the halls looking for Don Juan to satisfy their revenge, over and over again.

VOICES: (*whispering*) No forgiveness for murderers.

The GHOSTS exit. Transitional music.

LIATH: Oh, poor Don Juan Manuel. That is very much a house haunted by ghosts. This last story though, my favourite if I may say so, is a house haunted by itself.

RODERICK and NISH enter. They are on FaceTime with each other. Don't have them staring at their phones the whole time. Establish the phone and then have actors speak out to the audience.

RODERICK: Nish, I know it's been awhile. But I wondered if you had time to visit. I've been pretty sick, and... I just remember we had some awesome times. I could really use a laugh.

NISH: Of course I'll come. I don't leave for school for a month and my parents are driving me crazy.

RODERICK exits. Music fades. NISH turns to his parents who have entered.

MOM: Roderick?

NISH: Yes.

MOM: I don't remember any Roderick. Roderick Usher?

NISH: Yes.

DAD: His parents named him Roderick?

NISH: Yes.

DAD: And that's what he goes by.

NISH: He did in middle school.

MOM: Why don't I remember him?

DAD: And no one tried to beat him up?

MOM: Geoffrey!

DAD: It's an odd name for a kid.

MOM: How long are you going?

NISH: I don't know. A week. Maybe more.

MOM: But you have to get ready.

NISH: I'm ready.

DAD: Kid's ready.

MOM: There are so many errands you have to do. You have to do errands with me.

NISH: Um... I'm pretty sure I'm ready.

DAD: Kid's ready.

MOM: You can't go to school if you're not ready. How will you cope?

Sound of a train whistle, and a train leaving the station. MOM and DAD exit. CABBIE enters to stand beside NISH.

NISH: Is there something wrong?

CABBIE: You want to go to the Usher house?

NISH: Yeah. They're expecting me.

CABBIE: You're expected? At the Usher house? The Ushers?

NISH: Why is that so hard to believe?

CABBIE: Have you ever been to the Usher house?

NISH: No. I know Roderick.

CABBIE: You do?

NISH: Why is that so hard to believe?

CABBIE: Huh. All right, let's go. You'll see soon enough.

There is the sound of a car starting and continuing. The two cross the stage. The car sound fades out and they both look up.

CABBIE: There you go. The House of Usher.

NISH: Oh.

CABBIE: Yeah, oh. See?

NISH: It's... I guess it's...

CABBIE: Dark? Dreary? Depressing? Decaying? Desolate? A sickness of the soul?

NISH: Yes, that... but something else. It feels like...

CABBIE: What?

NISH: The house is looking at me.

CABBIE: That too. You know about the family? There's none of them left. Just him and his sister.

NISH: His parents are dead?

CABBIE: They're all dead. (*hands a card to NISH*) Here's my direct number. When you want to go, call me.

NISH: It won't be that bad.

CABBIE: When you want to go, you'll really want to go. Call me.

NISH: OK. Thanks?

There is the sound of a car starting, driving and fading. CABBIE turns and crosses back across the stage and exits. NISH continues to look up.

NISH: I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid. Why should I be? It's a house. Four walls. A ceiling and a floor. Windows and doors. It's not looking at me. It's my imagination. The fungus isn't growing as I look at it. It's a crumbling house because it's old, not because it's evil or anything. Why would I even say that? Houses can't be evil. Why am I talking to myself? It's just a house.

Sound of three knocks on a heavy door. Sound of a heavy door slowly, slowly opening with a long creak. The door is being opened by ASH the valet.

NISH: Hello, I'm Nish. (*there is no response*) I'm here to see Roderick?

ASH: Yes. You are expected.

NISH: That's right. I'm supposed to be here.

ASH: Yes. (*pause*) Come in.

There is the sound of a heavy door closing with a huge echoey boom.

NISH: It's um, dark? It's pretty dark in here.

ASH: (*with no humour*) Yes. We don't pay our electricity bills.

NISH: What? Oh! You're joking! Oh, that's great. This is some house. I feel like it's looking at me. (ASH turns away and starts walking, with no response) OK. Some banter good. Some not. Mental note.

The two slowly cross the stage. ASH walks extremely slowly. NISH cannot match this energy no matter how hard they try to walk slowly.

ASH: Mr. Usher will see you in the study.

NISH: OK. Great! How do you become a butler, anyway?

ASH: I am a valet.

NISH: Oh. Is that different?

ASH: Yes. (no further response)

NISH: Oh. (beat) Could I know the difference?

ASH: A butler is in charge of an entire household. A valet looks after one individual.

NISH: Oh! Like Roderick.

