

**How to Catch Ghosts...
and Make Friends Doing It**

A Spooky Mockumentary for Young People

by
Vincent S. Hannam

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First edition, printed 2026

HOW TO CATCH GHOSTS AND MAKE FRIENDS DOING IT.

(15-17 actors, flexible casting, one act) Orphans explore the local haunted house to prove ghosts exist and become famous enough for someone to give them a home. Along the way, they meet all manner of ghosts – friendly and otherwise!

VINCENT S. HANNAM. A playwright specializing in character-driven genre stories in the realms of sci-fi, horror, crime, and fantasy. BFA Acting, University of Central Florida; MA Teaching, St. Mary's University of Minnesota; Lab Company, Hangar Theatre. He lives in Minneapolis with his family, dreaming of new worlds.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

HOW TO CATCH GHOSTS AND MAKE FRIENDS DOING IT was produced as part of the Under Construction education program at Lakeshore Players Theatre in White Bear Lake, Minnesota (2024); directed and written by Vincent S. Hannam; the stage manager was Lewis Youngren; costumes by Sylvia Kemp; the technical director was Justin Hooper; the program coordinator was Quinn Masterson; the artistic programs manager was Kivan Kirk. The cast was as follows (in order of appearance):

HELLEN WOODBURN

BILL/ORPHAN/JAKE WILLIAMS

JJ WINKLESON

CAMERON

BROOKE OLSON

CHLOE ELANNA OLSON

GABI

ANNIE FRYE

GRANDMA OTIS MCSTINKLE PICKLE BURGER

STANLEY

BABY JIGSAW VODKA III

PRINCESS ELIZABETH

KING JAMES

ATHENA PETRA

BRIAR WINTONE

Nova Torok

Nick Brabec

Marco Kirby

Oliver Anderson

Tessa Delwiche

Nora Chapman

Elizabeth Luther

Layla Young

Zeke Harding

Irina Hill

Kai Combs

Kaylee Luther

Charles Roy

Addi Wielinski

Amelia Jensen

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ADDITIONAL THANKS

To the young actors who helped devise the story and characters. Special thanks to Megan K. Pence and the staff at Lakeshore Players. Finally, a big thanks to Ross Black who ordered the first published copy of this play.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HELEN WOODBURN:	A newscaster. Ambitious, savvy. Female. Adult.
BILL, THE CAMERA PERSON:	Any gender*. Adult.
ORPHAN WITH A CAMERA:	Any gender. Kid.
J.J. WINKILSON:	An aspiring ghost hunter. Any gender. Kid.
CAMERON:	A techno-wizard. Any gender. Kid.
BROOKE:	A level-headed runaway from California. Any gender. Kid.
CHLOE:	An opinionated runaway from California. Any gender. Kid.
GABI:	The chaperone. Works at DQ. Any gender. Kid.
ANNIE FRYE:	Bratty, but lovable. Any gender. Kid.
JAKE WILLIAMS, THE GHOST HUNTER:	A loud-mouthed braggart from Texas. Any gender. Adult.
GRANDMA OTIS:	An evil, interdimensional cosmic being. Any gender.
STANLEY:	A sad clown known as Bobo. Any gender. Ghost. Adult.

BABY JIGSAW VODKA III:	A Russian spy trying to get to Heaven. Ghost. Russian. Adult.
PRINCESS ELIZABETH:	A princess easily embarrassed, but a fighter. Any gender. Ghost. Adult.
KING JAMES:	A wrathful king. Any gender. Ghost. Adult.
ATHENA PETRA:	A pop singer killed by her haters. Any gender. Ghost. Adult.
BRIAR:	A medieval maiden curious about today's youth. Any gender. Ghost. Kid.

Notes:

You may cast this with as few actors as possible. I'll trust you to get creative with doubling/tripling/quadrupling/etc.

Please change written pronouns to accommodate the gender identity of the actor cast.

PLACE

A creepy old house outside of Salem, Massachuesetts

TIME

October, 1988

HOW TO CATCH GHOSTS... AND MAKE FRIENDS DOING IT

SCENE 1

The stage is dark. Thunder rumbles as a storm brews. HELLEN WOODBURN, a news reporter and BILL, a camera person, take center; they ready themselves. Lights rise on the news team.

HELLEN

(to the Audience)

Hi, I'm Hellen Woodburn for Channel 9 News. My boss asked me to take this job because Frank, the head anchor, finally - I mean, unfortunately - left. This is huge. I'm on mainstream news

(to Bill, the Camera Person)

Hey, Bill, are you getting this? This could really boost my popularity. Right now I'm living in a one-bedroom apartment with my dog, April, and living off Ramen. I need this gig if I wanna afford rent this month. No one watches the news at three in the morning.

