

SCARED STIFF

By Craig Sodaro

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CHARACTERS

(3 males, 11 females)

JIM SMITH	Forties, known to the world as horror writer Draco Dane
HANNAH SMITH	Sixteen, his oldest daughter
MADISON SMITH	Fifteen, his other daughter
KAYLA	A friend of the girls
TAYLOR	Another
EMMA	Another
HALEY	Another
CHARLOTTE CHUMLEY	Sixties, owner of the inn
HESTER SPARROW	Thirties, a psychic
ROXANNE POTTS	Fifties and looking
ELIZABETH POTTS	Her sister
MR. JEETERS	Forties, though he seems older
GUNTHER TUBBS	Twenties, a special effects master
PATIENCE	Twenties, his girl

PROPS

FOR JIM

2 large suitcases
Laptop
Legal pad
Books
Cell phone
Flashlight

FOR MADISON

Paper with list on it
Cell phone

FOR HANNAH

Old piece of paper
Diaphanous fabric
Hatchet

FOR CHARLOTTE

2 Towels
Teapot
Compress (Cloth)

FOR JEETERS

Small suitcase
Hatchet
Blanket
Checkbook
Cash (Bills)

FOR HALEY

Mechanical walking dog
Cell phone

FOR KAYLA

Large sheet of gauze
Flashlight

FOR HESTER

Money
Thermometer
Electrical device that flashes a red light

FOR ROXANNE

Cream and sugar
Book

FOR ELIZABETH

Tea cups and saucers (on tray, if desired)
Book
Legal paper (from desk drawer)

FOR PATIENCE

Cell phone
Toy chain saw

FOR ALL THE GIRLS

Duffel bags or backpacks
Pillows and blankets

FROM OFFSTAGE

Red rubber ball

COSTUME NOTES

This show can be a lot of fun to costume. The basics are very simple—everyday clothes for all the characters. The six teenage girls can wear contemporary clothing. Just remember that the play takes place during November, so the girls should wear clothes to reflect this (though they don't need coats or jackets). Charlotte, Elizabeth, and Roxanne all dress in either pant suits or dresses reflecting their older ages. Hester ought to wear something a bit more flowing and mysterious in dark colors or perhaps a pattern of sun, moon, and stars. She might wear quite a bit of jewelry. Gunther and Patience, when we first meet them, are dressed in biker clothes—as much leather or leather-looking clothing as possible. A bandana for both would look good along with boots and dark glasses.

The fun is in the extras the characters need.

PATIENCE—Easter bunny suit. Any basic animal suit will do—with perhaps some padding in the middle. Attach a big white pom-pom for a tail. The costume should include a hood that has the distinctive ears attached. If the basic costume doesn't have bunny ears, they can be made by cutting ears out of poster board, painting or covering them with brown and pink. Attach these to a hair band and you've got bunny ears. Patience's rabbit face should be created with makeup. Give her a very dark nose, whiskers, and evil eyes. Don't forget big red cheeks.

Later, when Patience enters as Elvinia Wendover, she should wear a long dress. On her head—because she's still wearing rabbit makeup—she wears a hat with a black veil. Want to get really spooky? Attach large eyes and a mouth to the veil. She can remove the hat and veil at the end so she'll have her rabbit face and the old dress combined to look very funny.

KAYLA—When she appears as Elvinia, she should be draped in a large sheet of gauze or net fabric that distorts proportion and covers her nicely. If desired, she can wear a mask with no face, and be sure to experiment with the flashlight and other stage lights to produce a spooky effect. A fan placed near her but out of sight from the audience can give the effect of a breeze, causing her hair and the fabric to move about mysteriously.

JEETERS—When he enters at the end of Act I holding the hatchet, it will be funny if he wears an old-fashioned nightshirt and a funny night cap. Later he can wear a bathrobe, if desired.

CHARLOTTE—She wears a bathrobe and, if desired, big fuzzy slippers, perhaps bunny slippers for fun.

HANNAH and MADISON—When they enter as Elvinia in the last scene, they can wear a more elaborate costume than Haley. Wear a long tattered dress, covered in diaphanous fabric, looking like they were just dug up from a grave. Wear wigs and perhaps the same masks that Haley wore if she wore one. That will help disguise their features more. The flashlight can be used again or some other spooky lighting such as battery powered Christmas wreath lights around the girls' heads. There's no end to what the imagination can come up with!

SETTING

The lobby of Sunnyside Inn, an old mansion at the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean. Wing entrances down right and left. French windows stand up center leading out to a small balcony, the rail of which can be seen when the French windows are open. Fireplace stands at right, with a chair beside it. A sofa or chair grouping sits left center. Several rather dark and gloomy paintings decorate the walls, and any objects d'art should reflect a pervasive gloom. A small desk up right is used as a reception area. Overall, the lobby of Sunnyside Inn is anything but sunny—it is more like the set of an old horror movie than a quaint Victorian bed and breakfast.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene One.....The lobby of Sunnyside Inn, a Friday afternoon.

Scene Two.....Later, after dinner.

Scene Three,.....Later that night.

ACT II

Scene One.....A short time later.

Scene Two.....A few minutes later.

Scene Three.....A half hour later.

SOUND EFFECTS (as directed in script)

Thunder
Thump offstage
Scream offstage
Cell phone ring

SOUND NOTE

Prerecord Jim's speeches at the beginning of each scene. This will enable the actor to concentrate on the scene ahead and will keep the production moving. If desired, music can be added as a background to Jim's speeches.

SYNOPSIS

Hannah and Madison Smith have a serious problem. Their father's a world-famous author of horror novels who shuns publicity to the point where "Draco Dane" has never even been seen. And now Jim Smith, really a mild-mannered homebody, has decided to give up writing horror and turn his talents to more academic subjects, such as the history of fire engines in America.

Sensing a mid-life crisis in full bloom, Hannah insists her dad take her, Madison, and four of their friends to Sunnyside Inn for her sixteenth birthday. Being the doting father, Jim agrees but doesn't understand why his daughter wants to spend two nights at a gloomy old house perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking the crashing waves of the Atlantic. He walks into the girls' trap thinking he'll have time to work on his new history book while the kids have their own fun.

And what a trap the girls have set up! They plan to haunt the Inn and terrorize Jim in order to inspire him to write a new horror novel. What the girls don't know is that a psychic has also checked in for the weekend, and she immediately senses active—and angry—spirits. The owner of the Inn, who's been trying to sell the place for a year, says there's never been a ghost at Sunnyside and there'd better not be now, for this same weekend Mr. Jeeters, who has purchased the Inn for a half million dollars, is showing up to check the place over. This is good news for Roxanne and Elizabeth Potts, two sisters who are fed up with being single and have their sights set on a rich man—for one of them at least.

Into the mix come Gunther, a special effects maestro and his dim-bulb girlfriend Patience. The psychic has hired them to ensure startling proof that Sunnyside is crawling with spirits. Unfortunately for Patience, Gunther gets a job in Hollywood and exits before he unloads his van. But not to worry. He leaves Patience and a single costume to finish the job.

Once the first scream is heard, the "ghosts" are off and running. First comes Dorian, a little boy who disappeared at the house. Then comes Elvinia Wendover, a woman whose thwarted romance led her to pick up a hatchet. And finally, most terrifying, is the Easter Bunny. With so many crossed wires, it almost takes a genius to untangle the resulting confusion—a job best left to Draco Dane.

SCARED STIFF

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ACT I

SCENE ONE

The lobby of Sunnyside Inn, Friday afternoon.

Sunnyside Inn is an old mansion at the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean. Wing entrances down right and left. French windows stand up center leading out to a small balcony, the rail of which can be seen when the windows are open. Fireplace stands at right, with a chair beside it. A sofa or chair grouping sits left center. Several rather dark and gloomy paintings decorate the walls, and any objects d’art should reflect a pervasive gloom. A small desk up right is used as a reception area. Overall, the lobby of Sunnyside Inn is anything but sunny—it is more like the set of an old horror movie than a quaint Victorian bed and breakfast.

AT RISE, the stage is in darkness. As JIM speaks, the lights gradually come up on the lobby, dimly lit in a gathering storm. The French windows are open, a dark sky visible beyond.

JIM'S VOICE: *(Over the P.A.)* My nightmare opened in the lobby of Sunnyside Inn, a bed and breakfast, on a gloomy Friday afternoon. I thought it a very odd place for my oldest daughter, Hannah, to want to spend her sixteenth birthday with her sister Madison and four friends. But what do I know? I'm just Dad. Actually, Claire, my better half and the mother of my two daughters set all this up, but then bowed out. Her mother decided to move this weekend from a brownstone on Twenty-Eighth Street to a brownstone on Twenty-Ninth Street and desperately needed help keeping the movers in line. So I had to interrupt work on my new masterpiece to spend the weekend with six teenage girls.

(The lights are up fully now, and we hear loud giggling off right.)

Did I mention that they giggle a lot?

(HANNAH and MADISON enter, each carrying a duffel bag or backpack.)

HANNAH: I couldn't believe he walked in dressed like a chicken! *(Sobering up)*
Hello? Anybody here?

MADISON: We've got a reservation!

(KAYLA, TAYLOR, EMMA, and HALEY enter right each carrying a duffel bag or backpack.)

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KAYLA: Gosh! This place is creepy!

TAYLOR: I think they made a movie here once.

EMMA: From one of your dad's books, Hannah.

HALEY: Gosh, if my mother knew I was in a place like this, she'd make me come right home.

HANNAH: Why, Haley?

HALEY: She won't even let me *read* your father's books.

MADISON: How come?

HALEY: They give her nightmares!

(JIM enters carrying two large suitcases.)

JIM: What do you guys have in these suitcases?

HANNAH: Our Xbox set up, Guitar Hero, three board games, and Dance Machine.

JIM: No wonder!

KAYLA: Don't you love this place, Mr. Dane?

JIM: Hey, you girls know the score. This weekend I'm just plain old Jim Smith. I don't want anybody, ever to know ... well, you know.

TAYLOR: Sure, to us, you're Mr. Smith. But to the world you're Draco Dane.

EMMA: The greatest horror novelist of all time!

HALEY: You've sold more books than ... than ... Betty Crocker.

KAYLA: Who will ever forget the terror of "The Shunning?"

