

THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

By Michael Druce

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THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

A One Act Comedy

By Michael Druce

SYNOPSIS: Ever wonder where Mary Shelley got the idea for *Frankenstein*? The Browning sisters are about to find out. Searching for peace and quiet in the English countryside, writers Charlotte and Emily Browning lease creepy Fielding Manor, a mysterious old house with a sketchy past. The experience is anything but peaceful or quiet. There are noises in the night, a snake in the maid's quarters, and a monstrous visitor. Someone or something wants the sisters out of the house. With the aid of the manor's wacky caretaker Mr. Willikers, Mrs. Haggis, an elderly neighbor, and Professor Fairing, the local historian, the sisters are determined to uncover the truth about Fielding Manor. In their search for answers, the Browning sisters discover a page from Mary Shelley's diary that reveals her novel *Frankenstein* may not have been a work of fiction after all; it may have been based on events that actually happened in the manor. *Things That Go Bump in the Night* offers up a delightful ensemble of charming characters in a simple to stage production that will appeal to both student and community groups.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 females, 2 males, 2 either)

ADELE (f) Cook. (45 lines)
MAGGIE (f)..... Housekeeper. (34 lines)
JEAN RANDALL (f)..... Real estate agent. (84 lines)
CHARLOTTE BROWNING (f)..... Writer. (211 lines)
EMILY BROWNING (f)..... Writer. (195 lines)
GRIFFIN WILLIKERS (m)..... Caretaker. (116 lines)
MRS. HAGGIS (f)..... Neighbor. (29 lines)
PROFESSOR FAIRING (e)..... Local historian. (42 lines)
EDWARD FRANK (m)..... Miss Randall's associate.
(18 lines)
CAROLINE TAYLOR (e)..... Charlotte's editor and publisher.
(17 lines)

The roles of the Professor and Caroline need not be gender specific. Appropriate changes may be made in order to accommodate casting requirements.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SET: A comfortable, but perhaps eccentrically furnished sitting room. Upstage are two doors set far enough apart to allow a table between. Both doors exit to the same hall. Off left are the kitchen and the upstairs rooms. Off right are the dining room, front entrance, and basement. The table between the two doors is covered with a tablecloth and a variety of decorative items. The table must be large enough for Mrs. Haggis to hide under. As for the rest of the room, there should be enough seating to accommodate at least eight individuals. Dust covers are draped over the furniture in the first scene.

PROPS

Sc. 1

- Dust covers are draped over the furniture.
- Bag of gingersnaps – Mrs. Haggis

Sc. 2

- Tray with dishes -Adele
- Rubber snake – Griffin
- Mop – Griffin

Sc. 3

- Tea cup, saucer, spoon – Griffin
- Diary page - Griffin

Sc. 4

- Diary page – Emily
- Overalls – Griffin

Sc. 5

- Diary page – Emily
- Flour – Mrs. Haggis

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COSTUMES: The action of the play occurs over a period of four weeks. Costume changes can take place between all scenes except 4 & 5, which occur a few hours apart. The exception is Edward, who should change from the monster outfit to street clothes.

Adele and Maggie can be dressed in housekeeper outfits for scene 2.

If desired, the sisters and dinner guests may be dressed formally for scene 4. Until scene 4, Griffin should be dressed in work clothes.

Note

*An earlier version of this play was published as *The LeBonte' Sisters*.*

SETTING

TIME: The present

LOCATION: The sitting room of Fielding Manor, the English countryside

DURATION: 60 minutes

SCENES

Scene 1 – Afternoon

Scene 2 – Evening, two weeks later

Scene 3 – Morning, one week later

Scene 4 – Evening, a few days later

Scene 5 – A few hours later

If an intermission is desired, it is best placed after scene three.

SCENE 1 - AFTERNOON

AT RISE: *In the dark before the lights fade up, we hear the faintest suggestion of clinking and scraping noises. Lights fade up to reveal a sitting room of eccentric charm. The furniture is draped with dust covers. As the noises fade, ADELE and MAGGIE enter. Although they are the cook and housekeeper, they are dressed for a day out.*

ADELE: Well, if you ask me—not that anyone is, mind you—I think I liked some of the other places better.

MAGGIE: You can say that again.

ADELE: Why? I just said it, didn't I? Repeating one's self is a waste of precious breath.

MAGGIE: Don't be silly, it's just an expression.

ADELE: I knew that.

MAGGIE: You were saying?

ADELE: Not that I liked any of them much, but this one's just a bit too eccentric for my liking. Just between you and me, I'm not that fond of the country, especially in the middle of nowhere. It makes me feel—adrift.

MAGGIE: Why couldn't Miss Charlotte finish her book in London? She could, couldn't she?

ADELE: Of course she could. They call it artistic temperament. Change of pace, new environment, fresh air, lots of that horrid New Age mood music, that sort of thing. We go through it whenever Miss Charlotte has a deadline to meet. Can't concentrate in the city; too many distractions. She becomes overwhelmed and blames it on writer's block. More like blockhead, if you ask me. I thank the good lord every day I wasn't burdened with talent and fame.

MAGGIE: This is my first time working for notables. Are they always, so-?

ADELE: Peculiar?

MAGGIE: I wouldn't put it that way.

ADELE: I would! Trust me! These two come by it honestly.

MAGGIE: Adele, you don't think Miss Emily and Miss Charlotte will take it, do you?

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ADELE: What, this place?

MAGGIE: I don't know. There's something about it that gives me the shivers.

ADELE: Don't you worry. I've worked for these two a long time, and I know a thing or two about their likes and dislikes. Miss Emily will hate it and Miss Charlotte will try to talk her into it. Miss Emily will pull a long face, and that'll be it. They'll pass on this one alright. I know them two like the back of my hand. *(Extends her hand to emphasize her point, only to realize her palm is facing up.)*

MAGGIE: Shall we look around some more?

ADELE: I've seen all I need to. I need to take a load off. My feet are killing me.

