

## THE GHOST HUNTERS

*“Coming up next! David and the crew inspect one of the scariest houses yet. Legend says the ghost of a concert pianist still haunts these halls centuries after her untimely death, but that’s only the start. The crew is ready as ever to take on this new challenge and get to the bottom of this mystery once and for all, but have these hunters finally met their match? Find out on an all-new episode of The Ghost Hunters, coming up right after this.”*

“Hey! The show’s about to start, if I have to tell you kids one more time—”

“They’ll make it, don’t worry. They’re just excited to be trying out the new stuff Roshan got them,” Maaya said reassuringly as she took a seat on the couch. The ghost who floated next to her rolled her eyes and sighed dramatically, then glanced over toward the kitchen where a tall young woman stood piling popcorn into several bowls.

“This is your fault, you know. What’s wrong with a few games, you said. How much time could they actually sit there playing them, you said.”

“In my defense, Roshan had already bought them. He was

asking forgiveness and not permission. I wonder who could have influenced him to think in such a way?” Adelaide said brightly, bringing the biggest bowl over to Maaya for the two of them to share.

“It’s okay when I do it,” Saber retorted. “Anyway, if they aren’t out here soon I’m going to make them wish the scariest thing they’d seen all night was this episode.”

“It’s cute when you still think you’re scary,” Maaya giggled, then covered her head with her arms as Saber descended upon her with a couch pillow, hitting her mercilessly.

“Saber, I’ve told you before, wait until we’re not holding food if you want to viciously attack your best friend. It’s hard to get blood stains out of these couches,” continued Adelaide casually.

The ghost relented, leaving Maaya pink-faced with laughter and looking thoroughly unfrightened.

Just then, Kim, Kalil, and Sovaan burst out of one of the bedrooms nearby, making their way quickly to the kitchen to grab their own bowls of popcorn.

“We’re not late are we?” Kim asked, glancing furtively at the TV in front of them and looking relieved to see only commercials.

“Nope! Just in time,” Adelaide answered, plopping down on the couch next to Maaya and giving her a quick kiss. “If you want drinks or anything you’ll have to get them yourself, though. I’m not moving from this spot for the next forty-five minutes.”

“Hmm. Hey, Maaya? Have you seen Chronis?” Saber asked idly.

Before Maaya could respond, she felt a tickling sensation at her neck. She shrieked, this time genuinely terrified, and leapt up from the couch, tripping over herself as she tried to get

away. Then she stopped as Saber cackled and held up the small feather she was holding in her hand.

“It’s cute when you still think I’m not scary,” the ghost said cheerfully. Maaya glared at the ghost, but like always, it had no effect.

“Where did you even get a feather?” Kim asked, trying and failing to avoid looking amused.

“From one of the neighbor cat’s toys. I figured since it keeps stealing decorations off our porch I would start stealing stuff right back.”

“You keep that up and The Ghost Hunters will film their next episode next door,” Kalil laughed.

“Yes, well, let’s see how they fare on tonight’s show,” Saber said airily, then glanced down at Maaya. “Whatever are you still doing down there?”

“Whatever indeed,” Maaya said darkly as she got to her feet, taking care to keep the ghost in full view.

“I’ll say it again if it makes you feel better: Chronis isn’t getting anywhere. I didn’t mess around when it came to his enclosure. Not with how aggressive OBTs are,” Adelaide said comfortingly, though she also looked like she was fighting away laughter.

“It does, but still. Go figure your arachnophobic wife gives you permission to get a spider and you choose one of the angriest species in the world.”

“I agreed not to keep him in the bedroom!” Adelaide protested. “*And* I let you know in advance of rehousing days so you can leave for a bit in case the worst happens and he escapes and I can’t find him and next thing you know he’s under your pillow and—”

“Stop, stop talking,” Maaya groaned, covering her ears, but she was still able to hear Adelaide and Saber give each other a high five.

“Hey Maaya! Do you want to come play with us when the episode is over?” Sovaan asked eagerly, and Maaya was grateful for the distraction.

“I might, though I don’t know much about what Roshan got you. I heard a lot of music in there, was that a game?”

“Yeah! It’s harder than it looks. Or... sounds?” Kalil jumped in. “All the games are fun, but Beat Saber is my favorite so far.”

“Excuse me?” the ghost said.

“All right, kids, quiet down. It’s starting!” Adelaide said excitedly. Saber went quickly to turn off the lights, leaving the room in total darkness but for what light came from the TV before them.

*“Last time on The Ghost Hunters, David and the crew went to investigate an abandoned prison said to be built where the home of an infamous witch once stood. Some of the area’s most notorious criminals were housed there, but even though the prison was thought to be abandoned, it was clear that the spirits of some of its inmates still lingered. It was one of the most frightening paranormal experiences of all time. This time, however, the Hunters travel to the countryside to visit an abandoned home. Its neighbors claim they can still hear music coming from inside even though no one has lived there in decades. On tonight’s episode, The Ghost Hunters become the first living beings inside this house in years, hoping to communicate with the spirit who remains, and to convince it to leave—before it makes them leave instead.”*

The screen faded in to a view of a large two-story house that didn’t appear to be in terrible shape given how long it had been abandoned. Or maybe that was just the effect of the strange green filter that made everything look darker and more sinister. The camera zoomed in slowly for a few seconds before switching to a view of three men standing next to a van, one of its sliding doors open to reveal the

inside to be full of expensive and complex looking equipment.

“Tonight we’re checking out this house, and I gotta say I’m already getting creepy vibes just standing outside,” one man said as a lower third graphic scrolled across beneath him that said *David Williams*. He was tall with unruly sandy brown hair, brown eyes, and a countenance that suggested nearly all of his expressions were at least a little exaggerated. “I feel like I’m being watched.”

