

HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL

By Michael Susko

Adapted from the 1959 film by William Castle

Screenplay by Robb White



Michael Susko
MichaelJSusko@gmail.com
973-650-4677
www.MichaelSusko.com

HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

FREDERICK: Male (40-50's). A self made billionaire. Distinguished member of the 1%. Husband of Annabelle. Charming yet controlling. He enjoys the game. Host of the party.

ANNABELLE: Female (40's) Vain and beautiful with studied perfection. Wife of Frederick. Manipulative. Hostess of the party.

MAYA: Female (early 20's). Confident as only a younger person can be. Works minimum wage job. Living at home taking care of sick mother.

LANCE: Male (20's). Former college football player. A man/child who doesn't take it all too seriously. Likes to have a good time.

LIZ: Female (30's). Ambitious journalist whose career has stalled. She's been around the block.

DR. TRENT: (40's). Handsome parapsychologist. Not afraid to take control in a situation, and does.

MISS WATSON: (60's, 70's). Eccentric spinster. Crazy white hair. The house has been in her family for over a century.

GIRL: (any age). A shape that may or may not inhabit the house.

SETTING: A House on a Hill **TIME:** Now

Playwright's Note: The actors should fully commit to the style of the play. Remember the play is based on a B Movie, but should never fall into camp. The situations are over the top but must be played for real - believe in them. Darkness, shadows, and sound are the key to the play. The audience should never get completely comfortable in their surroundings.

The audience can receive invitations with their programs or tickets. "I'm Frederick Loren and I've rented the house on haunted hill so my wife can give a party - a haunted house party. There'll be food and drinks and ghosts - perhaps even a few murders, and you're all invited.

A warning must be prominently displayed at the entrance of the theatre.

“WARNING. This play contains Ghosts, Guns, and Ghouls. Mystery, Mayhem, and Murder. If you are faint of heart this is your chance to run for the exit. If you like being scared out of your wits and enjoy a bloody good time...ENJOY THE SHOW!”

PRE-SHOW SPEECH

Good Evening. This is Frederick Loren, and welcome to my party. Before the festivities begin the house has a few rules. Please silence all electronic devices. I cannot be responsible for what may happen if one goes off. That includes anything that crinkles, glows, or demands attention. Because the ghosts don't want their presence known, the taking of photos and video is strictly forbidden. In the unlikely event of an emergency, the exits are *(fill in your theater information here.)* And finally—this house makes liberal use of haze, strobe, and gunshot effects. You have been warned. You have been warned. Ah...The ghosts are getting restless. Thank you for coming...and I do hope you survive.

ACT ONE

The house is less a livable home than a Gothic mansion preserved in a state of elegant decay. Parquet floors are worn, dusty, and heavy with shadow, absorbing sound rather than reflecting it.

Upstage, large solid wooden doors mark the main entrance. A staircase rises from the room, disappearing into darkness above, its upper landing unseen—suggesting bedrooms that feel distant, watched, and inaccessible.

At center, a heavy parlor sofa and an oversized Gothic chair dominate the space, positioned for observation rather than comfort. Upstage stands a large wooden table, scarred by age and use, suggesting gatherings that did not always end well.

Upstage right, an exit leads deeper into the house. Stage right, a massive fireplace looms beneath a mantle crowded with dusty objects whose purposes are unclear. Stage left, a fully stocked bar sits beside a door leading to the servants' quarters—an area that feels functional, private, and quietly surveilled.

A large glass-and-brass chandelier hangs ominously above the room, imposing, unmoving, and ever-present.

The house feels occupied—even when it is not.

PROLOGUE

The house plunges the audience into darkness. Sounds of wind, chains, breathing, moaning. The blackout holds just long enough to become uncomfortable.

Lights slowly rise on FREDERICK, entering in a tuxedo, carrying a champagne bucket. He moves with calm precision.

A clock strikes 8:00. Frederick stops. He listens.

His gaze lifts, not just to the room, but into the corners, the shadows, the unseen upper reaches of the house. Satisfied, he adjusts his jacket.

At the top of the staircase, ANNABELLE appears, wearing a beautiful peignoir. She is still, composed, and watchful. Elevated above Frederick, she surveys the space as though it belongs to her.

