

DON'T TRY TO WAKE HIM HAND ME THE SHOVEL

By Pat Cook

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 MEN, 12 WOMEN, 1 POLTERGEIST)

CARLISLE LIVERMORENewscaster (quivering coward) *(185 lines)*
HELEN HIGHWATERNewscaster (more practical) *(196 lines)*
LIGEScary caretaker *(11 lines)*
MACKOn-the-lam crook, the brains of the outfit *(73 lines)*
LEROYAnother crook *(48 lines)*
BIG SALLY PANDER.....Pushy and brash producer of B-horror movies *(41 lines)*
MYRNA.....Sally's secretary *(30 lines)*
OPALA gopher for the television station *(14 lines)*
AGNESAnother grunt for the station *(16 lines)*
CYRIL POOKEE.....A paranormal investigator *(104 lines)*
OSCAR SWOON.....Another *(46 lines)*
LEONA HEARTSLEEVE.....A slightly dithering woman, but kind-hearted *(51 lines)*
MATILDA BILLINGSGATE.....Leona's younger sister *(44 lines)*
OFFICER BUFORDMalaprop cop *(52 lines)*
COACH HATHAWAYCoach *(63 lines)*
BUFFYHead cheerleader, nosy *(17 lines)*
TIFFANY.....Cheerleader, second in command *(8 lines)*
HEATHER.....Cheerleader *(3 lines)*
SARA.....Cheerleader *(7 lines)*
FRIEDACheerleader *(9 lines)*
POLTERGEIST

TIME

The present

PLACE

The Billingsgate Mansion

PROPS

Video camera or recorder/HELEN

Video tapes for recorder/HELEN

Eight suitcases or bags/CARLISLE

Makeup bag/CARLISLE

Sleeping bag/small suitcase/CARLISLE

Two identical long canvas bags/LEROY AND AGNES (can use the SAME bag)

Two more suitcases/POOKEE AND OSCAR

Small recorder/OSCAR

Small electronic device/OSCAR

Notepad and pencil/POOKEE

Ax or bat (cardboard or plastic)/CARLISLE

Handkerchief/HELEN

Umbrella/MATILDA

Wallet/POOKEE

Jacket with patches/LEROY

Jacket/CARLISLE

Flashlight/COACH

Purses and Pompoms/CHEERLEADERS

Shotgun/LEONA

Canvas/rags/POOKEE

Gun/BUFORD

Press pass or wallet/MACK

Flashlight/HELEN

Notepad and pencil/BUFORD

Guns/COACH AND CHEERLEADERS

STAGE EFFECTS

Whenever the POLTERGEIST appears, the stage lights might dim and/or flicker to establish its eerie presence on stage, but the characters on stage are completely unaware of the POLTERGEIST unless the script indicates differently. The script mentions two different POLTERGEISTS. The “imitation” POLTERGEIST should look almost identical to the “real” POLTERGEIST with only a slight change in mask or makeup. The entrance of the “real” POLTERGEIST in the last scene should get a BIG “stir” from the audience. Have fun!

COSTUMES

Modern. As indicated in the script. Special attention should be given to the POLTERGEISTS’ costumes, but detailed masks/extravagant “ghost” costumes are not required. It would prove effective to have the CHEERLEADERS in cheerleading outfits and OFFICER BURFORD in uniform.

ACT ONE SCENE 1

Setting:

The setting for this farcical two act is the living room of the old Billingsgate Mansion. The room is spacious and full of echoes. There are four doors to the floor plan. The first, or front door, is located on the stage right wall. The second door is situated on the upstage wall near the front door. It leads to the cellar. The third door, which leads to the kitchen, is located further down on the upstage wall and the fourth door is situated on the stage left wall. It leads to the library. There is also a staircase which leads to the second and third floors.

The furniture in the room is slightly ragged and old. An overstuffed couch rests center stage and is flanked by side tables. An almost matching chair sits near it. An old desk is situated on the stage left wall. Fireplace on the stage right wall is optional. The rest of the room includes various tables and chairs.

At Rise:

CARLISLE'S voice is heard.

CARLISLE: Waiting as if some crouching asylum, the Billingsgate Mansion has stood for almost two centuries. The walls creak, the floors scream, the doors crack. Each shadow seems to hide some monstrous apparition, each room some unexplored horror. Enter if you must but beware. The ghosts who reside here want no intruders. *(HE slowly walks onstage through the front door followed by HELEN HIGHWATER who is taping him with a video recorder.)* And tonight, I, Carlisle Livermore, will seek out these ghosts! Are they real? Are they here? Are they really here? Nobody knows . . . for sure. But, On The Spot News will find out. And who will guide you through these unfortold terrors? Quote the Raven . . . *(Indicates himself.)* Livermore.

HELEN: Got it. *(SHE shuts off the recorder.)*

CARLISLE: *(Voice now quivering.)* Do we REALLY have to go through with this?

HELEN: Brace yourself.

CARLISLE: This was a dumb idea, this was a stupid idea, this was a ridiculous idea!

HELEN: And all three of them were **yours**.

CARLISLE: Who knew the Chief was listening? He just stands there, staring out his window and spits on people as they walk by.

HELEN: Well, he's a newsman.

CARLISLE: I asked for a raise, he didn't hear that. I need a new blazer, he didn't hear that. "Hey, let's do a ghost story!", bam, he

drops us off at the Billingsgate Mansion a half hour later.

HELEN stands next to the fireplace.