We HEAR those noises again. They are too subtle to identify.

MAGGIE: What's that?

ADELE: My feet—

MAGGIE: Shush! That! Do you hear that? That noise?

Whatever MAGGIE believes she hears has faded.

ADELE: All I hear is my tired old dogs groaning.

Offstage the sounds of walking are heard. JEAN RANDALL enters followed by EMILY and CHARLOTTE.

RANDALL: Here we are, back where we began. The grand tour. My, oh my, I'm practically winded.

CHARLOTTE: *(Not especially impressed.)* Now I know how Nick Carraway must have felt the first time he walked through Gatsby's place.

EMILY: *(Completely taken with the house.)* Isn't that true? A wonderful comparison. I can just imagine shirts streaming down everywhere.

ADELE: *(Aside to MAGGIE.)* I can imagine his poor old housekeeper having to pick up the mess he made.

CHARLOTTE: Let's not get carried away. I feel as if I've been gone a week.

EMILY: Speaking of not getting carried away, 'Oh queen of hyperbole.'

CHARLOTTE: You must admit this place is immense. (*To MISS RANDALL.*) Wouldn't you agree, Miss Randall?

RANDALL: I've had my workout for the day. Yes, much too large to be practical.

EMILY: It fairly--

RANDALL: Takes your breath away, doesn't it?

EMILY: Compared with the other places--

RANDALL: That's quite all right. No need to explain. That's why I hate to drive by this old place. Clients see the sign, want to stop, and then when we show it--well. Now you see why we don't advertise it. Anyway, it's due to be razed soon. As far as the county is concerned, it's become a liability. You see why it's so unsuitable.

EMILY: Not at all, it's perfectly—

RANDALL: Awful! I couldn't agree more.

EMILY: No, Miss Randall, it's enchanting!

RANDALL: Excuse me?

CHARLOTTE: Enchanting? (*To MISS RANDALL.*) Would you excuse us a moment?

RANDALL: Of course.

CHARLOTTE: (*Pulling EMILY away from MISS RANDALL.*) Emily, have you taken leave of your senses? You like this house?

EMILY: It's interesting, unique. It oozes—

CHARLOTTE: Something awful, like an old sore.

EMILY: Character, Charlotte, character. It oozes character.

CHARLOTTE: It's a dump. I shan't be able to work in a place like this.

EMILY: It has personality and possibility, only you refuse to see it. (*To MISS RANDALL.*) We'll take it.

RANDALL: (*Shocked.*) You will?

ADELE: (*To MAGGIE.*) They will?

CHARLOTTE: We won't!

MAGGIE: (*To ADELE.*) They won't.

RANDALL: You won't?

EMILY: We will.

CHARLOTTE: We will not.

MAGGIE: They will not.

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ADELE: (*Confused.*) They won't not?

EMILY & CHARLOTTE: (*To ADELE.*) What?

RANDALL: Will you, or won't you?

CHARLOTTE: Emily, it's dreadful.

EMILY: We've seen a dozen places, all of which look exactly alike.

There is nothing the least bit interesting about any of them. This place is different, intriguing. There's more here than meets the eye.

ADELE: That's what I'm afraid of.

MAGGIE: No telling what might crawl out of the walls.

EMILY: Charlotte, I have a feeling about this place. Let's just say it's-

CHARLOTTE: The romantic in you.

EMILY: There you have it. It's the perfect place for you to finish your novel. All sorts of rooms where you can hide in complete peace and quiet. *Who* said she was much too busy to make any decisions?

CHARLOTTE: I did say that, didn't I?

EMILY: You did, so *I* have decided.

CHARLOTTE: I am too tired to argue and I am tired of looking. (*To MISS RANDALL.*) I shall defer to the judgment of my sister.

RANDALL: But you haven't seen the others.

CHARLOTTE: There's more? In that case we've definitely seen all we need to. We'll take it.

RANDALL: But it's such a hodgepodge of styles.

EMILY: Eclectic!

RANDALL: It's unprotected from the elements.

EMILY: Dramatic!

RANDALL: Keep in mind it's twenty minutes to the village.

EMILY: Secluded!

RANDALL: You hardly have any neighbors.

EMILY: Private!

RANDALL: But there's so much more to tell you.

CHARLOTTE: Say no more, Miss Randall. I have a novel to finish and an outline to ready.

RANDALL: You do realize you'll have to be out in four weeks.

EMILY: Four?

RANDALL: Unless this property sells in the next few weeks, it's slated to be razed. At most I could only offer you a month's lease.

CHARLOTTE: Perfect. A month it is. I work better under pressure.

EMILY: We're agreed then.

RANDALL: (*Cagily.*) Then I suppose there's no point of going into the history.

EMILY: The history?

RANDALL: (*Eagerly.*) Well, if you insist. You should know this place was once an institution.

CHARLOTTE: An institution?

EMILY: Of course, an institution of higher learning. An academy.

CHARLOTTE: A university?

RANDALL: A home for the criminally insane. It housed the dregs of humanity. The worst of the worst. A real Charles Dickens sort of place.

EMILY: Oh, my.

RANDALL: Unspeakable things went on here.

ADELE: What kinds of unspeakable things?

CHARLOTTE gives her a sharp look.

If you don't mind my asking, Miss.

RANDALL: Things too horrible to tell. Eventually the house was closed. Since then it's been renovated and leased throughout the years, but no one ever stays long.

MAGGIE: Why not? (*To CHARLOTTE.*) Sorry, ma'am, but if I'm going to work here, I'd like to know.

RANDALL: Not that I believe it, mind you, but some say the house is inhabited.

ADELE: Inhabited?

RANDALL: Legend has it that the house is inhabited by restless spirits.

ADELE: Spirits?

MAGGIE: You mean ghosts?

RANDALL: No one knows exactly.

EMILY: Legends and spirits? My heart is pounding. I've come over all hot.