They both seem to exist slightly outside of time—figures from another era, preserved within the house.

FREDERICK

Annabelle? Our guests will be here soon. Is your face on yet?

ANNABELLE

You couldn't have found something a bit more modern?

FREDERICK

What better place for a party than a real haunted house?

ANNABELLE

Dust and cobwebs everywhere. The water barely trickles. Couldn't you at least have had the place cleaned?

FREDERICK

Atmosphere, darling. You know how ghosts are, they never tidy up. Not to mention nobody in town will come within ten miles of this place. *(He turns and sees her)* Well, that's a very fetching outfit, but hardly suitable for a party.

ANNABELLE

I'm not going to the party.

FREDERICK

A "Fright Night" party was your idea, remember? Since it's going to cost me five million dollars, I want you to have fun.

ANNABELLE

The party was my idea until you invited all the guests. Why strangers and none of our friends?

FREDERICK

Friends? Do we have any friends?

ANNABELLE

No. Your jealousy took care of that.

FREDERICK

I have a reason for inviting each guest. I scoured their social media. Found a perfect cross section of desperation. An influencer, a journalist, an athlete, and a parapsychologist...to add legitimacy.

ANNABELLE

Sounds dreadful.

FREDERICK

I chose them because they share one thing. They all need money. Desperately. Now let's see if they're brave enough to earn it.

ANNABELLE

And you call this a party?

FREDERICK

Could be. *(He shakes champagne bottle)*

ANNABELLE

Why do you always do that? It spoils the champagne.

FREDERICK

It might explode.

ANNABELLE

It never does.

FREDERICK

We could go viral. "Handsome Billionaire kills trophy wife with champagne cork".

He points the bottle at her like a gun

ANNABELLE

That's not funny.

FREDERICK

Come join me.

ANNABELLE

No, thank you.

FREDERICK

Just one sip might improve your mood. *(He pours champagne)*

ANNABELLE

My mood is fine, thank you. *(Whispering into his ear)* And don't worry...I haven't poisoned it.

FREDERICK

Always good to know that. Have some, you'll enjoy the party more. Go on.

ANNABELLE

Your trust is so touching. And I'm not going to the party.

FREDERICK

Of all my wives, you are the least agreeable.

ANNABELLE

But still alive.

FREDERICK

Would you go away for ten million dollars tax-free? *(She shakes her head)* You want it all, don't you?

ANNABELLE

I deserve it all. Your jealousy isn't tax free and your possessiveness is maddening.

FREDERICK

If ever a man had grounds for divorce.

ANNABELLE

Till death do us part.

FREDERICK

The time will come. You'll slip up one of these days.

ANNABELLE

You think so?

FREDERICK

If I live long enough. You remember the fun we had when you tried to run me over?

ANNABELLE

That pesky Tesla has a mind of its own.

FREDERICK

You'd do it again if you thought you could get away with it, wouldn't you?

ANNABELLE

Darling, what makes you think that?

FREDERICK

Something about you. I hear that hanging is very uncomfortable, in case you're feeling nostalgic.

ANNABELLE

Duly noted. *(She walks up the stairs)* Enjoy your party.

FREDERICK

Don't let the ghosts and the ghouls disturb you, darling.

ANNABELLE

Darling, the only ghoul in the house is you.

FREDERICK

And don't sit up all night, thinking of ways to get rid of me. It causes wrinkles...and you don't need any more of those.

She exits. The sound of cars pulling up.

FREDERICK

The guests are arriving. Let the fun begin.

He raises his glass. Thunder crashes. Lightning flashes. For an instant, a girl in white is seen on the landing, and then gone. It should be a "did I really see that?" moment.

A woman's scream rips through the theater - BLACKOUT.

SCENE 1

Lights rise. The front door opens and an excited young woman, MAYA early 20's, bursts through the door. She is recording herself with her phone as she enters the house. She has an overnight bag on her shoulder.

MAYA

...And I am officially inside the house. I can't believe this adventure is really happening. We're in the middle of nowhere, so no signal...but I'm recording everything. If anything crazy happens tonight, you're my witnesses!" *(She makes the sound of a ghost and laughs)*. Leave all the comments you want. Like, subscribe! Bye for now!