HELEN: Will you tape this, my hair is starting to droop.

CARLISLE: Yeah, yeah. *(HE aims the camera at her.)*

HELEN: *(Charmingly.)* So, you have guests coming for the weekend and all you have in the oven is your head. And just how do you make those minor repairs around the house? *(SHE takes a bottle out of her purse and a cloth.)* Hi, I'm Helen Highwater. *(SHE starts rubbing the mantle.)* And I can show you how to get a brand new shine on dull wood, how to rebuild a china cabinet with just a nail file and a squeegee and how to get your husband off the couch by just threatening to invite your mother over. Tune in for our three part series, "Repair, Restore, and Remodel." Right here at On The Spot News. Remember, if you want the ultimate in household hints, you have to go through Helen Highwater. *(Big wink.)*

CARLISLE: *(Stops taping.)* Gripping.

HELEN: I think I know why we're called On The Spot News. We get one location and make up all the news from there.

LIGE enters from the kitchen.

LIGE: Well, I got ever'thing up and running. The old place usually runs off town power, but if it don't, there's that old generator in the cellar. *(HE moves to the cellar door.)* You can get to the cellar just outside the kitchen or by goin' through here. *(HE taps on the door and then listens.)*

CARLISLE: What're you listening for?

LIGE: Huh? Oh, nothin'.

HELEN: We really appreciate you helping us out, Lige.

CARLISLE: Wait. What do you mean, if it don't run off the town power?

LIGE: Well, sometimes the 'lectricity goes off in this place . . . *(HE looks around.)* fer no reason at all.

CARLISLE: You telling us that just to cheer us up?

LIGE: Call it a warning. *(HE moves to CARLISLE.)* There are things goin' on here late at night, noises like you never heerd before, groans and screams. Then shadows and flashes a' light. And the old house creaks with ever'ghostly footstep falling on those stairs. And then, at the witching hour, the banshees howl and the gremlins come out. And then . . . the poltergeist!

CARLISLE: *(Voice squeaking.)* Poltergeist?

LIGE: This is his house and make no mistake. And ever'night he walks, forever searchin' for new victims, forever haunting, forever

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hungry. (*CARLISLE swallows hard. LIGE then takes on a cheery tone.*) Ya'll have a good time, you hear? (*HE moves to the kitchen door.*)

HELEN: Such lovely sentiments from such a sentimental kind of guy.

CARLISLE: How can we get in touch with you if we need to?

LIGE: Oh, I can't rightly say. You ain't got no phone.

HELEN: We brought along our cellular phone, thank you very much.

LIGE: Modern devices are useless in this place. It's an entity all to itself. (*HE opens the kitchen door.*) I'll be back tomorrow morning. (*HE starts to exit then looks back.*) If there's anyone left here to help. Pleasant dreams, now. (*HE exits.*)

HELEN: I bet he's fun at Christmas parties.

CARLISLE: I bet he sleeps in a coffin.

HELEN: Now, don't let all those old superstitions get to you. Just once, will you show a little backbone.

CARLISLE: Wait. Did you hear that?

HELEN: What?

CARLISLE: Listen! (*THEY both listen.*)

HELEN: I can't hear anything but your heart thumping.

CARLISLE: Let me know if you don't hear it anymore.

HELEN takes the camera from CARLISLE and puts it on the couch.

HELEN: I can't believe you're such a fraidy-cat.

CARLISLE: You ought to see my family tree.

HELEN: All fraidy-cats?

CARLISLE: Well, they're all up a tree, if that tells you anything!

HELEN: Will you get our suitcases off the porch? (*SHE takes the tape out of the recorder and puts in a fresh one from her bag.*)

CARLISLE moves to the front door.

CARLISLE: I'm telling you I've heard stories.

HELEN: Yeah? Did you hear the one about the fat lady and the buffalo?

CARLISLE pushes on the front door.

CARLISLE: I can't . . . it won't open! It's jammed. The door won't open. Do you hear what I'm saying? We're locked in here! IT WON'T OPEN! (*HE falls into a lump almost sobbing.*) IT WON'T OPENNN!

HELEN: (*Unmoved.*) Carl?

CARLISLE: What?!!!

HELEN: Pull.

CARLISLE: Huh? (*HE reaches and pulls the door open.*) Oh. (*Then, cheerily.*) Be right back. (*HE bounces out the door.*)

HELEN: My first weekend free and I have to spend it with a ghost and a chicken.

CARLISLE: *(From offstage.)* I heard that!

HE re-enters carrying three suitcases and throws them on the floor.

CARLISLE: Here.

HELEN: There's more.

CARLISLE: I know. *(HE exits again.)*

HELEN: You be real nice and I'll see if I can find you a saucer of milk.

CARLISLE: Very funny! *(HE enters again with three more suitcases.)*

There you go. *(HE puts them next to the others.)*

HELEN: Go on.

CARLISLE: No, no. I don't need any help.

HELEN: Good. *(Sits on the couch.)*

CARLISLE: Why, you . . . *(HE exits.)*

HELEN: Mother wanted me to learn a trade. No, I said to her, I want to be a news reporter. What was I thinking?

CARLISLE enters with two more suitcases and a makeup bag.

CARLISLE: There! *(HE puts them down.)* Now, I'll get mine. *(HE exits.)*

HELEN: Well? The Chief said we had to rough it, didn't he?

CARLISLE enters with a sleeping bag and suitcase.

CARLISLE: That's everything. *(HE drops his baggage and closes the door gently, all the while looking outside.)*

HELEN: I thought you were in the army?

