



Sample Pages from The House

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THE HOUSE

A HORRIFYING PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



The House

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Casting

5M/9W/14AG

This casting size is approximate. Your cast size will vary depending on doubling, and how many CHOSEN ONES you decide to cast.

Casting is a bit of a Rubik's Cube - there are a large number of roles, but doubling is more than possible between the different stories. Add to that, all of the story characters "become" CHOSEN ONES throughout the play. (In the original production at the end of the play, the story characters showed up in black/white/grey versions of their story costumes, and with grey make-up.)

Add to that, Liath plays a role in each story, the concept being they are always watching and always there. I have attempted to keep all the roles straight and focused on identifying how many individual actors are needed for each story. It's more than possible I've got it wrong. Do your best.

GENDER NOTE: AG = any gender. 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. When the CHOSEN ONES take over the roles in the Don Juan story, DO NOT feel bound for switching gender to gender. Don't worry about having a boy ghost play a boy role. The point is that ghosts are taking over.

LIATH NOTE: Liath, the Grey One, appears in each story as a character. The idea is that they are always watching, and always there. This is identified in the character list in each story.

SPANISH NOTE: A bilingual version of the Don Juan scene is available at the end of the play in the Appendix.

THROUGH-LINE CHARACTERS (2W/3AG+CHOSEN ONES)

Liath: (AG) The Grey One. Unknown age. Unknown origin. Pronounced LEE-EH.

Carmel: (W) Teen. The self-proclaimed leader of the trio. Intent on winning.

Raimy: (AG) Teen. The follower of the trio. Extremely smart and insightful. Also weird.

Lex: (AG) Teen. The outsider of the trio. Unsettled home life. Made one mistake.

Ms. Selma Paha: (W) Older. Real Estate Agent. Mary Kay vibe. Has a secret. Look up the meaning of Paha in Finnish.

The Chosen Ones: (AG) Ghosts dressed in grey. You can start with as many or as few as you like. Their numbers grow as the play progresses. They are not friendly.

STORY ONE (1M/2W/5AG+LIATH)

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. Bad head for business.

Maid: (AG) Unable to work for Caroline.

Liath: (AG) As Agency Manager. Owns the Agency that supplies Caroline with maids. Loves children.

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

STORY TWO (2M/4W/3AG+LIATH)

- Liz:** (W) Young woman. Wealthy. Without a care in the world. Best friends with Ceci.
- Ceci:** (W) Young woman. Wealthy. Without a care in the world. Best friends with Liz.
- Liath:** (AG) As Mrs. Silver. Or Mr. Silver. Or Mx. Silver. Renting out the house. Does not share its past.
- Maid:** (AG) Can't stay in the house. Feels it's watching.
- Baker:** (AG) Knows the history of the house.
- Henry:** (M) Ceci's husband. Does not believe in the story of the house.
- Sarah:** (W) Maid. A victim of the house.
- Doctor:** (AG) Unfamiliar with Sarah's condition.
- Adela:** (W) Young woman. Wealthy. Without a care in the world. Friend of Ceci.
- Ralph:** (M) Young man. Wealthy. Without a care in the world. Recklessly decides to take on the house.

STORY THREE (2M/1W/3AG+LIATH/6 CHOSEN ONES)

NOTE: Most of the characters in the story are taken over by a CHOSEN ONE. So the roles with a + CHOSEN ONE are played by two actors. If you are casting this story in a class, remember that the named character will get taken over and have little to no lines.

- Uno/Dos:** (AG) Two narrators who get taken over fairly quickly. + CHOSEN ONES
- Don Juan Manuel:** (M) A man of great power and great jealousy.
- Elena:** (W) Don Juan's wife. + CHOSEN ONE
- Nephew:** (M) Don Juan's unfortunate nephew. + CHOSEN ONE
- Liath:** (AG) As the Grey One The one without a shadow. Not a good person. Not a person at all...
- Chosen One:** (AG) As the Police. A member of the police force.
- Chosen Ones x2:** (AG) As Victims. Three unfortunate ones who meet Don Juan. (They are identified as men, but as they're played by CHOSEN ONES, don't feel bound by gender.)

STORY FOUR (2M/2W/3AG+LIATH)

There are a few ways to go here. You can have "story characters" and the CHOSEN ONES are there to help MADELINE. You can have everyone in the story look like CHOSEN ONES because the ghosts have taken over all of the storytelling. If you do this, everyone should be dressed in grey. You can have story characters but the CHOSEN ONES are everywhere on the set. Do what works best for you. Though genders are identified, don't feel bound by them.

- 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. Mom wants Nish to stay home. Dad doesn't like the situation.
- Cabbie:** (AG) Does not want to get too close to the Usher house.
- Liath:** (AG) As Ash, Roderick's valet. Mostly humourless.
- Doctor:** (AG) Madeline's doctor.

Play Length

The main script runs 75 minutes long. I have also included an extra scene should you wish to stretch the play to two acts. See the Appendix for the extra scene as well as an intermission suggestion.

A 35 minute competition cutting of *The House* is available at theatrefolk.com. It focuses on the stories without the teen through line.

Time

The through line characters are in the present. It is the beginning of October.

Location

Your town. Not a city, but not a village.

Set Suggestion

The set is made up of fragments/pieces of a “haunted house” in the Victorian style: a dark wooden staircase to nowhere; a broken stained glass window; cobwebs; furniture covered in sheets; sharp angles; dark shadows; a crumbling fireplace; a big imposing front door.

It is suggested that some of the pieces are moveable or come apart so that the set can be swiftly rearranged to suit each scene. The idea being that the pieces are universal from one haunted house to another, even if a fireplace moves from left to right.

If you have the teens enter through a door at the beginning of the play, the front door **MUST** be moveable in some way so that it can disappear at the designated moment. (It’s important at a specific point in the play that the house has no visible door. You’ll see...)

Front door alternative: If you want something simpler, have the front door be the audience and the teens and Ms. Paha enter through the audience when they enter the house. Then the disappearing front door is something the characters “see” and the audience imagines.

Sound

Sound should play an important role in the atmosphere of the piece. There are many, many, opportunities for soundscapes, echoes, and creepy music. There are sound cues that will need to be combined together. Also, consider the possibility of live sound done by your actors. For example, you could have the CHOSEN ONES bang a cube to indicate a knock or the slam of a door.

Light

Lighting is also key in any horror. There are lots of suggestions in the script. But if you don’t have access to a variety of looks, don’t be afraid to use flashlights. A flashlight under the chin with a red gel or a blue gel attached to it will totally give you the necessary atmosphere.

Original Production

The House premiered at Fort Wayne Youtheatre in Fort Wayne, Indiana, September 2023 with following cast:

Liath: QUINN BREHMER
Carmel: EM ORGAN
Raimy: MCKENNA ZOLLINGER
Lex: EVIE NAVARRO
Ms. Selma Paha: EMMA HUMBARGER
Lost: AVALIN SMITS
Joey/Ralph/Nephew: TY BUDENZ
Finley/Doctor/Young Woman: KENNEDY TASSLER
Caroline: LOLA MANN
John/Henry/Brother: ETHAN BUSHNELL
Maid: KYLIE ADAMS
Maid/Sarah: K'TAVIA BROOKS
Maid/Old Woman: ALEXANDRA CARTER
Maid/Madeline: ABIGAIL WESTFALL
Liz/Uno: BROOKE REYNOLDS
Ceci: ALIVIA WHEELER
Adela/Nosy One: KINSLEY SAMPLE
Hart/Baker/Policeman/Cabbie: ANTON PHILLIPS JR.
Don Juan Manuel: IAN FRASER
Elena/Nosy Two: ZOE ALDAZ
Roderick: RANDALL KEELING
Nish: LIAM NGUYEN
Chosen Ones: VIVIENNE HARTMAN, MIKAYA BRATTON,
 EDEN HARDLEY, DIERRE GREEN,
 HUDSON MALONE, ROWAN BREHMER

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director: MORGAN MONTGOMERY
Fight Choreographer: TODD ESPELAND
Stage Manager: CARTER HAMMON
Asst. Stage Manager: VIOLET PARK
Costume Designer: CHRISTOPHER J. MURPHY
Makeup Designer: SOPHIA MOSSBURG
Lighting Designer: JOSIAH BEIGHTS
Set Designer: THERRIN J. EBER
Co-Set Designer/Tech Director: RAE SURFACE
Specialty Construction: HOLLY & ERIC HINSCH
Props Assistance: EMMA HUMBARGER
Production Interns: CARTER HAMMON, VIOLET PARK,
 LANDON RICHEY
Sound Board Operator: SAMMIE VANCE
Light Board Operator: BRE ANDERS

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.

We then see that the house is populated by grey figures. The CHOSEN ONES. They wear grey ragged, ripped, clothing. Grey hair. Grey gloves. Still, unemotional faces, perhaps masks. They move at different paces. Perhaps dragging a leg, or displaying a cricked neck.

NOTE: The number of CHOSEN ONES here is up to you. However, by the end of the play EVERY actor playing a story character in the show will become one of the CHOSEN ONES. The look at the end of the play is that they surround the living.

In this opening, the CHOSEN ONES explore the space. They move an object. Perhaps the fireplace is made up of sections, they move the sections and bring it back together. They walk slowly across the stage. They are the ghosts in this house. Throughout the following, they slowly, and gradually “vanish” from the stage.

During the above, NISH, FINLEY, LOST and SARAH all get into position. This next section should flow from one moment to the next as seamlessly as possible.

