

GHOST

AT RISE: JONATHAN, a teenager with a shy, but eloquent demeanor, perches uncomfortably on a stool. He is alone on the dimly lit stage, which will add an increasing blue tint as the scene continues.

JONATHAN. I hate ghosts... Not with your typical shivering fear, but with a hatred that gnaws at my soul with a bitterness even I can't control. Ghosts ruined my life, and I'll never forgive them for that... I hate the way they suddenly appear at the top of the stairs, sending icy fingers of dread through your heart and straight up the back of your neck. I hate the way they fill the shadows in a room... watching... waiting...crouching on the farthest edge of perception. Always behind you. Always hovering. Always hungry. I hate the way they turn the soft comfort of darkness into something cold and menacing. And I hate what they did to me... *(Shudders.)* Ghosts are the hidden evil, which infests our deepest nightmares. Supernatural maggots, they exist only to plague us, to torment us, to feast on our fears like so much decaying meat. The biggest lie in the world is that ghosts can't hurt you. That they are harmless wisps of vapor, powerless in daylight, unable to choke the life out of anyone foolish enough to enter their terrible domain. It's a cruel lie. *(Looks away.)* Believe me, I know.

(He runs a trembling hand through his hair.)

JONATHAN. I had a pretty decent life before I came to this old place. I had a family who loved me. A good education and a head full of plans for the future. I had a chip on my shoulder as big as old New York.

(He pulls in a long, staccato breath before continuing.)

JONATHAN. I remember that night, so long ago. Caleb and Warren and me, crouching in the weeds before the dark, empty mansion. All of us, with the silly desperation of boys trying to prove who was the bravest. To prove who was man enough to spend an entire night cowering in the old, abandoned house under the sinister prodding of a full moon. Warren was the smallest of the three of us, and felt he had to talk the loudest. "Are you scared, Jonathan?" he sneered at me.

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JONATHAN. *(Continued.)* “Did all those ghost stories your momma told you about this place turn your spine to pudding?” Caleb looked at me with giggling fear, glad that he wasn’t asked the same question. “I just don’t see the sense in it...” I said, trying my best to sound reasonable, and hating that awful shiver in my voice. The huge mansion loomed over us as if eager to hear our decision. “This place hasn’t been lived in for years. We could fall through a rotted floorboard, and they wouldn’t find our bodies for months.”

(He shakes his head. So many foolish choices.)

JONATHAN. “Then we would become the ghosts that parents warn their children about,” Warren smiled. “Wouldn’t that be delicious?” By now, Caleb had heard enough. “I want to go home,” he mumbled, and I agreed. Turning away before Warren could see the tremble in my lips. “Do that then! Both of you! Dash off to the safety of your momma’s arms!” Warren’s eyes grew wild, like one possessed. “I, for one, will spend the night facing the unliving!” Caleb and I felt this was a reasonable time to saunter quickly away, until Warren added... “And tomorrow morning, I will tell Elizabeth Williams which of us had the courage to brave this old house!”

(Smiles, lost in the memory.)

JONATHAN. Elizabeth Williams... The most beautiful creature any of us had ever seen. The girl who filled our dreams as much as the mansion infected our nightmares. “I don’t care what Elizabeth Williams thinks,” I lied. “I won’t be catching pneumonia from spending the night in such a drafty old shack.” Warren just smiles. He knows that sometimes silence is the cruelest rebuke of all. So he dashes up the stairs of the old mansion, without a word. Breaks the lock with his father’s pick-ax and is swallowed up by the massive wooden doors. Caleb and I shiver in the cold night air, balancing our courage against our teenage pride, only to find our courage coming up woefully short. Warren’s challenge didn’t bother us, we were used to his foolish boasts. But the thought of Elizabeth Williams’ laughter reddened both our faces, even in the cold moonlight. “Are you going in?” Caleb whispers, though there was no one else around to hear. “Naw, I have better things to do.”

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