CARLISLE: Coast Guard.

HELEN: *(Moves to him.)* Don't you have to be sort of brave for that?

CARLISLE: I was stationed in Amarillo, Texas. You know how much coast there is in Amarillo, Texas?

HELEN: Well, I'm sure they all felt a lot safer knowing you were there. Are we staying down here?

CARLISLE: I think the bedrooms are on the second floor.

HELEN: Or the third floor.

CARLISLE: I'm not going on the third floor.

HELEN picks up her makeup bag and moves to the stairs.

HELEN: Let's get settled in, shall we?

CARLISLE: Right behind you.

HELEN: The suitcases? *(SHE smiles and exits up the stairs.)*

CARLISLE: You mean I have to . . . oh MAN! *(HE grabs three suitcases and moves to the stairs.)* Mom wanted me to learn a

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trade but NO, I had to be a reporter! *(HE exits up the stairs.)*

After a slight pause, LEROY and MACK enter through the stage left door.

LEROY is carrying a long canvas bag over his shoulder.

MACK: Be careful, will you?!

LEROY: Hey, you want to help?

MACK: You're doing fine.

LEROY lowers the bag over the couch.

LEROY: What're you worried about, anyway? *(HE indicates the bag.)*
He ain't gonna feel anything now, is he?

MACK: Stop complaining, will you? I TOLD you this is the perfect
stash for him. We just drop him off. Nobody ever comes here.
(HE sees the suitcases.)

LEROY: I'm sure he'll like the accommodations.

MACK: Hold on, we got a problem.

LEROY: You DON'T think he'll like his accommodations?

MACK: I mean, take a look.

LEROY: Huh? *(HE moves to the bags.)* Mack, somebody's here.

MACK: So. Let's just make a trade, what say?

LEROY: Hey, great!

The men take several suitcases, leaving just the bed roll.

MACK: And you were worrying where we was going to get new duds.

LEROY: Made to order.

THEY move to the stage left door and exit.

CARLISLE: *(Upstairs.)* I'm going, I'm going! *(HE stumbles down the stairs, all the while looking around cautiously. HE then reaches down to grab the suitcases and grabs air.)* What the . . . ? *(HE looks down and then around.)* What happened to the rest of the . . . *(HE sees the bag draped over the couch.)* What's that? *(HE crosses to the bag and unties the upstage end of it.)* What's in here, it can't be anything too . . . *(HE looks inside.)* Wha . . . Wha . . . he's . . . I . . . *(HE calls out into the bag.)* Hello? *(HE drops the end of the bag and rushes to the stairs.)*
HHELLLLLLLLLLLLLENNN! *(Frantic, HE exits.)*

LEROY and MACK rush back in through the stage left door, still carrying the luggage.

LEROY: Somebody's driving up!

MACK: I saw!

LEROY: We gotta get outta here!

MACK: How? That's the only road outta here. *(THEY put the bags down.)*

LEROY: So what do we do?

MACK: We can't let anybody know we're here just yet!

LEROY: I know!

MACK: Grab the stiff!

LEROY: Oh, no, not again! *(HE hoists the body over his shoulder again. MACK rushes over to the kitchen door and looks in.)* This guy gets around more dead than he ever did when he was alive!

MACK: Through here, hurry!

LEROY: Yeah, yeah. *(THEY exit out the kitchen door.)*

CARLISLE and HELEN rush down the stairs.

CARLISLE: You'll see! I'm not letting my imagination run away with me! You think I'm some kind of nut, don't you? Well, see for yourself. The suitcases used to be right here! *(HE points directly to the suitcases.)* And . . . there they are.

HELEN: *(Crosses arms.)* Yeah. And life like, too. It's like we were right in the same room with them. How bizarre.

CARLISLE: *(Rushes to the couch.)* Well, over here! The body is . . . *(Points to where the body was earlier.)* . . . not here.

HELEN: You're right. The body's not there. But, hey, don't stop with that. Let's see, what else is NOT there. No elephant, no cow, and funny thing, but I don't see a dead body there either.

CARLISLE: I know what I saw!

HELEN: Oh, right. We leave the room for two minutes and somebody comes in here, steals our suitcases and leaves a dead body in the living room.

CARLISLE: I'm not making this up!

HELEN: And you're not carrying the bags up, either, now are you? *(SHE picks up a suitcase and moves to the stairs.)*

CARLISLE: Okay! I'm getting them! *(HE grabs three more suitcases and moves to HELEN.)*

HELEN: Next time you make someone up, make it Tom Cruise *(Any famous actor's name.)* For me??!

CARLISLE: I bet your dad wanted a boy!

HELEN: *(Sassy.)* Little girls are full of sugar and spice and everything nice.

CARLISLE: That's a farce.

HELEN: Let's not go into that again.

THEY exit upstairs. After a brief silence, AGNES and OPAL enter through the front door carrying a long canvas bag between them.

The bag is identical to the body bag.

AGNES: Come on, Opal, hold up your end.

OPAL: I'm coming. Where do we put this thing?

AGNES: Let's just drop it here.

OPAL: Oh no, Helen said we should be really careful with it. (*SHE nods to the couch.*) Drape it over the couch.

AGNES: Right. (*THEY move to the couch and drape the bag over the back.*) Hold on. There.

OPAL: She wants carpet; she's got carpet.

AGNES: Out here?

OPAL: I don't know. Chief said Helen's doing one of her ditsy home improvement things and she needs a carpet to clean. Well, we couldn't be sure there'd be one out here.