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. LOST slowly turns to FINLEY.

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. I can't find my mother.

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

SARAH steps into the red light. Her hands are rigid like claws. A light under the chin pointing up would also be appropriate.

SARAH: Oh, my God. I have seen it.

A piercing screeching noise, like metal grinding on metal. Blackout. And then silence. SARAH exits. In the dark we hear voices.

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

A white light comes up on the Grey One – LIATH (pronounced LEE-EH). This character is definitely connected to the CHOSEN ONES, all dressed in grey. But there is more polish and crispness. Perhaps a three-piece suit. They are definitely a character in charge. They smile at the audience.

LIATH: *(to the audience)* Some people don't believe in ghosts and haunted houses. Some people don't believe in anything. Do you? 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? Perhaps you have the same questions as our... guests will have. Not that it matters. You see our house. *(gesturing to the space)* You know the truth. And there's nothing you can do to stop what's going to happen.

The mood shifts dramatically. Cold light but bright. Two teens (LEX and CARMEL) tumble through the front door with backpacks and camping lanterns and a lot of chatter. Actually it's just CARMEL who is providing the chatter. RAIMY stops at the front door and does not enter. They are carrying a bottle of hairspray. LIATH watches for a moment and then slowly crosses the stage to exit.

During this next section of text, a CHOSEN ONE should slowly, slowly enter to stand on the edge of the space, watching. Or slowly move into the space and move something of one of the teens. They're not there to steal any focus, but they are there, watching. Before the start of the first story, this should happen twice: a single CHOSEN ONE enters the space and leaves.

The teens do not see LIATH or the CHOSEN ONES or pay attention to anything other than their conversation. CARMEL is in mid-conversation as they enter. LEX looks a little wide-eyed – clearly the talking has been going nonstop.

CARMEL: Personally I want to believe but, you know there's never really been a proven haunted house. (sees RAIMY isn't with them) Raimy!

CARMEL goes back and yanks RAIMY into the room and goes right back to talking.

CARMEL: Amityville – they made it all up.

LEX: Uh huh.

RAIMY: (looking around) Creaking floors – check.

CARMEL: The Ackley house was deemed legally haunted but that was because the buyer said the ghost stories lowered the property value.

LEX: Uh huh.

RAIMY: Cobwebs and dust – check.

CARMEL: It's not because some paranormal expert gave them some official certificate thingy.

RAIMY: Dark shadows that could contain the ghostly remains of a vengeful being – check.

LEX: (to RAIMY) What are you going to do with that hairspray?

RAIMY: If a ghost attacks – (holds up the hairspray) right between the eyes.

CARMEL: Ghosts don't have eyes. I think.

RAIMY: Ghosts, spiders, anything that needs spraying around here, I'm on it. (turns suddenly as if seeing or hearing something) What's that? What's that?

LEX: Nothing.

RAIMY: Maybe. (looking around) Maybe not...

CARMEL: Well?

LEX: Well, what?

CARMEL: What do you think?

RAIMY: (*walking around*) I'm thinking I never should have let you drag me into this.

CARMEL: (*to RAIMY*) You love it. (*to LEX*) What do you think?

LEX: About what?

CARMEL: The house!

LEX: I've been here three seconds.

CARMEL: You must have a feeling. You know nothing about this place, right?

LEX: Nope.

CARMEL: So, what's your gut reaction?

LEX shrugs.

RAIMY: Did we need to be in a haunted house to make a haunted house?

CARMEL: Good haunted houses need good source material.

LEX: (*looking around*) I can't believe you got permission for this.

CARMEL: I told my dad it was for school.

RAIMY: If you say it's for school, they'll let you do anything.

CARMEL: It is for school.

RAIMY: Hey, Mr. Brati, mind if we spray paint the sculpture garden? It's for school.

LEX: That's specific.

CARMEL: I'd be an idiot not to use all my resources.

RAIMY: (*to LEX*) We are also resources.

CARMEL: You are my most important resource. (*referring to RAIMY*) The best researcher in the school, (*referring to LEX*) and the best artist. Both with an eye for detail I could never duplicate. That is a win-win combination. I can't believe I've never put this amazing group together before. (*she pumps her fist in the air*) Dream Team!

LEX: Don't say dream team. I am not on any dream team.

CARMEL: (*not fazed*) I know what I know. And I know how to put a group together. I know how to take ideas and turn them into projects that score big. Who won the science fair with Rez Alvi when everyone said he was a loser partner? Me.

LEX: (*to RAIMY*) Are we the loser partners in this scenario?

RAIMY: You catch on quick.

CARMEL: I can't think of a better team to make the best haunted house ever. Dream Team!

LEX: It's not haunted. It's just a building with some rats or raccoons in the walls.

CARMEL: (*advancing on LEX*) Ah ha. There it is. There it is...

LEX: What?

CARMEL: Your gut reaction. Boom. (*celebrating with fits in the air*) Success! Dream Team!

RAIMY: (*to LEX*) You're in for it now...

CARMEL: We're totally going to win the fall festival spot.

LEX: (*to RAIMY*) Is she always like this?

RAIMY: This is pretty tame.

CARMEL: (*totally focused on "someone" downstage*) Take that, Lance Nakamura! You think you beat me? You think because you conned Mrs. Steinberg into letting you do a haunted house even though you said for weeks you were doing a creepy senses walk, you think you got me? Ha! Ha ha! I am focused like a laser, an intense laser, like the Hercules laser and I am pointed directly at you.

LEX: Whoa.

RAIMY: This is less tame. (*to CARMEL*) Hey Mel, we're over here!

CARMEL: (*striding right up to LEX*) I know things have been tough for you this year.

LEX: (*moving back*) Whoa!

CARMEL: (*laser focused on LEX*) You're not going to let me down. And I'm not going to take any sullen shrugging like you give Mrs. Steinberg. You're better than that. Smarter. Brighter. I'm going to

crack your brain open like a nut. *(beat)* That didn't sound right. I'm going to set up.

CARMEL starts to set up. Unpacks notebooks, a camera, laptop – very focused on the task. So focused, she doesn't pay any attention to RAIMY and LEX's conversation.

RAIMY: *(moving LEX to the side)* Do you want some water? It's always a good idea to hydrate after you've been Carmelled.

LEX: You've been in a group with her before?

RAIMY: Oh yeah.

LEX: Why?

RAIMY: I'm a glutton for scholastic punishment. Also, the last time I turned her down she showed up at my house and told my parents I was failing three subjects. It's kinda cute.

LEX: *(looking around, more to self)* I'm not sure my parents would notice...

RAIMY: *(looking around)* Still, at least she's not gone for the movie version where we're doing this at midnight on a dare in the middle of a thunderstorm.

LEX: I wouldn't do that.

RAIMY: And yet, here you are. *(looking around)* Why do all haunted houses look the same? Big and old and dark and what is this? Victorian? Why is there never a haunted condo? Or a haunted hammock?

LEX shrugs.

RAIMY: Yeah, you might as well get those shrugs out now... *(beat)* My grandma says her RV is haunted. She won't go into the bathroom.

LEX: *(perking up a little)* You talk to your grandmother?

RAIMY: No. She smells. And she can move her teeth.

LEX: *(sighs)* You are so weird.

There is the sound of a door slam.

RAIMY: What's that? What was that?

MS. PAHA: *(offstage)* Yoo hoo!

CARMEL: Dang it! I was hoping we'd get more done before she got here. (*pulls out her phone and hits a speed dial number*)

MS. PAHA: (*offstage*) Yoo hoo!

CARMEL: (*calling out*) In here! (*to group*) Ms. Paha. Works at my dad's agency. Really nice. Talks a lot.

RAIMY: I don't know anyone like that...

CARMEL: (*on phone*) Ms. Lyles? I need a code D.

LEX: (*to RAIMY*) What is she doing?

CARMEL: (*whispering*) I'm creating a distraction.

RAIMY: D for distraction.

CARMEL: (*on phone*) Thanks. (*hangs up as MS. PAHA enters, fanning herself*) Hey!

MS. PAHA: (*puffing*) Carmel! You were supposed to wait on the front porch.

CARMEL: I know, I know, I'm really sorry. We got excited. My dad gave me the keys.

MS. PAHA: I'm sure he did. (*singsong*) It wasn't right, but I'm sure he did. (*fanning*) Phew, it is so hot for October. It's stifling in here, aren't you kids hot?

CARMEL: (*guiding MS. PAHA to a chair*) Sit down. Raimy, get me my water bottle.

MS. PAHA: (*really looking for the first time*) Oh! There are three of you.

CARMEL: Didn't I tell you? It's a group project. I'm sure I told you. I'm pretty sure.

MS. PAHA: Maybe you did. Of course you did. I just forgot.

RAIMY: (*to LEX*) Carmel probably talked a hole in her head and her brains leaked out.

MS. PAHA: (*exhales loudly*) Is my face super red?

CARMEL: Not at all. You look great. (*referring to the house*) This is OK, right? We don't want to do anything wrong.

MS. PAHA: You're fine. I just want you to be careful. You might take a wrong step through some rotted wood and how would I explain that to your dad?

CARMEL: We promise we'll be careful. We're just going to look around, tell a couple of stories –

RAIMY: Scare ourselves so hard our hair turns white...

MS. PAHA: What?

CARMEL: What better place to tell a haunted house story than in a real haunted house?

MS. PAHA: So you believe then? That the house is haunted.

