

THE HOUSE OF VILE SPIRITS

by

Lon Turner

(606)785-9874
lon.the.writer@gmail.com

© The material within this document is the sole property of the author, and may not be copied, produced or distributed without the author's expressed, written consent.

OVER BLACK.

Intermittent latino music and static.

FADE IN:

EXT. TRAILER - DAY

A lone single-wide on a desert lot. A collection of dated appliances scattered about. A sign out front reads RIVERA REPAIR SERVICE.

INT. TRAILER - DAY

ELADIO RIVERA (60s), bifocals on the tip of his nose, tinkers with a gutted antique radio. The static gives way to steady music. Eladio grins to himself. Success!

NESTOR (O.S.)

Boo!

Eladio flinches. POOF! The radio sparks, goes dead. He looks aside to his grandson, NESTOR (7), cloaked in a homemade ghost costume -- a sheet with eyeholes.

(NOTE: Dialogue is in Spanish with english subs unless otherwise noted.)

ELADIO

Damn it, Nestor! How many times has grandpa told you not to pester me while I'm working? Go to your mother!

Nestor scurries off, waving his arms and making ghost noises. Eladio wilts, defeated.

EXT. TRAILER - REAR - DAY

GLORIA RIVERA (30s) hangs laundry. She wears the modest attire of a staunchly Christian woman -- tasteful blouse, sensible shoes, ankle-length denim skirt. The only thing remotely glamorous about her is her ever-present silver cross necklace.

Nestor runs up, still in ghost mode, kicking up dust.

GLORIA

Nestor, no! You'll dirty the clothes.

Nestor spreads his arms, displaying his "costume."

NESTOR

What do you think? Is it scary?

GLORIA

Nestor, my love, you are the scariest ghost I have ever seen.

NESTOR
You've seen ghosts?

GLORIA
Don't be silly, there's no such
thing. Now go play and let mama
finish.

Nestor races his off, back to his ghost act. Gloria smiles
after him, then:

GLORIA
(in English)
I'm sorry for the interruption.
Please tell me...
(to camera)
How did you die?

EXT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

The sign out front advertises:

ROD BIDWELL, PhD, ThD

AUTHOR

LIFE AFTER LIFE:

A STUDY IN THE PARANORMAL

ROD (V.O.)
Ghosts. Spirits. Apparitions.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

A series of famous ghost photos fill the screen, fading from
one to the next. The Ghost of Lord Combermere. The Back
Seat Ghost. The Brown Lady of Raynham Hall...

ROD (O.S.)
I know it's a tough sell.
Afterall, to believe in ghosts
would first require a belief not
only in the afterlife, but also the
existence of a benevolent higher
power to grant it.

ROD BIDWELL (40) enters frame. Learned, studious. His
reputation as a leading authority on all things paranormal
has been well-earned.

ROD
But I'm not here to preach to you.
I'm not here to convince you. I
simply wish to open your mind to
the possiblity that death is not
the end.

ON THE AUDIENCE

Among the college-age audience we find a middle-aged Asian man, ramrod stiff in his impeccable three piece suit and glasses half the size of his face. His name is ALLAN TAM, and he's every inch the stone-faced skeptic he appears to be.

ROD (O.S.)

That there is something beyond that final curtain. Something beyond that unavoidable moment when these fragile vessels of meat and bone have ultimately and inevitably failed us. But to accept that possibility, we must first accept the facts.

BACK TO ROD

ROD

Fact: Ninety percent of all paranormal activity can be scientifically explained away. But there still remains ten percent which cannot. It is within that unexplainable ten percent that the possibility lies, and it is that ten percent I'll be discussing here today.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY (LATER)

The presentation over. Rod collects his materials at the base of the stage. The last of the audience files out, revealing the lingering Allan Tam.

TAM

Mr. Bidwell.

ROD

(not looking)

Yes?

TAM

My name is Allan Tam. I represent a man by the name of Winston Wallace. Are you familiar?

ROD

Not especially.

TAM

Well, Mr. Wallace is quite familiar with you. In fact he's sent me to deliver an invitation to join him at his estate this evening.

ROD
Sorry, I don't do private shows.
If you'll excuse me.

Rod slings his satchel and heads off.

TAM
You'll be paid for your time. Will
twenty five thousand suffice?

Rod stops. Did he hear that right? He looks back at the peculiar little man, who now holds a thick envelope in his extended hand.

TAM
Assuming, of course, that you
accept cash?

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A jet-black limo cruises along.

INT. LIMO - DAY (MOVING)

Rod sits across from Tam.

