

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Ghosts

by Bruce Mumford

EXTRACT

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GHOSTS

Music and lyrics Andrew Lyons

Script Bruce Mumford

CHARACTERS

THE GHOST Former owner of the house

The Guests:

MRS SIMPKIN-BLUSTER A wealthy socialite of robust proportions and dominating personality.

GERALD Her bespectacled, wimpish little husband.

MILES An overtly 'artistic' actor employed by Mrs S. Has a drinking problem.

RUPERT Bookish accountant employed by Mrs S. A man of little character and few morals.

SARAH A psychic. Sensitive and level-headed.

FLOYD A devious, money-hungry property developer. (Doubles as . . .

BUSHRANGER Mean and hard-bitten.)

JIM A wheelchair-bound historian. A little withdrawn and self-effacing at first.

BELINDA Friendly and down-to-earth but hiding a secret.

SARGE A jaded and cynical detective. Not quite on top of things. (doubles as . . .

TROOPER'S VOICE in Act 1, Sc. 5)

JENKINS Sarge's assistant policeman. Younger and more alert than Sarge.

MANAGER Caretaker of guesthouse. Nervous and perhaps with a slight twitch.

AUCTIONEER Gushing and assertive.

FLAPPERS 1-5 Party girls of the 1920's

GIRLS 1-5 Girls of the Women's Land Army (World War Two)

COLONIALS 1&2 Friends of the former owner in the 19th Century

DANCERS for 19th Century, 1920's, World War Two and Aboriginal dance scenes

NOTE: The script is printed in Times New Roman, while lyrics to songs are in Arial print.

Scene 1.

Opening Music

Silhouetted colonial mansion. Figure stands alone at front of house. Second figure moves behind first. Raises dagger (exaggerated by silhouette) and stabs . . .

Scene 2

(Lounge room inside house. Rather decrepit, but at the same time large and impressive with an old world air of opulence. Has a slight atmosphere of menace.

Main characters appear from various doors to sing. . .)

Look at this House

JIM: Look at this house - broken down, desolate, full of neglect
Some manor house! Left and abandoned in every respect,
Every defect, this isn't what you'd expect!

MRS S: Look at this house! I'll turn it into a country resort.
Only the best, wealthiest guests will be part of my clique,
Famous and chic, only those of the right sort.

RUPERT: Profitless waste, extravagant tastes, oh, but what the heck!
Let her lash out, splash out, as long as she pays my cheque!

ALL (chorus): This is the place; ruin and grace
Fortune and loss; glamour and gloss
Its elegant past never could last
The die has been cast, here in this house.

SARAH: Here in this house, I feel a presence that's holding me fast
Suffering souls, psychic disturbance beneath the veneer
And it is clear mysteries hide in its past.

FLOYD: Look at this house! Here is a goldmine that waits for me.
Knock it all down, sell off the land, think how rich I'll be!

ALL (chorus): This is the place; ruin and grace
Fortune and loss, glamour and gloss.
Its elegant past never could last
The die has been cast, here in this house.

Its elegant past never could last
The die has been cast, here in this house.

(MRS S and GERALD to front, behind them RUPERT and MILES-who is busy slugging a hip flask when he thinks others are not looking. RUPERT is busy looking around room, taking notes and tapping on his calculator.)

MRS SIMPKIN-BLUSTER: *(to Gerald)* Oh yes, this place . . . *(wiping dust from a table)* . . .this dump . . . it's just what I have been looking for.

GERALD: Well, perhaps dear. But have you seen the bathroom yet? I don't think you're going to be that pleased. There's a bucket by the toilet. There's a notice that says that the cistern isn't working and that . . well, you know there is a very nice looking guesthouse not far from here and they have a spa in each room and . . .

MRS S: No, no, Gerald. You don't see at all - as usual - that is not why I am here. This poor run-down old guesthouse will make a luxury resort once I have bought it and spent some money . . .

GERALD: Lots of money . . .

MRS S: . . renovating this house. It has charm, it has character, it has. . .

RUPERT: *(referring to calculator)* Around six hundred and fifty-four thousand dollars worth of work to be done.

GERALD: *(blanching)* That much?

RUPERT: Give or take a few dollars.

GERALD: My dearest, I am not sure we can . . .

MRS S: Of course we can.

RUPERT: *(referring again to calculator)* Oh yes, you can.

MRS S: And once this spot is established as a resort it will be the most sought after venue in the whole of the *(insert area)*. What do you think Miles?

MILES: *(who has been caught swigging his hip flask)* Oh. *(coughing)* definitely! Potential, potential. When I first saw it I said to myself *(burps violently)*

MRS S: Yes, I'm sure you did dear. But can you do something with it? You are an actor. Can you create something here to develop this into a special . . a unique *(she is impressed with her own vocabulary)* venue?

MILES: *(burps)* Oh yes, yes, . . . yes. The house . . it just reeks.. .

RUPERT: *(undertone)* Only near you.