TAYLOR: Or the gothic gore of "Nightmare on Elm Avenue?"

EMMA: And what about the unbearable suspense of—

JIM: Girls! I'll get you a job writing blurbs on the back of cheesy paperbacks.

But you all know that Draco Dane is bowing out of the horror business.

HALEY: But you can't! You've got to keep writing 'til I'm eighteen when can read what I want!

JIM: I'll still be writing. I'll always be writing.

HANNAH: But not what you're good at!

JIM: Gee, thanks.

MADISON: Hannah didn't mean it that way. It's just that you're like King Midas.

Every story you touch turns into a bloody, suspenseful page-turner.

HANNAH: The world can't get enough.

JIM: But I've had enough, girls. We've talked about this. It's getting harder and harder for somebody like me to lead a normal life. Reporters and paparazzi are always nosing around. Besides, I just found my old yearbook, and that made me think a bit.

MADISON: *(Tiredly)* Yeah, yeah, yeah, we know all about your old yearbook.

KAYLA: What about the old yearbook?

HANNAH: You're just reading too much into it, Dad.

TAYLOR: Into what?

JIM: *(To HANNAH)* It's not important now because my decision's final. Okay?

Now we're here because you wanted your birthday here, Hannah, although I honestly can't think of one good reason why.

HANNAH: If you can quit your job, I can celebrate here if I want to.

JIM: I'm not quitting my job. I'm just changing directions.

MADISON: Yeah ... you used to climb mountains. Now you're going downhill.

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JIM: Writing about the history of the fire engine is not going downhill. It's fascinating. Did you know it wasn't until 1852 that three Ohio residents began to build the world's first practical steam-powered fire engine?

HANNAH: (*Sighing*) Hello? Anybody here?

JIM: It could begin pumping from a water source in ten minutes.

KAYLA: Maybe there are only ghosts hanging around and they only come out at night.

JIM: Cincinnati created the first professional fire department.

TAYLOR: Or vampires!

MADISON: Yeah, Dad! You haven't written a good potboiler about vampires yet.

JIM: I'm writing about fire engines!

EMMA: Well, maybe a few of the firemen can be vampires!

HALEY: Yeah! Dracula, Fire Chief!

(*CHARLOTTE enters left, followed by HESTER.*)

CHARLOTTE: Now I thought I heard voices! Welcome to Sunnyside!

HESTER: But beware!

CHARLOTTE: Please, Miss Sparrow, these are new guests and they don't want to be bothered with all your nonsense.

HANNAH: Gosh, what kind of nonsense do you do?

HESTER: I am a psychic!

CHARLOTTE: Who is going to let me check in my guests.

HESTER: I wouldn't have it any other way. The more the merrier. At least that's what the spirits say.

KAYLA: Are you really a psychic?

HESTER: (*Stage whisper*) More like a ghost whisperer.

TAYLOR: Gosh! Is this place haunted?

CHARLOTTE: Absolutely not! I wouldn't let a ghost rent a room here no matter how much money he has.

HESTER: Oh, Charlotte Chumley, can anyone be more naïve than you?

EMMA: Actually Haley is pretty dumb, too.

HALEY: Hey! I resent that!

JIM: May I ask why a psychic is at Sunnyside?

HESTER: A voice came to me at midnight! It whispered in my ear ... Sunnyside! Sunnyside!

TAYLOR: Maybe it was somebody asking you how you wanted your eggs cooked.

KAYLA: Sunnyside up!

HESTER: Ah! A comedian! But be careful what you laugh at, my child! Be very careful!

JIM: Well, now that we're all here--

CHARLOTTE: Yes, along with the man I'm selling Sunnyside to. Poor Mr. Jeeters is a bundle of frazzled nerves and he's due any minute.

HANNAH: You're selling this place?

CHARLOTTE: Trying! I've had it on the market for over a year and finally—finally!--Mr. Jeeters made an offer.

HESTER: The fool!

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CHARLOTTE: You stay away from him, Miss Sparrow, or I'll punch a hole in your crystal ball.

HESTER: (*Haughtily*) I always carry a spare! (*exits right*)

MADISON: Gosh! This is even better than we thought!

(*HANNAH hits MADISON.*)

Well, it is!

CHARLOTTE: I'm certainly glad you made it, Mr. Smith. They say a big storm is rolling in.

KAYLA: What wonderful atmosphere!

EMMA: Positively inspiring!

JIM: Unless the roof leaks. So, Mrs. Chumley, you've got four rooms for us?

CHARLOTTE: My last four, all ready and waiting. Would you like to come this way?

JIM: Might I ask why you're selling Sunnyside, Mrs. Chumley?

CHARLOTTE: (*As SHE closes French window*) Oh, Mr. Smith, running an inn is for younger folks. My late husband Charlie and I bought this place when we were in our twenties. It's been a lovely home and a fine business, but my sister has a condo in West Palm Beach and she's been after me for years to join her. And you know? I think I've fallen into a rut and this is my way of digging myself out of it.

JIM: We all fall into ruts once in a while, Mrs. Chumley. You're definitely not alone!

CHARLOTTE: (*Exiting left*) Now, our dining room is right in here ...

(*JIM follows her off left carrying the suitcases.*)

HANNAH: (*Checking right and left*) Okay. Does everybody have everything we need?

MADISON: (*Pulling out a list*) Sheets?

KAYLA: Check.

MADISON: Chains?

EMMA: Check.

MADISON: Flashlights?

(*HALEY is texting on her phone.*)

Haley!

HALEY: Oh, sorry, I was just texting Mom to let her know we got here.

MADISON: Did you bring the flashlights?

HALEY: Check.

MADISON: Batteries?

HALEY: Uh oh!

HANNAH: You didn't really forget batteries, did you?

HALEY: Just fooling! I got plenty!

MADISON: Voice altering mike?

KAYLA: And an amplifier.

TAYLOR: How about the you-know-whats to make it all look real?

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HANNAH: We've got 'em.

HALEY: But, Hannah ... what about that psychic lady?

HANNAH: What about her?

HALEY: Well, Mrs. Chumley's trying to sell the place. What if ... well ... we wouldn't want to scare Mr. Jeeters off.

EMMA: Gosh, I never thought of that! We could wreck the sale.

MADISON: Hey, my father's career is on the line here.

KAYLA: Well, maybe it's okay if your dad changes subjects.

HANNAH: Who's going to buy a book about fire engines?

TAYLOR: My brother will. He wants to be a fireman!

MADISON: He's three years old!

HANNAH: I just don't think Dad realizes what an icon he really is. There'll be a huge hole in the literary world if Draco Dane departs the scene.

HALEY: Gosh, Hannah! That's downright poetic.

(ROXANNE and ELIZABETH enter left.)

ROXANNE: Did I hear somebody mention Draco Dane?

KAYLA: *(Nervously)* You don't know him, do you?

ELIZABETH: Oh, no. But my sister here and I have read every one of his books.

EMMA: Don't they scare you?

ROXANNE: Right out of our bloomers!

ELIZABETH: I once got so scared I dropped my teeth right down the drain!

HALEY: Gosh, I hope you got them back.

ELIZABETH: Oh, yes, but not until I'd finished the book.

ROXANNE: Are you girls staying here at Sunnyside?

HANNAH: For the weekend. It's my sixteenth birthday.

ELIZABETH: I think I would have gone clubbing.

HANNAH: Oh, we do so much of that that we all just wanted to take a weekend off! You know ... rest up for the next round of clubs. C'mon, guys. Let's go see our rooms.

ROXANNE: Right that way!

(ROXANNE points left. HANNAH, MADISON, KAYLA, TAYLOR, EMMA, and HALEY exit left.)

ELIZABETH: I'll never understand the younger generation.

ROXANNE: Imagine spending a birthday at a place like this.

ELIZABETH: They aren't even desperate like we are.

ROXANNE: We're not desperate, Elizabeth. Just motivated.

ELIZABETH: When it comes to finding a rich husband, Roxanne, I'm not motivated, I'm desperate.

ROXANNE: You're right. But it doesn't look like the prospects are too good here.

(MR. JEETERS enters right carrying a small suitcase.)

ELIZABETH: Well, now, maybe you're wrong, Roxanne.

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(ELIZABETH moves to JEETERS.)

Haven't I seen you somewhere before?

JEETERS: Yeah, that's why I don't go there anymore.

ROXANNE: What my sister means is, aren't you in the movies?

JEETERS: Yeah. I played Jaws, and those were my real teeth.

ELIZABETH: Well, pleased to meet you, Mr. Jaws. I'm Elizabeth Potts and this is my older sister Roxanne.

ROXANNE: Older by ten minutes. And surely you have a real name.

JEETERS: Jeeters.

ELIZABETH: Oh, so you're the gentleman who's buying Sunnyside.

ROXANNE: Such a sound investment.

JEETERS: Lady, you wouldn't know a sound investment if it bit your nose off!

(CHARLOTTE enters left.)

CHARLOTTE: Oh, Mr. Jeeters, welcome to Sunnyside!

JEETERS: Looks like more paint's chipped off the walls from the last time I was here.

CHARLOTTE: Absolutely not! The inn is in perfect condition.

(A loud thump is heard off left.)

JEETERS: What's that? The roof caving in?

CHARLOTTE: We've got several rooms full of teenagers upstairs. They probably dropped a curling iron or something.

JEETERS: It'll scratch the floor. If I'm paying half a million bucks for a place, I want it in perfect condition!

ELIZABETH: *(Interested)* Did you say half a million dollars?

JEETERS: Too much, if you ask me.

CHARLOTTE: Now, Mr. Jeeters, that's the price you offered. According to the contract—

JEETERS: I can break that contract if there's anything wrong with the place that wasn't wrong with the place when I said I do!

ROXANNE: My favorite two words.

CHARLOTTE: Mr. Jeeters, I can assure you, Sunnyside is in pristine condition. Just look around. I'm not hiding a thing!

(HESTER throws open the French window. We hear thunder.)

HESTER: Speak to me! Speak to me, oh, spirits!

JEETERS: Who's that? What's she talking about?

HESTER: Spirits, speak to me! Pull back the veil between life and death! Let your voices be heard!

JEETERS: You never said anything about talking ghosts, Mrs. Chumley!