LEX: No.

RAIMY: Yes.

CARMEL: Maybe. That's what we're here to find out.

MS. PAHA's phone rings with a particular ring.

MS. PAHA: Oh goodness! That's the office. Where's my bag? (very scattered) Where's my phone? Where is it!!!

CARMEL: (giving MS. PAHA the bag) Here you go!

MS. PAHA: (throwing things out of the bag, pulling out the phone, she fixes her hair before she answers the phone in a completely put on calm voice) Selma Paha speaking. Why, hello Jennifer. What can I do for you? (listens)

RAIMY: (to LEX) Code D.

MS. PAHA: (phony calm voice) Oh my, that sounds serious. Let me look through my notes on that property. (panicked voice to CARMEL) Notebook! Notebook! Notebook!

CARMEL: (picking up a notebook and pen from the pile of things from MS. PAHA's bag) Here you go! Why don't you take the call in the dining room? (she points off) I'll put your things back in your bag. (tidies up MS. PAHA's bag)

MS. PAHA: Carmel, you are one of a kind. (on phone, phony calm voice) All right, Jennifer. I'm ready. Go ahead. (she exits off stage)

LEX: What just happened?

CARMEL: My dad's assistant owes me a favour.

RAIMY: Did you cover up her counterfeiting scheme?

CARMEL: We don't have much time, let's get to work! (*taking notes*)
First question: What makes a house haunted? Is it the house or the ghosts in the house?

LEX: There's no such thing as ghosts.

CARMEL: I say ghosts. Ghosts are the ones who slam the doors.

RAIMY: I don't know. Houses creak. A house lets you know if it doesn't want you there. A house has memories. Echoes. A house breathes. Who says a house can't do more?

LEX: I say.

RAIMY: (*looking around and thinking*) What if a house won't let a ghost leave? I mean, why would a ghost stay in the place where they tragically died? It doesn't make any sense. Unless the house traps them. Forces them...

CARMEL: (*smiling and nodding*) Evil house...

LEX: Houses are not evil.

RAIMY: ...to replay the moment over and over again.

CARMEL: I love your brain! I love it! I want it in a bottle on my shelf!
(*beat*) That doesn't sound right. The house traps them... that's something we can play with. (*to LEX*) Start recording.

LEX: (*Goes to their backpack. They actually know what they're doing.*) I'm going to do some sketches first. (*grabs a sketch pad and starts to draw*)

CARMEL: Great. Perfect. Raimy. Tell the story of the house. You did the research, right?

RAIMY: I did. (*empties out backpack looking for notebook*)

LEX: What are you doing, Carmel?

CARMEL: I am bringing it all together. I'm organizing the thoughts.

LEX: Uh huh.

CARMEL: I'm going to get you an A. Maybe an A+. That would change your reputation.

RAIMY: It all started with a family. (*turning to a page in the notebook*)
Not the first family in this house, but the only one that counts. A husband, a wife, and a child.

Lights and atmosphere change. It's all blue – the visuals of extreme cold. LIATH enters, holding LOST by the hand. LOST does not look at LIATH.

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

LIATH lets LOST go and moves to stand at the side of the stage, watching.

RAIMY: The child was found after a week in the back bedroom on the first floor.

LEX: Murdered?

RAIMY: 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!

RAIMY: The place has never been able to shake the cold. (beat) Ha. Or its reputation.

CARMEL: Like how?

JOEY steps forward.

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.

LEX: See? Rats in the walls.

JOEY: Hello?

The scritchng noises continue. It gets louder.

JOEY: Hello? Who's there?

There is the sound of a rush of wind.

JOEY: Oh! It's so cold. Who's there? (as if just seeing someone) Who are you?

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

JOEY steps back. FINLEY steps forward.

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

RAIMY: And of course, they see the girl.

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. FINLEY and JOEY exit. LOST moves to stand beside LIATH.

RAIMY: And then people stopped living in the house. They couldn't take it.

LEX: So your standard fare. Noises. Door slams. Screams. Ghost kid.

RAIMY: And unexplainable cold. (*reading notes*) "The cold went through me like a fog."

LEX: You're not going to convince me that a super draft is a ghost.

CARMEL: So why won't people stay?

LEX: Active imaginations.

CARMEL: Did the house trap the child? Hmmmm. So, what happened?

A door slams with an echo.

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

LEX: I like the echo...

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. A party erupts onstage. CAROLINE weaves among the people, greeting LEX, CARMEL and RAIMY watch and comment. LOST also watches but is not in the scene.

CAROLINE: *(to the people)* 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)* John, open up another bottle of champagne!

JOHN: Anything for you, my love! *(raising a glass)* Cheers!

All the party goers yell 'Cheers!' and laugh joyfully. The crowd disperses, chatting with each other, dancing off. The music fades and JOHN approaches CAROLINE.

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.

LEX: That's suspect.

CARMEL: Don't interrupt.

RAIMY: It's not like he could text.

LEX: If you want to get in touch, you get in touch.

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 and 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: *(to LOST)* Your skirt is so dirty. What did I tell you about staying clean? Go to your room!

LOST: I can't find my mother. *(moving away, but doesn't go far)*

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

LEX: Ah ha!

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

CAROLINE *begins to pace. LOST watches.*

RAIMY: Skipped town with company money. Weeks went by and she had no idea what happened.

LEX: I knew it. Suspect!

RAIMY: Which, mostly, explains her behaviour...

MAID: (*stepping forward*) Good morning, Ma'am. Would you like bread or 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. LOST is right there.

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!

LOST doesn't move. LIATH steps forward as the AGENCY MANAGER.

LIATH: (*as 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.

LIATH: 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.

LIATH moves to the side, continuing to watch. 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. As they do, one of the CHOSEN ONES follows behind during their moment. Saying nothing, emotionless.

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. During the above LOST has moved downstage to stand beside CAROLINE.

LOST: I can't find my mother.

NOSY TWO: Should we check?

CAROLINE: (to LOST) 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. (exits)

LOST stares after her mother. There is the sound of a door creaking open. 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.*

LOST: I can’t find my mother.

RAIMY: So the story goes, the lost child 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.

*Music fades. The lights revert back. LOST is still there,
though the teens can’t see her. LIATH takes LOST by
the hand and exits.*

*During the following, a CHOSEN ONE circles the
action on stage, slowly without drawing focus. They
then stand on the side of the stage for a moment.
They exit after MS. PAHA enters.*

LEX: I hate parents.

CARMEL: Creepy...

LEX: Creepy wandering child. Doors slam. Screaming. Textbook stuff.
(thinking) Why don’t I draw her? A frozen ghost who says the
same line over and over again.

CARMEL: (thinking) Hmm... Let me think. (Moves away. She sits in a
squat, hair in face, and stares out.)

LEX: What is she doing?

RAIMY: That’s the thinking pose.

LEX: It needs a pose?

RAIMY: Something about blood flow.

LEX: Why?

RAIMY: You’ll get used to it.

LEX: I don’t want to get used to it. (more to self) What am I doing here?

RAIMY: Excellent question. I know why I'm here. But you punch people in the face. It would seem that Carmel is very punchable.

LEX: One person. I punched one person.

RAIMY: I stand corrected.

LEX: And they deserved it.

RAIMY: Oh I have no doubt. Tammy Charles is also very punchable. So, why didn't you just walk away when Carmel asked you to be in her group?

LEX: I don't know. I – just – She was in my face and said you're in my group and started talking. I didn't even have time to say no.

RAIMY: Carmel could talk a hole in the ground. And then organize it to do all the work.

LEX: *(beat)* It was the first time someone... I get assigned groups. *(to CARMEL)* Am I doing this or not?

CARMEL: Don't talk to me! I'm thinking!

LEX: This is so weird. Why are you all so weird?

RAIMY: *(unfazed)* Maybe you're weirder than you think. And maybe it's not nice to call people weird because you don't like what they do.

LEX: *(sighing)* My abuela says I judge people too quickly. *(beat)* My grandmother.

RAIMY: I know what abuela means. I've watched *Dora the Explorer*. *(not entirely true)* Not recently...

CARMEL: *(moving back)* I've decided. It's too sad. More sad than scary.

LEX: I can make her scary.

CARMEL: I know you could. Is it a great story for a haunted house?

MS. PAHA enters.

MS. PAHA: Well! That was a bit of a brouhaha. *(pronounced BREW-HA-HA)*

CARMEL: Everything OK?

MS. PAHA: Just a little paperwork snafu. *(singsong)* There's nothing more terrifying than misplaced papers! Where's my bag?

CARMEL: (*giving briefcase to MS. PAHA*) Here you go! So, we've dived right into our work, and there's no reason for you to stay.

MS. PAHA: (*sitting*) I brought a whole bunch of material. I can't wait to show you!

CARMEL: What?

RAIMY: (*aside*) Uh oh...

MS. PAHA: (*digging into her briefcase*) I have all the documents, the entire history of the house. Sure, it's from the perspective of the agency but the coming and going of sellers is quite fascinating.

LEX: (*aside*) What is she doing?

RAIMY: (*aside*) I think she's staying.

MS. PAHA: (*pulling out papers and handing them to CARMEL*) I have a whole bunch of stories, too. You would be amazed how many people want to talk to me about the house. Maybe because I haven't been in town long. But I'll be in the grocery store trying to buy mustard and someone wants to tell me about something they did on a dare in a rainstorm.

RAIMY: (*elbowing LEX*) See.

