

HIGH SPIRITS

by
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STORY OF THE PLAY

Cliff Rundle, a twenty-something who wants to hit the big time as star of a new reality show, “Mansion Makeover,” accompanies his on-again, off-again girlfriend Jackie to an old Hollywood Hills mansion. Jackie’s business, Ghost Sense, has been hired to kick a few lingering spirits out of the house. While Cliff claims he’s gone along for moral support, he’s really scouting the place as a potential site for the pilot episode of his TV show. Both, however, get a lot more than they bargained for.

Jackie has brought along her video man, Perry; audio girl Inga; and psychic, Galena, to help her banish any ghosts. Unfortunately, the only one who ends up seeing any ghosts is Cliff. He finds Natalie Fairchild running from someone or something and helps her hide, but then discovers she’s quite able to appear and disappear at will. He quickly learns she’s a film star hiding from four other movie people—a director, writer, costume designer, and her own fiancé, an actor named Greg Palmer. Most unsettling for Cliff is that Natalie and the others insist it’s 1931.

After the spirits try to scare the intruders out of the house by pulling all sorts of haunted-house shenanigans, Galena and Jackie agree that the only way to send the spirits packing is to find out why they are still hanging around. Champagne glasses, old newspaper articles, and distant memories channeled through Cliff begin to clue the “Hollywood Five” in that they were murdered in the house. But before they can leave, they must find out who did it, why, and where their bodies lie.

To compound the problems, Cliff and Natalie fall hard for one another—much to the chagrin of Jackie and Greg who try all kinds of tricks to get Cliff and Natalie to come to their senses. In the end, of course, the crime is solved and the spirits depart quite amiably—even Natalie and Greg who once promised to love forever, a promise they now will keep.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 M, 6 W)

CLIFF RUNDLE: Twenties, a home improvement store employee who's looking to conquer the small screen with a new reality show. "Makeover Mansion."

JACKIE BARNES: Twenties, a longtime friend of Cliff's who is the new owner of Ghost Sense, a ghost-hunting company. She and her crew are on their first big case.

INGA TOBIN: Twenties, an audio expert on the team.

PERRY NEWTON: Twenties, the video expert on the team.

NATALIE FAIRCHILD: Twenties, a glamorous film star from the 1930s.

GALENA SZMYD: Fifties, a psychic.

MELVIN CRUIKSHANK: Fifties, a film director from the 1930s.

BEVERLY GOODWIN: Forties, a playwright and screenwriter from the 1930s.

LEZLEE LITTLE: Thirties, a costume designer from the 1930s.

GREG PALMER: Twenties, a matinee idol from the 1930s.

THURSTON SHELBY: Eighty.

NOTE: The part of Shelby can be played by Melvin disguised by make-up or by an additional actor.

SETTING

The great room of an old Hollywood Hills mansion, a room that looks like it's taken from a haunted house. Wing entrance right leads to main door and access to other areas of the house. Wing entrance left leads to dining room, kitchen, and all other areas of the house. Fireplace up center is set with logs, as if ready to burn. Above the mantel a portrait covered in ragged cloth hangs mysteriously. On either side of the fireplace are windows covered with dusty, worn curtains. Several old easy chairs sit left with a table between them. On the table are several champagne glasses. At right is a bureau or desk on which sit more champagne glasses. Several chairs lie overturned on the floor as if someone left in a rush. If possible, an old chandelier hangs from above. Dust and cobwebs cover everything in the room.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: The mansion great room, evening.

Scene 2: The same, a short time later.

ACT II

Scene 1: The same, a short time later.

Scene 2: The same, a half hour later.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: JACKIE enters right carrying a clipboard, a briefcase, and a crystal ball. She is clearly angry and moves directly to the table by the easy chairs. CLIFF follows her on right.)

CLIFF: *(Pleadingly.)* I am not humoring you, Jackie!

JACKIE: I don't believe you!

CLIFF: C'mon! I don't have a funny bone in my body!

JACKIE: Everything to you is funny, Cliff.

CLIFF: Not this.

JACKIE: And why's this so special as to escape your chronic cynicism? *(Sadly.)* I don't even know why you came along tonight.

CLIFF: *(Moves to HER and tries to put his arms around her.)*
You know why.