AGNES: So we were nominated to haul this one out.

OPAL: Right. (*SHE dusts off her hands and moves to the front door.*)

AGNES: (*Follows her over.*) Well, at least we got jobs with the TV station.

OPAL: Yeah, and look at the glamorous jobs they gave us

AGNES: Think Helen will like the carpet?

OPAL: She should. We got it out of her office. (*She starts to exit.*)

AGNES: Wait. Shouldn't we check to make sure they're okay?

OPAL: Look, Agnes. You know as well as I do that EVERYTIME they need something we have to do it.

AGNES: Oh, yeah, right.

OPAL: Besides, we stay out here any longer and they'll probably want us to move that thing upstairs.

AGNES: That's what I like about you, you're always thinking.

THEY exit out the front door. After a brief pause, LEROY looks through the kitchen door. Not seeing anyone, he enters.

LEROY: (*Looks on the floor.*) Good, they're gone. I can't believe I lost my wallet. Not here two minutes and I lose something. That's all I need is to have somebody find it. I'd be as good as dead. (*HE turns and notices the bag over the couch. HE moves over to it. He then looks out, a bit confused and tries to think. HE pantomimes his previous actions of picking up the bag, muttering to Mack, and then moving to the door to exit. Then, HE turns around and looks back at the bag.*) MACK! (*HE runs out the kitchen door.*)

CARLISLE comes down the stairs.

CARLISLE: What was that? (*HE sees the remaining bags.*) Well, at least you're still here. (*HE then looks over at the couch.*) And

you're not. *(HE grows wide-eyed.)* YES, YOU ARE! No, it can't be. HELLLLLLEENNNNN!!! *(HE exits up the stairs.)*

The front door opens and SALLY and MYRNA enter.

SALLY: Didn't I tell you? Is this place perfect or what? *(SHE looks through her outstretched hands as if focusing a view finder.)*

MYRNA: It's spooky, all right.

SALLY: *(Moves around the room.)* This is just the hook. The picture's almost ready to be released. All we have to do is make a few location changes in the dialogue and we're in.

MYRNA: But I still don't see how this is gonna help our movie.

SALLY: Myrna, Myrna, Myrna, pay attention. Look, my dear. *(SHE puts an arm around MYRNA.)* We have a fairly boring horror picture, right?

MYRNA: Well, if anybody can make horror, it's you.

SALLY: You sound like my first husband. Now, what occurs? I hear that this television station is sending out some snoops to check this place out for a proverbial boogie man, right?

MYRNA: Right?

SALLY: Well, I think to myself, here's the opportunity that's always knocking if one does but listen.

MYRNA: Beg pardon?

SALLY: I seize the chance, grab hold of fate and here we are. We make sure they actually have something to report.

MYRNA: What?

SALLY: The boogie man, the spooks, the ghosts.

MYRNA: You mean . . . ?

SALLY: That's right. *(SHE moves into the room and envisions it.)* We rattle a few chains, set up our speakers in the bushes for a few sound effects, maybe drop some fake blood around and suddenly they really have a big news story. And I mean BIG news. It gets picked up by the networks and syndicates and then, when notoriety peaks, we release "Home, Bloody Home" and advertise it as the gut-wrenching, hair-raising story of the Billingsgate Mansion.

MYRNA: Say, that's great!

SALLY: That's why they call me . . . the movie maker!

MYRNA: They also call you the queen of horror.

SALLY: You sound like my second husband. Let's move the car around and unload everything. We can't have anyone see us.

MYRNA: Whatever you say.

THEY exit out the front door. Just after they leave, CARLISLE and HELEN bolt down the stairs. CARLISLE points to the couch.

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CARLISLE: There!

HELEN: Well, I'll be. (*SHE crosses to the couch.*)

CARLISLE: What're you going to do?

HELEN: Look inside.

CARLISLE: Not advisable.

HELEN: Can't I see for myself.

CARLISLE: You STILL don't believe me, do you?

HELEN: Uhhh . . . let me see . . . no! (*SHE reaches for the end of the bag.*)

CARLISLE: Okay, Miss Smarty-Pants!

HELEN: You leave my pants out of this.

CARLISLE: Look for yourself. (*HE unties the end of the bag.*) See? See for yourself. There. It's carpet. Carpet?

HELEN: (*Mock amazement.*) Is it dead? (*SHE reaches in the bag.*) Carlisle, I don't feel a pulse!

CARLISLE: (*Backs away.*) There USED to be a dead body in there!

HELEN: No, it's a carpet. I know a carpet when I see one and that's carpet. (*SHE looks again.*) In fact, it looks like my carpet.

CARLISLE: (*Thinking.*) Somebody's behind this. Surely, the Chief wouldn't pull anything on us, would he?

HELEN: Hey, this IS my carpet!

CARLISLE: You have carpet?

HELEN: In my office.

CARLISLE: You have an office?

HELEN picks up the end of the bag.

HELEN: Help me with this, will you?

CARLISLE: What are you doing?

HELEN: It's for my spot on carpet repair. Opal and Agnes must've brought it out.

CARLISLE: Ohhh . . . (*HE grabs the other end and they move it to the stairs.*)

HELEN: Let's put it in the den there.

CARLISLE: Right behind you.

HELEN: Good, Carlisle.

THEY exit stage left. LEROY and MACK enter through the kitchen door.