“Yes, that’s exactly it. And it feels kind of chilly out here,” said the second man, Hari. He was the smallest of the group, lanky and somewhat clumsy, but the dark eyes behind his glasses hinted at his quick wit.

The third person, a burly man who looked like he could pick up the van itself if he felt like it, spoke last as the camera turned to sweep slowly back over the house and its dark windows.

“Gives me the creeps. I almost wish I was staying in the van tonight.”

“You like a little excitement, don’t you, Holm?” Hari asked as the camera returned to them. Holm and David were putting on equipment like radios and night vision goggles, and they carried with them a few more things that were a little more unorthodox.

“If this is like the prison again, I’m not so sure. That one seriously creeped me out.”

“Oh yeah. There was a lot of anger in that place. I definitely felt one spirit in particular. It made me think of the guy the priest told us about, what was his name... Rahu? The guy who was in for murder and arson. Apparently he held a huge grudge for the rest of his life in there. I felt that for sure.”

“This should hopefully be different,” David broke in as he zipped up his vest. “We don’t know the names of the occu-

pants of this house for sure, but we're pretty sure this was the home of a famous concert pianist who died of sickness the night before she got to perform her magnum opus, and her regret was so great that she's remained here ever since. Her neighbors keep hearing music coming from the house, so I think she's still gotta be in there."

"You ready, guys?" Hari asked, looking excited.

"Ready as I'll ever be!" Holm said, shifting uncomfortably as he looked over at the house. "Let's do this."

"Let's go see if we can talk to a ghost," David added, raising his eyebrows at the camera and taking the lead as they started forward.

Ominous music played again as the camera zoomed back in on the house toward the front door. Next, the show's intro sequence played, showing quick clips of several frightening encounters The Ghost Hunters had experienced during the current season. Maaya reached into the bowl to grab some popcorn, noticing with some alarm that it was almost halfway empty.

"Adelaide, how in the world—?"

"I had a small dinner. I'll get more during commercials," Adelaide answered, happily taking another handful.

The intro sequence finished and the show resumed. This time the view was of the hallway just inside the front door, where David and Holm stood inside. Lights affixed to their headgear lit the way in front of them, and the green tint was even more noticeable here, making it harder to see anything that was outside the light.

"Right, we're here inside the house," David said like this needed explaining. "It's very quiet in here so far. We're heading now to what looks like... ah this is the kitchen. Seems pretty well cleaned out. Nothing left to rot, no furniture thrown about..."

“Ghost likes a clean house,” Holm said quietly.

“As we walk through places like this, we need to be careful,” David continued, glancing occasionally at the camera. “We like to keep aware of where we are relative to our exits and have multiple options. Some spirits can get pretty aggressive. This is very dangerous work.”

“We’ve got with us our electromagnetic field detector here, as well as our temperature gun and temperature filter for our cameras.” Holm held up a few devices in turn. “We’ve also got things like first aid kits, motion detectors, and holy water. You never know what you’re going to come up against.”

They walked slowly through the kitchen, the camera taking time to slowly move over everything to make it all look as ominous as possible. Low music played in the background, quiet notes that could almost be mistaken as ambiance, like the low rumble that preceded an earthquake.

“This must be the living room... oh! Look!”

The camera turned quickly to face David, who was pointing across the room. Cameras and light fixated on the object of his attention to reveal an elegant grand piano nearby.

“This must be it. This has to be what the neighbors are hearing, you think?” Holm said, walking over to inspect it closely.

“It has to be. Look, the bench is pushed out a little. I get the feeling someone sat here just recently.” David looked around, his eyes wide with slightly exaggerated apprehension. He held out a device that buzzed in his hand, and he spoke aloud, “Is someone here with us right now? Does the person who played this piano live here?”

Nothing changed for a few silent moments, and David lowered the device, but kept it on and in his hand as the two men walked around the room.

“I still don’t get what those are supposed to do. Are they like supernatural walkie talkies? Are ghosts supposed to have the other one?” Kalil asked.

“Fun fact: when you die, your vocal cords are replaced with electromagnetic field generators. That’s how those devices work. When dead people speak, the devices pick up their vocal emissions from the other world and make them audible for the living,” Adelaide said seriously.

“You’re lying,” Sovaan laughed.

“I am absolutely lying.”

“Vocal emissions’? I’m saving that. That’s the best phrase to describe what happens every time Kalil talks,” Kim teased.

“I’ll show you vocal emissions,” Kalil retorted.

David and Holm walked upstairs and inspected a few more rooms. There were three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and an office upstairs alone, which spoke to the size of the house. Downstairs were two more bedrooms and another bathroom, and finally, a door that led to a set of stairs descending into a dark basement. As the men walked, they set up a few cameras in different rooms as well as motion detector lights and microphones.

“I definitely feel like I’m being watched,” David said as they returned to the room with the piano in it. “Something is definitely here. I don’t think it wants to talk to us yet, so I want to try to make it clear that we’re not here to do any harm.”

While David spoke, Holm kept an eye on the rest of the room, slowly making his way toward the kitchen as he went. There were now a few different views of the room, one from one of the cameramen himself and the others from cameras that had been set up at different places in the room.

As they walked, David’s voice played over the footage, narration that had been added after the fact.

*“At this point, both of us felt that something was definitely in there*



*with us. I didn't know if it was malicious or not, and it wasn't giving us any signs of its presence so far, but I knew it was there. Little did we know we were going to have our suspicions confirmed much faster than expected."*

There were a few moments of silence, and then the slightest creaking sound was heard, so quiet Maaya knew she would have missed it had the volume not been turned up as high as it was.

Predictably, both men whirled around, facing one of the nearby bedroom doors.

"Whoah whoah whoah! Did you hear that? Did you see that?" David shouted.

"I heard it, what was that?"

"The door, man, that door just moved, I swear it moved. I saw it."

"The door moved?!"