RANDALL: Understandably you wouldn't want to move in, so we'll just move along.

EMILY: All the more reason to take it.

ADELE: What?

RANDALL: But you said you were feeling flush.

EMILY: That's from the excitement of the possibilities. We're writers, Miss Randall. This place will be the perfect inspiration. It positively exudes atmosphere. I can feel my creative juices flowing already. I may start a novel myself. (*Launching into an imaginary first few lines.*) His cruel mouth devoured her fulsome lips. She heaved--

CHARLOTTE: She's not the only one about to heave.

EMILY: It's destiny, don't you think?

RANDALL: Apparently.

EMILY: You know what they say about destiny, Miss Randall.

RANDALL: Do tell.

EMILY: It's bound to happen.

RANDALL: (*Ominously.*) Yes, I suppose so. You're sure you won't reconsider?

EMILY: We're quite agreed.

CHARLOTTE: Still, I would like to hear more about this place.

ADELE: I've heard all I need to.

RANDALL: Professor Fairing, he's the local historian. I'm sure he can fill you in on what I've left out.

EMILY: He'll be one of our first dinner guests. If you don't mind, we'd like to take possession now.

RANDALL: Now? But--

EMILY: I know it seems hurried, but we need all the time we can manage. Shall I draft a check now for the deposit?

RANDALL: No hurry. Who knows, in a few days you might change your minds.

CHARLOTTE: We won't change our minds. I've too much work to do.

RANDALL: You can drop off the check on your first visit to the village. If there's nothing else, I'll be going.

CHARLOTTE: There is one thing. The door between the dining room and the parlor, where does it lead?

RANDALL: Nowhere.

CHARLOTTE: All doors lead somewhere. Have you a key?

RANDALL: Not necessary. Wherever it led, it's been walled in.

EMILY: A cellar, perhaps?

RANDALL: Possibly. If so, it was probably closed off during the days of the institution.

EMILY: Why?

CHARLOTTE: To keep the inmates from getting into the cellar?

ADELE: Or maybe to keep something from getting *out* of the cellar.

CHARLOTTE: Please, Adele. (*To MISS RANDALL.*) Thank you, Miss Randall, I'll see you out.

RANDALL: No bother, I know my way.

CHARLOTTE: Of course. See you soon.

RANDALL: (*Almost sinisterly.*) Very. (*Exits.*)

MAGGIE: Miss Emily, if you don't mind, I know you didn't ask my opinion, but I don't know if I can work in a place like this.

EMILY: Posh! It'll be fun, an adventure.

ADELE: I can't help but think Miss Randall really didn't want you to take it. All that business about the history, sounded like a warning to me.

CHARLOTTE: That was the icing on the cake. Exactly the sort of thing to pique one's interest. A nice bit of salesmanship that worked perfectly for my sister.

ADELE: If I see any spirits, you'll be looking for a new cook.

MAGGIE: And a housekeeper. I'm not sure I haven't already heard something.

CHARLOTTE: It's an old house. Old houses make noises.

EMILY: For now, you can take the car back to the inn, bring the luggage and stop off at the local grocery for a few essentials. Perhaps a drive will settle your nerves.

CHARLOTTE: Since there's no mobile phone service here, telephone Simpson from the inn so he can organize a van and give him directions from London. Tell him he'll be expected by week's end.

ADELE: Yes, ma'am.

ADELE and MAGGIE curtsey and exit.

EMILY: You don't think there's anything to all that, do you?

CHARLOTTE: Renter's remorse?

EMILY: Not at all! I'm just worried about Adele, that's all.

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CHARLOTTE: Adele hates leaving London, you know how she gets. Give her a day or two to adjust.

EMILY: Yes, I suppose you're right. Alright, work to be done. You start upstairs and I'll begin in the study. Last one finished is a rotten egg.

BOTH exit. For a moment the stage is empty. From offstage we HEAR a sudden gasp. EMILY walks back on wide-eyed. She has seen something. Putting her hand over her heart, she totters toward a sofa, sits, and faints dead away.

CHARLOTTE: *(Enters.)* There is one more thing before I forget. *(Sees EMILY lying on the sofa.)* What on earth? Gone a minute and already taking a nap. Emily! Em! Wake up!

EMILY: *(Snapping to.)* It's awful, Charlotte, simply awful.

CHARLOTTE: You were the one who wanted this place, we're not backing out now.

EMILY: That's not it. I uncovered a chair in the study and there was man there, sleeping.

CHARLOTTE: A man?

EMILY: A horrible looking man! Deranged! Wild eyed!

CHARLOTTE: You said he was sleeping. How could you see his eyes?

EMILY: I'm telling you there's a man in this house.

CHARLOTTE: Wishful thinking, Emily, wishful thinking.

EMILY: It is not my imagination. I know what I saw, Charlotte. Gee, willikers!

GRIFFIN: *(Enters.)* Yes?

Offstage or on, whenever WILLIKERS' name is spoken, he responds. He is always polite and good natured.

CHARLOTTE & EMILY: *(Both scream.)*

EMILY: It's him!

GRIFFIN looks to see if anyone is behind him.

CHARLOTTE: Step back, otherwise I'll let you have it with-- (*Pulling a sofa cushion from under the dust cover.*)—this—this cushion. It's very heavy.

EMILY: There's an iron in it.

CHARLOTTE: Don't think for one second I'm afraid to use it. My sister and I are trained in the martial arts.

GRIFFIN: Name one.

EMILY: (*Taking on a ridiculous martial arts stance.*) Chai tea!

GRIFFIN: That's one of those trendy drinks served in coffee shops.

EMILY: Steady Charlotte, he seems unbalanced. I'll telephone the police.

GRIFFIN: Not from out here you won't. You can put down the cushion, I won't do anything. The name's Willikers, Griffin Willikers, care taker, gardener, and handyman.

CHARLOTTE: (*Setting aside the cushion.*) You absolutely horrified us.