LEROY: You'll see, I ain't makin' this up. It's right over . . . (*HE points to where the carpet was.*) . . . right . . . not there.

MACK: Leroy, you're cracking.

LEROY: Guess so.

MACK: We have our guest of honor leaning up against a hamper and

...

The front door opens and POOKEE and OSCAR enter, each carrying a suitcase.

POOKEE: Finally. Here we are. We better get reading.

OSCAR: Of course. *(HE takes a small tape recorder from his pocket.)*
I'll just make a few cursory notes.

POOKEE: Yes, I want to make sure . . . *(HE sees MACK and LEROY.)* Oh, hello.

MACK/LEROY: Hello.

POOKEE: We have arrived! *(HE puts his suitcase down.)*

MACK: Yeah, we know.

LEROY: We were standing right here.

OSCAR: Upon entering the Billingsgate Mansion, we have not encountered any cool spots or magnetic planes. *(HE moves around the room.)* The first room resembles the main lobby or living room.

POOKEE: We're looking for the news team. *(Moves to MACK.)*

MACK: You are?

POOKEE: Yes. Who're you?

LEROY: Me?

MACK: He doesn't know. He lost his wallet.

POOKEE: I beg your pardon?

OSCAR: There is no physical signs of paranormal activity in this room.
No residue ectoplasm as far as I can see.

POOKEE: We're paranormal investigators.

MACK: I see. We're . . . uh . . . just looking at the house.

LEROY: Yeah, that's it.

JACK: I'm showing the house to my client. He's thinking about buying.

POOKEE: Oh, a real estate agent.

MACK: Sure.

POOKEE: I see. Say, I'm looking for a place myself. Do you have a card?

MACK: Uh . . . *(HE feels his pockets.)*

OSCAR: From all reports, this is the area where most of the sightings have been recorded. *(HE turns off the recorder and puts it back in his pocket.)*

MACK: I must have left them in my other suit. Do you have a piece of paper and a pencil?

POOKEE: Oh, of course. *(HE takes out a small notepad and pencil.)*

MACK: Okay. Write this down. My name is . . . uh . . . Morris Gett.

POOKEE: *(Writing.)* Morris Gett.

MACK: That's right. Gett Realty. *(HE looks over his shoulder.)* Make

that in big letters.

POOKEE: I see. *(HE writes again.)* Like this?

MACK: Great. Now. Any house, any time.

POOKEE: Got it. Phone number?

MACK: Uh . . . 987-6543.

POOKEE: Fine. Anything else?

LEROY: Yeah, like you need a motto or something.

MACK: No, no motto, that should do it.

POOKEE: Great.

OSCAR: Nothing yet. *(HE moves to the others.)*

As OSCAR moves in, MACK and LEROY edge to the front door.

MACK: That's all you need. Now, I want five hundred copies of that in standard business cards and we'll come back for them. *(HE shoves LEROY out the door.)*

POOKEE: Okay, but it'll take at least two weeks. Do you want these delivered or are you . . . hey, wait a minute. *(HE and OSCAR look up to see the other two have vanished.)* That was odd.

OSCAR: That's why we're here.

POOKEE: *(Puts the notepad away.)* Those were not ghosts.

OSCAR: Now how do you know that?

CARLISLE and HELEN enter from the stage left door.

HELEN: We'll tape that first.

CARLISLE: Then can we leave?

HELEN: Will you STOP? *(SHE sees POOKEE and OSCAR.)* Oh, hello.

POOKEE: You're not ghosts, are you?

CARLISLE: It's only a matter of time.

OSCAR: We're the paranormal investigators. We're Pookee and Swoon.

CARLISLE: I know the feeling. I had chili for lunch and I still haven't been able to . . .

HELEN: *(Jumps in.)* That's their NAMES!

POOKEE: Quite. I believe your boss called us?

HELEN: Of course. *(SHE shakes POOKEE'S hand.)* Helen Highwater and yes, that's my real name. This is Carlisle Livermore.

CARLISLE: You guys are ghost-busters?

OSCAR: Yes and please don't sing.

CARLISLE: You mean, you're real?

POOKEE: What do you mean by real? In ever expanding scientific boundaries we must allow for investigations that, years ago, would never have been attempted.

OSCAR: Cyril, you promised you wouldn't lecture. *(HE holds his hand out.)* Oscar Swoon. This is Cyril Pooke. Where can we set up?

HELEN: Well, we can show you everything we've seen so far. You must want to get settled in your bedrooms first. *(SHE moves to the stairs.)*

CARLISLE: Did you bring a gun?

OSCAR: Oh, we never carry fire arms.

THEY move to the stairs.

CARLISLE: How about a club, a real big club. Baseball bat? Baton? Any hard oblong object will work.

POOKEE: Sir, what we hope to discover will not be assuaged with any physical means.

CARLISLE: I don't care about that I just want HUH?

OSCAR: He means those things won't be any defense against the paranormal.

CARLISLE: I don't know, they work on the Chief.

POOKEE: Have you seen anything unusual since you arrived?

CARLISLE: Say, funny you should ask, I . . .

HELEN: *(Interrupting him.)* No, we haven't!

CARLISLE: What about a dead body? Wouldn't you call that unusual?

HELEN: Oh no.

POOKEE: A body?

CARLISLE: A dead body.

OSCAR: Where did you see it?

CARLISLE: Right over here. *(HE moves back to the couch.)*

POOKEE: My, my. *(OSCAR and POOKEE move to CARLISLE. OSCAR pulls out his recorder.)* Can you describe it?