"The door, yeah, it like, it opened a little wider, can you see? Can you see how it's different now?"

"Whoah, I see it, I see it."

"Is there a spirit with us right now?" David asked loudly, holding up the buzzing device in his hand once again. "Who's here with us? Can you give us a sign you're here?"

Nothing happened at first, and the two men stood totally still, listening intently. As the camera shifted, one of the lights temporarily caused a glare in the left corner of the screen.

Maaya did a double take. No, not a light. It was moving even when the camera was still. That had to be...

A white shape that was clearly a ghost made its way onto the screen. The men didn't seem to notice it at all. The ghost approached them until it was only a few feet away, but then, instead of making its presence known to them, it turned slowly to stare straight into the camera.

And then it waved.

Maaya smiled. She recognized that particular spirit.

“Hello world! Who’s ready for some mayhem?” Saber said gleefully.

The room erupted in cheers, and further narration was lost to the spectators’ outcries of delight.

“You’re on TV! You’re actually on TV!” Kim exclaimed, looking starstruck. Kalil pumped his fist, and Adelaide gave Saber a high five.

“Oh, this is going to be good. I hope you didn’t torture those poor men *too* much,” Maaya said, having difficulty containing her own excitement.

“You’ll just have to find out. They aired the episode, so at the very least you know I didn’t kill them,” Saber said.

“And really, what else could we possibly ask of you?” Adelaide replied.

“*Coming up*,” the voice on the TV said, “*the crew tries to communicate with the spirit who has shown herself to them... but the spirit has other plans.*”

The five living people in the room groaned, but they couldn’t stay unhappy for long.

“This show is always best when they’re dealing with actual ghosts and not just pretending to see stuff that’s never on camera,” Kim commented.

“What do you think they suppose night vision cameras and goggles do to make ghosts visible where all the other cameras don’t?” Kalil asked.

“Night is scary and ghosts are scary, so ghosts show up in nighttime-related stuff, I guess?”

“The military made night vision stuff, right? How do you suppose they just *accidentally* invent something that lets you see ghosts when they’re just trying to make you see better at night?”

“The same way an inventor accidentally creates a

doomsday device at his vacation home. It's not too big a stretch," Adelaide said, hopping to her feet and taking the now-empty bowl back with her to the kitchen.

"That was still the weirdest movie I've ever seen," Sovaan said, shaking his head.

After a few minutes the show resumed, and everyone quieted immediately, their full attention back on the screen. This time the first shot was of Hari inside the van still parked outside the house as he stared at several different screens at once.

"I'm trying to keep an eye out for any more weird activity," Hari explained quietly as he watched the green screens. "We don't usually see something that noticeable that fast, so the presence here is strong. This spirit is definitely tied to this house one way or another, it's still here, and it wants us to know it's here."

Then, David's narrator voice spoke again.

*"Back inside the house, Holm and I spent the next few minutes trying to make contact, but it seemed that whatever presence was in the house with us wasn't ready to communicate directly... not yet."*

The ominous nature of the moment was somewhat hampered as the screen cycled through the views of several different cameras, one of which briefly showed Saber floating right in front of it while making a very rude hand gesture. Maaya and the others laughed. It was hard to be frightened; shows like these were designed to appeal to people who couldn't see ghosts, which meant that for those that could, there was a disconnect between the tone of the show and what was actually going on.

When they had first started watching the show, Maaya had expected something about as campy and silly as what they got. She had wondered if perhaps The Ghost Hunters had access to special equipment that could reveal the ghosts, but it turned

out that wasn't quite how things worked. Being able to see ghosts depended on the person's ability, not the technology they used. Though technology *could* capture ghosts, nobody would see them unless they already could anyway.

"What if we try playing the piano? Touching a few notes on it or something," Holm suggested in a voice near a whisper. David shook his head.

"I don't want to anger the spirit. This piano seems important to her, so we're going to leave it alone. I'm going to check upstairs, can you look at the basement?"

"On it," Holm confirmed.

The two men went their separate ways, sneaking quietly through the house, shining their lights into each room as they went. A cameraman first followed David up the stairs, staying close to him as he spoke.

"I feel something strange up here. It's hard to describe. It's like... like a weight on my chest, not enough to hurt, but enough to let me know it's there. It's a little hard to breathe."

Just then, a quiet knocking sound came from one of the bedrooms. David's eyes widened, and then he dashed toward the bedroom, appearing in the room a moment later. Saber floated nearby, having clearly just tapped on the wall.

"Is someone here? Is there a spirit with us here?" David asked. Saber waved her arms wildly over her head as David's gaze passed her, and then she frowned when he continued turning, completely unaware of her presence. "I just heard something in here. Are you trying to give me a signal? Can you do something else? Give me a sign you're here and that you can hear me."

"Not yet, my friend. We're saving the big stuff for later," Saber said. Then, suddenly, she seemed to get an idea, because she snapped her fingers and then disappeared through the floor, heading downstairs.

Unfortunately, the camera remained on David for several more seconds as he continued trying to communicate with the empty room. But then there came a shout from downstairs. David made sure to glance at the camera in fright before hurrying downstairs toward the basement. The view switched to the cameraman following Holm just as David entered.

“What is it? What happened? What did you see?” he asked hurriedly and slightly too loudly for what the situation demanded.

“I saw a light over there in the corner, there was like a dull light just for a second like someone with a candle was walking over there. I only saw it for a second but it was definitely there.”

Meanwhile, Saber floated near the door, her hands raised incredulously.

“I didn’t even get a chance to *do* anything yet! He just started shouting on his own!”

David and Holm rushed over to the other side of the basement, their equipment raised.

“I feel something. It’s definitely colder here than the rest of the house,” Holm said quickly, raising his temperature gun. Beside him, David raised his buzzing device.

“We know you’re here! What do you want? Can you tell us why you’re in this house?”