JACKIE: *(Shrugging HIM off.)* I don't know why I even let you come!

CLIFF: It's a free world *(For the first time he sees the house, the room, the possibilities.)* And is this a house or is this a house!

JACKIE: I told you it's a mess.

CLIFF: But look at the structure, the molding, the style!

JACKIE: This isn't "Extreme Makeover," Cliff.

CLIFF: *(Enthusiastically.)* It could be! I mean ... if I just got a chance! I could show the world some real makeover possibilities!

JACKIE: We're here to do a job, and I've told you, you have to follow the rules.

CLIFF: Hey, I'm game!

JACKIE: It's a serious job.

CLIFF: Did I say it wasn't?

JACKIE: Somehow your laughter when we drove through the gates while Perry and I were talking about our strategy didn't seem like you were too serious.

CLIFF: It wasn't you! Honest! I wasn't even listening to you!

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JACKIE: Yeah, right.

CLIFF: You want to know the truth?

JACKIE: That would be refreshing.

CLIFF: I was thinking how much this place looked like the Addams Family house.

JACKIE: You watch too much TV.

CLIFF: I half expected Morticia to answer the door and Cousin Itt to run out from behind her.

JACKIE: Nice try, Cliff.

CLIFF: Oh, Jackie, give me a break, for crying out loud. I'm here to learn. (*Trying to keep from laughing.*) I ... I've got an open mind.

JACKIE: Do you?

CLIFF: Yes! I wouldn't be here if I didn't!

JACKIE: It's all real, Cliff. What we do is very real and it's important. There are so many disturbed spirits, and someone has got to help them find their way.

CLIFF: And if anyone can, you can.

JACKIE: I know I was skeptical at first, Cliff.

CLIFF: I remember.

JACKIE: When Mr. Hogalin took me on my first hunt, I thought he was nuts. But then ... then after that first encounter, well, I had to believe!

CLIFF: I'm with you, Jackie. I've always been with you. Even back in high school when you wore your hair all ... well ... all up like you did and that kid Arney Schlebel stole your apple at lunch. I got it back, remember?

JACKIE: (*A sweet memory.*) How gallant of you! Even if it was applesauce by then.

CLIFF: Isn't it the thought that counts?

JACKIE: I know. I'm sorry I've been so testy ... I know you wish me well. It's just that this case ... well, it's so important.

CLIFF: It's your first solo.

JACKIE: Well, hardly solo.

CLIFF: But I mean ... you own Ghost Sense now. It's your business! Your very own business!

JACKIE: That's what's scary.

CLIFF: Mr. Hogalin knew what he was doing when he left it to you.

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JACKIE: I hope so.

CLIFF: And if you screw up, he'll probably come back and set you straight.

JACKIE: No ... Mr. Hogalin was a very happy man who died peacefully. He's at rest, I'm sure. The ones we've got to worry about are the ones who didn't pass over peacefully or who've got unresolved issues.

CLIFF: Speaking of which

(INGA and PERRY enter right. Inga carries a small tape recorder, microphones, etc., while Perry carries a video camera bag, tripod, and so on.)

PERRY: Hey! Get a load of this!

CLIFF: Frankenstein's castle, ha?

PERRY: And it's not even Halloween!

INGA: *(Dramatically.)* Oh ... Jackie! Jackie!

JACKIE: What, Inga?

INGA: This room ... this house ... there's activity everywhere! They're here! They're checking us over.

CLIFF: Let's hope the rent's not due.

PERRY: Who owns this place? *(Pulls out a bag of chips.)*

JACKIE: Some family trust. Nobody's been interested lately until Mrs. Monahan decided to buy it. They've been trying to unload it for decades.

PERRY: *(Tearing open the bag.)* No wonder it's in pretty bad shape. *(The bag of chips tears.)* Oooooops!

JACKIE: And getting worse!

(PERRY picks up a few chips off the floor and eats them.)

INGA: You'll die of germs one day, Perry!

PERRY: So will everybody! Except I got to enjoy mine before they killed me!

INGA: Chips are fried in every poison known to man. Have a carrot stick?

PERRY: I'd rather die.

CLIFF: You mean nobody's been interested in buying this place all these years?

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