ASH: Indeed.

NISH: Who knew? Today I learned a new thing.

ASH: (humourless) Congratulations. (they meet up with the DOCTOR)
Good evening, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Who is this?

ASH: A friend of Roderick's.

DOCTOR: A friend?

ASH: Indeed.

NISH: We haven't seen each other in a couple of years.

ASH: How is Miss Madeline tonight?

DOCTOR: The same, I'm afraid.

NISH: Is she sick? Does she have the same thing as Roderick? (there is a long pause as ASH and the DOCTOR stare at NISH) OK, bad question. Mental note.

ASH: Let me take you to the study. Good evening, Doctor.

The DOCTOR continues crossing and pauses centre stage. They turn and watch. RODERICK enters with a smile but not a lot of energy. ASH moves to stand with the DOCTOR. They watch for a moment and then exit.

RODERICK: Nish!

NISH: Roddy! How are you?

RODERICK: No one calls me Roddy. You know I hate it.

NISH: *(with a grin)* I know.

The two move to sit.

NISH: You look like crap.

RODERICK: It's been a year.

NISH: And your sister's sick too? What's going on here?

RODERICK: She's... My sister and I are not suffering the same way.
Her illness is more of a family evil, let's say.

NISH: Evil?

RODERICK: Poor choice of words.

NISH: It's... um... nothing to do with the house then?

RODERICK: *(a little sharp)* Why would you say that?

NISH: Well, houses can have a lot of stuff in them that can make you sick. My mom made my dad rip up all the laminate flooring in our house because she read somewhere that laminate flooring has formaldehyde in it. Totally toxic. *(beat)* Um, you look like you've... come in contact with one or two toxic things...

RODERICK: We don't have any laminate flooring here.

NISH: I guess you don't. So, what's the plan? Do you have a movie marathon in you?

RODERICK: *(hopeful)* Star Wars? Madeline won't watch them.

NISH: You're not going to make me watch one to three are you?

RODERICK: *(joking a little)* They're part of the canon.

NISH: They suck so bad.

RODERICK: All or none.

NISH: (*exaggerated, but totally joking*) Fine. Whatever. (*standing and moving*) Let's get some light in this place.

RODERICK: (*unexpectedly forceful*) No! Don't!

There is a pause.

NISH: OK. No lights. Mental note.

RODERICK: Sorry. Sorry. I should have said. My... condition has heightened my senses.

NISH: Oh. I don't know what that means.

RODERICK: I can't stand light or certain noises. I can't even eat properly, it's so annoying. (*beat*) You must be starving. Let's raid the kitchen. Just because I can't eat doesn't mean you shouldn't.

They start to exit.

NISH: What kind of sounds bug you? I don't want to do anything that'll hurt your ears.

RODERICK: It changes all the time. Sometimes I hear the house shifting.

NISH: Well, houses do that. Don't they? Sure they do.

Transitional music.

They exit. Music plays. MADELINE enters from the other side of the stage. She walks without expression, almost lurching. Slow. As slow as you can get away with. She doesn't get far when she stops without expression, but breathes audibly if possible. It sounds chilling.

On the other side of the stage RODERICK and NISH enter. If possible and it's not too annoying sound-wise, NISH has armfuls of snacks. They are in mid-conversation. They sit. Music fades.

NISH: And Madeline has a different illness?

RODERICK: Yes. It's an apathy. She is wasting away.

NISH: That's awful.

RODERICK: When she dies, so die the Ushers. We're the last of the line.

NISH: Aww, don't say that.

RODERICK: It's unavoidable. We're going to die. Both of us. Sooner than later. *(beat)* Sorry, that was morbid. *(RODERICK turns his head, he hears something)*

NISH: Yeah. Death always is though. My mom refuses to even say –

RODERICK: Shh! *(beat)* She walks.

NISH: Who? Madeline?

RODERICK: We can't talk. Shhhh.

The two stand and turn their focus toward MADELINE who continues lurching across the stage.

NISH: *(whispering)* She looks so pale.

RODERICK: She only walks at night.

NISH: Really? At least she's moving. That's a good sign. Isn't it?

RODERICK: Soon she may not be able to walk at all.

NISH: *(looking around, as if they feel something)* Huh.

RODERICK: What?

NISH: There's something... in the air?

RODERICK: Yes?

MADELINE lurches off. She has to be gone by the time the DOCTOR runs on.

NISH: Around Madeline. The air just got thicker.

RODERICK: *(oh yes he does)* I don't know what you're talking about.