GRIFFIN: I apologize for that. I was just having a bit of a sit down. I didn't know anyone was here.

CHARLOTTE: We've just leased this place.

GRIFFIN: Nice to meet you. And who might you ladies be?

EMILY: We might be the Browning sisters, Charlotte and Emily.

GRIFFIN: You might be, or you are?

CHARLOTTE: We are!

GRIFFIN: (*Wiping his hands on his pants, he offers a hand to shake.*)

The pleasure is all mine. It'll be good to have someone in this old place again. That is before it goes the way we must all go eventually. This place is not long for this world.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, we know all about that. Where do you work, Mr. Willikers?

GRIFFIN: Yes?

CHARLOTTE: Where you do work?

GRIFFIN: Here, right here.

CHARLOTTE: Here? What do you mean, here?

GRIFFIN: Right here, in this house. I'm the caretaker of the manor.

CHARLOTTE: The manor has a caretaker?

GRIFFIN: It must have, because I'm me.

EMILY: Where do you live?

GRIFFIN: I've got a little cottage out back.

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EMILY: Who do you report to? Who pays you?

GRIFFIN: Well, I suppose I'll be reporting to you now that you're the new tenants. As for my pay, Miss Randall sends me a check every two weeks.

CHARLOTTE: Miss Randall didn't mention a caretaker.

GRIFFIN: I'll try not to take that personally.

EMILY: Do we need a caretaker?

GRIFFIN: Indeed you do, unless you do yard work, plumbing, and general maintenance.

EMILY: But we have a man named Simpson coming.

CHARLOTTE: If you don't mind my saying, Mr. Willikers--

GRIFFIN: Yes?

CHARLOTTE: This place is rather a mess. It doesn't look very well cared for and the garden is atrocious.

GRIFFIN: Frankly, not much is expected, since no one lives here.

EMILY: We live here now. If you plan to work for us, that will change.

CHARLOTTE: But we have Simpson

GRIFFIN: Right. Now what is it you ladies do?

EMILY: We're writers.

GRIFFIN: Writers, eh? I knew it. You ladies have culture written all over you. I like a bit of culture now and then. Not much though, if you get my meaning. We don't have an awful lot of culture round here. Makes you a bit funny in the head. I was saying to Mrs. Haggis the other day--

CHARLOTTE: Mrs. Haggis?

GRIFFIN: A delightful lady who lives down the lane. Always checking in on me, brings me baked goods, casseroles, things like that, but they're not very good. Have an odd taste. Can't throw things away fast enough before she says, 'Mr. Willikers, you must have enjoyed that, here's something else for you.' Anyway, it's a pleasure to meet you and I'm sure I'll enjoy working for you. If you need me, I'll be working on the boiler. You'll be needing some hot water. *(Exits.)*

CHARLOTTE: I think we're already in hot water. All the more reason we need Simpson.

EMILY: You're thinking of getting rid of Mr. Willikers?

GRIFFIN: *(Offstage.)* Yes?

EMILY: Nothing, sorry.

CHARLOTTE: Let's face it Em, this place is a shambles. He's quite incompetent.

EMILY: As he said, little is expected of him. We should at least give him a try.

CHARLOTTE: You are far too tender-hearted. Until Simpson arrives, then he's out.

KNOCK on door.

Now what?

MRS. HAGGIS, who is quite elderly, enters. She is always delightful, bubbly, and sincere. She carries a small bag of gingersnaps.

MRS. HAGGIS: *(Entering without being invited in.)* Hello, hello. I'm Mrs. Haggis. You must be the Browning sisters.

CHARLOTTE: My, word certainly travels fast. We've only just arrived.

MRS. HAGGIS: Actually I saw Miss Randall drive by. I was on my way over to bring Mr. Willikers--

GRIFFIN: *(Offstage.)* Yes?

MRS. HAGGIS: Nothing, go on--some homemade gingersnaps. But you take them, as a welcome gift. *(Hands the bag to CHARLOTTE.)* I'll bring Griffin the next batch.

EMILY: Why thank you, that's most thoughtful of you.

CHARLOTTE: I'm Charlotte, and this is my sister Emily.

MRS. HAGGIS: *(To EMILY.)* I'm so pleased to meet you. I believe I've read every book you've written. I did so like *Heart in the Hills* and *Daughter of Destiny*.

EMILY: Why thank you.

CHARLOTTE: I wonder, Mrs. Haggis, if you've had a chance to read any of my novels?

MRS. HAGGIS: Well, well— *(Unable to think of any titles.)*

CHARLOTTE: I see. We'd ask you to stay, but--

MRS. HAGGIS: No, no, you're busy. Besides I've got to be off to my therapeutic swim class. Another time perhaps.

CHARLOTTE: As soon as we're settled in, we'll have a get acquainted dinner.

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MRS. HAGGIS: That sounds wonderful. It was very nice to meet you.
Toodle-oooo. (*Exits.*)

CHARLOTTE & EMILY: Goodbye.

CHARLOTTE: Perhaps now we'll have some peace and quiet.
Gingersnap?

EMILY: Thank you.

EACH takes a gingersnap from the bag and bites at the same time. BOTH have the same reaction. The cookies are terrible. They exit hastily. Lights fade.

SCENE 2 - TWO WEEKS LATER

During the blackout, all of the dust covers are removed from the furniture. Before the lights come up to full, we hear a faint CLINKING and TAPPING NOISE. Once the lights are up all the way, ADELE, carrying a tray on her way to the kitchen, passes between the doorways. She pauses, listens, and steps into the room, setting down the tray. MAGGIE, passing by the door, steps in and comes up behind ADELE and taps her on the shoulder.

MAGGIE: (*Startled.*) You half scared me to death.

ADELE: Got the jitters?

MAGGIE: I should say so. I heard those noises again last night.
Every night now for almost two weeks.

ADELE: Have you said anything?

MAGGIE: Lot of good that does. They don't hear a thing upstairs.