(to the Audience)

Sorry. Today I finally get to report on an interesting topic. Behind me is the old creepy house the locals supposedly call haunted because of an ancient curse. Every October, the spirits are said to rise and snatch the souls of children.

(to Bill)

I don't believe in ghosts, but people love to see this junk so if it helps pay the bills.

(to the Audience)

Sorry. We'll begin through the back door where a clown ghost has supposedly been heard honking his horn.

A ghostly honking is heard; lights dim on the news team. Hellen exits; Bill remains.

Lights rise on a gang of children standing outside the house. They are ORPHANS and RUNAWAYS from different parts of the country. They stand in various spots.

Bill becomes an ORPHAN WITH A CAMERA; he turns the camera on himself.

ORPHAN WITH A CAMERA

(to the camera)

We, the lost and lonely children of Sister Margaret's Orphanage, located in the forgotten hills outside Salem, Massachusetts, are here on this stormy night to record a documentary. Though we hail from all over the country, we come together now to expose the truth behind the hauntings of the old creepy house. Recorded in October, 1988.

(to the others)

Alright, gang, I'm going to have you introduce yourselves.

The Orphan With a Camera takes the camera and moves D.S.; he exits in the dark. Lights rise and dim on the children as they take their turns speaking.

JJ

Hello, my name is JJ Winkleson and I am from Oklahoma. I am eleven and I like to draw. My favorite color is red. I had two parents once... but now I have lots of friends. The reason I'm going to the supposedly haunted house is because I want to study the ghosts so I can be a ghost hunter like my role model, Jake Williams, the most famous ghost hunter in the world. Do I think ghosts are real? 100%. Do I have experiences with ghosts? No, I do not.

CAMERON

Hi, I am Cameron and I'm from Boston. I am thirteen and I love technology. I strive to prove to skeptics that ghosts indeed exist and should be destroyed. I believe this with all my heart. Why? Because they killed my parents one night. You want to hear the story? You asked for it.

CAMERON (cont'd)

I walked into the living room and they both passed by me floating in the air and then I -

Two RUNAWAYS speak together. They are sisters from California.

BROOKE

Sorry, Cameron, but it's our turn! Hi, my name is Brooke Olson. I love to play soccer and everyone on my team says I'm just the second best player.

(rolls eyes)

The person who is just the teensiest bit better than me is Bella Hill. Gross. I'm so glad we ran away from California.

CHLOE

(nervous)

Um, hi... um, I'm Chloe Elanna Olson and um, Bella Hill really isn't that mean. Uh... well, I'm thirteen years old and uh, when I'm older I want to be an author. Oh! And I'm lucky enough to be twins with Brooke. We ran away from California because our dad was forcing me to be the next mayor. He's the current mayor.

BROOKE

And I had to go to public school. That's for poor people. Gross.

CHLOE

And even though Brooke doesn't believe in ghosts, I know they are real. When I was three, I saw one! It was floating right above my head and, and -

BROOKE

It was probably your imagination!

(to the Audience)

Ghosts are obviously not real.

(to Chloe)

Let's go, Chloe. We're done here.

GABI

Do I have to do this? Fine. Hi, my name is Gabi. Now me, personally, I don't believe in ghosts. I think this is stupid. I only came with because someone needs to chaperon these weirdos. Anyways, I ran away from home, hated my dad and my horrible step-mom. Yeah, I work at the local DQ. Yeah, technically I'm supposed to be on shift... Yeah, don't tell my boss.

ANNIE

I'm Annie Frye and I love being an orphan. I've come to the haunted house because why not? I'm a brat. I admit it. But it can be a good trait in certain situations. People say a nine year old shouldn't talk as much, but do I care? No. I love ghosts.

The ghost known as BRIAR, enters; she stands next to Annie.

Sometimes I feel a connection to the mystical world. As if they're right here, right now, desperately trying to call me attention.

Beat.

Does Annie sense the ghost standing next to her? She introduces herself.

I'm Annie Frye. '70s rock is my life and I live in the orphanage.

SCENE 2

Thunder. Lights rise. Annie calls out:

ANNIE

Hey guys! The storm is coming in fast!

GABI

Let's get inside!

CHLOE

But Brooke, what if I see a ghost?

BROOKE

The only thing we're going to see is a dusty old house.