CARLISLE: Well, it was a body and it was dead.

OSCAR: *(Into the recorder.)* First instance of activity. The sighting of an alleged dead body.

CARLISLE: It WAS a body. Maybe he was alleging to be dead.

HELEN: Carlisle!

The front door opens and LEONA and MATILDA enter.

LEONA: There they are!

MATILDA: You just stop this and right now!

HELEN: Oh, Mrs. Heartsleeve, I thought you said we could investigate.

LEONA: Well, we had no idea WHAT you were here for.

MATILDA: That's right. This is our family home and when we gave your station permission to tape on the premises it was with the understanding that you would dispell any such notions.

HELEN: Don't worry, we will.

LEONA: But your station keeps running all these news ads saying how you were going to show real ghosts here.

HELEN: That's just a sort of coming attractions hook. You know, something to get our audience to tune in.

LEONA: But it sounds like you're spreading more rumors. Making up new stories.

HELEN: We're not making anything up.

CARLISLE: And the body was wrapped up in something, a bag.

OSCAR: (*Again, into his recorder.*) The ghost body was wrapped in a shroud.

POOKEE: Was it moving?

CARLISLE: If it was moving, it wouldn't be dead, would it?

POOKEE: Ghosts are capable of doing almost anything.

MATILDA: What're they talking about? (*SHE moves to CARLISLE and hits him with her umbrella.*) Stop that! Right this minute, you stop that!

CARLISLE: Hey! Hey! (*HE takes the umbrella away from her.*) Look, toots, I can take you hands down with or without an umbrella.

POOKEE: See here!

HELEN: Carl! (*SHE rushes over to him.*)

MATILDA: (*To POOKEE.*) Who're you?

POOKEE: I am a paranormal investigator.

MATILDA: You inspect those things they jump out of airplanes with?

POOKEE: That's parachutes. No, we don't do that.

MATILDA: Oh, so you just let people jump without checking on those things? What kind of animal ARE you? (*SHE reaches for her umbrella. CARLISLE inches away from her.*)

CARLISLE: You're not getting this back until the end of the school year.

HELEN: Gentlemen, these lovely ladies are the owners of Billingsgate Mansion. That's Matilda Billingsgate and this is Leona Heartsleeve.

POOKEE: My pleasure.

HELEN: Mrs. Heartsleeve, if I may get a word in here.

POOKEE waves for HELEN to be quiet. HE then takes LEONA'S hand and kisses it.

POOKEE: Mrs. Heartsleeve, we would never do anything that would be so unseemly as to cast any aspersions on your lovely estate.

LEONA: Huh?

POOKEE: And I'm sure, a lady as radiant as yourself, would be of the most valuable service if you would but lend your kind and wise guidance in our endeavors.

LEONA: (*Giggles.*) You're selling something. (*SHE stops giggling.*) Aren't you?

POOKEE: Only my true belief that, with you as our leader, we can rid your life of whatever sordid stories that this house has no doubt troubled you with. (*HE kisses her hand again.*)

LEONA: (*Flirting.*) What's your name again?

MATILDA: Look, if Little Lord Fauntleroy there will stop licking my sister's hand for a minute . . .

LEONA: Shut up, Matilda!

POOKEE: Then you'll stay and help us out?

LEONA: Well . . . of course.

MATILDA: (*Crosses to her.*) Are you out of your mind?

LEONA: Mattie, we can stay in our old rooms. It might be fun.

MATILDA: Fun?!

CARLISLE takes advantage of the pause and jumps in.

CARLISLE: Then the body suddenly vanished and as near as I can figure it . . .

POOKEE: Why don't you show me the upstairs? My friend and I have just arrived and are in need of a sure hand at the helm.

LEONA: Of course. (*SHE moves to the stairs.*) It's so refreshing to find a gentleman in these course and brutal times.

POOKEE: (*Follows her over.*) And a lady of your bearing.

MATILDA: Yeah, well, I think she's SLIPPED a bearing if you ask me.

LEONA: Mattie, if you don't come on, I'm going to burn all of your People magazines.

MATILDA: Right behind you dear.

POOKEE picks up his suitcase.

LEONA: Now, you were saying? (*POOKEE and LEONA exit upstairs.*)

MATILDA: Acting like a school girl! (*SHE grabs her umbrella from CARLISLE and aims it at him.*) I'm going to keep my eye on you two, you get me?! (*SHE storms off, upstairs.*)

OSCAR: I wonder what kind of readings we're going to get tonight? (*HE crosses and picks up his suitcase.*)

HELEN: You mean from the ghosts or from her?

OSCAR: Hey, what could happen?

OSCAR exits up the stairs. HELEN moves over to the couch and sits.

CARLISLE: I wasn't through with my story.

DON'T TRY TO WAKE HIM, HAND ME THE SHOVEL

HELEN: Let THEM do the investigating, will you? *(SHE fiddles with the video camera.)* We just report what THEY find.

CARLISLE: *(Sits next to HELEN.)* But what if WE see something?

HELEN: They're the ones getting paid, let THEM take all the responsibility.

CARLISLE: They're getting paid?

HELEN: Just relax, will you? Like the guy said, what could happen? *(SHE leans back.)*

Unseen by the two reporters, a POLTERGEIST wearing a shroud with a terrifying mask enters from the kitchen and raises its arms. IT moves to the couch as the lights blackout.