MS. PAHA: (*singsong*) It's fascinating.

CARMEL: (*loudly, interrupting*) We were thinking... (*now quiet*) We were thinking we would explore on our own.

MS. PAHA: Oh, I can't let you do that.

CARMEL: It's a school project. We need to do our own work.

MS. PAHA: (*with a smile*) You know I'm not supposed to leave you alone.

CARMEL: I know, I know, I know. But maybe for a little while... maybe... just this once?

MS. PAHA: Carmel...

CARMEL: It's Saturday! You don't really want to sit around a dusty,

RAIMY: Derelict,

CARMEL: (*shoving RAIMY*) Solidly built frame house getting cobwebs in your hair. Please, please, please, please, please?

MS. PAHA: Well...

CARMEL: Go shopping! There's a 20% off sale at Banana Republic at the mall in Cobourg.

LEX: (to RAIMY) That's specific.

RAIMY: (to LEX) Code D has many levels.

CARMEL: What could go wrong? It's the middle of the day. It's not like we're going to get ambushed by a ghost in daylight. Everyone knows ghosts only come out at night.

RAIMY: They do? (CARMEL shoves RAIMY)

MS. PAHA: (laughing) Carmel, you are one of a kind. (beat) Just this once. And just thirty minutes. OK?

CARMEL: Thank you so much! You're the best!

MS. PAHA: Watch where you step. I'm not taking the fall for any broken legs. Toodle-oo! (exit)

RAIMY: No pun intended.

CARMEL: (calling out) Thanks! (to others, a girl on a mission) Now. I want big. I want impressive. I want special. That's what we are. Dream Team! OK. Stories. Lex, did you bring one?

LEX: Did you?

CARMEL: Of course. More than one. I'll even go first. What kind of leader would I be if I didn't do the same as I ask of my team! When I was accidentally on purpose put in the at-risk group for an Ancient Greek debate project, I could have cried. Did I? No. I got down in the mud. Those flunkies rose to the occasion like they never have before. I rallied my troops to victory!

LEX: (to RAIMY) Are we the flunkies in that scenario?

CARMEL: Do evil houses exist? Listen to this.

Lights change. Music plays. This time LEX, RAIMY and CARMEL exit. We are immersed into the world of the story. LIZ and CECI enter from opposite sides of the stage. They are wealthy young women without a care in the world. They are FaceTiming each other. STAGING NOTE: Don't have them staring at a phone the whole time. Establish it but then set the convention that speaking out to the audience is characters talking to each other through FaceTime.

LIZ: I had no idea how many awful rental properties exist in this city.

CECI: Thank you, thank you, thank you for doing this.

LIZ: And the ones that aren't cesspools cost an arm, a leg, and half a shoulder.

CECI: Have I mentioned how thankful I am?

LIZ: (*teasing*) I had no idea what I was getting into when I said I'd do this.

CECI: Thankful and grateful?

LIZ: Oh I'm kidding. I'm so excited to have you nearby again. I can't wait.

CECI: (*laughing*) All right, I can't stand it. Did you find us a place to stay or not?

LIZ: Don't rush me. I'm setting the scene. (*dramatic*) I was tired. Irritated. Hungry. My feet were in shreds. Shreddy feet, hangry belly. It was a sad sight.

CECI: You are never going to let me forget this, are you.

LIZ: (*exaggerated*) I was at the end of my rope! I was sure that this last place was going to be like all the others. Failure number two hundred and fifty-seven. Imagine my surprise when I stumbled into a piece of paradise.

Lights change. LIZ turns to talk to LIATH, playing MRS. SILVER, who has approached.

LIATH: As you can see, clean as a whistle. Bright. And the blue and white decor is throughout the whole place. It's very sweet.

LIZ: It smells of... flowers.

LIATH: Three windows in the front, as requested.

LIZ: Yes.

LIATH: But no street noise.

LIZ: The only way to describe it is... perfect. Pretty and perfect. So, Mrs. Silver, what's wrong with it?

LIATH: Nothing, I assure you.

LIZ: When do I find out about the toxic waste in the basement?

LIATH: (*laughing*) Never.

LIZ: Did the last renter commit some horrible crime?

LIATH: He was an old man. And between you and me, a cranky hypochondriac without a liver and a loving wife.

LIZ: But they only stayed two weeks.

LIATH: Between you and me, I don't think he would have been happy anywhere.

Lights change. LIZ is back in her conversation with CECI. LIATH circles round, watching the scene.

LIZ: (to CECI) I know you're a skeptic when it comes to these things. But I was totally thorough. A painstaking 100 percent. An exhaustive 110 percent.

CECI: (with a smile) I'm thankful, grateful, and thoroughly appreciative. All the words.

LIZ: (laughing) I deserve them all!

CECI: Although, my expectations are super high now.

LIZ: I am up to the challenge. Be prepared for a ton of gloating.

CECI: If I find the teeniest, tiniest flaw...

LIZ: You won't. Not a single one. (beat) I'm sorry I won't be there. Archie can't shake his pneumonia so we're going to the beach to try and get some ocean air into his lungs. Children always get sick at the worst times. I think they do it on purpose. Love you!

CECI: Love you!

There is a brief light and sound transition (light and sound, up and down). LIZ and CECI move from standing to sitting. They are on FaceTime again. Establish the phones if you want, but don't have them staring at them the whole time.

During this section, four CHOSEN ONES slowly cross, one at a time behind the two women. They are not drawing focus, but they are most definitely there. They look at the women as they pass. When they finish their cross they stand with LIATH.

LIZ: Well? What do you think? Can I gloat from afar?

CECI: It's unbelievable!

LIZ: I know!

CECI: It is paradise.

LIZ: Not a single flaw, right?

CECI: Not one. And I searched. Top to bottom.

LIZ: I know you have. It's one of your most annoying qualities.

CECI: Ha, ha.

LIZ: Kidding!

CECI: I couldn't find a thing. Well, except for the rent. Why is it so low?

LIZ: Why can't you take this at face value? Be happy you have something pretty and reasonable.

CECI: Because nothing is pretty and reasonable. There must be a reason.

LIZ: Or maybe there's not. Maybe it's just a lovely house that you and Henry can enjoy...

CECI: You have to get back here. I want to have as many parties as possible. When are you coming?

LIZ: I don't know. (*pouting*) My child is being impossible. He keeps wheezing and Tom is insistent we stay.

CECI: You're going to miss Adela. She's visiting next week.

LIZ: I haven't seen her in ages!

CECI: There's a knock on the door. I'll call back later! Love you!

LIZ: Love you!

There is a light and sound transition. LIZ is leaving a message. CECI looks very troubled. She has not picked up the phone. During this, the CHOSEN ONES start to move to CECI, as if surrounding her.

LIZ: Ceci! Are you there? You have to save me from this misery. All I'm doing is playing in the sand and eating shrimp. I hate shrimp. It's so windy here. And boring. There is nothing worse than being in the middle of a windy boredom. All right I've complained long enough, can you tell I'm totally jealous? Say hi to Adela! When you get this message, try not to weep too hard for me. I know

you won't. I'm calling you back immediately and you better pick up. Bye!

There is a light and sound transition. The two are on FaceTime again. They move to stand side-by-side. THE CHOSEN ONES stare at CECI.

CECI: (*subdued*) Lizzy, I have to... I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful...

LIZ: What's the matter? Why do you look so pale?

CECI: It's the house. I wish we'd never come.

LIZ: What?

CECI: You couldn't have known. We couldn't have – it's just –

LIZ: Calm down, calm down! Tell me what happened.

Lights change, ominous music plays. CECI turns to talk to a MAID who has approached through the CHOSEN ONES, causing them to move out of the way. They slowly make their way back to LIATH. They all watch the scene.

CECI: What do you mean you can't stay?

MAID: I thought I could. I heard the stories, but I didn't believe...

CECI: Stories?

MAID: This house. It watches you. I can't stay.

The MAID runs off and the BAKER approaches.

BAKER: Certainly we can deliver. Let me set it up.

CECI: Fabulous. I had visions of melting cake on my way home.

BAKER: No worries.

CECI: I love this area so much.

BAKER: How long are you staying?

CECI: We're not sure. For the summer, and then it depends on my husband's work. I hope we're here for a long time.

BAKER: What's your address?

CECI: 32 Mayfair Lane.

BAKER: Sorry?

CECI: 32 Mayfair Lane.

BAKER: Oh. (*beat*) Do you... know about the house?

CECI: Should I know something? Oh, there is something wrong with it. I knew it! Is it the foundation? Is the whole thing going to fall apart? I knew it was too good to be true.

BAKER: No. It's as solid as they come.

CECI: What's the matter then?

BAKER: I shouldn't say.

CECI: You can't leave it there.

BAKER: Can I get a phone number?

CECI: What is it? Tell me.

BAKER: It's the house. Everyone knows.

CECI: Apparently not everyone.

BAKER: Well... It's haunted. The house.

CECI: Haunted?

BAKER: The last renter only lasted two weeks before he couldn't take it anymore.

CECI: I thought he was a cranky hypochondriac without a liver.

BAKER: I shouldn't have said anything. Folks don't stay long. That's all.

CECI: What happened?

BAKER: If you haven't found out, better that you don't know.

CECI: That's not fair.

BAKER: (*blurting out*) It's evil. (*pause*) The house is pure evil.

CECI: What?

BAKER: I shouldn't have said anything. I'm sure you'll be fine. I'll finish the delivery form in the office. (*exits*)

CECI is back to talking to LIZ.