Lance, a handsome young man in his 20's enters followed by LIZ a dry as toast journalist in her 30's.

LANCE

Check this place out. It's just like being in the Haunted Mansion at Disney.

MAYA

I love that ride!

LANCE

And did you check out all those gargoyle thingys on the roof?

MAYA

It's like they were watching us pull up.

LIZ

It feels like we're being watched now.

LANCE

And how about that road?

MAYA

Right? All those hairpin turns. Crazy!

LANCE

We're lucky we didn't drive right over the edge.

MAYA

But how cool was it that we each got our own hearse to ride up in?

LANCE

So awesome!

LIZ

Nothing says "welcome" like a rehearsal for your own funeral.

LANCE

Let's just hope we don't need them to go home. *(He laughs)*

MAYA

This is going to be amazing! Say cheese.

Maya takes a photo with Liz and Lance

MAYA

(Excitedly offering hand to Liz) Hi, I'm Maya.

LIZ

(Looks at hand) I hope they invited some adults to this party.

They leave their bags, take off their jackets and step into the room.

LANCE

Well, where is everybody?

MAYA

It looks like we're the first ones here.

LIZ

And nobody to meet us. That's a promising start.

MAYA

Do you know anything about this place?

LANCE

Don't know, don't care.

LIZ

I've done a little research. It has a colorful history.

MAYA

Do you think it's really haunted?

LANCE

Only if you believe in ghosts and all that crap.

MAYA

I take it you don't?

LANCE

I just need the money.

LIZ

We're all here for the cash, my boy.

LANCE

Whatever's in here can't be worse than what's waiting for me when I get back home.

A loud bang comes from inside the walls.

LANCE

Whoa.

MAYA

What was that?

The chandelier shakes and creaks. Children's laughter is heard.

LIZ

I think that's the house saying "hello."

Dr. Trent enters with confidence. He is a handsome well dressed man.

MISS WATSON lingers at the door - watching the house, not the people. She is a little eccentric older woman with wild white hair. He steps inside.

DR. TRENT

Hello, fellow ghost lovers! Looks like rain. Fabulous night for a haunted house party, don't you think?

LIZ

Are you Mr. Loren?

DR. TRENT

No. I'm Dr. David Trent. And this is...I'm sorry I didn't catch your name.

MISS WATSON

Emily Watson. This house has been in my family since the days of prohibition.

LANCE

So what, it's like a gothic Air-BNB?

MISS WATSON

Few people leave this house alive. You should go now while there's still a chance.

LIZ

Charming.

LANCE

Are we the only guests?

MAYA

It looks it.

LIZ

It isn't a very warm welcome, is it?

MISS WATSON

Only the ghosts are glad we're here.

LANCE

(Sotto Voce to Maya) I bet she's gonna be a ton of laughs tonight.

Liz begins typing on her phone as she speaks.

LIZ

Are we all strangers to each other?

DR. TRENT

(To Maya and Lance) Don't you two know each other?

MAYA AND LANCE

(Quickly separating) No.

LANCE

We just met.

DR TRENT

(Dripping Charm) And who do I have the honor of meeting this fine evening?

MAYA

I'm Maya Manning.

DR. TRENT

My pleasure.

LANCE

Lance Schroeder.

DR. TRENT

And you, my love?

LIZ

Elizabeth Grier and I'm not your love. Is Frederick Loren a friend of yours?

DR. TRENT

I'm afraid we don't travel in the same circles.

LANCE

I've heard of the guy, but never met him.

MAYA

I've seen pictures of him online.

LIZ

And I've only corresponded through email. *(To Miss Watson)* Well then Miss...

MISS WATSON

Watson.

LIZ

Yes, Miss Watson. It would appear you're the only one of us who does know him.

MISS WATSON

I don't know him.

DR. TRENT

You mean to tell us you've never met the man?

MISS WATSON

All the details about renting this house were done electronically.

LIZ

(Typing into her phone) Interesting.

LANCE

How much does this place rent for? Because I know some people who could use a good haunting.

MAYA

Lance!

LANCE

I'm kidding.