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ACT ONE, SCENE 2

At Rise:

Several minutes later. CARLISLE is lying face down, unconscious on the floor in front of the couch and HELEN is fanning him with her handkerchief. POOKEE and OSCAR rush down the stairs. OSCAR is carrying a small electronic device.

POOKEE: What was that scream?

HELEN: I don't know. *(She gets off her knees.)* We were just talking and he looked behind us and . . . you get what you see. *(Shrugs her shoulders.)*

OSCAR: Good heavens. *(HE takes his device and "runs" it over CARLISLE.)*

POOKEE: Did he say anything?

HELEN: No, just the usual scream.

POOKEE: Did you see anything?

HELEN: Not a thing. After he hit the floor, I turned around. Nothing.

OSCAR shuts off his device and looks back at the others.

OSCAR: He's fainted.

OFFICER BUFORD enters through the front door, cautiously.

POOKEE: Brilliant. Try to see if you can rouse him.

HELEN: Maybe we can just put him on the couch.

BUFORD draws his pistol and moves to the others.

BUFORD: All right, all right, just hold it right there.

HELEN: What?

POOKEE: Good heavens, who are you?

BUFORD: I am an officer of the law. Notice the nice uniform. And the gun. Sort of a package deal, comes with the office. And I am an officer.

POOKEE: Oh, you don't have to say sir to me.

CARLISLE: *(Lifts head.)* You have an office? *(Drops head again.)*

BUFORD: What did you do to that man?

HELEN: He fainted.

BUFORD: Says you.

HELEN: Sounded like me.

POOKEE: Officer, we're here on business. *(HE takes out his wallet.)* Here. My name is Cyril Pookee. That's my assistant, Oscar Swoon. And this is Miss Highwater.

DON'T TRY TO WAKE HIM, HAND ME THE SHOVEL

HELEN: We're with a news station in town.

BUFORD: Well, you sure got here quick. *(HE hands the wallet back to POOKEE and holsters his gun.)* I guess everything's all right here.

POOKEE: Then why are YOU here?

BUFORD: Well, we're always keeping an eye out on this old place. Vandals, you know. Also, we just got a bulletin that . . . *(HE looks at HELEN.)* Hold it. You're afflicted with the news?

HELEN: Good way to put it.

BUFORD: Right. *(HE pulls POOKEE downstage and speaks to him quietly.)* Listen, we don't want this flycasted all over the local mediocre. The thing is, we just got word that a couple of dangerous characters might be in the neighborhood. They're real easy to spot on account of they ain't too bright. Oh, and one of them is wearing a denim jacket with patches. Real disparaging types.

POOKEE: What?

BUFORD: You know. No couth.

POOKEE: I see. We haven't seen anyone of the sort around here. But, of course, we just arrived.

BUFORD: Well, you just keep your eyes open. We'll be around. *(HE nods to the others.)* Sorry to protrude.

HELEN: Thanks for stopping by. *(To OSCAR.)* What did he say? *(OSCAR shrugs.)*

BUFORD: If you need anything we'll remain in the proximity.

POOKEE: We'll figure out what you said after you leave.

BUFORD: Right. *(HE nods and exits out the front door.)*

HELEN: Did he say what he said or what I thought he said?

OSCAR: What'd you think he said?

HELEN: What he thought he MEANT to say.

OSCAR: What he meant to say or what he thought he was trying to say?

HELEN: What're YOU trying to say?

OSCAR: I don't know. You started this.

POOKEE: I don't think he THOUGHT before he said anything.

OSCAR: Can we drop this?

HELEN: Carlisle? *(SHE shakes him again.)* Let's get him on the couch.

EVERYONE helps CARLISLE onto the couch where HE stares out wide-eyed.

POOKEE: Mr. Livermore! Hello in there!

OSCAR: *(Holds up two fingers.)* How many fingers do I have up?

CARLISLE: *(Pushes his hand out of his face.)* Oh, I had such a

horrible dream. (*HE points to each of his attendants.*) And you were there . . . and you . . . and you.

HELEN: (*SHE picks up the video camera.*) I'll get him to come around.

POOKEE: Mr. Livermore.

CARLISLE: And there was this real horrible thing hovering over me.

POOKEE: Can you hear me?

CARLISLE: Huh?

HELEN: (*Announcer's voice.*) And now, On The Spot, with Carlisle Livermore. (*SHE aims the recorder at CARLISLE.*)

CARLISLE immediately snaps out of it and jumps to his feet.

CARLISLE: Carlisle Livermore, On The Spot and on his toes!

HELEN shuts off the recorder and puts it on a table.

HELEN: Never fails!

CARLISLE: Helen! That was a nasty trick.

OSCAR: Mr. Livermore, you think you saw something?

CARLISLE: Didn't I say that? That's what I THOUGHT I said. Maybe what I said and what I thought I said . . .

HELEN: Not again. (*SHE grabs CARLISLE'S arm.*) Come on, oh great warrior, let's get you upstairs and splash a little water on your face.

OSCAR: Here, let me help you. (*HE helps HELEN take CARLISLE over to the stairs.*)

POOKEE: I'll get the rest of the equipment. I think we need to get set up as soon as possible.

OSCAR: Let's start here in this room.

POOKEE: You must be able to read my mind. (*THEY exit upstairs*)

After THEY leave, LEROY and MACK enter through the stage left door.

MACK: Oh, great, did you hear all that?

LEROY: Yeah, what do you think he saw.

MACK: (*Slaps LEROY'S head.*) Not that, you doofus! The cops are already looking for us. And here we are waltzing out the front door and almost run smack dab into their patrol wagon. We'll NEVER get out of here.