ROD
So, tell me about this Winstone
Wallace.

TAM
I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to
discuss Mr. Wallace's personal
affairs.

ROD
I'm not asking for his blood type.
A general impression would suffice.

Tam doesn't respond.

ROD
C'mon. There must be something you
can tell me about him.

TAM
(If it'll shut you up)
I can tell you that Mr. Wallace is
very old, and very rich.

ROD
How old?

TAM
Very.

ROD
How rich?

Tam sours. Rod subdues a grin.

EXT. WALLACE ESTATE - FRONT GATE - DAY

The Limo pulls up to the guard shack. The iron gates creep open, slowly revealing the sprawling Wallace estate. The limo pulls through.

INT. LIMO - CONT.

Rod surveys the grounds. Notices a black man in overalls digging a grave beside an already-existing one beneath a willow tree.

O.S., the CLICK-CLACK of hard shoes on ceramic floor.

INT. WALLACE MANSION - CORRIDOR - DAY

Tam leads Rod through. Rod takes in the numerous expensive-looking paintings lining the walls. They pass through a set of heavy oak double doors, leading into...

THE MAIN HALL

Lavish and enormous. Tam pauses, suddenly irritated.

TAM

Wait here.

Tam marches out.

MIKE (O.S.)

I know you.

Rod turns to see two other men and a woman. They are:

MIKE VIRGILLIO (40s). A friendly bear of a man with a Jersey accent and a penchant for Hawaiian print shirts.

KELLY VIRGILLIO (30s). Mike's petite wife. Glasses, tie-dyed tee. Could be a looker if she put some effort into it.

RAY SHAFER (50s). Balding, bearded, bespectacled. Polo shirt tucked into his slacks. Even smarter than he looks.

ROD

I'm sorry?

MIKE

You're Rod Bidwell, right?

ROD

Yes...?

MIKE

See, Kel'? I told you it was him.
Me and the missus here are big
(MORE)

MIKE (cont'd)
fans. Mike Virgillio. It's great
to meetcha.

They shake hands. Mike pumps so vigorously it's a wonder
Rod's arm doesn't snap off at the shoulder.

MIKE
Can I just say, me and Kelly
wouldn't even be in the biz if not
for you.

ROD
The biz?

MIKE
You know. Paranormal
investigation? We took it up after
Kel' saw you on Larry King.

KELLY
Eight years and a hundred
investigations later...

ROD
Impressive. Why haven't I read
about you?

MIKE
Eh, we like to keep it on the
down-low. We don't wanna draw
attention, that kind of thing.
(then, loud)
Wow! Rod-freakin'-Bidwell.

ROD
Is he always this...boisterous?

KELLY
You'll have to excuse my husband.
He's like a puppy when he gets
excited.

RAY
A very large puppy. Ray Shaffer.

ROD
(shaking Ray's hand)
Akron, 2006. I attended your
discussion on Raudive's EVP
recordings. Fascinating stuff.

RAY
I could say the same about your
book.

ROD
You've read it?

RAY
I've read all of them.

MIKE
(aside)
Nerd alert.

Kelly nudges him.

RAY
So. Any idea what this is all about? This Mr. Tam was frustratingly non-forthcoming.

ROD
Same here. But considering present company, I'm starting to get an idea.

KELLY
What do you mean?

ROD
A pair of seasoned investigators, an EVP expert, myself. I'd say this Mr. Wallace has gathered himself quite a team. The only thing we're missing is a medium.

WOMAN'S VOICE
Hello, Rod.

Rod stiffens. He knows that voice. He turns to see...

GLORIA RIVERA

Our laundry-hanging ghost whisperer, smiling warmly in the doorway. There's tension between the two, all of it on Rod's part.

GLORIA
It has been too long.

Read Rod's face: "Not long enough."

TAM (O.S.)
Ms. Rivera.

Tam marches in, fit to be tied.

TAM
You were given -- all of you were given -- specific instructions to contain yourselves to the main hall.

ROD
I didn't get those instructions.

TAM
And now you have. I would thank
you to adhere to them in the
future. Now if you would all
follow me --
(to Gloria)
-- and ONLY me.

Tam leads the group out. Ray and Rod share an amused look and follow.

INT. WALLACE MANSION - DINING HALL - DAY

The group enter.

TAM
Be seated.

The group take seats about the massive oak dining table. At the end of the table is a film projector; on the wall across from it, a projector screen.

Tam kills the lights. A beat. Then, in the darkness, a CLICK. A WHIR. A head leader flickers upon the screen. Five...four...three...two...black...