Whenever I say anything, Miss Charlotte says it's my imagination.

ADELE: Your imagination must be very loud, because I heard it too.

MAGGIE: You did?

ADELE: Didn't I just say that? It was like a scraping noise or clinking.

MAGGIE: Yes, that's the sound. Weren't you scared?

ADELE: Well, it's not really a scary sound, is it? I don't know whether I should be scared or not. You should have said something to that professor fellow.

MAGGIE: I didn't have a chance, did I? I'd feel a lot better if Simpson were here.

ADELE: (*Wiping her hands on her apron.*) Simpson! Do you believe that story about his old aunt dying? I think it was one night in this house and he was looking for any excuse to take a leave of absence. If you ask me, he heard them noises too, but he was too cowardly to admit it.

MAGGIE: What about you know who? You think he's heard anything?

ADELE: Oh, him? I don't trust him one bit. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if those noises didn't have something to do with him.

Offstage noises.

MAGGIE: Better get along, sounds like they're on their way.

ADELE: I'll be along in a minute. I need to run upstairs for a clean apron.

ADELE exits L.; MAGGIE exits R.. CHARLOTTE, EMILY, PROFESSOR FAIRING, and MRS. HAGGIS enter.

CHARLOTTE: We can chat here, Professor.

PROFESSOR: Lovely dinner, absolutely splendid.

MRS. HAGGIS: Oh, yes, lovely

EMILY: Go on, Professor, you were about to tell us about this house.

PROFESSOR: It was built in the late 1700s as an asylum for the criminally insane. Seems to have been a real chamber of horrors. Developed a horrid reputation. In time a new director took over, a doctor by the name of Vincent Fielding. Fielding was something of a researcher, pioneering new techniques to treat various maladies. He's credited with bringing order and respectability to the place.

MRS. HAGGIS: Moved in here with a wife and seven children, he did.

PROFESSOR: Then things went bad. Several patients died under Fielding's care. All sorts of rumors floated about, but there was never any evidence of wrongdoing. Nonetheless, the county closed the institution. Fielding stayed on and converted the place into his private residence and opened a private practice. Quite a popular fellow, well-liked, and played host to many of the notables of the day.

MRS. HAGGIS: Apparently he was good friends with Lord Byron.

EMILY: Really? Byron is one of my favorite poets. Do you think Byron ever visited this house?

PROFESSOR: Oh, yes, very definitely. Byron sought treatment for his foot. It was a congenital issue. He and Fielding became very good friends. He was quite a regular here--until the disappearances.

CHARLOTTE: Disappearances?

PROFESSOR: This is where the history gets a little murky. Over a three day period in October of 1814 five bodies disappeared.

EMILY: You mean grave robberies?

PROFESSOR: No, Miss Emily, I mean fresh corpses from the hospital morgue, ferreted out in the middle of the night. That set off a rash of ghastly rumors, reports of things being seen and heard.

EMILY: What kinds of things?

PROFESSOR: You name it, noises in the night, ghouls prowling the moors, unexplained deaths. Apparently someone reported seeing Fielding near the hospital one of those nights, but it couldn't be proved and Fielding had an airtight alibi. But none of that mattered. Rumor and speculation ruined him.

CHARLOTTE: What happened to him?

PROFESSOR: No one really knows. One story has him fleeing to Romania.

CHARLOTTE: In Fielding's day it would have been known as Transylvania.

EMILY: Oh my!

MRS. HAGGIS: Isn't that where—what's his name--?

CHARLOTTE: (*Impatiently.*) Vlad Tepes!

MRS. HAGGIS: Who? No, the chap with the teeth.

EMILY: You mean Dracula?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, yes it is. Go on, Professor.

PROFESSOR: Up and abandoned his wife, children, and the house. Bills mounted, the house fell into disrepair, and the family was evicted. Eventually the estate became the property of the county. Families have been in and out ever since.

CHARLOTTE: How uplifting.

EMILY: How sad.

We HEAR an offstage scream (L). It is ADELE. Almost immediately we hear MAGGIE gasp and the SMASHING OF GLASS from the dining room.

MAGGIE: (Offstage right.) Oh!

CHARLOTTE: That's Adele! (Calling off.) Adele? Are you alright?

ADELE rushes on L., frightened. MAGGIE rushes on R. a beat behind ADELE.

CHARLOTTE: Adele, what's the matter?

ADELE: It's monstrous, simply monstrous. There's a snake on my bed.

CHARLOTTE: What?

GRIFFIN enters. CHARLOTTE sees GRIFFIN and immediately assumes the worst.

CHARLOTTE: You snake!

EVERYONE looks at GRIFFIN.

ADELE: No, it wasn't Mr. Willikers!

GRIFFIN: Yes.

ADELE: It was another snake, a real one.

GRIFFIN: Whew!

CHARLOTTE: Calm down, breathe. How on earth could a snake be in your room? (To the PROFESSOR.) There aren't any snakes here, are there?

PROFESSOR: Not to my knowledge.

CHARLOTTE: (To GRIFFIN.) Mr. Willikers—

GRIFFIN: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: Have you ever seen a snake?

GRIFFIN: At the zoo, a very nasty looking character, it was. About the size of a tree trunk.

CHARLOTTE: Thank you for sharing that delightful memory. Now go immediately up to Adele's room and dispose of that serpent on her bed.

THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

GRIFFIN: What? I've never handled a snake before.

CHARLOTTE: Then you're in for a treat.

GRIFFIN moves hesitantly toward the door as EMILY begins to question MAGGIE.

EMILY: Maggie, what about you? Are you alright?

MAGGIE: I'm so sorry, Miss Emily. When I heard Adele scream, I dropped the flower vase. There's water all over that lovely wooden floor.

EMILY: Don't worry about the vase. Here, sit down.

MRS. HAGGIS: I'll get a mop.