CHARLOTTE: There are no ghosts at Sunnyside! There never have been! Why, Sunnyside has been the scene of nothing but happy times. Very happy times!

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(A scream off left.)

JEETERS: That somebody having a good time, hmmm?

HESTER: They're here!

CHARLOTTE: Oh, stop that!

(Another scream. HANNAH, MADISON, KAYLA, and TAYLOR run on left.)

HANNAH: Oh, gosh! I don't believe it!

MADISON: I saw her, too!

ELIZABETH: Who did you see?

HESTER: She has returned!

JEETERS: Who? What are you talking about?

HANNAH: A woman dressed in a flowing red robe!

CHARLOTTE: *(Covering)* That's just Nellie ... that's all. She's our cleaning lady.

She likes red.

MADISON: But you could see through her!

CHARLOTTE: She's a very transparent person. You know the type.

HANNAH: And in her hand she was holding ...

HESTER: A rope?

MADISON: No!

HESTER: A gun?

HANNAH: No!

HESTER: A knife?

MADISON: No!

JEETERS: What kind of psychic are you? *(To HANNAH)* What was she holding?

HANNAH and MADISON: A hatchet!

(Thunder as the curtain falls.)

SCENE TWO

Later that evening.

AT RISE, in darkness, we hear...

JIM: *(Over P.A.)* You don't know what scared is until you hear your own child scream in terror. And on a scale of one to ten, that scream of Hannah's registered about a six for terror. I mean, I've written so many screams into my book, I could tell all that had really happened was she'd seen a spider ... or scorpion ... or maybe a snake. Something long, green, and slimy. But the afternoon and dinner passed without any further incidents except that I'd made a bit of a boo boo with Hannah's birthday cake. Well, I never claimed to be perfect.

AT RISE, JIM sits in chair by fireplace working on his laptop. HE has a legal pad full of notes that HE keeps referring to. HANNAH, MADISON, TAYLOR, EMMA, KAYLA, and HALEY sit around the couch and floor playing Truth or Dare. The French window is closed, and we hear thunder far off.

HANNAH: Okay, okay ... it's my turn!

MADISON: Truth or dare?

KAYLA: Did you kiss Tommy Jerritt on your first date?

(JIM stops typing.)

TAYLOR: Or you can be a trained seal and bark out the first line of the “Star Spangled Banner.”

HANNAH: Gosh, give you a “yes” or “no” answer or make an idiot of myself! What a choice.

EMMA: I bet you kissed Tommy.

HALEY: Or maybe he kissed you.

HANNAH: Gee, Dad, you look lost in thought.

JIM: Did you know there are more fire engines in New York City than in the entire state of Idaho?

MADISON: Quit stalling, Hannah. Did he kiss you or are you going to bark like a seal?

HANNAH: Couldn't I just kiss a seal?

(ROXANNE and ELIZABETH enter right.)

ROXANNE: Oh, girls, that was a lovely birthday cake you had at dinner.

ELIZABETH: And that little yellow fellow on top was so cute.

JIM: I'm afraid that was my mistake, ladies. I picked up the wrong cake.

MADISON: *(Sarcastically)* Actually, Hannah's had a thing for SpongeBob SquarePants.

ELIZABETH: Well, he certainly is a cheerful little fellow.

ROXANNE: Oh, Mr. Smith, could we prevail upon you?

ELIZABETH: Our suitcase is too heavy to put up on the luggage rack.

JIM: I'll be glad to help, right after Hannah does her truth or dare.

(HANNAH barks like a seal.)

ROXANNE: Is she all right?

JIM: Now I know the answer to the truth! Lead on, dear ladies. My fire engines can wait!

(ROXANNE, ELIZABETH, and JIM exit right.)

HANNAH: For the record, I did not kiss Tommy Jerritt.

MADISON: That is such a lie! I saw you two when he dropped you off, and—

HANNAH: One more word and I'll scream!

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KAYLA: Speaking of which, you laid some pretty solid groundwork this afternoon, Hannah.

TAYLOR: That scream was a Meryl Streep (*or other famous actress*).

EMMA: I thought you'd really seen a ghost!

HALEY: I know ... it gives me the creeps.

HANNAH: Let's just hope it gives Dad the creeps.

(Cell phone rings.)

It's yours, Madison.

MADISON: That's your ring!

HANNAH: We swapped, remember?

(MADISON pulls out her cell phone and answers.)

MADISON: Hello? Mom? How's the move going? Grandma's vase got broken? The one that Napoleon gave Josephine on their first wedding anniversary? I hope it was insured. Oh. Really? Well, you live and learn. Oh, we're all fine. Things are going exactly according to plan. I wouldn't worry about having to look for a job just yet. Yeah, he's still talking fire engines ... but I have a feeling for not much longer. Mom? Mom, we're breaking up ... Mom? Bye!

HALEY: Who was that?

TAYLOR: Haley, you need a crash course in eavesdropping!

HANNAH: Grandma's beautiful vase got broken?

EMMA: Did Napoleon really give it to Josephine?

MADISON: Grandma fessed up. It was Napoleon Barone, a guy who owned a drug store on the block where Grandma grew up ... and he gave it to his wife Josephine. Barone.

HANNAH: And all this time she had us believing it was worth millions! Look, guys, this afternoon Maddy and I explored this old place and I found a few very good hiding places.

MADISON: Want to see?

TAYLOR: You bet!

HALEY: Hold it! I've got to show you my contribution.

HANNAH: You've got it down here?

HALEY: Right here!

(HALEY moves behind the couch and from a backpack SHE pulls a mechanical walking dog (or other animal) covered with cheesecloth.)

MADISON: What is that?

HALEY: Ghost dog!

(HALEY places dog on floor and turns it on. It walks and barks with the cheesecloth atop it.)

TAYLOR: Haley, we're supposed to scare Mr. Smith, not tickle his funny bone!

EMMA: Actually, it is kind of creepy.

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HANNAH: That's our last resort! So, is it time to introduce Elvinia Wendover?

HALEY: Just let me get Rover here ...

(HALEY picks up the dog and is returning it to her backpack when HESTER enters left.)

HESTER: Did I hear a dog? Oh, spirits! Do you have a dog with you on the other side?

HALEY: *(To HANNAH)* See?

HESTER: Sometimes a dog actually serves as a better medium than the ghost of a person.

HANNAH: You learn something every day!

MADISON: C'mon, Hannah. You were going to show us your new nail polish.

HALEY: I thought you were going to—

(EMMA kicks HALEY.)

Ouch!

HANNAH: Gosh, be careful! I stepped on that tack, too.

(HANNAH leads MADISON, TAYLOR, KAYLA, EMMA, and HALEY off left.)

HESTER: *(Looking on the floor)* I don't see any tacks!

(GUNTHER and PATIENCE enter. THEY are dressed like proverbial bikers.)

GUNTHER: Why don't you say abracadabra, doll face? It'll show up.

PATIENCE: What are you lookin' for? A fiver?

HESTER: A tack. And for your information, Mr. Tubbs, I am a psychic, not a magician!

PATIENCE: That's psychic spelled with a "p".

GUNTHER: If you're so psychic, what do you need me for?

HESTER: Sometimes even the best psychics need a little help.

GUNTHER: I brought a lot of help.

HESTER: Oh, no! I wanted you to come alone! Even having her here is probably a mistake.

PATIENCE: Who are you callin' a mistake, lady?

HESTER: I mean the fewer people in on this, the better.

GUNTHER: Don't go gettin' your reels all mixed up, lady. I was talkin' about my equipment.

PATIENCE: Yeah!

HESTER: Oh, what kind of equipment?

GUNTHER: Look, lady, you want special effects or not?

HESTER: Shhhh! Don't talk so loud. Someone might hear!

GUNTHER: Who? Count Dracula?

HESTER: No. No, but there *is* something funny about this place. Psychically, I mean. There's already been a ... manifestation!

GUNTHER: Can't be a manifestation. I'm the only guy here!

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(PATIENCE laughs loudly and stupidly.)

HESTER: Can't you shut her up?

GUNTHER: *(Snaps his fingers and PATIENCE stops laughing)* That better?

HESTER: Infinitely! Now, apparently there's a spirit from a long time ago ... and she's been seen carrying an hatchet!

PATIENCE: I saw that movie! "Night of the Lady with an Ax."

GUNTHER: Patience, it was called "Night of the Lady with an Ice Pick."

PATIENCE: Are you sure?

GUNTHER: I oughta know. I did the special effects.

HESTER: Then use whatever you used in that movie, Mr. Tubbs. The more mist and chains clanking, the better.

GUNTHER: I got a Radiance Touring fog system, a tornado fan, enough rigging to make Peter Pan feel at home, and more pyrotechnics than they had at the burning of Rome.

HESTER: I'm not sure if we'll need all that.

GUNTHER: You just scream when you've had enough. So in this business, we settle up before the big show. *(Extends his open palm)*

HESTER: *(Reaching into her pocket)* Mastercard or Visa?

GUNTHER: I prefer the age old classic—

PATIENCE: Cash.

HESTER: All right ... here's half now. You'll get the other half when the job's done.

(SHE hands GUNTHER money.)

Now ... I don't want to see either of you again. The rooms are upstairs ... the dining room, kitchen, and library are in there. There are several nice alcoves upstairs ... a perfect spot for something to happen. But remember—nobody can see you.

GUNTHER: Hey ... indiscretion is our middle name.

HESTER: Oh, dear. *(Exits right)*

PATIENCE: Gosh, Gunth, this is a pretty easy gig.

GUNTHER: *(Holding up the cash)* Yeah ... this'll get me that new phone I want.

PATIENCE: What about me?

GUNTHER: You've been tellin' me that since I'm yours, you'll never need another thing.

(GUNTHER's phone rings.)

(Very formally) Good evening. You have reached Gunther Tubb Enterprises, specialists in cinematic effects. *(Relaxing)* Oh, hiya, Don. What? Say that again! A movie? A real movie? All right! When? Okay ... okay ...

PATIENCE: You got a movie, Gunther?

GUNTHER: Yeah ... I can do that. Right. Hey, thanks, man! *(Snaps his phone shut)*

PATIENCE: Wow! Hollywood, here we come!