As the men continued conversing with the wall, Saber grew clearly more impatient behind them. Finally, she shrugged, looking defeated.

“Oh, fine. If you two are going to be this impatient I suppose I can give you a little more.”

She moved over to a faucet nearby and turned one of the handles ever so slightly, causing water to start to trickle quietly into the old and dusty sink beneath it. The others didn’t notice

at first, but when they did, they rushed over to the sink, shouting as they went.

“Whoah whoah! This is new, this just changed, this just happened, are you seeing this?” David gasped.

“This is insane. This is completely wild. This is one of the most obvious signs of ghost activity we’ve seen in a long time. Something is *definitely* here,” Holm added.

Narrator David spoke again as the cameraman focused with great attention to the slowly dripping faucet.

*“I didn’t yet get the impression that this was a malevolent spirit, but I’d already seen several things that convinced me it was here and watching us. The moving door, the mysterious lights, the dripping faucet... it all pointed to a presence with us. Right now our most important goal was still to try to communicate with it. If we had any chance of finding out what it wanted or trying to convince it to leave, we had to do it before it got bored with us... or angry.”*

Saber watched them stand near the sink for another minute before clearly getting bored, and she left the basement, heading resolutely upstairs. Completely unaware of this, the others remained downstairs, focused still on the sink as though it was the most interesting thing they’d ever seen.

“I can’t decide if I feel sorry for them or envy them,” Adelaide mused through a mouthful of popcorn. “Life has to be exciting at all times if you get so worked up over a slowly dripping faucet, don’t you think?”

“And Saber knows it, too. Why do you think she started so subtly?” Maaya snorted.

“It’s all in the buildup for these folks. Besides, it’s all the better for us if they think the dead have some unique power over public utilities,” Saber reasoned from beside them, still focused on the TV.

“Whoah! Hang on, quiet, quiet,” David cried out suddenly, holding up the device in his hand. Maaya barely

heard any noticeable difference in the sounds it was making, but then David and Holm both gasped and stepped back in alarm.

“Did you hear that? What did it say?” Holm exclaimed.

The footage of the buzzing noises replayed three times, two times at normal speed and once slightly slower. Each time it did, text overlaid itself on the screen to match up with the sounds.

“... it was here ...”

“I think it said ‘it was here,’” David said excitedly. “What was here? What happened? Is something missing?”

“Now it’s trying to tell us something,” Holm said to the camera, shifting his weight from leg to leg. “Something was here. Now we can start to piece together the clues we’re getting.”

“Do you think it’s referring to an object? Or maybe an event?”

“I wonder if this is the spot where she died. Maybe that’s why the faucet turned on, to get us over here so we could listen to what she had to say.”

“I am up **HERE**, gentlemen!” came Saber’s distant and irritated voice, followed by the sound of impatient, and this time much louder, pounding on the wall.

“Whoah! Let’s go, let’s go!” David cried, and everyone made their way back up the stairs as Narrator David took over.

*“It was clear that the longer we stayed here, the more agitated the spirit was becoming. It was trying to tell us something, and it was taking us too long to understand. Or it could have been that the spirit was leading us to the next place something important happened. Only time would tell.”*

The camera view switched to the men returning to the room with the piano. Nothing was happening at the moment, but Saber was nearby, her arms crossed, looking annoyed.

“Okay, we’ve definitely heard more and more signs of paranormal activity here. It seems to know where we are and seems to want us to go somewhere. I don’t know why yet, but this is... this is crazy, there is so much going on right now,” David said breathlessly. From behind him, Saber swore loudly.

“Oh man, I just...” Holm started, then he placed his head in his hands, suddenly looking exhausted.

“Whoah whoah, you okay?” David asked, rushing over to him.

“I don’t know, I suddenly feel like... I feel like something is taking away all my strength,” Holm said tiredly, kneeling down on the floor. “Something is definitely happening to me, something is wrong here.”

*“Now we started to realize just how upset this spirit was,”* Narrator David said. *“We’ve experienced this a few times before, all in the places where the most gruesome and tragic things happened, and where the spirits left behind are tethered more closely to our world than almost every other spirit we’ve ever encountered. While Holm recovered, I needed to see what I could do about the spirit herself.”*

“What do you want?” David asked the room at large, holding up his buzzing device.

“A pen and paper would be a good start,” Saber said dully.

“What happened here that you want us to see? What do you want us to know about? We know you were a pianist and that you never got to perform your biggest show. Is it that regret which is keeping you here?”

Saber yawned and stretched widely, very purposefully nudging one of the nearby chairs in the process. It moved hardly an inch, the sound of it scraping the floor just barely audible, but David jumped like he had just heard a gunshot.

“Did you see that! Did you see that!” he shouted, gesturing at one of the cameramen and pointing at the chair. The moment where the chair moved slightly replayed several times



in a row, a red arrow pointing at the chair as if viewers would otherwise not know where to look.

*“We hadn’t been able to solve the mystery, but I felt like we were close. It isn’t often we get so many signs of ghost activity so close together, and they were happening with such frequency that I started to believe we were being visited by more than just one spirit. With Holm suddenly feeling like his very life force was being drained, I had to do whatever I could as fast as I could.”*

The next few scenes were of several of the cameras still recording empty rooms while eerie music played over them.

*“Coming up, David and Holm continue to explore the house, now looking for more than one vengeful spirit. Meanwhile, Hari starts to get a bad feeling about the situation even as he watches from what he thought was a safe distance.”*

Maaya stretched as commercials started playing again, though she couldn’t help but shiver as well. It was starting to get a little chilly inside, but she didn’t want to get up from her comfortable place on the couch to go find a blanket. Luckily, she didn’t need to; Saber seemed to understand already, and with a knowing wink, she flew off down the hallway toward one of the hall closets.