Then begins colorful home movie footage. No audio. A plantation house on the edge of a small lake. Hundreds of people here, all races and ages, enjoying a lakeside picnic.

A man walks among them. Towering, fifty-ish, in black cassock. An air of loving authority. This is WILLIAM BLACKSTON (50-ish). He exchanges handshakes, hugs, pecks on cheeks, strokes an infant's head.

Footage cuts to Blackston delivering a sermon. Voiceless amens and hallelujahs from his flock. But his demeanor is different now. Aggressive. He waves his bible, pounds his pulpit. Three men on either side, all armed.

His flock regales him. He spreads his arms, receiving their love.

Footage cuts. Our group collectively GASP at the new footage:

Dead bodies. Everywhere. Men, women, children -- the entire congregation. Most are bullet-ridden. Others appear to have been hacked and chopped, others strangled. A number of bodies face-down on the lake.

Forensic techs and state troopers on the scene. A trooper looks to camera, says something, points to the plantation house.

Footage cuts to inside the plantation house. The bodies of the armed men and no less than half a dozen pregnant women lay about.

In the center of them all, slumped in a wicker chair, is Blackston. Pistol dangling from his dead finger, a nasty exit wound on his left temple. Footage holds on that final image for a long beat, then cuts to black.

INT. WALLACE MANSION - MAIN HALL - DAY

The group sit silent, still shocked from the footage they've seen. Finally:

MIKE

All right, I'll say it. What the hell was that?

ROD

That, Mike, was Blackstonburg.

MIKE

Blackstonburg?

ROD

A religious commune, founded spring of 1979 by one Charles Henry Blackston. What we saw was the aftermath of the commune's mass suicide in the summer of 1981.

KELLY

Suicide? You mean they did that to themselves?

ROD

No, they just didn't put up a fight when Blackston had his "holy guard" do that to them.

RAY

Thirty years investigating cults and the paranormal and I've never heard of Blackstonburg. How do you know all this?

Before Rod can answer, a voice like stone on metal interrupts:

WALLACE (O.S.)

A very good question.

All turn to see Tam wheeling in the frail, gaunt form of WINSTON WALLACE. Ancient, ashen, his body wracked by some horrible disease. Yet despite his weakened state, his eyes bristle with angry determination.

WALLACE

Particularly considering the small fortune I've paid to keep that information hidden. Answer the question, Dr. Bidwell.

ROD

I'm a researcher. And I'm very good at what I do.

WALLACE

Indeed, which is why you, all of you, are here. Allan?

Tam passes out file folders.

RAY

What's this?

WALLACE

Case files. In the thirty five years since the communal suicide, Blackstonburg has been the source of numerous reports of supernatural activity. Nine men have lost their lives there. Transients, mostly, the most recent being a migrant worker hired to maintain the grounds. The authorities in their rustic narrowmindedness ruled the deaths accidental, but I know the truth.

ROD

You think Blackstonburg is haunted.

WALLACE

I don't think it, Dr. Bidwell. I know it.

MIKE

So this is a gig. You want us to P.I. the joint.

WALLACE

What I want, Mr. Virgillio, are facts. Does the afterlife exist: Yes or no? I'll pay for either answer, as long as it is indisputable.

MIKE

What kind of pay are we talking about?

WALLACE

One million dollars apiece. Contingent, of course, upon your providing of incontrovertible proof.

The group exchange stunned looks -- except for Rod, who seems concerned. He catches eyes with Gloria, who bears an odd, Mona Lisa smile. Rod lays his file folder aside.

ROD

I can't help you.

MR. WALLACE

What?

ROD

Mr. Wallace--respectfully--you're obviously ill. Terminal, judging by the fresh grave out front. You want to know if there's something on the other side. But despite our combined experience, we're no closer to a definitive answer now than Charles Fort was one hundred years ago. I can't in good conscious take advantage--

WALLACE

One-point-seven billion dollars, Dr. Bidwell. The estimated value of my estate. I would have spent every last penny for a cure to the disease which ails me. It took less than half a million to determine there isn't one. I'm not interested in falsities designed to appease a dying old man. I simply want the truth. If you're not willing to provide it, I'm sure the reliable Mr. Tam can find someone else who is.

Rod hesitates, but we can see what his answer is, as can Wallace.

WALLACE

Then it's settled. Accommodations have been made for the night. You'll leave first thing in the morning. Allan?

Tam wheels Wallace out. The group buzzes with excitement, save for Rod, who once again catches eyes with Gloria. That smile...