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GUNTHER: They're doing a remake of "Scream a Little Louder" and they want me for sound effects!

PATIENCE: Hey, you know my scream is the best in the business, baby.

GUNTHER: But the thing is, Patience ... they need me day after tomorrow.

PATIENCE: Well, if we leave right now and drive straight through, we'll make it.

GUNTHER: But you got this gig here.

PATIENCE: I got this gig?

GUNTHER: Hey, I've taught you everything you know, baby!

PATIENCE: So that's why I'm so smart?

GUNTHER: C'mon ... I'll take a couple of things out of the van and you see what you can do with 'em. (*Backs right*)

PATIENCE: You can't just leave me here!

GUNTHER: You can take a bus to Hollywood tomorrow morning.

PATIENCE: Gunther! I don't know how to work all those contraptions!

GUNTHER: I'll leave you all the easy stuff! It'll be the easiest money I ever earned. (*Races off right*)

PATIENCE: (*Exiting right*) Gosh! I should have listened to your old girlfriend, Gunther!

(*ROXANNE and ELIZABETH haul JEETERS on left, one on each side of him.*)

ROXANNE: We'll have a spot of tea by the fireplace.

ELIZABETH: You'd like that, wouldn't you, Mr. Jeeters?

JEETERS: I hate tea!

ROXANNE: You can tell us all about yourself.

JEETERS: One thing I'll tell you—I hate fireplaces!

ELIZABETH: Well, then, let's sit on the couch.

JEETERS: And I'll tell you another thing—I hate sitting around chit-chatting!

ROXANNE: But you must have some fascinating stories to tell.

JEETERS: I got some fascinating money to count. And I want to count it alone!

ELIZABETH: Why, Mr. Jeeters, do you have a bit set aside for a rainy day?

JEETERS: I sure do!

(*Thunder roars.*)

ROXANNE: Well, it's raining!

ELIZABETH: And you'd love to share all your good fortune with a good woman, wouldn't you?

(*JEETERS, realizing THEY're hitting on him, yelps loudly and runs off right.*)

ROXANNE: Elizabeth, I'm afraid we're losing our touch.

ELIZABETH: (*Sadly*) Oh, I don't think we ever had a touch.

(*CHARLOTTE enters right followed by JIM.*)

CHARLOTTE: Oh, dear ... Mr. Jeeters didn't look pleased at all.

JIM: Maybe he's got indigestion.

ELIZABETH: I'm afraid it's all our fault.

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ROXANNE: We thought he'd like a bit of tea and sympathy.

JIM: I think he's more the Mylanta and Tums type.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, ladies, please, please don't upset that man. He's only spending the night and I want him to have a restful, peaceful night.

JIM: He hasn't had a night like that since he was a baby.

ELIZABETH: Oh, I'm sure he has a different side to him.

JIM: Yeah ... like Mr. Hyde.

CHARLOTTE: I don't care if he's Frankenstein's monster. I've had Sunnyside on the market for over a year and he's the only person who's made a decent offer.

JIM: Maybe you've been asking too much.

CHARLOTTE: My real estate agent said Sunnyside is worth five hundred thousand dollars if it's worth a penny.

JIM: Right around the same time pigs fly.

CHARLOTTE: Well!

JIM: Oh, I'm sorry, Mrs. Chumley, but in this market ...

ROXANNE: And with all those new luxury hotels and things up and down the coast.

ELIZABETH: This is like taking a real step back in time.

JIM: More like a leap.

CHARLOTTE: Well, it doesn't matter what you say, Mr. Jeeters signed a contract. The only way he can stop the sale is if he finds out I've been hiding something from him.

ELIZABETH: You haven't, have you?

CHARLOTTE: Of course not! I even told him about the little leak in the roof and have promised to have it fixed.

ROXANNE: Well, then, a deal's a deal!

CHARLOTTE: And I'll be on my way to West Palm Beach!

(A noise off center.)

ELIZABETH: Did you hear something?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, just a branch hitting the building right outside. I'll get the tree trimmed back! I promise!

(JEETERS enters right.)

JEETERS: Mrs. Chumley!

CHARLOTTE: Oh, yes, Mr. Jeeters?

JEETERS: I need two more towels!

CHARLOTTE: Of course! Right away. *(Exits left)*

ELIZABETH: We thought we scared you off, Mr. Jeeters.

JEETERS: You did! You two stay right where you are.

JIM: Your fan club, Mr. Jeeters?

JEETERS: Fan club my foot! They're a couple of spiders trying to get me in a web. But I'll have none of it. You hear? None of it!

(HESTER enters left with MADISON and EMMA.)

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HESTER: Footsteps? You heard them, too?

MADISON: In the room above us.

EMMA: But there's no room above us!

JEETERS: What's this about footsteps?

HESTER: Oh, the spirits are restless tonight. Restless!

MADISON: I'm getting kinda scared, Dad.

JIM: Don't worry! I'll clobber 'em over the head for you.

EMMA: You've got to take this seriously, Mr. Smith!

HESTER: It's deadly serious!

(CHARLOTTE enters left with two towels.)

CHARLOTTE: Here we are! Fresh and clean!

JEETERS: Sounds like you got trouble, Mrs. Chumley!

CHARLOTTE: Oh, it was no trouble at all!

JEETERS: I mean the ghosts!

CHARLOTTE: There are no ghosts at Sunnyside!

HESTER: Are you sure?

MADISON: We heard somebody!

EMMA: Or something!

JIM: Probably nothing but a cat chasing a mouse!

(The lights go out so the room is dimly lit.)

JEETERS: The mouse turned off the lights?

CHARLOTTE: Now, everyone, just stay where you are. I've got a candle right in the drawer here ...

(The French windows open. KAYLA, draped in gauze, is lighted by a flashlight held under her face. SHE speaks in a raspy, breathy voice.)

HANNAH'S VOICE: *(Over P.A.)* I am Elvinia Wendover. I always carry my hatchet!

(MADISON and EMMA scream and grab JIM. The French windows close.)

JEETERS: Oh, my! Oh, my! My heart! My heart!

(JEETERS collapses into a chair. We hear a scream off center.)

JIM: Girls! Let go of me! Sounds like somebody's in trouble!

(MADISON and EMMA release JIM, who moves to French windows.)

CHARLOTTE: Mr. Jeeters, I can assure you nothing like this has ever happened before.

HESTER: But it will happen again! And again! And again!

(JIM opens the French windows and steps out.)

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CHARLOTTE: Who's out there, Mr. Smith?

JIM: Nobody. Not a single soul!

JEETERS: That's it, Mrs. Chumley! I'm dropping my offer to four hundred thousand—take it or leave it!

(The curtain falls.)

SCENE 3

Later that night.

AT RISE, in darkness we hear...

JIM: *(Over the P.A.)* I've got to admit, the weekend was shaping up weirdly. I began thinking it was Halloween and I'd stumbled into a cheesy haunted house complete with screams, frightening visions, footsteps in empty rooms—the whole bit. But having written over thirty-five novels dripping with bloody suspense, I was a firm believer in the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. I couldn't help wondering, though, why anyone would want us to think a ghost was haunting Sunnyside.

(Lights come up on JIM, who sits on the couch with several books open. He's scribbling notes in a legal pad.)

JIM: The Christie Tractor ... built in 1897 ... champion water tower ... could fight fires ... tall buildings going up at the time.

(HANNAH, MADISON, TAYLOR, and EMMA enter left.)

HANNAH: Dad? Dad!

JIM: Still playing Truth or Dare?

MADISON: No!

JIM: I guess one of you didn't want to tell the truth very much.

HANNAH: What are you talking about?

JIM: A very dangerous dare.

(HALEY enters helping KAYLA who is limping.)

MADISON: We don't know what you're talking about.

JIM: You've just got to remember, there are a couple of people here who are up in years.

TAYLOR: Oh, you're not that old, Mr. Smith.

JIM: Gee, thanks. What I mean is their hearts probably can't take a whole lot of shocks. And what happened to you, Kayla?

KAYLA: *(Nervously)* I fell.

JIM: Where?

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HANNAH: (*Simultaneously with others*) The bathroom.

EMMA: (*Ibid*) The hall.

MADISON: (*Ibid*) The stairs.

TAYLOR: (*Ibid*) The closet.

JIM: (*Closing his books, standing*) A multiple choice disaster, ha?

KAYLA: Actually, I was reaching for something in the closet when I fell and rolled into the hall and down the stairs.

JIM: You'd better be careful.

HANNAH: Dad, can we talk to you?

JIM: That's what I'm here for.

HANNAH: We've heard things upstairs.

JIM: More footsteps?

MADISON: No, not this time.

JIM: Then what?

(*We hear loud whimpering.*)

TAYLOR: Crying! We heard crying!

(*More crying.*)

EMMA: Just like that!

KAYLA: Except ...

(*KAYLA counts the girls. THEY're all present.*)

HALEY: Gosh, you think it's really a ghost?

JIM: Well, if you're scared, maybe we ought to pack up and leave.

HANNAH: No!

MADISON: We love it here!

HANNAH: (*Unconvincing*) This is the best birthday ... ever.

TAYLOR: But hasn't the atmosphere gotten to you yet, Mr. Smith?

EMMA: Don't you think this would make a great place for something horrible to happen?

JIM: You mean like some hatchet wielding spinster?

HALEY: Thwarted in love, she becomes a murderess!

JIM: And then, horrified at what she's done, she throws herself off the balcony. It's positively dripping with romance.

KAYLA: Gosh, Hanna, I'd hate to be your mom on Valentine's Day.

HANNAH: You know, Dad, if I were a writer, I don't think I could concentrate on fire engines while I'm here.

JIM: I *am* having some trouble in that department. Maybe a cup of Joe will help me get back to the Christie Tractor. Anybody want anything from the kitchen?

HANNAH: How about a hideously disturbing plot?

JIM: I'll tell you what. If you think of one, I won't steal it. (*Exits left*)

MADISON: Gosh, he's a hard nut to crack!

TAYLOR: I don't know, Hannah ... I don't think this is going to work.

EMMA: We could hide all his books and stuff.

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HANNAH: He's like a bloodhound. He'd sniff 'em all out.

KAYLA: Yeah, they smell musty enough.

HALEY: Maybe you should go out on the balcony again, Kayla.