GRIFFIN: Never mind, Mrs. Haggis, I'll get it. I may need the handle to wallop the snake. *(Exits L.)*

EMILY: What is the likelihood of a snake finding its way into Adele's room and slithering onto her bed?

ADELE: I'm sorry, Miss Charlotte and Miss Emily, but I've got to leave. I can't stay here.

EMILY: Adele, I'm sure there's a logical explanation.

ADELE: Not for a snake on my bed there's not. My nerves are completely shattered. There's something very strange about this place.

MAGGIE: It's true. I haven't had a decent night's sleep since we moved into this place, what with those noises

CHARLOTTE: What noises?

MAGGIE: Those things that go bump in the night.

CHARLOTTE: I told you before, it's an old house.

ADELE: They may not bother you, but we can't work under these conditions.

EMILY: Adele, you can't leave.

ADELE: You'll still have Griffin.

EMILY: That's not the point. We don't want you to leave. You're family, you both are.

ADELE: I know what I've heard and I know what I feel working and living in this place. Miss Emily, this is not a place for families.

GRIFFIN: *(Enters with a mop and a rubber snake.)* Well, here's the culprit.

A general stir.

GRIFFIN: A big rubber snake.

MRS. HAGGIS: What? It isn't real?

GRIFFIN: Most rubber snakes aren't, Mrs. Haggis.

PROFESSOR: It's some sort of practical joke.

CHARLOTTE: Mr. Willikers--

GRIFFIN: Yes?

CHARLOTTE: Did you put that snake in Adele's room to be funny?

ADELE: I don't think it's very funny.

GRIFFIN: No, I didn't. If you'll excuse me, I'll mop up the spill in the dining room. (*Exits R.*)

MAGGIE: I wouldn't put it past him to do something like that.

EMILY: I know you're upset, but I believe him.

ADELE: If he didn't do it, who did?

EMILY: That's what we must find out.

MRS. HAGGIS: Do you think it's ghosts?

CHARLOTTE: I don't believe in ghosts, Mrs. Haggis.

GRIFFIN: (*Enters.*) Excuse me.

CHARLOTTE: What now?

GRIFFIN: Maggie, you did say you dropped a vase filled with water?

MAGGIE: In the middle of the dining room floor.

CHARLOTTE: Do you need a map of the house? Is there a problem?

GRIFFIN: Other than a few drops, there's no water, only broken glass and flowers.

CHARLOTTE: Then don't worry about it.

PROFESSOR: Mr. Willikers--

GRIFFIN: Yes?

PROFESSOR: You've been working here for some time, are you sure you haven't heard or seen anything strange?

GRIFFIN: Other than Miss Emily and Miss Charlotte, not a thing.

PROFESSOR: I mean anything paranormal.

GRIFFIN: Paranormal? Is that more than normal? Beyond normal? Outside of the range of normal?

PROFESSOR: No, it means other-worldly, ghostly. Have you seen or heard anything like that?

GRIFFIN: No, I can't say I have.

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CHARLOTTE: A lot of good you are.

GRIFFIN: (*Turns to exit and then halts.*) All right, I have heard something.

PROFESSOR: Now, we're getting somewhere.

EMILY: Then why didn't you say so?

GRIFFIN: I didn't want people thinking I'd gone balmy. But I have heard those noises at night. For the life of me I don't know where they're coming from. They seem a bit more prevalent since you two moved in.

CHARLOTTE: Apparently our presence here isn't appreciated.

All look at GRIFFIN.

GRIFFIN: Personally, my life has been enriched by your presence.

MRS. HAGGIS: Do you think someone or something is trying to persuade you leave?

EMILY: Why? We're leaving in a couple of weeks anyway. After that, this place will be razed.

CHARLOTTE: Curious, but that's an interesting idea, Mrs. Haggis.

MRS. HAGGIS: It is?

CHARLOTTE: That might explain a couple of things.

EMILY: Such as?

CHARLOTTE: I found a note in our post box.

EMILY: What did it say?

CHARLOTTE: "If you know what's good for you, you'll get out before it's too late."

EMILY: Oh, my! And you didn't tell me?

CHARLOTTE: I didn't want to alarm you.

EMILY: It was a death threat!

CHARLOTTE: Not exactly! It was precisely worded. It didn't use the word death.

EMILY: I'm speechless. Is there anything else I should know that you haven't told me? I'm appalled, stunned, discombobulated.

CHARLOTTE: Hardly the definition of speechless. But there was something else. Two dead rats hanging by strings from the ceiling of the bicycle shed.

ADELE: That settles it. If someone wants me out, I'm out. I'm not spending another night in a place where I'm not wanted. Rubber snakes, dead rats, threatening notes, not for me, thank you. (*To MAGGIE.*) Maggie, what about you?

MAGGIE: I'm sorry, Miss Emily, but I can't stay.

THEY exit.

EMILY: It's my fault. I should never have insisted we take this place.

MRS. HAGGIS: It's not your fault, darling. I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation for what's going on.

CHARLOTTE: Explanation? Yes! Reasonable? No!

PROFESSOR: Shall I contact the constable for you?

CHARLOTTE: No, I don't think we're to that point.

EMILY: (*To the PROFESSOR.*) After we're murdered, then you may call the police.

PROFESSOR: You need some protection.

CHARLOTTE: We have protection. We have Mr. Willikers—

GRIFFIN: (*Enters.*) Yes.

CHARLOTTE: You'll be spending your nights with us from now on.

GRIFFIN: Oh, I couldn't do that. It would be improper.

CHARLOTTE: You'll have a room of your own.

GRIFFIN: Oh, of course. And what might I be doing, if you don't mind my asking?

CHARLOTTE: Providing emotional support. Standing guard. I don't know. I don't have time for this. In two weeks my editor Caroline Taylor will be here expecting a wonderful dinner to celebrate the conclusion of my novel, which isn't concluded, and to read a plot outline for my next novel.

EMILY: You've finished your outline?