MILES: *(continuing)* of . . .of . . mystery. That's it. There's an aura. Yes, I can see a mystery here. A murder mystery. Weekends of murder mysteries . . . People coming here . . . to be murdered . . .

MRS S: That's brilliant. Keep thinking dear - I knew you could do it!

GERALD: For his fee, he'd want to.

(Manager enters.)

MANAGER: Ah, Mrs Simpkin-Bluster. I hope everything is to your liking. I'm sorry I wasn't here when you arrived, but something . . . came up. *(walls of the house shake a little)*

GERALD: Well, the bathroom . . .

MRS S: No, no. It will do.

MANAGER: Yes, I'm sorry about the plumbing, but I'm afraid this place isn't what it used to be. I'm only caretaking here at the moment and to tell the truth, I'll be happy when this place is sold and someone can do it up properly. But if there is anything I can do . . .

MRS S: Thank you, but everything is quite all right. I find old places like this quite charming. Full of character. I am sure it has oodles of history. *(‘eyes’ of house -windows with blinds-wink)*

MANAGER: Oh yes, it certainly has that. I'm not sure of all the details, but every now and then you can *(chandelier begins to shake)*. . . feel it. Well, if everything's all right then, I'll go and see how some of the other guests are settling in.

(She exits. In a different part of the lounge room Jim, in a wheelchair, is examining some of the furnishings. He backs into Sarah, who is wandering about room deep in thought.)

JIM: Oh, I'm sorry. I wasn't looking. I was . . .

SARAH: No, it's all right. It was my fault. Just lost in my own thoughts.

JIM: Yes, er no, ah . . . well.

SARAH: *(taking command)* My name's Sarah

JIM: I'm Jim.

SARAH: Are you staying here too?

JIM: Just a few days. . . I'm doing some research.

SARAH: So am I.

JIM: and SARAH: Into what?

J and SARAH: Well I . . .

JIM: I'm sorry . . .

SARAH: No, you first.

JIM: Well, I'm writing a thesis on the history of this house.

SARAH: That's interesting

JIM: Oh, no, not really. It's just that . . . this place . . .it's got quite a background . .

SARAH: Yes, I know. Well a bit of it anyway. That's why I'm here too.

What We Can Do

JIM: The subject that absorbs my mind is what the past has left behind
It captivates my soul, I must preserve it, that's my only goal.
I live, perhaps, for history. My passion is antiquity.
This house has value far beyond the ravages of time.

SARAH: I understand, for though there may be ruin here, dust and decay
This place has meaning that transcends what mind alone can comprehend
I feel the weight of others' pain, their quest for peace, their need to claim
Some way to right a wrong, some way to rectify a crime.

BOTH: And we both share a common view, we do what we can do
To put things right, to rebuild and restore.
We want to help to redefine, to put things back in line,
The past, present, future make secure.

SARAH: The spirits here do not remain the only ones who are in pain
{ He draws me, but I clearly see, he tries to hide his pain from me,
JIM: {Why does she

SARAH: { I know,.....he has depth there.....one who is fair
JIM: { Perplex me so, it's not like me, I need no one, I have to be

SARAH: {.....perhaps his need, is need that's also mine.
JIM: {Apart, though others have that need, that need was never mine.

BOTH: And/but we both share a common view, we do what we can do
To put things right, to rebuild and restore.
We want to help to redefine, to put things back in line,
The past, present, future make secure.

(dialogue over instrumental)

SARAH: He seems to be afraid.

JIM: She seems interested . . . it must be the house.

SARAH: There's so much here in this place: so much hidden beneath the surface. A lot like him . . .

JIM: Perhaps she'd help me with the research. . . but she mightn't want to get too involved . . .

SARAH: He could be an interesting person to work with on this house . . .

BOTH: And we both share a common view, we do what we can do
To put things right, to rebuild and restore.
We want to help to redefine, to put things back in line,
The past, present, future make secure.
(some "echoing" of phrases in above)

SARAH: { We do what we can do.....we do what we can do

JIM: {.....We do what we can do.....what we

SARAH & JIM: Can do.

SARAH: *(at end of song)* I don't want to pry . . .but I meant to ask you. Your wheelchair. What did you do?

JIM: Nothing really. I've always been like this. Since I could walk . . .well. One of those things I guess. Still, it's good on a slope - and it saves looking for a chair at parties.

SARAH: *(giggling)* Well, yes. *(pause)* Why did you choose this house for your thesis, Jim?

JIM: I read about it in an old Historical Society bulletin. It seemed that so much had happened here, at least since the white man arrived.

SARAH: And perhaps before that.*(she holds out a hand-sized stone, which she has taken from her pocket)* Do you know what this is?

JIM: I'm not sure, but it looks like some kind of marker. Aborigines sometimes used rocks like that to show some important site. Where did you find it?

(MANAGER enters and gasps on seeing rock)

JIM: Are you all right?

MANAGER: Ah . . .Yes! It's just that *(nodding toward rock)* Where did you pick it up?

SARAH: It was in my room . . .