KAYLA: You can go this time, Haley. It's just a good thing there's a ledge right below or you'd be scraping me off the rocks.

(We hear crying.)

EMMA: Hey, Hannah, that's really good!

MADISON: How did you rig that up?

HANNAH: I didn't!

EMMA: *(Looking around)* Mrs. Chumley?

TAYLOR: Miss Potts?

KAYLA: It can't be Mr. Jeeters!

HANNAH: Let's split up and see if we can find who's crying.

MADISON: Emma, Taylor, and I will go this way. *(Points left)*

HANNAH: *(Moving right)* Okay ... we'll go this way. Kayla, you can sit here and keep your leg up.

KAYLA: *(Rising)* No way I'm staying here by myself!

MADISON: Meet back here in five minutes.

(The girls sneak off, MADISON, EMMA, and TAYLOR left; HANNAH, HALEY, KAYLA to the right. A moment later, the French windows open. PATIENCE enters crying while talking on her cell phone.)

PATIENCE: *(Through her tears)* I don't care, Gunther! It's not fair! I don't know what to do! And just where am I supposed to hide? And do you know what you left me for equipment? Gunther? Gunther? I'm losing you! I won't go outside ... it's raining and ... Gunther?

(Angrily SHE ends call. Hearing voices, SHE exits right. JIM enters left with ELIZABETH and ROXANNE.)

ELIZABETH: I'm sure I've never heard of an Elvinia Wendover.

JIM: If she went around whacking people with a hatchet, she'd have made the newspapers, wouldn't she?

ROXANNE: There was a woman in Grangeville who did some terrible things.

ELIZABETH: Are you thinking of Beula Bradford?

ROXANNE: No, she used poisons.

JIM: On who?

ROXANNE: Her husbands. All seven of them.

JIM: How'd they catch her?

ROXANNE: Number eight got suspicious when he found weed killer mixed in with his bran flakes.

ELIZABETH: Wasn't there a Sally Simpson?

ROXANNE: Oh, she just embezzled the company money.

ELIZABETH: And then there was Paula Peersall. She was a nasty one!

ROXANNE: Took her cousins out fishing and tossed them into the sea.

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ELIZABETH: She wanted the family fortune, you see. And with her three cousins out of the way she'd get it all.

JIM: How'd she do three cousins in?

ROXANNE: She laced the deviled eggs with sleeping powder.

ELIZABETH: When the three cousins dozed off, she pushed them overboard.

JIM: Wow! What was the family money in?

ROXANNE: They manufactured sleeping pills.

JIM: Convenient!

HANNAH'S VOICE: (*Raspy, disguised over P.A.*) I am Elvinia Wendover. I always carry my hatchet! (*SHE laughs wickedly.*)

ELIZABETH: Oh, dear!

ROXANNE: Where is that voice coming from?

(*HESTER and CHARLOTTE enter left. HESTER carries a thermometer and an electronic device that is beeping.*)

HESTER: The great beyond!

JIM: Sounds like a bad connection.

CHARLOTTE: Really, I don't know what's going on! None of this has ever happened before! And who left this window open?

(*CHARLOTTE closes the French window.*)

HESTER: Of course this has never happened before! *They've* caused it all!

CHARLOTTE: Who is *they*?

HESTER: Those girls!

JIM: You know, their Truth or Dare game might have gotten a little out of hand, but they aren't the type to ... well ...

(*HESTER is prowling around the room, reading her two tools which SHE thrusts frequently into the air.*)

HESTER: You don't understand! It's often in the house where a teenager lives that ghosts begin to manifest themselves!

JIM: Kind of like MTV.

HESTER: Don't make fun! The thermometer tells me that there is a cold spot here.

CHARLOTTE: There's always a bit of a draft from the front door right there.

HESTER: Nonsense! There is a spirit right here! A spirit!

ELIZABETH: What does it want?

HESTER: My Emotometer tells me the spirit is angry! Angry enough to—no, I won't say it!

ROXANNE: It's Paula Peersall still looking for the family treasure!

HANNAH'S VOICE: (*Raspy, over the P.A.*) I am Elvinia Wendover. I always carry a hatchet!

CHARLOTTE: Oh, I hope Mr. Jeeters is sound asleep.

JIM: Look, I'm sure this is just some kind of practical joke or something. Maybe we ought to go look for this Elvinia Whoever.

HESTER: You won't find her! She's in her grave!

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(JIM's phone rings. HE answers it.)

JIM: Jim Smith here. Oh, Max, it's kind of late, isn't it? I know you've been having trouble sleeping. No, I don't care to discuss it now. I'm enjoying myself a lot, and I don't ... Max? The reception here ... Max?

(JIM exits right, still talking. HESTER begins to moan and go into a trance.)

ELIZABETH: Miss Sparrow? Are you all right?

ROXANNE: I think she's in a trance.

HESTER: Come to me! Speak to me! What is it you want?

CHARLOTTE: Tea! She needs a good cup of tea! That'll stop all this nonsense!

(HESTER begins to move around the room, frightening the THREE WOMEN.)

ELIZABETH: Why don't you sit down, Miss Sparrow?

ROXANNE: Take a few deep breaths!

CHARLOTTE: Let's ... let's get some tea!

(CHARLOTTE, ROXANNE, and ELIZABETH race off left. HESTER relaxes.)

HESTER: Yeesh! *(SHE moves left)* Gunther? Gunther?

(PATIENCE enters right.)

Where's Gunther?

PATIENCE: *(Covering)* He's ... he's outside. Getting something.

HESTER: That man didn't see you, did he?

PATIENCE: What man?

HESTER: The goofy writer!

PATIENCE: No.

HESTER: That was too close for comfort. But tell Gunther that voice of Elvinia Whatever is terrific! He's got everybody scared! Now, we're going to need to ramp up the effects, if you know what I mean!

PATIENCE: Look, lady ... I don't ...

HESTER: You don't what? Want to have a little bit of fun? C'mon, Patience ... it's all a good time, just like those Candid Camera shows ... Punked ... Scare Tactics.

PATIENCE: I get the picture, but—

HESTER: You've got to have Gunther make you up into this Elvinia Wendover. I don't suppose he brought a hatchet, did you?

PATIENCE: I've only got one costume there.

HESTER: Make it work!

PATIENCE: How?

HESTER: Gunther's the expert! Ask him! Shhh! Somebody's coming! Hide!

PATIENCE: Where?

(HESTER opens the French windows.)

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Not out there! It's cold and—

(HESTER pushes PATIENCE out and closes the windows just as MADISON, EMMA, and TAYLOR enter right.)

HESTER: *(Going back into her trance)* Oh where are you spirit? Come to me so I can help you!

MADISON: Did you see somebody out there?

HESTER: What? Oh, oh, my, you've broken my trance.

EMMA: Sorry.

TAYLOR: Can you fix it?

HESTER: It will return, never fear. This house is so alive with spirit activity my goose bumps have goose bumps.

MADISON: You really can sense those things?

EMMA: *(Picking up thermometer)* What's this for? You got a fever?

HESTER: It measures the room's temperature. Wherever a spirit is standing the temperature drops.

TAYLOR: Lemme try it!

(TAYLOR grabs the thermometer and moves left.)

Oh, wow! There's a ghost right over here!

(HANNAH, HALEY, and KAYLA enter left. MADISON, EMMA, and TAYLOR scream.)

HANNAH: What's wrong with you?

TAYLOR: The thermometer said you were a ghost!

MADISON: And this thing is flashing like crazy!

HESTER: It means the spirits here are angry. Very angry!

KAYLA: Gee, Hannah, your dad's missing all the good stuff.

(JIM enters still on phone.)

JIM: I'm through with all that, Max. I don't care what kind of offer you give me.

I'm in such a rut I don't know if I can ever dig myself out. Look, put a couple of sleeping pills in your devil eggs and have a good night. Ciou. *(Ends call)*

MADISON: Dad! This place is really, really, really haunted!

EMMA: We've heard the ghosts.

TAYLOR: And they really cool the place down!

KAYLA: On top of that they're very, very angry!

JIM: How about we all just sit down and tell ghost stories!

HALEY: That's too scary!

HESTER: Shhhhh! The spirits are speaking! Speak to me!

JIM: I don't hear anything.

HESTER: Shhhhh!

HANNAH: What ... what are they saying?

HESTER: What is your name? Oh, spirit ... do you have a name? Yes? Yes!

No! No! Yes!

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EMMA: Gosh, is it yes or no?

HESTER: *(As if talking to a spirit in the air)* Your name is Dorian? You lived here at Sunnyside with your mommy and daddy, is that right? But what happened, Dorian? Oh? You were four? Only four? Oh, Dorian, my poor little friend!

(As HESTER begins her story, the others sit and can't disguise their involvement.)

TAYLOR: I used to babysit for a kid named Dorian, and he was really--

HESTER: Shhhhhhh!

(CHARLOTTE, ELIZABETH, and ROXANNE enter. CHARLOTTE holds a tea pot, ELIZABETH and ROXANNE sugar, cream, and tea cups.)

CHARLOTTE: What's going on now?

ALL: Shhhhhhh!

JIM: A ghost is telling us something.

HESTER: You liked nothing better than to go down by the water and toss your big red ball into the surf and watch the ball return on the gentle waves? Oh, that must have been fun, Dorian. I'm sure your mommy and daddy always went with you. You used to laugh and jump up and down? How much fun that must have been! But one day ... Oh, Dorian, don't cry ... I'll help you. Don't cry. What happened one day? Mommy fell down the stairs and hurt her ankle. Daddy helped her up to bed but they forgot about you. You were bouncing the red rubber ball and what happened? It bounced out the door and down to the beach? Oh, Dorian, you'd been told not to leave the house by yourself, hadn't you? I know ... I know ... you didn't want to lose it. You followed your ball and watched it land in the water. Oh, Dorian, you didn't! No, you shouldn't have done that.

KAYLA: What'd he do?

HESTER: He ran after the ball. Then what happened, Dorian? Oh, my poor little friend.

EMMA: What happened?

HESTER: You waded into the water which got deeper and deeper and...

TAYLOR: Gosh, I could cry!

(A scream is heard off left. ALL are terrified.)

CHARLOTTE: Who was that?