CECI: I can face anything real. If it's tangible and I can hold it, I can face it. I can be brave. But the supernatural is... something else. The thought of facing the undead, the idea of an evil house...

HENRY storms forward.

HENRY: You can't be serious. We're going to leave a perfect house because some baker says (*mocking*) "It's evil."

CECI: Don't make fun of me.

HENRY: They've got ulterior motives, that's what I think. They want the house. They want us to leave so they can sweep in.

CECI: I really don't –

HENRY: Don't be a baby, Ceci. We're not leaving.

HENRY exits at the same time as SARAH approaches with an armful of sheets.

SARAH: Do you want me to make up the room?

CECI: Yes please. I'll be right up with some flowers.

SARAH: Top room on the right?

CECI: That's it. Thank you. (*LIATH steps forward to hand CECI a vase of flowers*) I love the blue in these flowers. They're perfect.

CECI puts the flowers on a table and focuses on arranging them.

At the same time, SARAH crosses the stage, humming. She sets the sheets down. She picks up one sheet and shakes it out, as if ready to put on a bed.

The lights change. A long, distorted, echoing scream starts low and builds slowly. The scream adds in volume and begins to reverberate. The sound should last for all of the following action until the blackout. SARAH drops the sheet. She starts to shake. She stares at her hands which become rigid and claw-shaped. Her body goes rigid and contorts. She falls to her knees grabbing her head and rocking as the scream continues building.

Once SARAH falls to her knees CECI looks up. The scream is loud enough the characters have to shout over it.

CECI: (*hearing the scream*) What is that?

She runs across the stage to see SARAH on her knees rocking back and forth.

CECI: (*over the sound of the scream*) Sarah! What's the matter?

SARAH: Oh, my God!

CECI: Sarah!

SARAH: I have seen it!

HENRY runs in.

HENRY: What's the matter with her?

CECI: I don't know!

There is a blackout. The scream echoes and finally fades. Lights up on CECI and LIZ.

CECI: (*on phone to LIZ*) They came and took her away. She's... she hasn't come to her senses. The doctor says she's quiet not because she's back to normal but because of sheer exhaustion. I don't know what happened. But it was real. It was awful.

LIZ: It sounds awful.

CECI: We can't stay here.

LIZ: Ceci. It was a terrible experience. But I don't see how a house is to blame. A house? It's ridiculous. She had a fit or a seizure. My cousin has epilepsy and her whole body becomes rigid exactly as you describe. Or maybe there's a family history. It could be that. There's an easy explanation.

CECI: You weren't there.

LIZ: It makes no sense. You can't believe your house turned a perfectly normal person into a raving lunatic. You've been there three weeks. You've been in that room, haven't you? Why aren't you out of your mind? It's all explainable. You must listen to me. There's no such thing as an evil house!

CECI: You weren't there.

LIZ: I wish I was! If I could just talk to you face-to-face, you'd see. There's a reasonable explanation. Take deep breaths, OK? Don't give into this silly panic. Love you!

Lights change. Music plays. The CHOSEN ONES now follow CECI and stay as close to her as is possible, while still having the scene progress. CECI turns to talk to the DOCTOR who has approached. SARAH enters to sit in a nearby chair. She rocks back and forth with a vacant expression.

DOCTOR: She hasn't improved. In any moment of clarity she has, she does nothing but moan. Do you really want to see her?

CECI: I do.

DOCTOR: All right. Be prepared.

The two approach SARAH.

CECI: Sarah? Sarah.

SARAH looks up with a vacant expression.

CECI: It's Mrs. Montresor.

SARAH starts to moan.

DOCTOR: We should leave.

CECI: Just a second. (to SARAH) Do you recognize me? Do you know who I am?

SARAH: (moaning) The house.

CECI: Yes, the house. You were at my house.

SARAH: The house.

CECI: What did you see?

SARAH: The house.

CECI: What happened to you?

SARAH: The house.

CECI: Sarah!

SARAH's moan turns into a laugh.

SARAH: You'll see it. You'll see it too.

Music fades. The DOCTOR takes SARAH away. CECI turns away and talks to ADELA, who approaches.

ADELA: (hugging CECI) Oh, Ceci! You poor thing.

CECI: She's much worse.

ADELA: I can't believe you put yourself through that.

CECI: I feel a little guilty. I'm so glad you're here, Adela.

ADELA: Let's not talk about it anymore.

CECI: I wouldn't even know what to say.

RALPH enters.

RALPH: Ladies! Hello! I just happened to be walking by... (*overly cool*)
oh, hi, Adela.

ADELA: (*blushing*) Hello, Ralph.

RALPH: What's the news on that young woman? Henry told me all
about it.

CECI: Nothing good.

RALPH: (*flippantly*) Tragic. So! I was thinking. If you're up for it Ceci... I
want to stay the night in that room.

ADELA: Oh why?

RALPH: Because. Why not?

ADELA: Why would you take the risk? What if something happens?

RALPH: Nothing's going to happen. She has to be faking.

CECI: I don't know...

RALPH: Oh, don't get me wrong, it's a great fake. But she's clearly
watched every movie and knows every haunted house hack.

ADELA: But to what end? Why would she do it?

CECI: What if it's real?

RALPH: Well then, I'll fight every demon that shows their face.

ADELA: But what if –

RALPH: Nothing's going to happen. I'm sure of it. I am of sound mind
and sturdy skull. Some might say I've an extra thick skull. (*to CECI*)
What do you think?

ADELA: I wish you wouldn't.

RALPH: I'll be fine. There isn't a chance that anything, real or dearly departed, could drive me crazy. Maybe I'll even see a ghost. That would be awesome! I'd write a book.

ADELA: Don't joke.

HENRY: (*entering*) Hello, all. (*sensing the tone*) Oh, oh. What's happening?

ADELA: Ralph wants to spend the night in the room.

HENRY: Really? That's one way to settle this once and for all.

RALPH: What do you say, Ceci? Do we have a deal?

CECI: Oh... all right.

There is thunder and lightning. Lights pulse up and down. It's now 10 p.m.

RALPH: Perfect! Thunder and lightning. The perfect atmosphere for this adventure.

HENRY: (*moving forward*) The room is ready. All the lights are on, plus a few extra and I've put a golf club on the desk. I can officially state that there are no ghosts under the bed.

CECI: Oh, Henry.

HENRY: You know Ralph is going to spend a perfectly quiet night, get a great sleep and come down in the morning wanting pancakes.

RALPH: If we're putting in orders, I'd like eggs. Two eggs over easy with... home fries! (*beat*) Adela, your face will stay like that if you're not careful. Don't worry.

ADELA: (*very worried*) If you say so.

There is thunder and lightning.

HENRY: Here's a buzzer (*or a whistle, or a bell, something tangible that makes a loud jarring noise*). If you feel you're in any danger, give it a blast and we'll all come running.

RALPH: (*dramatic*) Goodbye, my friends! My adventure awaits! Now. If you hear me buzz once, don't come. Maybe my hand slipped or something. If I buzz twice, that's your cue.

HENRY: Good luck. (*HENRY and RALPH shake hands*)

RALPH: I'm so excited, I'm sure I'll be up all night. See you in the morning. (*exits*)

There is thunder and lightning.

They all sit. The CHOSEN ONES stand over each of them. LIATH slowly exits after RALPH. The stage is quiet. There is the sound of a ticking clock. Let this pause go on as long as you can, so that the sound of the buzzer is a bit of a shock. Don't have the buzzer ring after two seconds.

The buzzer goes once. It is loud and jarring. ADELA and CECI leap up and move as if to exit, HENRY gets in the way.

HENRY: Ceci! Remember what he said.

CECI: Who cares, let's go.

ADELA: I want to check on him.

HENRY: You know he'd hate that.

ADELA:.. He wouldn't have rung if everything was all right!

HENRY: Everything is fine. Just wait. *(there is a long silent pause)* You see? Just one buzz. It wasn't anything at all. Sit down.

They do. Again, pause. This time in silence, no clock. Wait as long as you can. And there it is. The buzzer starts ringing and ringing and ringing. It is loud and jarring. The three run off in one direction. From the other side of the stage, RALPH enters, rigid, shaking, a face full of fear, staring at his hands that are rigid and held like claws. And now the slow building scream begins and continues.

The three run on and cross to RALPH.

ADELA: Ralph!

CECI: Henry, help him.

ADELA: Ralph, talk to me!

RALPH: Oh, my God! I have seen it!

RALPH falls to the floor. When he hits the floor, There is a blackout. The scream continues and fades. A dim light comes up on CECI. She talks out with a dull voice as if talking to LIZ.

CECI: He's dead, Liz. Not insane like Sarah. But dead. Gone. We tried to bring him back but it was no use. It was the house. The house took him. It took him.

The lights fade on CECI. Lights up on the teens. It is suggested they return, without drawing focus, during the previous action. LEX is sketching, CARMEL is videoing what's around her on her phone, RAIMY is sitting, arms tight around knees, rocking back and forth. There are now a variety of CHOSEN ONES watching the action.

RAIMY: Nope, nope, nope, nope.

CARMEL: It wasn't that bad.

RAIMY: Nope, I don't like evil houses. I don't like them. I don't like them.

LEX: It's just a story. (*admitting*) A creepy story, but a story.

CARMEL: Ah ha! It got you?

LEX: It's just a story.