“You know what always gets me? Whenever they see something strange they always focus on what they just saw and start shouting, and they ignore everything else. So if a ghost is trying to communicate with them, they keep getting interrupted,” Kim giggled.

“Here’s another fun fact about dying: gaining access to the second world lets you communicate via inanimate objects. By attuning your otherworldly energies to the resonance frequency of an object you can create vibrations that translate directly into contemporary language. The Ghost Hunters know this, which is why they’re focusing so much on what gets moved,” Adelaide explained.

“I feel like you’re lying again,” Kalil said suspiciously.

“You are correct.”

“Adelaide!” Maaya exclaimed suddenly.

“Yes my love?”

“How! I’ve only had three handfuls so far, where is all the popcorn going?” she asked in disbelief. The bowl was empty again. Adelaide, far from looking embarrassed, smiled happily.

“Hey, we’re sharing a bowl. In other words, this is a competition and you’re losing. I’ll make it up to you by getting more, how’s that?”

“If that meant I’d *get* any of it, that’d be wonderful,” Maaya muttered as Adelaide leapt to her feet and dashed off.

Saber and Adelaide both returned before the show started again, and now Maaya had a large blanket on top of her to make it even better. Still, as soon as Adelaide returned with the popcorn bowl, she immediately took as much as she could hold in one hand, pulling it protectively closer to her. Adelaide grinned.

“See? I knew you’d figure it out.”

“You, hush,” Maaya returned.

“*Everybody* hush, my show is back on,” Saber announced from where she was floating upside down above them. Everyone stopped talking again and turned their attention back to the TV just in time.

A camera outside the house panned over its dark exterior once more before the scene changed to once again focus on Hari inside the van. The bespectacled man sat casually before the monitors, glancing between them and the camera, looking very casual.

“I’m having a good night tonight, I really am. Sometimes things aren’t eventful, or some stuff happens but it’s all spread out so most of the time I’m just looking at a whole lot of nothing. Tonight is a little on the more extreme side of things,

which is exciting, of course. Part of the reason I do this is to try to watch all the places the guys can't while they're in there, and it's also to keep them safe. If something is happening I want to make sure they have a heads up before anything gets too dangerous. The idea there's more than one spirit in there, though? I'd believe it. You know, while some of the stuff in there was going on, I swear I started to feel something out here, too. It wouldn't be the first time, but I have to stress that it's *very* rare. Whatever's going on in there... it's pretty intense, man."

After a few quiet moments that showed Hari returning his full attention to the monitors, the screen once again switched to show the inside of the house, slowly zooming in on different angles while scary music played before returning to where David and Holm were positioned in the piano room.

"How you feeling? You all right?" David asked, kneeling close to Holm, who was now lying on his back on the old carpeted floor.

"I'm just so exhausted. I don't know what's going on. Like, I don't feel *possessed* or sick or anything, but something is definitely happening to me."

"Is it getting better or worse?"

"About the same I think. Whatever's in here has a pretty strong grip on me."

"What an absolute drama queen," came Saber's voice from slightly off camera. "He's probably got indigestion. Ooh, I know, he could be dehydrated! See, this is why you should be trying to listen to me right now, I'm dispensing potentially life-saving advice. Hang on, I know what will get your blood pumping again."

The room got slightly darker as Saber left it, and then only a few seconds later, the sound of shattering glass came from upstairs.

David glanced around in shock, then sprinted upstairs, his device held aloft as he ran. A cameraman followed him as he went, and they entered a room where an old snow globe now lay broken on the floor.

“Whoahhh!” David uttered as he crouched near the globe.

“The sheer variety of his surprised exclamations is unrivaled,” Adelaide said thoughtfully.

The scene switched to a view of the same room which had been captured by another camera while the room was empty. Maaya saw Saber float through the wall, peer around the room, then take a swipe at the globe very much like a cat would. The moment she was satisfied with the way it broke apart on the floor, she left the room again. The clip of the falling globe repeated several times for effect, including in slow motion.

Maaya wasn't sure exactly why Saber left so quickly; she didn't even have time to get annoyed at David's reaction. But her question was answered only a moment later. David hadn't had a chance to start speculating on what could possibly be happening before the sound of music started playing from downstairs. It couldn't have lasted for longer than one or two measures, but David was already on his way. The music stopped before he entered the room, running so fast he nearly tripped over the piano bench.

“Did you hear that? Did you see something?” David asked excitedly, some of his genuine excitement poking through his facade of fear.

“You have to see this, you have to see what just happened, check the tapes, check the tapes!” Holm answered, and his emotions were almost completely opposite his companion's. He was feigning interest, but Maaya had seen that look on people's faces before. What he had just seen had very much unnerved him. This wasn't like the shows he usually filmed.

“I will! What did you see?”

“The keys, man, the keys, they just started... they were being pushed down like someone was playing, but no one was there!”

Narrator David cut in next.

*“Unfortunately, there was no using any footage of this event. Just before the piano began to play itself, a mysterious force knocked the camera we had placed in this room off its ledge, leaving it facedown in the carpet.”*

Helpfully, footage from that camera replayed itself a few times at these words. One moment it was surveying the room in the same position it had always been in, and next it was toppling to the ground as though it had been pushed over.

“Saber! Why’d you do that?” Kim asked in surprise. “Now no one can see the piano playing itself!”

“That’s the idea,” the ghost answered, amused. “Everyone who wasn’t there will say, ‘It’s just convenient how all your footage of the most important stuff is gone, huh?’”

“Oh, that’s mean,” Maaya laughed.

“Did you recognize the music? Do you know what song it was?” David asked quickly, looking between his friend and the piano.

“I think it was... I think it was her song. I think it was the song she was going to perform,” Holm answered, his eyes wide.

Nearby, floating over the piano, Saber placed her face in her palm.

“I quite literally just made that up. Why do you feel the need to... oh, forget it.”