JIM: Stay here! I'll go have a look—

(Another scream is followed by JEETERS running on left. HE carries something at his upstage side, but the audience can't see what it is.)

JEETERS: Mrs. Chumley! How dare you?

CHARLOTTE: How dare I what?

JEETERS: I ... I ... was trying to calm my nerves! I read a chapter of *Chicken Soup for Chickens* ... and was feeling a bit better. I decided to go to sleep.

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As I climbed into bed, I picked up my pillow to fluff it up ... and what do I find? This!

(JEETERS holds up a hatchet. Several screams and ad libs of horror.)

CHARLOTTE: *(Weakly)* Well you ... you ... might have to ... chop firewood at night.

HANNAH: It's him! Dorian!

HESTER: No! Not Dorian! Dorian was never, ever found. But his spirit lives on in this house ... a playful spirit. He's not an angry ghost. All he wants is his red rubber ball back from the sea.

JEETERS: Miss Chumley, I won't pay more than \$300,000 for this place, and that's that!

CHARLOTTE: Oh, dear! How can I convince you this is just all pure nonsense?

(A red rubber ball bounces in from the right. Again, screams and ad libs.

CHARLOTTE faints into JIM's arms. JEETERS jumps up on chair or sofa in terror.)

JEETERS: You can't!

(The curtain falls.)

Do Not Copy

ACT II

SCENE ONE

A short time later.

JIM: *(Over the P.A.)* After that red rubber ball bounced into our lives, nobody really wanted to say good night and curl up with a good book. The girls decided to huddle in one of their rooms, and I've got to admit, my mind was beginning to wonder how the dots were connected. Was little Dorian haunting the place? Or was it Elvinia Whoever? Or maybe it was both of them involved in a turf war. My mind began to race backwards to the inspiration for my first book, *Don't Look in the Closet!* I'd worked as a night auditor at an old hotel, a lot like this one, and one night ... no, wait a minute! I've got to stick to fire engines. Big red fire engines ... or is it red rubber balls?

(The lights come up revealing ELIZABETH and ROXANNE each holding a book.)

ELIZABETH: Did you find something you'd like to read?

ROXANNE: Just the thing to soothe frazzled nerves.

(HESTER enters left, and is surprised to see the SISTERS.)

HESTER: I thought everyone would be sound asleep by now!

ELIZABETH: We might if we knew where that red rubber ball came from.

ROXANNE: Everyone in the house was in the room at the time.

ELIZABETH: But *you* know, don't you!

HESTER: *(Dramatically)* It was Gideon!

ROXANNE: I thought his name was Dorian.

HESTER: Yes, what did I say?

ELIZABETH: Gideon.

HESTER: *(Covering)* Oh, why, Gideon haunted the last house I visited.

ROXANNE: Do you visit lots of haunted houses?

HESTER: Three, four a week.

ELIZABETH: There must be lots of ghosts running around.

HESTER: You'd be surprised! Very surprised!

ROXANNE: Well, we've had our fill for one night.

ELIZABETH: We're going to read.

HESTER: I hope you've got something to put your mind at rest.

ROXANNE: *Tales from the Darkest Night.*

ELIZABETH: *Alfred Hitchcock's Stories Not for the Faint of Heart.*

ROXANNE: Nighty-night!

(ROXANNE and ELIZABETH exit left.)

HESTER: Gunther? Gunther!

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(PATIENCE, in a bunny suit but a face made up to look menacing, enters right. HESTER is facing left, then moves up to the French window. She opens it with her back to the audience. PATIENCE approaches her from behind.)

Gunther, are you out here?

(PATIENCE taps HESTER on the shoulder. HESTER turns, sees PATIENCE, and screams. PATIENCE, in terror screams and runs off right. ELIZABETH and ROXANNE run on left, still holding their books. CHARLOTTE follows them on. SHE's in a bathrobe and slippers.)

ELIZABETH: Miss Sparrow! What happened?

ROXANNE: You're pale as a ghost!

HESTER: *(Pointing off right, unable to catch her breath)* There! There!

(CHARLOTTE moves right, checking.)

CHARLOTTE: There's nothing there!

HESTER: A rabbit! This tall!

ELIZABETH: Oh, dear.

ROXANNE: First that Edwina Wendover, then little Dorian, and now Peter Cottontail.

(JIM enters right.)

JIM: Did I hear a scream?

CHARLOTTE: It was just the Easter Bunny.

JIM: Was he here to hide some eggs?

HESTER: Laugh if you like ... but I saw ... I saw ...

ROXANNE: You come with us, honey.

ELIZABETH: We've got just the thing to calm you down.

ROXANNE: We always carry a bit of brandy, just for medicinal purposes, of course.

(ROXANNE helps HESTER off left, followed by ELIZABETH and ROXANNE. JIM sits and opens up his laptop. HE begins to work. JEETERS peeks on right.)

JEETERS: Psssst!

JIM: Mr. Jeeters?

JEETERS: Did I hear somebody scream?

JIM: That psychic was just seeing things.

JEETERS: *(Cautiously moving into the room)* What was it this time?

JIM: The Easter Bunny.

JEETERS: The woman's crazy! It's November.

JIM: Can I ask you something, Mr. Jeeters?

JEETERS: Can't promise I'll answer.

JIM: Fair enough. Why do you want to buy Sunnyside if you're so ... so ...

JEETERS: Go ahead, say it. Chicken.

JIM: It doesn't seem like a very good fit if you ask me.

Scared Stiff – Page 31

JEETERS: Well, nobody's asking you, but I'll tell you this, these old New England seaside mansions are a national treasure. I've made my money in hardware, Smith, selling hammers, nails, plaster, wiring, you name it. And I've made a fortune. But a long time ago I promised myself if I ever made it big, I'd do something good with my money. So I buy up old dumps like this, restore 'em to their original condition, then donate 'em to the state to run as museums.

JIM: Really! Now that's very admirable. One of my favorite spots to visit is Edgar Allan Poe's boyhood home in ... Massachusetts. Dunberry Hill, I think it's called. And I remember reading that an anonymous donor had the place restored. You wouldn't be ...

JEETERS: Shhhhh! If word got out I'd have broken my promise to myself. Why ... why, that was my first restoration. But that goes no further than this room. I'm not in this for fame or glory, Smith.

JIM: That's very commendable. But why are you so worried about ghosts?

JEETERS: You ever try to keep a construction crew workin' with ghosts making nails fly around and dropping hammers on toes and making the lights flicker all the time?

JIM: I guess that would put a damper on things.

JEETERS: If there's ghosts, I want to know and I deduct all that lost restoration time from the cost of the place.

JIM: You're quite a businessman.

JEETERS: I didn't get where I am today without a few smarts.

JIM: So it's not really that you're a ... chicken ... at all.

JEETERS: Me? A chicken? I just act like that to keep my opposition off guard!

(PATIENCE, in rabbit suit, enters right. JEETERS sees her, and is terrified.)

JIM: *(Working on his laptop, not looking up)* Yeah ... there's that old saying, "Never let 'em see you sweat." I thought it was all about deodorants, but I guess it's about you.

(JEETERS, unable to talk because of his fear, taps JIM on the shoulder.)

Gosh, you look like you've seen a ghost!

(JEETERS points right. PATIENCE moves up to center. JIM turns, and sees nothing right.)

Mr. Jeeters, it's okay. There's nothing there!

(JEETERS suddenly screams in horror and runs off left. PATIENCE quickly ducks behind the desk. JIM jumps up.)

Mr. Jeeters? Mr. Jeeters!

(JIM sits and opens his laptop again.)

That scream's enough to keep anybody off guard!

Scared Stiff – Page 32

(JIM begins to work. PATIENCE rises from behind the desk, but hears someone coming and ducks just as HANNAH, MADISON, TAYLOR, KAYLA, EMMA, and HALEY run on right. HANNAH holds an obviously aged piece of paper.)

MADISON: Dad! Dad!

HANNAH: Emma found something in her room.

EMMA: There was a little piece of the wallpaper peeling off and I noticed something hidden behind it!

TAYLOR: We took a tweezers and pulled this out!

(HANNAH flashes the paper in front of JIM, who reaches for it.)

HANNAH: *(Snatching the paper away)* No! It's too delicate for you to touch it.

JIM: I held you when you were a baby.

MADISON: Oh, this is more delicate than Hannah. Remember that time she fell down the stairs and just bounced?

JIM: Like a red rubber ... ball.

KAYLA: Oh, Mr. Smith, this is serious!

EMMA: It's a letter!

JIM: You know you're not supposed to read other people's mail.

HANNAH: But, Dad, it was written by some guy who knew Elvinia Wendover!

JIM: The one and only?

MADISON: Dad, it's real! You ought to hear what he says!

(JEETERS enters left with CHARLOTTE. ELIZABETH, ROXANNE, and HESTER follow them on left.)

JEETERS: It was right there!

CHARLOTTE: Mr. Jeeters, you are just over-tired.

JEETERS: I saw a giant rabbit standing right in that doorway!

HANNAH: A giant rabbit?

CHARLOTTE: You just ate too many carrots at dinner

ELIZABETH: Miss Sparrow said she saw Peter Cottontail, too!

HESTER: *(Pointing right)* There! There!

ROXANNE: Poor thing. I think she's scared out of her wits.

JIM: Then she'd better not listen to this letter.

CHARLOTTE: What letter?

EMMA: Well, it was ... behind the wallpaper.

TAYLOR: But we didn't do anything to the wallpaper, Miss Chumley! Honest!

HALEY: We just took a tweezers and slid it out. Very carefully!

HANNAH: It's about Elvinia Wendover.

(HESTER gasps.)

MADISON: What's wrong?

HESTER: *(Moving about, dramatically)* She ... She's here!

JIM: Maybe you'd better read the letter, Hannah.

HANNAH: No! I'm too scared.

MADISON: I'm not.

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(MADISON snatches the letter.)

JIM: Hey! That's a precious artifact! You're not supposed to touch it.

MADISON: Don't worry. I washed my hands.

ELIZABETH: Go on, my dear. What does it say?

MADISON: *(Reading)* To Whom So Ever May Find This Letter ... My name is Reverend Goodacre, the minister to the Wendover family who resided here at Sunnyside for many years. Elvinia Wendover was the only daughter of Simon Wendover, the owner of the Wendover Hatchet Company.