RAIMY: (*still rocking*) You have no idea how imagination works. You hear a story like that, everything is evil. Rooms are evil. Doors are evil. Toilets are evil.

LEX: This isn't the same house. We're all fine.

RAIMY: For now.

CARMEL: What do you think, Lex?

LEX: Ghosts are better to work with visually than evil houses.

CARMEL: Hmmm. Let me think on that. Raimy, quit it. Get up and help. (*wanders away, thinking*)

LEX: (*RAIMY*) You don't have to do what she tells you.

RAIMY: You are.

LEX: What? No. I'm drawing what I want. And I can leave whenever I want.

RAIMY: So, why don't you?

LEX: I could.

RAIMY: So do it.

LEX: What do you care if I stay or go?

RAIMY: Oh I care a lot. I'm caring more and more by the second. You are a fascinating cat.

LEX: You are so... *(about to say weird and swallows it)* I have my reasons.

A door slams.

MS. PAHA: *(offstage)* You hoo!

CARMEL: Oh no!

MS. PAHA: *(calling, still offstage)* All right. Time to go.

CARMEL: We are not leaving. We are NOT leaving.

RAIMY: *(to LEX)* You might want to stay back.

MS. PAHA: *(entering)* OK Carmel. You've had your fun.

CARMEL: We're not finished.

MS. PAHA: It's time to go.

CARMEL: It hasn't been thirty minutes.

MS. PAHA: It has. I've been gone for over an hour.

RAIMY: What?

LEX: An hour? That's imposs... *(pulls phone out of back pocket, or looks at watch, seeing it's been over an hour)* Huh.

MS. PAHA: There you see? I've been more than generous. *(to CARMEL)* I'll take the keys now, thank you.

CARMEL: I can lock up. I'll give them to my dad. Promise.

MS. PAHA: No, no, that's not how this works. *(singsong)* I could lose my job. You don't want that do you?

CARMEL: Of course not, but –

MS. PAHA: *(to LEX and RAIMY)* Pack up your things, OK?

CARMEL: *(a girl on a mission)* Ms. Paha. This project is really important. Do you know about the fall festival? You haven't been in town very long – did I tell you about it? *(before MS. PAHA can speak, she's off)* It's the best time of the year. It's the biggest festival around with a food hall and a craft market, and a corn maze, and all the schools have a competition to put up components for the Haunted Haunts area and there's one winner from each school.

My goal is to win our school's slot and if we're going to do that we have to thoroughly research. We need to be here.

MS. PAHA: That all sounds very neat –

CARMEL: (*not happy*) Neat? Did you say neat?

RAIMY pulls LEX back a step.

MS. PAHA: – but I need you to pack up. I don't want you to get hurt.

CARMEL: We'll be careful. We've been careful. (*jumps up and down*)
Look, no broken bones!

MS. PAHA: It's going to be dark soon.

CARMEL: It's not going to be dark for hours. You have to – (*next tactic, yanking LEX forward*) This is Lex. Have you met my best friend Lex?

LEX: Best friend?

RAIMY: (*hiding behind a chair*) Everyone for themselves!

CARMEL: (*ignoring them both*) Lex is having a tough, tough year. Aren't you, Lex?

LEX: What?

CARMEL: A terribly tough year. Already been suspended. And it's only October. (*throwing an arm around LEX, sad voice*) Lex is in danger of failing. Being held back.

RAIMY: In October?

CARMEL: This project is the only thing that could save my dear, dear friend. You don't want to be responsible for someone failing school, do you Ms. Paha? You wouldn't want to be directly responsible for pain and suffering. (*very pointed and direct*) Aren't you in pain and suffering Lex? (*giving LEX a little shove*) Aren't you, Lex?

LEX: Uhhhhhh, my grandmother is really sick? It would kill her if I failed?

RAIMY: (*referring to CARMEL getting LEX to do what she wants*) Carmelled.

CARMEL: You see? All we're really trying to do is keep our dear friend afloat. Can you help us do that Ms. Paha? Just one more hour, that's all I'm asking for and then I promise –

MS. PAHA: All right, all right, all right. You win. Carmel, you could convince a flower to grow in the desert.

CARMEL: Thank you. You're a lifesaver.

MS. PAHA: I'll give you another half an hour. But that's it. And I mean it this time.

CARMEL: We'll be packed up and ready to go in forty-five minutes. Promise.

MS. PAHA: Thirty minutes, Carmel. *(starts to leave)*

CARMEL: You got it. Absolutely! Thank you!

Just before she exits, MS. PAHA turns and looks at the others. There's a little something different here.

MS. PAHA: Are you sure none of you want to leave?

CARMEL: Positive.

MS. PAHA: You could if you wanted to.

CARMEL: *(waving her away, not even looking)* No thanks! Gotta save our friend!

MS. PAHA: *(singsong)* I just wanted to ask. Toodle-oo! *(exits)*

CARMEL: *(pumping a fist in the air)* Yes! Yes! Success!

LEX: *(to RAIMY)* What just happened?

RAIMY: Carmelled. Everyone and everything. It's a carmel-plosion. *(as in explosion and to emphasize the point, RAIMY makes an explosion noise and gesture)*

CARMEL: *(pulling LEX centre)* OK, OK, OK! Lex, your turn. Did you bring one of your grandmother's stories?

LEX: *(pulling away)* Listen, you can't boss us around like this you know.

RAIMY: Oh too late, you're too late.

CARMEL: *(not listening)* That is really going to put us over the edge. Lance isn't going to have a Spanish story. *(in her own world)* Is your haunted house bilingual, Lance? Oh when I see the look on his face... I can't wait... *(wanders off a little)*

RAIMY: She'll be back. Your abuela knows scary stories? More than one?

LEX: Yep. She loves them. She grew up in Mexico City. I... I don't see her very much. But we text all the time.

RAIMY: Your grandmother loves horror and texts? Who is she?

LEX: The best.

RAIMY: Huh.

LEX: What?

RAIMY: I didn't know what it would be like to be in a group with you.

LEX: What did you think?

RAIMY: I did consider the possibility of being punched. But you don't seem scary. You seem more sad than scary.

LEX: *(shrugging)* I don't know. Maybe.

RAIMY: Mrs. Steinberg has written you off and it's only October.

LEX: People see what they want to see. Mrs. Steinberg sighs every time you put up your hand. Like a big sigh.

RAIMY: Sometimes, I do it on purpose to make her sigh. I like you, Lex. And there's no need to return the sentiment. I know you think I'm weird.

LEX: You're not that weird.

RAIMY: I will take that as a compliment. *(to CARMEL)* Hey Carmel, if we're going to beat Lance we actually need to do something.

CARMEL: Sorry, I was just visualizing our win. It's important to picture the destination. *(she takes a big breath in and out)* You know what we three have in common?

RAIMY: Teachers hate us?

CARMEL: What? No! We're smart. We're more than smart. We're exceptional. *(beat)* Teachers do not hate me.

RAIMY: Not to your face.

CARMEL: We're going to beat them all.

LEX: Who's "they"? Lance? Or Mrs. Steinberg?

RAIMY: Her dad.

CARMEL: Shut up.

RAIMY: (to LEX) It's not hard to get people to hate me.

CARMEL: Come on, Lex. Story time.

They exit. Lights change. Traditional Mexican folk music plays. A bilingual version of this story is available at the end of the script.

If you're using an actual door on stage, the front door has to disappear during this story. It can leave piece by piece, or moved as a whole.

UNO and DOS step forward. They look like normal narrators that any story might have. But a group of CHOSEN ONES have gathered upstage. As soon as UNO starts talking, two of the CHOSEN ONES slip behind UNO and DOS.

UNO: The house of Don Juan Manuel de Solórzano stands in Mexico City.

DOS: In its time, it was a beautiful house.

The convention here is that the CHOSEN ONES are taking over. I've gone with a symbolic neck snap that involved zero stage combat as described below. Choose the actions that work for you, with the only caveat being that the scene needs to keep moving forward. There should be no pausing for whatever death is happening on stage. Do not stop the flow of the scene. Otherwise it will become clunky.

CHOSEN B puts their fingers on one of DOS's shoulders. DOS cricks their neck to the side (as if their neck has been snapped) and falls to the floor.

UNO: Large and expansive with a tall wall surrounding the property.

CHOSEN A puts their fingers on one of UNO's shoulders. UNO cricks their neck to the side (as if their neck has been snapped) and falls to the floor.

NOW CHOSEN A and CHOSEN B take over telling the story. Remember, keep the flow going!

As this continues to happen, those in the story take no notice of the takeovers.

As CHOSEN A and B speak. UNO and DOS rise to sit. Emotionless faces. They stand. They slowly move, zombie-like, to join the CHOSEN ONES.

CHOSEN A: To this day, even in its dilapidated state, it is much larger than those that surround it.

CHOSEN B: Much richer.

CHOSEN A: It's hard not to look at the house. It pulls you in. In its day it was a house with power.

CHOSEN B: For Don Juan Manuel was a powerful man. A powerful man with one significant flaw.

DON JUAN and ELENA enter arm-in-arm. The CHOSEN ONES watch the scene. CHOSEN C slips behind ELENA.

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.

CHOSEN C puts their fingers on one of ELENA's shoulders. ELENA cricks their neck to the side (as if their neck has been snapped) and falls to the floor.

CHOSEN C is now ELENA. During the following, ELENA sits up, emotionless. They stand and move, zombie-like, to join the CHOSEN ONES.