*“Meanwhile, while we attempted to solve the mystery of the music that once again rang through the long-empty halls of this haunted home, Hari was starting to feel uncomfortable outside,”* Narrator David said.

The scene abruptly switched to Hari, who was making a great show of shaking and hugging himself.

“You might not believe this, but I’ve got the heater running full blast in here, and it is *freezing*,” he said to the camera. “Holm took my temperature gun or I’d show you, but I feel like I’m getting frostbite. There’s gotta be something in here with me right now!”

“He’s sweating,” Sovaan observed, frowning.

“Those are just the ice crystals forming upon his very skin,” Adelaide explained. “So, fun fact about being dead—”

“Stop lying!” said Sovaan and Kalil together, and Adelaide beamed.

Hari was on his walkie talkie now, speaking urgently into it.

“Hey guys, just so you know, there is something seriously weird going on out here. You guys feeling it too?”

“Yes, absolutely,” David said dramatically. “There is something in here with us, it’s playing the piano, it’s breaking glass, we’re dealing with something very powerful here.” Shutting off his walkie talkie and pulling out his buzzing device again, he continued, “Spirit who remains in this house! Speak to us! Tell us what you need!”

“By the skies, I am certainly trying,” Saber said exasperatedly, but then she tilted her head slightly as though a thought struck her.

And then she smiled.

“Oh no,” Maaya whispered. She knew that look.

Saber appeared to crack her knuckles, and then she disappeared into another room. With no one on the crew able to see her, Maaya couldn’t see what was happening. But she didn’t need to wait long.

A *tremendous* crashing sound came from down the hall, so loud that David visibly jumped even on the poor-quality footage. He hesitated a moment, his concern real, until he

remembered he was supposed to be investigating this. With slightly overcompensating eagerness, he got to his feet and dashed toward the source of the noise.

But Saber was only getting started.

Crashing and shattering sounds came from all across the house. At one point, something fell on the second floor with such force that the cameraman still downstairs with Holm caught dust falling from the ceiling. Holm, seemingly forgetting all about his episode of spirit-induced weakness now the house sounded like it was being hit by a tornado, leapt to his feet, looking around warily. It seemed like he wasn't sure what he should be doing, and for a few moments, the expressions on his face were as genuine as Maaya had ever seen them.

"Guys! Guys are you seeing this! What's going on in there?" came Hari's voice over Holm's walkie talkie.

"I don't know, I don't know what the hell is happening here," Holm said urgently, looking relieved to have something to do. "Everything's gone crazy! I need to go find David."

The screen then changed to footage of David running through the house, courtesy of his trusty cameraman. Saber, ever careful, made sure that the results of her destruction were never actually caught on film; she remained at least two rooms ahead of the increasingly nervous Ghost Hunters. As soon as everyone had cleared out of the main room to pursue her, piano music sounded again through the house, this time slightly more messy and aggressive. All the while, the cameramen showed footage of rooms that looked absolutely wrecked; furniture had been toppled over; mirrors were broken, old bedsheets had been flung haphazardly everywhere, and entire shelves and desks' worth of objects now lay on the floor.

"This is crazy! I've never seen this before!" David shouted as he ran back toward the piano, which stopped playing

seconds before he came in. Maaya hadn't seen Saber in at least a minute, but she saw evidence her friend had been there all over the place. David's bravado was starting to disappear, and the narrator version of himself hadn't spoken in some time. "These are some incredibly angry spirits. I've never seen them have this much of an influence over the world of the living! Whatever happened here must have been much more serious than we imagined!"

"Guys, you're going to want to see this when you get a minute," came Hari's staticky voice over the walkie talkies. "The cameras in every single room are going dark, I can't seem to—"

The walkie talkie went dead.

David and Holm shared a look.

"Hari? Hari, you there man?"

The footage switched to Hari, who was in the van, looking more and more worried.

"I don't know what's happening. We suddenly got cut off. I've never had this happen before. I don't know how I'm gonna communicate with the guys. I hope they're all right in there."

The screen cut back to the inside of the house where David and Holm were still making futile attempts to reach Hari over their walkie talkies. When they evidently spent too much time doing this for Saber's liking, she flung a door closed with all her strength, causing it to slam so loudly it sounded like a gunshot. Helpfully, she opened it right back up again so that by the time the startled cameraman pointed his camera in its direction, the door looked the same as it always had.

"I think we need to get out of here, I don't think we're welcome right now," Holm suggested, and David nodded.

"Yeah. We'll go regroup with Hari and see what we should do next." David looked incredibly unsettled now, but he forced



himself to look at least a little fascinated with what was going on.

That was, of course, until they reached the front door.

David turned the handle and pulled on the door, looking ready to make a dramatic dash out into the night, but then he paused. He tried tugging on the door handle again, but the door would not budge. Finally, Maaya saw a glimmer of true fear in the man's eyes as he started to realize what was happening.

"What are you waiting for? Come on, let's go!" Holm said.

"I'm trying, the door won't open! It's like it's locked or something!" David said, tugging on the door with all his might. "What the hell is...?"

"Let me try." Holm shouldered his way past David and pulled on the door with such force that Maaya wondered if it might simply burst out of the door frame entirely, but it didn't move. "How is it locked from the inside?!"

"I don't know! Okay, we'll try another door, I saw one in the kitchen that went out to the side yard."

Door after door they tried, each one refusing to let them out. The men's efforts grew slightly more desperate each time, though David was still clearly trying to put on a show.

As they moved back into the main room near the front door, David started to say something, but suddenly broke off as every single light that had been set up around the house suddenly went dark, save only for the lights set up in the room with them. For a few moments, while the men looked at each other in stunned silence, Maaya could hear Saber whistling merrily to herself in the background.