JEETERS: *(Terrified)* Hatchet? Did you say hatchet?

MADISON: Uh ha. Elvinia was a plain girl whose nose was always stuck in a book. I don't doubt her father was secretly disappointed in her. None of the young men who came calling interested Elvinia. Regardless, Mr. Wendover eventually decided that Elvinia was to marry Colonel Ethan Smythe. Sadly, Elvinia came to me and asked for help. She said that she was sure Colonel Smythe only wanted the money that would someday be hers. Another man, in fact, had taken her heart in secret.

EMMA: I saw this on a Lifetime movie once.

TAYLOR: Shhhh! Don't interrupt!

HALEY: Yeah! Who took her heart?

MADISON: *(Clears her throat menacingly, then reads)* She was in love with the gardener. When her father found out, he fired the gardener and the man was never seen again. Elvinia was heartbroken and hadn't the strength to stop her impending marriage to Colonel Smythe. A small wedding was planned for a night in November. It turned out to be a rainy, stormy night, not fit for man nor beast. However, I drove my buggy to Sunnyside to perform the ceremony. But when I arrived ...

HESTER: The house had been reduced to ashes!

HANNAH: No!

HESTER: He found the gardener and Elvinia had run off together!

EMMA: No!

HESTER: He found it had all been a dream!

HALEY: Gosh, you'd better use some Windex on your crystal ball.

MADISON: Now, where was I? *(Reading)* But when I arrived, I found the house completely abandoned. Mr. Wendover, the Colonel, Elvinia, and the guests had all vanished. There were no flowers, no wedding cake, nothing to signify a joyous ceremony was about to take place. The only thing I found out of the ordinary was a hatchet lying in the middle of the parlor, its blade stained with dried blood. No sign of any of the participants has ever been found.

ELIZABETH: Oh, dear.

ROXANNE: They all must be here.

HESTER: Yes! Yes! And they're angry!

JIM: I would be, too, if I didn't get any wedding cake.

CHARLOTTE: You don't really believe all this, do you?

HESTER: You must believe! You must!

MADISON: *(Reading)* I warn all who may wish to approach the steps of Sunnyside. Beware! You may be next!

JEETERS: Two hundred thousand, Mrs. Chumley! And that's final!

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CHARLOTTE: But this is nonsense, and I think we'd all benefit from a good night's sleep!

JEETERS: How can I sleep knowing there's a giant rabbit somewhere here! He might think I'm a carrot! (*Exits right*)

HANNAH: Yeah! Maybe we ought to have a camp out right here, girls.

MADISON: Sounds like a plan!

CHARLOTTE: Well, do as you like, but I'm pooped!

ELIZABETH: Do you think you can rest a bit, Miss Sparrow?

HESTER: They're all around us!

(*HESTER begins to hum "Here Comes the Bride" as ROXANNE leads her off right.*)

ROXANNE: Let's get you to bed!

CHARLOTTE: I can guarantee the salty sea air will give you a good night's sleep! Night all!

JIM: Good night, Miss Chumley.

(*CHARLOTTE, ROXANNE, HESTER, and ELIZABETH exit left.*)

A very interesting story, girls.

HANNAH: We ... we didn't make it up!

MADISON: But it would make a good book, wouldn't it?

TAYLOR: Poor Elvinia Wendover!

EMMA: Her passions tearing her asunder!

HALEY: Torn between her sense of duty and her true love.

KAYLA: Maybe ... maybe you can begin the story when the minister arrives for the wedding!

HANNAH: He slowly walks up the steps.

MADISON: He opens the door ...

EMMA: Oh, it's too scary to think about!

KAYLA: Whatdayasay, Mr. Smith?

JIM: Go get your blankets if you're sleeping down here tonight!

HANNAH: (*Disappointed*) C'mon, guys.

(*HANNAH exits left followed by TAYLOR, EMMA, KAYLA, and HALEY.*

MADISON moves left, but turns to JIM.)

MADISON: Dad, is it possible for an imagination to just dry up and completely disappear?

JIM: You mean like all the people at that wedding?

MADISON: Gosh, I can't imagine anything worse happening, can you, Dad?

JIM: I guess not!

(*MADISON exits left. JIM opens his laptop and begins to work again. HESTER enters, thinking no one's in the room. SHE's about to call out "Gunther" when she sees JIM.*)

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HESTER: Oh! Mr. Smith! How can you stay in this room ... the scene of so much ... death?

JIM: Oh, there'll be a bunch of live wires along in a minute. The girls are just getting their blankets.

HESTER: They mustn't stay here! You must go at once!

JIM: We paid for two nights.

HESTER: You don't understand!

JIM: Look, I've done a lot of work with the paranormal. I know my way around a haunted house.

HESTER: Oh, you talk brave, Mr. Smith! Like some kind of Draco Dane!

JIM: He writes pretty scary stuff.

HESTER: But I know the truth about Draco Dane!

JIM: Oh, yeah?

HESTER: No one ever sees him ... no one knows who he is ... and do you know why?

JIM: He probably likes his privacy?

HESTER: No! It is because he doesn't exist!

JIM: An invisible author?

HESTER: I have heard that his books appear on his publisher's desk and no one knows where they come from. And they are written in longhand ... in blood!

JIM: Well, you know what they say ... if you want to write, just open up a vein!

HESTER: Please, Mr. Smith! Take your girls and go! Go now before—

(JEETERS enters right carrying a blanket.)

JEETERS: I heard somebody crying upstairs! I'm sleeping down here!

JIM: The girls will like the company!

(JIM goes back to working on his laptop.)

JEETERS: Girls? All those teenagers are going to sleep down here?

HESTER: And this room is the center of spirit activity! It's alive with ghosts!

JEETERS: I thought my room was! They must be following me! *(Moves nervously around the room)*

HESTER: Perhaps it's you they're after, Mr. Jeeeeeeeeters!

JEETERS: What do they want me for? *(Calling out)* I'm not a carrot! You hear that? I hate vegetables!

(JEETERS is near the French windows. HESTER moves down right.)

HESTER: You have offended them! Their anger is palpable.

JEETERS: What are they mad at me for?

JIM: Maybe they like this place just the way it is!

(PATIENCE begins to rise from behind the desk.)

JEETERS: So why send a rabbit to do a ghost's job?

(JEETERS sees PATIENCE. HE screams, then opens the French doors. PATIENCE immediately ducks behind the desk. JEETERS exits through French windows, his screams dying away. HESTER rushes to French window and gets there before JIM, who's had to set his laptop down. HESTER blocks the windows with outstretched arms.)

HESTER: Mr. Jeeters! Mr. Jeeters!

(HESTER steps out on balcony, followed by JIM. PATIENCE exits right as the TWO look over the edge of the balcony.)

JIM: He okay?

HESTER: No, Mr. Smith. He's gone!

JIM: Gone? He must have fallen over the edge!

(JIM rushes off right as the curtain falls.)

SCENE TWO

A few minutes later.

JIM: *(Over the P.A.)* I couldn't remember exactly when I'd shed childhood fantasies, but I knew they'd been shed like my old football jersey I'd outgrown or my hockey skates that had become too tight. Yet I guess you never really outgrow some things. I couldn't help my imagination shifting into overdrive, especially after I'd grabbed a flashlight, looked everywhere outside, but didn't find any sign of Mr. Jeeters. Unless he'd turned into a bat and flew away, he had completely vanished.

(The lights come up as HANNAH, MADISON, TAYLOR, KAYLA, EMMA, and HALEY enter left carrying pillows and blankets.)

HANNAH: Dad? Are you here?

MADISON: He probably went to bed.

TAYLOR: I'll bet he's upstairs working on our story right now.

KAYLA: I don't think so. His laptop's still here.

EMMA: Hey, he must be thinking about taking you guys on a real cool vacation!

HANNAH: Why?

EMMA: He's on a Website for a fancy resort hotel in Acapulco.

HALEY: I wish I could go to Acapulco!

TAYLOR: Yeah! How come you didn't want your sixteenth birthday in Mexico?

HANNAH: Because there aren't any haunted Victorian Inns in Mexico.

KAYLA: But we'd have settled for a haunted Mexican Inn.

MADISON: For all the good it's done us.

EMMA: No, I could tell he was excited about the idea!

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HALEY: Yeah ... his eyes were red and glowy. I read that in a magazine. Every time Draco Dane gets an idea, his eyes seem to glow.

HANNAH: That's ridiculous! The only time Dad's eyes are red is when something gets under one of his contacts.

EMMA: Well, I don't think he can pass up Elvinia Wendover in favor of some old broken down fire engines.

(JIM enters right carrying a flashlight.)

HANNAH: Dad! Where were you?

(No response from JIM.)

MADISON: Dad? Were you outside? Dad!

JIM: Oh, hi, girls.

HANNAH: What are you doing?

JIM: Looking for someone.

TAYLOR: Who? Maybe we've seen him.

JIM: *(Picking up his laptop)* Mr. Jeeters. He seems to have vanished.

MADISON: He probably got so scared he left. Too much atmosphere!

HANNAH: Where are you going?

JIM: Library. I've got an idea ...

EMMA: Need any help?

KAYLA: Yeah, we're great at fleshing things out.

JIM: No, this one's got plenty of flesh.

(JIM exits left. HANNAH and MADISON shake hands.)

HANNAH: Congratulations, Sis!

MADISON: Draco Dane has returned.

TAYLOR: A genius is reborn.

KAYLA: I've never seen a genius at work.

EMMA: Do you think he'd mind if we watched?

HANNAH: He sits there and types on his laptop.

MADISON: It's not really very exciting.

HANNAH: But every once in a while he stops and stretches.

HALEY: Can't you see the wheels in his brain working?

HANNAH: He's got too much hair.

TAYLOR: Let's go take a look anyway.

KAYLA: And on the way let's stop in the kitchen.

EMMA: Miss Chumley said there were some cookies in case we got hungry.

(HANNAH, MADISON, TAYLOR, EMMA, and KAYLA move to left.)

HANNAH: Coming, Haley?

HALEY: In a second. I want to text my mom.

MADISON: Now?

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HALEY: On school mornings she gets up at five to make my breakfast and I want to remind her it's Saturday and I'm not home anyway, so she can go back to sleep.