CHOSEN A: 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 centre stage. CHOSEN C stands just behind him.

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

CHOSEN B: With power comes responsibility.

A small group of CHOSEN ONES move to join CHOSEN C behind DON JUAN.

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

CHOSEN B: Did those people whisper stories into Don Juan's ear about a possible infidelity? Who knows?

CHOSEN A: His wife Elena was beautiful...

The CHOSEN ONES in the group behind DON JUAN whisper around him. DON JUAN hears the voices and is clearly disturbed.

CHOSEN ONES: *(individuals, whispering, repeated, don't do this in unison, a wave of voices talking at once, with different sentences)* She must be cheating on him. She must be cheating. She must be.

CHOSEN A: *(overtop of the whispering)* So many voices.

CHOSEN ONES: *(individuals, whispering, do not do in unison, a wave of voices talking at once, with different sentences)* 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.

CHOSEN C (as ELENA) steps forward. As they do, the voices stop. The CHOSEN ONES move back to the main group.

CHOSEN C: Good morning, my darling.

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

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

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

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

DON JUAN: You will stay here.

DON JUAN stalks off to the side where he paces. CHOSEN C joins the CHOSEN ONES. The NEPHEW enters.

CHOSEN A: Jealousy is a powerful creature.

A CHOSEN ONE puts their fingers on one of the NEPHEW's shoulders. The NEPHEW cricks their neck to the side (as if their neck has been snapped) and falls to the floor. They get up, emotionless and zombie-like and join the CHOSEN ONES during the following.

CHOSEN B: Don Juan's jealousy grew so much that he asked his nephew to come from overseas.

CHOSEN A: He wanted someone to watch his wife every second. But it wasn't enough.

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

CHOSEN B: Who will he ask for this proof?

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

CHOSEN A: Who will he ask?

CHOSEN B: Perhaps he needs to go down to the Salgado.

DON JUAN: I must go to the underground. I must find someone without a shadow.

Creepy music plays. LIATH moves forward to be part of the story, sitting on the opposite side of the stage from DON JUAN. A small group of CHOSEN ONES move to stand behind LIATH.

LIATH: Hello, Don Juan Manuel. How can I be of service? (*gestures to DON JUAN for him to sit*)

DON JUAN: You're the only one who can help me.

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 hands and a sound is made*) And what will you do when you have this information? What will you do when the man reveals himself?

DON JUAN: (*stands*) 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 moves to the side. LIATH watches.

CHOSEN A: And so, Don Juan stepped out of his house –

CHOSEN B: – and into the dark corners of the night.

One of the CHOSEN ONES moves toward DON JUAN, who turns.

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

CHOSEN D: Yes, it's eleven o'clock.

DON JUAN: Then you are a lucky man.

CHOSEN D: 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. CHOSEN D grabs their chest and reacts as if being stabbed. During the following they move emotionlessly to join the rest of the CHOSEN ONES.

DON JUAN: (*running to LIATH*) I did it. I did it.

LIATH: Oh, Don Juan Manuel. 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. He is followed by CHOSEN E. DON JUAN turns.

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

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

CHOSEN E: Yes, it's eleven o'clock.

DON JUAN: Then you are a lucky man.

CHOSEN E: 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. CHOSEN E grabs their chest and reacts as if being stabbed. During the following they move, emotionless to join the rest of the CHOSEN ONES.

DON JUAN: *(running to LIATH)* 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: *(standing)* I must leave now. But if... when I return after the deed, 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. You must kill this man.

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?

LIATH circles round to join the CHOSEN ONES.

CHOSEN A: And so Don Juan began his march of death.

CHOSEN B: And the town fell into fear.

The CHOSEN ONES stamp to simulate a knock on the door. CHOSEN F steps forward as the policeman.

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

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

CHOSEN F: 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...

*CHOSEN F moves to stand with the CHOSEN ONES.
CHOSEN G moves forward.*

CHOSEN A: And so Don Juan began his descent into madness.

CHOSEN B: The trap was set and never ending.

DON JUAN: *(turning)* Excuse me, do you know the time?

CHOSEN G: 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 pulse, DON JUAN strikes as if plunging a knife into the victim's chest. CHOSEN G grabs their chest and reacts as if being stabbed. During the following they move, emotionless to join the rest of the CHOSEN ONES.

CHOSEN A: 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*)

CHOSEN B: Until one morning...

THE CHOSEN ONES stamp to simulate 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.

CHOSEN B: 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.

A group of CHOSEN ONES move to stand in a semi-circle around DON JUAN.

CHOSEN ONES: (*whispering*) Murderer... murderer... (*continuing underneath*)

CHOSEN A: But try as he might, Don Juan could not leave his house.

The group of CHOSEN ONES each grab hold on to a part of DON JUAN so he can't move. The lights change to red. A heartbeat begins and continues underneath. DON JUAN struggles against the CHOSEN ONES, who do not let go.

DON JUAN: I must pray for forgiveness! I must confess!

CHOSEN ONES: (*whispered*) You killed me... killed me... (*continuing underneath*)

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

The gong of a loud church bell is added.

CHOSEN ONES: (*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*)

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

DON JUAN: No! Let me be!

CHOSEN ONES: (*continuing*) No forgiveness for murderers. You killed me. Murderer. (*continue underneath, getting louder and louder*)

CHOSEN B: Hour after hour Don Juan tried to leave.

DON JUAN: I must repent!

CHOSEN A: And time after time he was stopped.

CHOSEN ONES: (*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!

All the CHOSEN ONES descend on DON JUAN until he can no longer be seen. There is a scream. CHOSEN A and B move downstage. During the following, DON JUAN exits. The rest of the CHOSEN ONES slowly move to stand in various positions around the stage on a variety of levels, all staring out, emotionless. There is silence.

CHOSEN A: What happened next, no one was there to see.

CHOSEN B: But Don Juan was found swinging from the branches of the house's big oak tree.

CHOSEN A: No one died on the doorstep of Don Juan Manuel ever more.

CHOSEN B: And no one could stay in the house. For those who tried, never found a moment's peace.

The CHOSEN ONES whisper with malice. They stare out at the audience.

CHOSEN ONES: (*whispering*) You killed me. Murderer. You killed me. Murderer.

CHOSEN B: The victims of Don Juan moved in.

CHOSEN A: They took up the corners of his large and expansive home.

CHOSEN B: They walk the halls looking for Don Juan to satisfy their revenge, over and over again.

CHOSEN ONES: (*whispering*) No forgiveness for murderers.

Music plays, the lights change, but the CHOSEN ONES do not move. CARMEL enters, with drive, followed by LEX and RAIMY who looks puzzled. RAIMY keeps looking around, almost as if they can see the CHOSEN ONES, or at least feel their presence. The CHOSEN ONES are everywhere.

CARMEL: Voices looking for revenge, I like that, I like that. What do you think, Raimy? (*RAIMY doesn't answer*) Raimy!

RAIMY: Huh?

CARMEL: What did you think of the story?

RAIMY: (*distracted*) The story's fine. Do either of you feel something... off? Different. Things are different.

CARMEL: Where? In the house?

LEX: Different how?

RAIMY: I don't know. But there's... during the story, the air felt different?

CARMEL: What?

RAIMY: I know, that's weird.

LEX: I didn't say it.

CARMEL: Lex, do you feel anything?

LEX: Nope... (*but starts to look puzzled as they really look around*)

RAIMY: (*looking around*) And I definitely feel like we're being watched.

CARMEL: You've been in here too long.

LEX: Wait, is it way darker in here?

RAIMY: Yeah. Like we've been here for hours and didn't know it?

CARMEL: Don't be stupid.

RAIMY: (*seeing and trying not to freak out*) And, not that I want to alarm anyone... but isn't that where the front door used to be?

CARMEL: (*not looking*) Raimy, you can't let your imagination get away from you like that. (*now sees*) We don't have time to... where's the door?

RAIMY: Uh huh.

LEX: Doors don't just disappear.

CARMEL: We're mixed around, that's all. We're not in the right part of the house.

LEX: This is where we came in.

CARMEL: Then we'll go out a window.

LEX: The windows are boarded up.

CARMEL: So how do we get out?

There's a low, not at all comforting laugh. MS. PAHA enters from inside the house. She has a much different energy now. And she is dressed in grey.

MS. PAHA: Now, now, now. There's nothing to worry about.

CARMEL: Ms. Paha? Where did you come from?

MS. PAHA: I have to tell you, I expected more. That was hardly a scary story. I thought you were really trying to turn your hair white. I was looking forward to that. Although I suppose revenge is a worthy cause.

CARMEL: Are you OK...?

RAIMY: You sound different.

MS. PAHA: Do I? You might say this is my true voice. You were asking about the light. And the door.

CARMEL: Yes. I'm glad you're back. It seems we've stayed much longer than we should have and we're totally grateful, but it's time for us to go.

LEX: Yeah. Through a door.

RAIMY: My parents are going to freak out.

MS. PAHA: Oh, don't worry. They'll hardly miss you.

CARMEL: What does that mean?

MS. PAHA: This house... This beautiful house. It has a way about it. And when it doesn't want you to go, it doesn't want you to go.

RAIMY: What?

MS. PAHA: You've stayed too long, my dears.

CARMEL: I've had enough of this. You want to scare us? You'll find I don't scare. And my dad is your boss and when he finds out about this...

MS. PAHA begins to laugh.

MS. PAHA: Carmel, you're delightful. Wrong. But delightful. I've so enjoyed my time getting to know you. You had your chance.