CHARLOTTE: No, because I am living in a house that makes noises and where rubber snakes mysteriously appear, and now I have no cook and no housekeeper. So Mr. Willikers--

GRIFFIN: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: You'll do as I say, when I say, do you understand?

GRIFFIN: Yes. Thank you, Ma'am. I'll get my things from the cottage.

CHARLOTTE: Otherwise I am going to have a complete breakdown.
(*Exits dramatically.*)

SCENE 3 - A WEEK LATER

As the lights fade up, there is just enough light to see EMILY standing alone in the dark. She seems to be listening for something.

CHARLOTTE enters and turns on the lights.

CHARLOTTE: What on earth? What are you doing in here with the lights off?

EMILY: Shush, listen.

CHARLOTTE: What am I supposed to be listening to?

EMILY: During the night I came down for a glass of milk, and I heard that noise.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, well, it's morning now.

EMILY: Adele and Maggie only heard the noises at night. Why is that?

CHARLOTTE: Because things go bump in the night, not during the day.

Offstage a clinking sound is heard.

EMILY: You hear that?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, you're right. I do.

EMILY: It's that clinking sound again.

EMILY and CHARLOTTE get down on their hands and knees, turning their ears to the floor. Their backs are to the upstage doors.

GRIFFIN: *(Enters, stirring a cup of tea.)* What we listening to?

EMILY and CHARLOTTE scream and scramble to their feet.

EMILY: We heard a clinking sound— *(Realizing the noise she has heard was GRIFFIN stirring his tea.)* Never mind.

CHARLOTTE: What are you doing?

GRIFFIN: Admiring the view. Oh, and having a cup of tea.

CHARLOTTE: Did you want something?

GRIFFIN: What was it you wanted done in the library?

CHARLOTTE: Replace the burned out light bulbs in the ceiling.

GRIFFIN: Right, very good. *(Exits.)*

Offstage: KNOCK on door.

EMILY: Are we expecting someone?

GRIFFIN: *(Offstage.)* I'll get it.

CHARLOTTE: Most likely Miss Randall.

EMILY: That's right.

CHARLOTTE: Hopefully with good news.

MISS RANDALL and EDWARD enter.

RANDALL: Good morning, Miss Browning and Miss Browning.

CHARLOTTE: Good morning, Miss Randall.

RANDALL: This is my associate, Edward Frank.

CHARLOTTE: How do you do, Mr. Frank, I'm Charlotte and this is my sister Emily.

EDWARD: Pleased to meet you. Jean has spoken quite highly of you. *(To EMILY.)* I can see why.

EMILY: *(Blushing.)* Why thank you.

RANDALL: Despite our best efforts, we've contacted over a dozen prospective employees and none say they will work here.

CHARLOTTE: Did you tell them they would be well-paid?

RANDALL: Made no difference.

EMILY: Gee willikers--

GRIFFIN: *(Offstage.)* Yes?

EMILY: Nothing, sorry, false alarm.

EDWARD: Were it some other place, there'd be no problem.

CHARLOTTE: Well, it isn't some other place, and we're hardly in a position to leave now. We'll be here until the lease is up.

RANDALL: I wish I could help you, but I'm afraid we've exhausted every possibility.

EMILY: *(Playing up to EDWARD.)* We've been a week now without domestic help. Surely there is someone.

RANDALL: I'm afraid not.

CHARLOTTE: Miss Randall, we're desperate. One week from tonight we're hosting a very important dinner.

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EDWARD: I can only think of one possibility. (*Glancing at MISS RANDALL.*)

RANDALL: (*A beat.*) No, Edward, definitely not.

EMILY: As my sister says, we are desperate.

EDWARD: Mrs. Haggis.

A silence hovers over the room.

CHARLOTTE: That is such a bad idea on so many levels.

EMILY: What other choice do we have?

CHARLOTTE: (*Reluctantly.*) I am nothing, if not practical. Very well.

RANDALL: I'll drop in to see Mrs. Haggis on the way back to the village.

EMILY: Thank you so much. (*A big smile.*) Nice to meet you, Edward.

EDWARD: The pleasure is all mine. Good day.

As MISS RANDALL and EDWARD exit, EMILY goes to the door to watch them leave.

CHARLOTTE: Have you no shame?

EMILY: I don't know what you're talking about.

CHARLOTTE: Flirting with him like a schoolgirl.

EMILY: I wasn't flirting.

CHARLOTTE: You were definitely flirting. 'Nice to meet you, Edward.'

EMILY: Well, it was nice to meet him. What if I was flirting with him?

CHARLOTTE: It's unseemly.

EMILY: Romance is in my blood.

CHARLOTTE: Romance is in my blood as well, only I don't wear it like a badge.

EMILY: It's an occupational hazard.

CHARLOTTE: Just because you write romance novels, you don't have the market cornered.

EMILY: Can I help it if he took a fancy to me?

CHARLOTTE: I am every bit the romantic you are.

EMILY: Oh, really? We'll ask Mr. Willikers.

GRIFFIN: (*Enters, carrying a torn piece of paper.*) Yes? (*He lays the piece of paper on the table.*)

CHARLOTTE: My sister and I are having a debate. As you know we are both writers. One of us writes murder mysteries and the other romance novels. Would you care to venture a guess as to who writes what?

GRIFFIN: Do I have to?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, otherwise you're fired.

GRIFFIN: In that case, I'd say Miss Charlotte you write mysteries, because you're cool and calculating. And Miss Emily writes the romances because she strikes me as warm and passionate.

EMILY: (*A smile of satisfaction.*) Well?

CHARLOTTE: (*To GRIFFIN.*) You're fired!

GRIFFIN: You don't mean that.

CHARLOTTE: I most certainly do.

EMILY: She does not. You're not fired.

CHARLOTTE: Yet!

GRIFFIN: You seem very stressed, Miss Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: Really?

GRIFFIN: Anything I can do?

CHARLOTTE: Unless you can transport me back in time, no!