LEROY: And certainly not carrying a stiff. Where'd you put him, anyway?

MACK: In the cellar for the time being. There's some stairs outside that I was able to take. (*HE looks at LEROY'S jacket.*)

LEROY: What're you doing?

MACK: They got a make on you on account'a this stupid jacket.

LEROY: My MOTHER made this jacket for me, it's my lucky jacket.

DON'T TRY TO WAKE HIM, HAND ME THE SHOVEL

MACK: (*Sweetly.*) How nice. (*Not-so-sweetly.*) GET THAT OFF! Did you hear that cop?

LEROY: Okay, okay, just a second. (*HE throws the jacket over the chair.*)

MACK: There.

LEROY: Now what am I going to wear? It's cold outside.

MACK: I'm thinking.

CARLISLE comes down the stairs and calls back.

CARLISLE: I'm fine! I'll get the video camera.

MACK: (*Winks at LEROY.*) Follow my lead.

LEROY: That's how I got in this problem in the first place.

CARLISLE: (*Sees the others.*) Who're you? (*HE moves to the video camera.*)

MACK: Look, buddy, you're that guy on TV, right?

CARLISLE: Uh . . . yeah.

MACK: Well, I don't like what you said about my sister. (*HE pokes CARLISLE in the chest with his finger.*)

CARLISLE: What did I say about your sister?

MACK: Just never you mind. (*HE holds up his fists.*) Put 'em up!

CARLISLE: What?

LEROY: Mackie, what're you doing?

MACK: Pay attention. (*Back to CARLISLE.*) Now, defend yourself!

CARLISLE: I think I'm losing it. (*HE moves away from MACK.*)

MACK: Come on. Or are you yellow?

CARLISLE: Well, yes, as a matter of fact.

MACK: What? Well, are you just going to stand there and let me attack you?

CARLISLE: Stand in line.

MACK: Yeah, well, your news is nothing but lies!

CARLISLE: Right.

MACK: This ain't working out! Wait. (*HE tries again.*) And on top of that, I don't like your voice.

CARLISLE: (*Now angry.*) That does it! (*HE takes off his coat and throws it on the couch.*)

MACK: Yeah, that's right. You . . . (*HE sees LEROY putting on the jacket.*) Wait a minute. (*HE holds CARLISLE back with one hand.*) My mistake. You ain't the guy I thought you was.

CARLISLE: I ain't.

MACK: Naw, I guess I was thinking of somebody else. (*LEROY rushes out the door.*)

CARLISLE: So you like my voice?

MACK: Oh, it's a sweet voice. (*HE moves to the stage left door.*)

CARLISLE: That's better. (*Just before MACK leaves, he turns to*

him.) Wait a minute! Who're you?

MACK: Well, remember when you came downstairs and saw a stranger over there?

CARLISLE: Yeah.

MACK: That's me.

MACK exits.

CARLISLE: Oh I see. *(HE scratches his head and then reaches for his jacket, but can't find it.)*

HELEN enters down the stairs.

HELEN: Carl, did you faint again?

CARLISLE: Over here.

HELEN: Are you bringing up the video camera or not?

CARLISLE: I was just about to when I ran into these two . . . *(HE looks at HELEN.)* . . . skip it.

HELEN: *(Picks up the camera.)* What're you looking for?

CARLISLE: My jacket.

HELEN: You lost your jacket?

CARLISLE: Sort of.

HELEN: But you had it when you passed out.

CARLISLE: I took it off when I was getting ready to fight.

HELEN: YOU? Were getting ready to FIGHT? You really WERE dreaming.

CARLISLE: Guy said he didn't like my voice.

HELEN: Who?

CARLISLE indicates the stage left door and then drops his arm.

CARLISLE: Why didn't we cover the flower show? *(HE sees the denim jacket over the chair and picks it up.)*

HELEN: Hey, what's this? *(SHE reaches down behind an end table and picks up a wallet.)* It's a man's wallet. Is this yours?

CARLISLE: No, mine's in my . . .

A scream is heard upstairs.

HELEN: What was that?

CARLISLE: It wasn't me.

HELEN: Come on! *(SHE rushes up the stairs.)*

CARLISLE: *(Still carrying the jacket.)* Hey, don't leave me down here all by myself!

After THEY exit, SALLY and MYRNA enter cautiously from the kitchen.

SALLY: Did you hear that? *(SHE tiptoes over to the stairs.)*

MYRNA: Yeah, wonder what happened?

DON'T TRY TO WAKE HIM, HAND ME THE SHOVEL

SALLY: I think our little nightmare has begun without us.

MYRNA: Yeah, and we haven't even set up yet. Say, you don't think this place really IS haunted, do you?

SALLY: Hey, it's only haunted when I haunt it. (*SHE moves to the front door.*)

MYRNA: (*Follows her.*) You really ARE a blood thirsty lady.

SALLY: You sound like my third husband.

Unseen by the two women, the shrouded POLTERGEIST appears again through the kitchen door. Again, IT raises its arms and moves to them.

MYRNA: We better get out of here before somebody sees us.

SALLY: Well, if they do, I'll make up something.

MYRNA: I'm sure you will. Let's get the sound effects tape and get started.

SALLY: Right. (*SHE looks out the door and then nods to MYRNA. THEY both exit out the front door and never see the "ghost."*)

The POLTERGEIST then climbs the stairs, laughing maniacally. Lights dim out.

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