(The GIRLS exit. HALEY texts on her phone. SHE hears someone coming and puts her phone down. SHE quickly hides under the blankets on the couch. HESTER and PATIENCE enter right.)

HESTER: That bum! That lousy bum!

PATIENCE: What are you complaining for? I gotta find my own way to Hollywood!

HESTER: I want to ramp up the action here and all I've got is the Easter Bunny!

PATIENCE: It's the only costume he left me!

HESTER: Well, go upstairs and snoop around in the attic! There have got to be some old clothes lying around. See if you can't turn Peter Cottontail into Elvinia Wendover.

PATIENCE: Who's she?

HESTER: She's one of our resident spirits according to the teeny-boppers. They're falling for my act the way I wish everybody would.

PATIENCE: Look, this place is really creepy. I don't know if I want to go up to an attic and snoop around.

HESTER: You don't believe all this ghost stuff, do you?

PATIENCE: You're the psychic!

HESTER: Look, kiddo, it's an easy way to make a buck. You know what P.T. Barnum said. There's a sucker born every minute!

PATIENCE: Just don't forget me when the suckers start paying up.

HESTER: Don't worry. We're partners now and you'll get what I promised Gunther.

PATIENCE: And what's that?

HESTER: The Easter Bunny likes carrots, doesn't he?

PATIENCE: *(Holding up her hand)* Yeah! A full carat ... right on this paw.

HESTER: Then just get the job done!

(PATIENCE salutes and opens French door.)

Where are you going?

PATIENCE: This thing weighs fifty pounds and it's hot as a barbecue grill!

(PATIENCE exits through French door. HESTER closes it and exits left. ROXANNE and ELIZABETH enter right.)

ROXANNE: You know, Elizabeth, she did have a thermometer and an emotometer.

ELIZABETH: Not very sophisticated, though.

ROXANNE: Well, I'm completely convinced.

ELIZABETH: But another manifestation would be just the thing.

ROXANNE: She claimed the action was centered in this room.

(ELIZABETH and ROXANNE look around the room carefully.)

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ELIZABETH: You know, I do feel something in here.

ROXANNE: It is a bit chilly right here.

ELIZABETH: And over here.

ROXANNE: That's where Miss Chumley said there was a draft.

ELIZABETH: Oh, that's right. But not over here.

ROXANNE: I'm afraid I don't sense any anger here.

ELIZABETH: I don't see why that little Dorian would be angry.

ROXANNE: He can't find his red rubber ball, remember?

ELIZABETH: Such a shame it's here on this earthly plane and he can't reach it.

ROXANNE: It's probably keeping him from moving on.

ELIZABETH: We must do a bit more research into him.

ROXANNE: And what about this Elvinia Wendover?

ELIZABETH: I don't know what to make of it, but I'm not sure that letter was real, Roxanne.

ROXANNE: Me neither. Why would a reverend stuff it behind wallpaper?

ELIZABETH: My thought exactly.

ROXANNE: I think those girls are just having a bit of fun.

ELIZABETH: Do you think they're trying to scare their father?

ROXANNE: Mr. Smith is about as meek and mild as they come.

ELIZABETH: And I'm afraid he doesn't have much imagination. I hope he doesn't intend to support his family writing about fire engines.

(ROXANNE and ELIZABETH are near the sofa.)

ROXANNE: Perhaps Sunnyside is just a bust, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: We had such high hopes.

ROXANNE: If only we'd get a true sign.

ELIZABETH: Something that would jump start our research!

(ROXANNE and ELIZABETH simultaneously go to sit on sofa, right atop HALEY, who screams. ROXANNE and ELIZABETH jump up, scream, and run off right. HALEY runs off left. A moment later, PATIENCE enters from French window. CHARLOTTE enters left, yawning.)

CHARLOTTE: Now what's happened?

(SHE notices PATIENCE and rubs her eyes.)

It's ... it's ...

PATIENCE: Ah ... what's up, doc?

(CHARLOTTE faints. PATIENCE exits right quickly. HANNAH, MADISON, TAYLOR, KAYLA, EMMA, JIM, and HALEY enter left.)

MADISON: We just wanted to watch you—

(THEY notice CHARLOTTE.)

HANNAH: Mrs. Chumley?

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JIM: Stand back. Let me help you to the sofa, Mrs. Chumley.

(JIM does so.)

MADISON: I wonder what happened.

TAYLOR: You just left this room, Haley.

HALEY: She wasn't here when I left.

JIM: Mrs. Chumley, are you all right?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, oh, my head.

KAYLA: What happened?

CHARLOTTE: I saw ... I saw ... There really *is* an Easter Bunny! He's this tall and has furry paws and doesn't look very friendly at all!

JIM: Emma, Taylor, will you help Mrs. Chumley to her room?

EMMA: Sure!

TAYLOR: But don't let anything exciting happen while we're gone.

EMMA: C'mon, Mrs. Chumley.

CHARLOTTE: And he didn't have any eggs with him.

TAYLOR: We'll stick by you until you get to your room.

(TAYLOR and EMMA help CHARLOTTE off left.)

CHARLOTTE: *(Exiting)* And do you know what he said to me? What's up, doc?

(JIM has moved to the French window and is following tracks across the floor.)

HANNAH: Gosh! What's going on here?

MADISON: I'll bet your fingers are getting tired writing about all this exciting stuff, right, Dad?

JIM: So, Haley, what is it you wanted to tell us?

(Just as HALEY opens her mouth to speak, HESTER enters right with ELIZABETH and ROXANNE.)

ELIZABETH: It was right on the couch!

ROXANNE: Nearly gave us a heart attack!

HESTER: There's nothing here but blankets.

KAYLA: That's mine.

ELIZABETH: It was a complete manifestation.

HESTER: I told you this place is rife with activity.

ROXANNE: We had our doubts, but there was a mobile ectoplasm under that blanket.

ELIZABETH: Who is it? Do you know?

HESTER: It's her!

HANNAH: Who?

HESTER: Elvinia Wendover!

MADISON: Look, there really isn't ...

JIM: *(Suspiciously)* What do you know about all this, Madison?

MADISON: Nothing. Nothing at all.

HESTER: But I know! I know all!

ELIZABETH: What do you know, Miss Sparrow?

HESTER: Elvinia Wendover has claimed her first victim!

ROXANNE: What? Who?

HESTER: Mr. Jeeters!

ELIZABETH: Then he's ... he's ...

HESTER: And she'll soon be here for another! Maybe you!

(HESTER points to HANNAH. Thunder and lightning as the curtain falls.)

SCENE THREE

A half an hour later.

JIM: *(Over the P.A.)* I'd never worked a detective into my novels for the simple reason when you're up against a bloodthirsty manifestation of evil incarnate, what good would a Sherlock Holmes do? But just by scratching the surface a bit with the help of a couple of trusty search engines, I dug up a few facts that explained a few more things. I just didn't know exactly how to untangle the mess without completely ruining Hannah's birthday.

(The lights come up to reveal CHARLOTTE lying on the couch. SHE holds a cold compress on her head. HESTER stands at center, in a trance. ROXANNE and ELIZABETH fuss about CHARLOTTE pouring tea, adjusting a blanket that covers her, and so on.)

ELIZABETH: Any luck, Miss Sparrow?

HESTER: Mr. Jeeters! Mr. Jeeters!

ROXANNE: You know? I think you're going about it all wrong.

HESTER: Wrong? I, who have twenty years of experience in dredging up the dead?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, dear! Mr. Jeeters isn't dead, is he?

ELIZABETH: Oh, now, Miss Chumley, take it easy. I'm sure we'll find him.

ROXANNE: The girls and their father are checking Sunnyside top to bottom.

ELIZABETH: And Miss Sparrow has turned up her antennae full force.

HESTER: Mr. Jeeeeeeeters! Mr. Jeeeeeeeters!

ROXANNE: You know? If you hold something of his, you'll get a better connection.

HESTER: But of course! Of course!

ELIZABETH: Miss Chumley, is there anything down here that belongs to Mr. Jeeters? Something that he perhaps touched?

CHARLOTTE: The ... the ... purchase agreement. It's in the desk.

ELIZABETH: *(Moving to the desk)* Top drawer?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

(ELIZABETH opens drawer and takes out paper.)

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ELIZABETH: Is this it?

HESTER: Let me have that!

(HESTER grabs the paper and plasters it to her forehead.)

Mr. Jeeeeeeeeters! Wait! I ... I'm beginning to see something.

ROXANNE: *(To CHARLOTTE, comfortingly)* You see? She sees something.

CHARLOTTE: Is that good?

ELIZABETH: It's better than nothing.

HESTER: I see ... an old baseball bat. A green tennis ball. A net of some kind.

A volleyball net.

ROXANNE: Mr. Jeeters is in a sports shop?

ELIZABETH: It sounds like it.

CHARLOTTE: No ... no ...

HESTER: I see stairs. Dark stairs. One broken step.

CHARLOTTE: My basement stairway has a broken step. And there are baseball bats and tennis things down there.

ROXANNE: Are you sure?

CHARLOTTE: We used to have a much younger crowd here. They liked sports and set up volleyball on the beach. Now all that's stored in a closet downstairs.

ELIZABETH: Why, Miss Sparrow, you never cease to amaze me!

ROXANNE: Let's go down and see if she's right.

HESTER: Of course I'm right! Go! Verify the truth of my vision!

ELIZABETH: Through the kitchen?

CHARLOTTE: Yes ... and there's a door right before you get to the back door. There's a small light. And be careful. The bottom stair's a killer.

(ELIZABETH and ROXANNE exit left just as JIM, HANNAH, KAYLA, and HALEY enter right.)

HANNAH: Gosh, we didn't see hide nor hair of Mr. Jeeters.

JIM: But he couldn't have just vanished.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, no! Miss Sparrow knows where he is.

KALYA: *(To HESTER)* Gosh, you're must really be good!

HESTER: Oh, my young friend, it merely takes an open mind and years and years of practice.

HANNAH: So where is he?

CHARLOTTE: Downstairs in the closet where I keep all the old equipment.

HALEY: That kind of sounds like Mr. Jeeters.

(MADISON, EMMA, and TAYLOR run on left.)

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