GRIFFIN: Right! Well, I'll just get back to those bulbs then. (*Seeing the piece of paper on the table.*) Oh, by the way, does this belong to one of you?

EMILY: What is it?

GRIFFIN: I'm not sure.

CHARLOTTE takes the piece of paper and begins reading.

It fell out of that big green book on the top shelf.

EMILY: The complete works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge?

GRIFFIN: Yes, that's the one.

EMILY: That's one of my favorite books.

GRIFFIN: Mine too, Miss Emily.

EMILY: I had no idea you read Coleridge.

GRIFFIN: Oh, I don't. That's the book I always stand on when I want to reach the ceiling light.

CHARLOTTE: This is extraordinary. It's a page from a diary, dated November 1814.

EMILY: (*Glancing at the piece of paper.*) It's written too haphazardly to be a diary page.

CHARLOTTE: It's a diary, I tell you. Listen to this. '...am completely unsettled. I shared all with P, only I don't believe he took me seriously. Said my imagination has taken flight. Says I should rest and enjoy our time away.' It's signed M followed by a squiggle.

EMILY: M? This is the voice of woman, don't you think?

CHARLOTTE: Definitely.

GRIFFIN: Definitely.

EMILY: Is there more?

CHARLOTTE: An entry dated November 17. 'Heard noises again during the night.'

EMILY: Noises? I heard noises. Didn't I say that?

GRIFFIN: Yes, you did say that. You did indeed, Miss Emily. Right as I was stirring my tea--

CHARLOTTE: Shush! 'Went downstairs. Saw light streaming up. V at table, writing. Someone--no, that's struck out--something on it. V saw me, eyes ablaze. Took me by the throat, said if I ever told....'

EMILY: Told what?

CHARLOTTE: She doesn't say.

EMILY: Is there more?

CHARLOTTE: One more entry. 'Have been unable to move from my bed for two days. P concerned. Says we'll return to London and then leave for Switzerland straight way. Cannot rid my mind of images. Am terribly fearful.' M, squiggle. That's all.

EMILY: M? Who could M be?

GRIFFIN: There's M, and V, and P. I'm on this, ladies. (*An idea springs to life.*) Most valuable player.

CHARLOTTE: (*Sarcastically.*) Yes, it has all the makings of a cricket match.

GRIFFIN: I was just eliminating the obvious.

CHARLOTTE: Remember the professor's story. V could well be Vincent Fielding. But who are M and P?

GRIFFIN: Member of Parliament?

EMILY: May I see that? (*Looks at the torn page.*) I don't think this is a squiggle after the M, I think it's a W.

GRIFFIN: It's definitely a squiggle.

CHARLOTTE: Now that I look at it again, it could be a W.

GRIFFIN: Squiggle!

CHARLOTTE: It is not a squiggle, I tell you. I agree with Emily it's a W. Our writer is M.W!

Suddenly we HEAR a CRASH and the SOUND of the WIND HOWLING.

GRIFFIN: Gee, willikers!

EMILY & CHARLOTTE: Yes?

EMILY: What was that?

GRIFFIN: Sounds as if a window blew open.

CHARLOTTE: You better have a look.

GRIFFIN exits.

EMILY: Do you think those stories about Fielding are true?

CHARLOTTE: They were interesting, but I didn't take them seriously. But now, I'm not sure. Whoever M.W. is, her diary would seem to confirm something terrible was going on here.

EMILY: The light! Where was the light coming from?

CHARLOTTE: The door with the wall behind it. Obviously there's a basement or an underground passage.

EMILY: But she says the light was streaming up.

CHARLOTTE: Perhaps there's another door or a panel we haven't seen.

GRIFFIN enters.

GRIFFIN: That was odd.

CHARLOTTE: It was a window, right? The wind blew it open.

GRIFFIN: Yes, the big one in the hallway. Blew right open.

CHARLOTTE: There you have it. Nothing! (*To EMILY.*) The light! You were saying something about the light.

EMILY: Yes, how could the light be streaming up?

Slipping into deep thought, the three of them enter into a sort of rhythmic, choreographed pacing. The torn page slips from EMILY's hand and floats to the floor. As EMILY bends over to pick it up, the solution comes to her.

EMILY: I have it!

CHARLOTTE: You do?

EMILY: Of course, the vase of flowers that Maggie dropped in the dining room. We're ripping up the dining room floor.

CHARLOTTE: No, you can't!

EMILY: We must!

CHARLOTTE: We have a dinner party to plan and only Mrs. Haggis for a cook.

GRIFFIN: (*Flinching.*) Oooo!

EMILY: You'll need a hammer, Mr. Willikers--

GRIFFIN: Yes?

EMILY: And plenty of elbow grease.

CHARLOTTE: I will lose my mind before this over. (*Hurries from the room.*)

EMILY: To the dining room, Mr. Willikers.

GRIFFIN: Yes! Miss Emily, before we start ripping up the dining room floor, I think there's something you should know.

EMILY: Go on.

GRIFFIN: I didn't want to say anything in front of Miss Charlotte, since she seems a little on edge—actually—a lot on edge. I check the locks on those windows every night. That window didn't blow open. It had been opened from the inside.

EMILY: I don't understand.

GRIFFIN: Someone unlocked that window.

EMILY: Are you saying there was someone in the house?

GRIFFIN: Let's put it like this, I'm going to look for the biggest hammer I can find.

EMILY: But why would someone just open the window? Why not just sneak out the door?

GRIFFIN: If I was Miss Charlotte, I'd say whoever it was, they wanted us to know they were here.

EMILY: But you're not Miss Charlotte.

GRIFFIN: And for that, I am very thankful.

EMILY: So what do *you* think?

GRIFFIN: Don't have a clue.

EMILY: You are really something, Mr. Willikers.

GRIFFIN: Yes, I am, if I do say so myself, Miss Emily.

EMILY and GRIFFIN exit.

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