NISH: You don't feel it, huh? It's kind of ominous. *(voice changes, almost as if in a trance)* Like everywhere she goes, it follows her. If she asked me to do something, I couldn't refuse. *(shudders and makes a noise, as if coming out of the trance)* Huh. I wonder what would cause that.

RODERICK: You have an active imagination.

NISH: It's not hard. I mean... this is Haunted House 101. If you look up haunted houses in the dictionary, there is a picture of this house.

RODERICK: *(oh he does know)* I don't know what you mean. It's just a house.

NISH: Sure, sure. *(beat)* It does have more than a fair share of mold.

RODERICK: (*loudly*) There's nothing wrong with it. (*beat*) There's nothing wrong.

NISH: (*not offended*) Sure. It's your house. You would know. (*beat*) Speaking purely as an outsider I would say...

There is a scream. The DOCTOR runs on.

DOCTOR: Mr. Usher. You must come at once!

Music plays. RODERICK runs off after the DOCTOR. NISH is left alone. MOM and DAD enter to the side, they are on FaceTime with NISH.

MOM: That's awful. That's so awful.

NISH: Yeah.

DAD: And you're not coming home?

NISH: Not yet.

DAD: Why not?

NISH: He doesn't have anyone to help him through this.

MOM: Just awful.

DAD: It's not your job, Nishy.

MOM: And tragic.

NISH: Dad, his sister just died. His twin sister. I can't leave him alone.

DAD: I wish you would.

NISH: Why?

DAD: I did some research. On the Ushers.

NISH: What?

DAD: I don't think you know what you're dealing with. That family... bad things follow them. That house is bad.

NISH: It's just a house.

DAD: I'd rather you weren't in the thick of it.

RODERICK enters, slowly, almost exactly like MADELINE did earlier. NISH sees him.

NISH: I gotta go. (*hangs up*)

MOM and DAD look at each other and exit. NISH moves to RODERICK. RODERICK sits and stares out.

NISH: Hey. (*RODERICK does not respond*) I was just talking to my parents. Totally annoying. I can't wait till I get out of... um... You know, maybe I should go. Um, leave? I don't want to intrude on any family stuff.

RODERICK: (*forcefully*) No. (*less so*) Don't go. I would like it if you stayed. I'm glad you're here.

NISH: OK. Then I'm going to stay. Do you want to talk?

RODERICK: No.

NISH: OK. Why don't I put a movie on? That way we can both pretend to watch something.

RODERICK: No.

NISH: OK.

RODERICK: I have to ask you something.

NISH: OK.

RODERICK: I have to do... something. Quickly, before the Doctor and Ash get back with the death certificate. I sent them away.

NISH: OK.

RODERICK: I need to bury Madeline in a special coffin.

NISH: (*this info is hard to process*) OK...

RODERICK: Everything is prepared.

NISH: Shouldn't you have the coroner, um... handle... her?

RODERICK: (*leaping up*) No! They'll want to... inspect and analyze her body and I won't have it. I won't have it! Do you trust me?

NISH: Sure...

RODERICK: Will you do what I say and not ask any questions?

NISH: I think my questions... are not out of the question.

RODERICK: We are going to put her in the special coffin. The coffin will go in the family tomb behind an iron door, under the house. (*beat*) There can't be any light.

NISH: This seems like a lot of trouble. That isn't a question. That's a statement. This seems excessive.

RODERICK: I have to do it.

NISH: Why?

RODERICK: I told you no questions!

RODERICK runs off. NISH hesitates and then follows.

There is the long piercing sound of heavy metal as the heavy iron door into the vault is hauled open.

MADELINE's coffin is brought onstage. The easiest way is to have a group (actors from the other stories) carry or push a rectangular box (possibly on wheels) with an opening at the top. MADELINE is inside. The group stands behind the box. RODERICK and NISH enter. RODERICK has a hammer.

There is the sound of hammering.

NISH: I don't think anything is getting in or out.

RODERICK: *(hands the hammer to NISH)* Put the final nail in? I can't do it.

NISH: No one's going to –

RODERICK: Do it. Please!

NISH hits the box with a hammer three times. The sound of the hammer echoes.

NISH: What do we do now?

RODERICK: Nothing.

NISH: Are you sure?

RODERICK: I don't want to talk about it. *(stalks off)*

There is the long piercing sound of heavy metal as the heavy iron door is closed. When it finally closes there is a booming sound.

The group and the box remain onstage.

NISH: *(alone, to self)* Here's a question. Did I make a mistake? Do I have to admit to my dad this was a mistake? Do I have to call a guy to come get me? *(beat)* Roderick is allowed to act a little... odd.



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