LEX: There has to be a way out.

MS. PAHA: There was, but not any more. Once the door is gone, it's too late.

CARMEL: What did you do to the door?

MS. PAHA: I have a story for your research. It's perfect. You're not going to be able to use it, but it's my favourite. You might say I connect to it.

CARMEL: We don't care about your story. We don't want to hear it. We're ready to go.

MS. PAHA: Ah, but you see I want to tell it. And you will listen, whether you want to or not.

Blackout. Creepy music plays.

See the story character list at the beginning of the play for some variations on how to play this with the CHOSEN ONES. Regardless of how you cast it, throughout the story, there should always be members of the CHOSEN ONES watching the story. It's not about pulling focus, but they are always there. By this point in the play their numbers have clearly grown. Everyone in previous stories is a part of the CHOSEN ONES now.

RODERICK steps forward stage left and NISH steps forward stage right. They are on FaceTime. 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. NISH turns as MOM and DAD enter.

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. LIATH steps forward as the valet.

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

LIATH: Yes. You are expected.

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

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

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

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

LIATH: *(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. *(LIATH turns away and starts walking, with no response)* OK. Some banter good. Some not. Mental note.

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

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

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

LIATH: I am a valet.

NISH: Oh. Is that different?

LIATH: Yes. *(no further response)*

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

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

NISH: Oh! Like Roderick.

LIATH: Indeed.

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

LIATH: *(no humour)* Congratulations. *(they meet up with the DOCTOR)*
Good evening, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Who is this?

LIATH: A friend of Roderick's.

DOCTOR: A friend?

LIATH: Indeed.

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

LIATH: 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 LIATH and the DOCTOR stare at NISH)* OK, bad question. Mental note.

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

The DOCTOR continues crossing and pauses centre stage. They turn and watch the scene. RODERICK enters with a smile but not a lot of energy.

RODERICK: Nish!

NISH: Roddy! How are you?

LIATH turns and crosses to the DOCTOR. The two of them watch the scene for a moment, conferring silently before they exit.

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

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

The two move to sit.

RODERICK: It's good to see you. *(has a coughing moment)*

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: (*standing, unexpectedly forceful*) No! Don't!

NISH freezes. 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.

They exit. Music plays. MADELINE enters from the other side of the stage. CHOSEN ONES follow her. 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. Perhaps the CHOSEN ONES join in with ragged breathing.

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. *(turns his head; he hears something)*

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

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. The CHOSEN ONES exit away from the action.

NISH: 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...

RODERICK: Yes?

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

NISH: (*as MADELINE exits*) 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. (*moving forward, as if to follow MADELINE, 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 turns back toward RODERICK*) Huh. I wonder what would cause that.

RODERICK: (*turning away*) You have an active imagination.

NISH: Well, 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. It does have more than a fair share of mold.

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

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. *(beat)* 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.

Now a group of CHOSEN ONES enter carrying/ pushing a rectangular box (possibly on wheels) with

an opening at the top. This is your representation of a coffin. MADELINE is inside. The CHOSEN ONES stand in a group 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 of CHOSEN ones remains behind the box and the box remains 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. Crazy. Right? This situation is not normal. Why am I talking to myself? *(paces)* It's fine, I'm not afraid. It's fine, I'm not –

Sudden thunder and lightning. NISH turns to see RODERICK entering. LIATH follows behind, walking in a circle upstage to join the CHOSEN ONES. RODERICK's eyes are darting around, he mutters to himself. He looks terrified.

RODERICK: *(muttering to self)* It's nothing, it's nothing, it's nothing, it's nothing.

Thunder and lightning. NISH turns to RODERICK.

NISH: Roderick? Everything okay? (*RODERICK continues to mutter and look around*) Want to watch a movie? Or pretend to watch a movie?

RODERICK: (*ignoring NISH*) It's nothing, it's nothing, it's nothing.

NISH: (*putting a hand on RODERICK's shoulder*) Roddy?

RODERICK: (*jumping at the touch*) No! (*beat*) Oh. Nish.

NISH: Is everything OK?

RODERICK: (*nervously looking around*) Do you hear that?

There is no sound.

NISH: What?

RODERICK: (*hearing something*) That. Can you hear it?

NISH: I don't hear anything. Besides the normal noises this house makes. It's a pretty noisy place if that's what you mean.

RODERICK: (*muttering to self*) It's nothing, it's nothing.

NISH: Um... want to eat something? Or watch me eat something?

RODERICK: What? Oh. I'm not hungry. You'll have to eat dinner by yourself. (*runs off*)

There is thunder and lightning. NISH paces.

NISH: (*to self*) I'm not leaving. I'm not abandoning my friend when he's going through this. Whatever... this is.

Now there is definitely a creepy noise. Like the sound of heavy metal slowly scraping against more heavy metal. NISH stops. They have definitely heard that sound.

NISH: OK...

There is a pause. And then the noise is repeated again.

NISH: I am not afraid. It's just a house.

The noise is repeated again. NISH hides behind a chair.

NISH: There's nothing here. Four walls. I am not afraid. It's a floor and a ceiling. Windows and doors. I am not afraid. That noise is perfectly normal. There's a perfectly normal explanation.

The noise is repeated again. Now the noise continues to repeat throughout the following. RODERICK runs in. He is almost beside himself, extremely nervous.

RODERICK: Do you hear that? Do you hear that?

NISH: I do.

RODERICK: Do you know what it is?

NISH: Should I?

RODERICK: (*terrified, almost babbling*) I tried. I really tried. I had a plan and I thought I was doing the right thing. I thought I was doing the right thing.

NISH: Of course you were.

RODERICK: I don't want to die.

NISH: Roderick?

RODERICK: She is coming for me!

NISH: Who?

RODERICK: Madeline!

The CHOSEN ONES help MADELINE out of the coffin/box.

NISH: Madeline is dead.

RODERICK: No, no, no, no no. I tried! I tried!

NISH: We put her in the coffin.

RODERICK: She was supposed to stay dead.

NISH: We nailed the lid shut.

RODERICK: She has been scratching on it for hours. She is calling me. I tried to ignore it, I tried to shut it out. I tried to keep her away.

There is the sound of a building scream. The scream continues and distorts and echoes through the following.

RODERICK: She is coming!

NISH: She can't do that!

MADELINE now stands. She slowly raises a hand and points it at RODERICK. She now has blood on her mouth, her hands, and her dress. She slowly walks downstage. The group of CHOSEN ONES move slowly to get in position behind RODERICK.

RODERICK: There's nothing I can do to stop her. I tried, I tried, I tried.

NISH: What are you talking about? Calm down, Roderick. Calm down.

RODERICK: I tried. I tried to keep her away.

MADELINE is coming for RODERICK. Slowly. Lurching. She is dead after all. She cannot reach RODERICK until he says "And now she stands at the door."

The CHOSEN ONES grab RODERICK and move him slowly centre stage. This is where MADELINE will meet him. NISH has to be out of the way.

RODERICK: I tried to stop the cycle. I tried to stop her. I tried to fight it. I put her deep in the ground. It was the only thing I could think to do. I don't want to die. I don't want to die at her hand and now it seems that everything I did was useless. The house is helping her. The house wants me to die. The house has set her free! She will come for me, no matter what I do. And now she stands at the door!

There is the sound of a boom as if a door is being blown open. The stage is red. MADELINE is there. The CHOSEN ONES push RODERICK into MADELINE, who grabs him by the throat, choking him. There is the sound of a scream.

RODERICK: (as MADELINE attacks him) No!

The two of them fall to the floor. Chaos begins.

The CHOSEN ONES begin to swirl around the stage. All actors from all the stories are now CHOSEN ONES and should be on stage in this movement. There is the sound of a house groaning. There is the sound of thunder. There is the sound of a growing moan. If you can, have a spinning gobo or some other lighting effect with movement.

NISH moves as if the ground is shaking. The DOCTOR runs in.

NISH: What's happening?

DOCTOR: You have to leave. The house is unhappy.

NISH: What?

DOCTOR: The house is coming for you!

The swirling CHOSEN ONES grab the DOCTOR and swallows them into their group.

NISH: No!

DOCTOR: (as being taken) Run! Run!

NISH runs offstage. There is the sound of a house collapsing in on itself. Grating metal.

In the above madness of movement, light and sound, LEX, RAIMY and CARMEL are brought in and sit together. Three CHOSEN ONES have an arm around each of their throats, choking them. MS. PAHA and LIATH stand together with LOST. CHOSEN ONES end up scattered around the stage. MADELINE and RODERICK stand up and join the CHOSEN ONES.

The sound and movement grows to a climax. We then slam to full light onstage and the sound abruptly cuts off. Everyone is in position. RAIMY, LEX and CARMEL all begin to verbally and visually struggle as they are having trouble breathing. They can't escape their captors.

MS. PAHA: Now, now, there's no need for such panic. We can be civilized can't we? Hmm.

She snaps her fingers and the CHOSEN ONES let up enough so the three stop struggling. If at any point they try to escape, the CHOSEN ONES should be right there to stop them from getting up.

MS. PAHA: Some introductions are in order. This is Liath, the Grey One. The first of our brood. I knew I needed someone to look after the others. I am, as you have always known, Ms. Paha. And these are the chosen ones.

RAIMY: Why are they called that?

MS. PAHA: I think it's obvious. I chose them.

LEX: For what?

MS. PAHA: We'll get there.



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