*"We started to realize we were up against what was perhaps the most dangerous group of spirits we'd ever been up against. Somehow they had trapped us inside the house while destroying it at the same time, and they had also managed to cut us off from the outside. We thought*

*we'd seen the worst... but this was nothing compared to what came next."*

And then, to Maaya's horror... the show went to commercials.

All six people in the room started shouting in disapproval and disappointment, Saber above all.

"They *would* cut it there, wouldn't they?" she huffed.

"You went a lot harder on them than I thought you would," Maaya said once their protests had all quieted somewhat.

"Hey, like I said, I didn't kill them," Saber said, shrugging.

"Okay, but how close to that did you get?"

"I left them completely physically unscathed."

"The fact that you have to specify—"

"So many *concerns*, my dear!" Saber interrupted, placing her finger to Maaya's lips and smiled as Maaya glared indignantly at her. "You'll find out! As soon as we're done watching this absolutely enthralling pitch for breath mints, we'll watch the best part."

This commercial break seemed to last longer than the rest, and Maaya felt she was now probably just as invested as every other person watching the show who couldn't see Saber. They all wanted to see how the crew got out of this one, but Maaya was personally interested in seeing just what her best friend happened to do next. Saber had only seriously dedicated her time to haunting anyone before, a business executive named Farid, and Maaya hadn't had the pleasure of seeing it happen.

When the show returned, no one had to ask anyone to quiet down. The room was already silent, and Maaya leaned forward a little.

The camera panned over the house again, then switched to a cameraman's view of the inside where David, Holm, and the other cameraman sat. The green filter and lack of

surrounding light made them look ghostly pale and tired, an unintentionally clever effect.

*“As Holm and I sat there trying to figure out our next move, the house had, for the moment, gone quiet. All attempts at reaching Hari failed, and we couldn’t leave the house to talk to him. For the first time in our professional lives, we were being held hostage... by spirits.”*

“I feel like this is the calm before the storm, man,” Holm whispered. “The ghosts haven’t been talkative. All we heard was one saying ‘it was here,’ and I’m not sure what that means. Now I have to assume the rumors we heard don’t come close to capturing what actually happened.”

David nodded in agreement, keeping his voice low as well.

“I feel like this young woman was murdered. She didn’t just die before her performance, she was *killed* before she could play. Likely by someone who was very jealous of her. Another musician, maybe. She might have lived here with family, and that family could have been jealous of her success. Maybe she was getting popular and making a lot of money but refused to share any with them. Maybe they killed her and then killed themselves, so the spirits of the entire family are here with us right now.”

“That’s what I’m thinking, too. You notice none of the events seem to happen *at* us? It’s always in another room, almost like there’s some kind of supernatural conflict going on between the spirits. I thought at first they might be working together, but now I’m not so sure.”

“Why would we be locked in, though?” David continued. “Oh! What if... what if the spirit of that pianist knows we’re scared of the fighting, but it’s very important to her that we know what happened here, so before we can leave, we have to understand what’s happening here.”

“Right, right, yes, you’re onto something,” Holm continued, snapping his fingers.

“Spirits of the house,” David continued grandiloquently, “I speak now to the pianist who once lived here, the young woman. What is it you wish us to know? We are listening to your tale. We are here to listen to what you have to say, to hear your story.”

“Amazing how they just cooked all that up out of nothing, huh?” Adelaide murmured quietly to Maaya.

“Honestly, yes. If they’re doing this on the fly, they’re really creative,” Maaya whispered back.

As she looked back at the screen, however, she frowned. The men were talking to the room, asking for the spirit to communicate with them, but nothing was happening. This was in stark contrast to the mayhem that had been going on just before the commercial break, and Saber hadn’t even reappeared to make a witty comment. The ghost was conspicuously absent, and the longer she remained off camera, the more Maaya worried. She glanced up at her dead friend, hoping for some hint of what was to come on her face, but her expression was blank.

Just then, there came a loud scraping sound from upstairs. It sounded like someone was dragging an enormous piece of furniture halfway across the hall. And then, as suddenly as it started, it stopped.

“We gotta check that out,” David said, his voice quavering ever so slightly with very real fear.

Holm got up and followed him wordlessly as they made their way slowly upstairs. The house remained quiet, and this seemed to unnerve David and Holm as much as it did Maaya.

Then they slowly opened a bedroom door which had, at some point, closed itself.

And Maaya’s jaw dropped.

Every light that had gone out around the entire rest of the house sat in a circle on the floor. Several chairs also formed a

circle with them, and upon each one sat one of the cameras from the other rooms, all pointing toward the center of the circle. Only a moment later did Maaya realize that all the rest of the furniture in the room had been pushed to the side.

What caught Maaya's attention most, however, was what was on the opposite wall from the door. As she heard the men gasp and swear in fright, she read what had been written there in red.

OUR WRATH  
IS GREATER THAN YOURS  
REMEMBER THIS NIGHT  
OR YOU WON'T SEE ANOTHER

Whatever had been used to write these words was also spilled ominously all over the floor. Maaya half expected to see a body there before she remembered she was watching a campy ghost adventure show starring her best friend, and not, as she had momentarily thought, a slasher film.

For the first time, the men showed no desire to get any closer, to investigate, or even to have a friendly chat with whoever might have done this. Seemingly aware that they were in far over their heads, they turned around and headed nervously toward the front door. Their anxious walk turned into a terrified run as loud shattering sounds suddenly erupted behind them. The men shouted in alarm and nearly tripped over each other going down the stairs. Maaya wondered if they might still be locked in, but mercifully the door let them out, where they continued running toward the van, shouting the entire way.

Maaya glanced up at Saber in alarm.

“Was that—?”

“It was not human blood, no.”

“Again, you’re being weirdly specif— never mind. Forget I said anything.”

The last few minutes of the show played out, mostly featuring the men talking to each other in frightened tones interspersed with swearing that had been carefully bleeped out. Eventually, however, the mood shifted, and Narrator David returned.