MAYA

(To Liz) Are you getting service up here?

LIZ

No. Just taking notes.

MAYA

What for?

LIZ

Something I hope to write.

LANCE

So you're like what? A journalist?

LIZ

Something like that.

DR. TRENT

Have you written anything we would know?

LIZ

Hardly. Apparently I don't write things people can scroll past in thirty seconds.

MAYA

I mean... that's kind of the point though, right?

LIZ

I'm assuming we all received the same invitation?

MAYA

Well, an agent reached out to me.

LIZ

An agent?

MAYA

Yeah. I'm trying to get more into social media stuff.

LANCE

An influencer?

MAYA

Exactly.

LIZ

(Dryly) Don't tell me, you want to be rich and famous.

MAYA

Who doesn't? Fingers crossed tonight leads to something.

LIZ

The million bucks doesn't hurt either.

MAYA

That too.

DR. TRENT

You know this agent?

MAYA

No. But I have to trust things will work out.

LIZ

Ah, the idiocy of youth.

LANCE

That's so weird. Out of the blue, I was contacted by some recruiter.

DR. TRENT

And what are you being recruited for?

LANCE

I don't know yet. He just said that if I came, there would be connections here that might restart my career.

LIZ

And that is?

LANCE

Was. Football injury. Had to put that dream on hold.

LIZ

Mine was an invitation to write a book.

DR. TRENT

What about?

LIZ

A night in a real haunted house.

DR. TRENT

Then you landed in the right spot. Is that everybody, then?

MAYA

You didn't tell us why you're here.

DR. TRENT

I'm ashamed to say I've never heard of Frederick Loren. So, when I first got the invitation I ignored it. However, he seemed genuinely interested in my work. And besides, debunking amateur ghost hunters rather amuses me.

LANCE

This Mr. Loren. He's loaded, isn't he?

LIZ

Billions. (*Reading her notes*) Made his first fortune selling an internet security firm when he was twenty five.

Now a venture capitalist who owns an information technology company, a football team, a publishing house, and the distribution leg of a movie and television studio.

MAYA

A movie studio?

LIZ

Loren International.

MAYA

You see? Trust. Things are already working out.

LIZ

Mmmhmm

LANCE

This guy gets around.

DR. TRENT

He also has five wives, I believe.

LIZ

Four, I think...so far.

MAYA

Is Mrs. Loren going to be here?

LIZ

I would think so.

LANCE

Is she hot?

MAYA

Gross.

LIZ

If we are to believe the promises, this should be the party to end all parties.

DR. TRENT

I wonder why? A five million dollar affair for only five people is a bit steep even for a millionaire.

MAYA

Billionaire.

LIZ

You need to go online more often, Doctor. Just last year, Mr. Loren rented an entire Greek island for one party. It lasted a month.

A violent bang. The lights cut out.

MAYA

Who turned out the lights?

MISS WATSON

They're coming.

DR. TRENT

Let the festivities begin!

LANCE

(Ala Night of the Living Dead) They're coming for you Maya. They're coming for you.

MAYA

Not funny Lance!

DR. TRENT

Its probably a blown fuse.

LIZ

That doesn't sound promising. Help me find the light switch.

LANCE

It should be over here somewhere.

They use their cell phone flashlights. Ghostly whispers can be heard.

MAYA

Do you feel that? It got so cold in here all of a sudden.

DR. TRENT

Classic thermal differential. These old houses are notorious for temperature fluctuations.

As they all search, a girl in white appears to drift slowly from outside to the hazy entrance of the door - only illuminated by fragments of light. Only Maya sees her!

LANCE

Listen. Can you hear that?

MISS WATSON

The voices of the dead.

DR. TRENT

Or unsealed windows.

LIZ

Well, if I were going to haunt anybody this would certainly be the house I'd do it in.

Maya slowly approaches the door.

MAYA

Who is that?

The door slams in her face.

LIZ

Hey, who closed the door?

MAYA

It's stuck. I can't open it.

LANCE

Here. Let me try. *(Trying to open the door)* Wow. This thing is solid. They don't make 'em like this anymore.

MAYA

It might not be safe out there. We should let that girl in.