*“Unfortunately, all of the cameras from the other rooms had their footage wiped from them. The only remaining footage we managed to save was from where they were positioned in the demonic circle. When we returned the next day to explore and capture more evidence, the message written in blood on the wall was gone. Between equipment malfunctions and tampering by evil spirits, most of what we saw did not make it to film. However, this was still easily our most frightening haunted house yet. This is the first time I can safely say that reality far surpassed rumor, and that if people knew the truth, they would be even more afraid of the house than they already are. Will this mystery ever be solved? Will we ever find out what happened to us that night? If we ever return, we just might.”*

A few slow panning shots of the house inside and out passed across the screen while haunting music played over them. A few of the photos featured Saber performing various poses in front of the camera, which greatly took away from the mood the editing was trying to create.

And then the credits began to roll.

*“Next time on **The Ghost Hunters**...”*

The room erupted in applause and cheers, and Saber flew in front of the TV, curtsied, then bowed twice before flying over to turn the lights back on.

“That was AMAZING,” Kim exclaimed happily.

“How the heck did you do that! With the writing on the wall and everything?” Kalil added, impressed.

“Paint,” Saber answered simply.

“Paint...? Where did you find paint in that old house?”

“I knew the show was being filmed there several days in advance so I had time to move in some supplies from a local hardware store. It wasn’t too hard. Not since I can, you know, fly. I wanted to make sure I ended things well!”

“Where did you come up with what you wrote? That was spooky!” Sovaan asked next.

“It was in some book I read, I think. Nothing good enough to remember, but I liked that part at least.”

“Seriously, well done. That was even better than I thought it would be. Those guys were scared to death,” Adelaide said approvingly.

“How did you make their walkie talkies stop working?” Sovaan continued, looking beside himself with excitement.

“Oh, I just turned the frequency knobs a little to switch their channels so they weren’t using the same one. They were so spooked they didn’t even notice,” Saber snickered, then did a double take when she saw Maaya. “What’s wrong?”

“It was paint!”

“Yeah, it was. Why? I thought you’d be happy.”

“You said it wasn’t human blood! Why specify that if it wasn’t blood at all?!”

“I was right, wasn’t I? It wasn’t human blood. It wasn’t any *other* kind of blood either, but I was still accurate. I also said it because I knew it would bother you, and you’re cute when you get all pouty like that. Yes, like that. Just makes me want to pinch your cheeks.”

“I feel like you were the kid in school who bullied other kids by putting your fist an inch from their faces and saying you technically weren’t touching them,” Kalil laughed.

“I don’t remember if I bullied anyone, but if that’s what bullies do, then probably. You’re going to tell me that logic isn’t sound?”

“I swear you’ve decided to take full advantage of being dead to be as annoying as humanly possible,” Maaya said.

“That could be, but dying doesn’t change you *that* much. This is probably what I was like when I was alive, which could very well explain why I died so early. If I find out someday I was murdered, it will make total sense to me.”

Maaya rolled her eyes, then smiled.

“I still like you. I’m going to die early from stress because of you, but I like you. And that was the best episode I’ve ever seen. How’d you like it now you’ve seen it?”

“It wasn’t bad! They didn’t capture as much of me as I would have liked, but that’s partially because I was never sure which camera they would take footage from and when, so a lot of it was just guesswork. But I’d do it again. If they ever have another local show I’m going to be there, too.”

“You know what surprised me most? The fact that you can actually play the piano. I thought you were just joking all this time.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, I never joke. I either say truthful things so bluntly everyone thinks I’m joking or I’m just flat-out mean.”

“Or flirty?” Maaya teased.

“I have never jokingly flirted with anyone. My feverish passion for you has never been anything but completely genuine. I’m only holding out hope that someday you will return my feelings for you and we can both run off together. No offense, Adelaide.”

“None taken,” Adelaide said placidly. “Though I will say that after I saw how, erm, *aggressive* you are with Maaya, it gave me some hint as to why it took her so long to realize I was hitting on her.”

“Hey, I thought I was helping her practice. It’s her fault she somehow got even worse.”



“Goodness, not *everything* has to come back to this,” Maaya complained.

“True enough. Let’s talk about dinner instead! Who wants pizza?” Adelaide asked, and everyone around her cheered.

As Adelaide whipped out her phone to start an order, Maaya chose not to ask how she still had room for anything after three bowls of popcorn, and instead stretched and walked nearer the kitchen with Saber in tow.

“So what are you going to do if The Ghost Hunters don’t come around this way again?” Maaya asked.

“I’ll make them. Or get someone else to, anyway. If I try hard enough I can make any place around here hit national news over the course of a weekend.”

“You are truly terrifying.”

“Aw, you’re sweet. It’s not like I’m entirely out of ideas, though. You could say I’ve been working on some other things here and there. Testing the waters, you might say. Hey, unrelated, but did you ever watch *Annabelle*?”

“Whatever you’re thinking about doing, the answer is no.”

“I wouldn’t be doing it to you!”

“NO, Saber.”

“You know, haunted dolls really get an unfairly negative reputation.”

“We need to change the subject.”

“Fine, fine. I was thinking recently. Have you ever wondered if Chronis’ enclosure could open by itself if there was ever an earthquake—?”

“*Oh my god stop talking.*”

As the night wore on and Maaya and her friends sat gathered around the table, eating pizza and talking about what they’d just watched earlier, Maaya had to appreciate the unique position she was in. Not very many people could see ghosts, and even among those who could, being good friends

with the dead was unusual. This being the case, it wasn't something she could exactly talk about openly. But she almost preferred it that way. This was something special and unique that she got to enjoy, and at the end of the day, she wouldn't have it any other way.

If she started seeing any spiders or haunted dolls, however, she already knew of a certain group of ghost hunters she'd have to give a call.