JJ

But just in case we do run into any pesky poltergeists, I know just what to do! I've been reading the ghost hunting manual by Jake Williams, the greatest ghost hunter in the world.

CAMERON

Yeah, Chloe, and I have the Specter-Catcher 9000, the most reliable ghost entrapment device on the market.

CHLOE

Brooke, I miss home...

GABI

That's why we're doing this. So we can be famous enough for someone to give us a home.

BROOKE

Ugh. All I want is for Bella Hill to admit that I'm the best.

GABI

Annie, are you sure this is a good idea?

ANNIE

Let's go, gang, hands in:

They put their hands in the circle.

Here we go again on our own,
Going down the only road we've ever known,
Like drifters, we were born to walk alone,
And we've made up our minds -

ALL

We ain't wasting no more time!

Hands rise. Thunder. Lightning. The children exit.

SCENE 3

Hellen Woodburn enters the house.

HELLEN

Bill, where are you?? Hello!? Where could he have gone? Hmm... let's see... What can I do without a camera?

She checks her pockets for a recording device.

A-ha! If I can't have video, I'll record audio. They'll be impressed with my can-do-attitude. Alright, let's do this. Rent ain't gonna pay itself and we can't eat Ramen forever.

(to the Audience)

Hellen Woodburn here with Channel 9 News. We are located inside the old haunted house. My cameraman has apparently gotten lost, but the news must carry on!

(beat)

Legend has it that this house is haunted by all kinds of spirits: a princess and a King; a Russian spy; a kooky old grandma; a medieval maiden; and even a goofy clown.

At this moment, a ghost passes upstage of Hellen. She shivers.

There must be a window open...

The ghost makes spooky ghost sounds.

Bill, if that's you, this is perfect for the recording!

(to the Audience)

Bill is a genius with sound effects.

The ghost exits. There is a knock on the door.

That must be him!

Hellen opens it, but it is not the Camera Person. It is JAKE, THE GHOST HUNTER.

JAKE

Holy Yellow Rose of Texas, is it comin' down out there!

HELLEN

Who are you!?

JAKE

Howdy. Name's Jake Williams, the Ghost Hunter. And who might you be, ma'am?

HELLEN

Hellen Woodburn with Channel 9 News.

JAKE

Pleasure to make your acquaintance, Hellen. I could use some free publicity!

HELLEN

And I could use a camera!

JAKE

I'll set one up. Can't hunt spooky phantoms without one! Jake sets up the camera on a tripod.

HELLEN

But I don't see it.

JAKE

That's because it's my invisible camera.

HELLEN

Why do you have an invisible camera?

JAKE

So the ghosts can't see it.

HELLEN

Of course!

JAKE

Now if you don't mind, I'm gonna do a little introduction.

(to the Audience)

I'm Jake Williams, the Ghost Hunter, and I need to find them ghosts. OK, look everyone, I'm a straight-shooter, and I believe I am the best. I am from Texas and did move to Salem thirteen years ago. No better place under the sun to catch them little haunters. I have been apprehending apparitions all my life and you can read about my exploits in my self published manual, "How to Catch Ghosts and Look Good Doing It."

HELLEN

This is going to be a killer story!

JJ shouts offstage:

JJ

(offstage)

Jake Williams, the Ghost Hunter!

JAKE

Jumpin' jackrabbits, it's an ever-lovin' ghost!

He runs away scared. Hellen opens the door for the kids. Jake comes out of hiding with an air of bravado.

I knew it was them whipper-snappers all along.

HELLEN

What are you kids doing here?

CAMERON

We're here to prove that nasty old ghosts exist and to destroy them!
When my parents were killed I ran to the phone but it short-circuited -

BROOKE

Cameron, please, ghosts are not real!

JAKE

Oh, you misguided little tumbleweed. Those nasty old ghosts are all
around us. Forever caught between this world and the next.

*As Jake speaks, Briar enters. She waves to Annie; Annie goes to her.
They exit together.*

Sometimes, they enjoy the purgatorio—

ATHENA, the singing ghost enters.

Sometimes they're madder than a wet hen to be left behind.

BABY JIGSAW VODKA III, the Russian ghost enters.

Sometimes they make the best of a bad situation.

STANLEY, the clown ghost enters.

And sometimes they're here to help us on our own paths through life.

ELIZABETH, the princess ghost enters.

But sometimes! Sometimes they just want to plain scare us.

KING JAMES, the king ghost enters.

JJ

What about the super, all-powerful, evil poltergeist you describe in chapter thirty-one?

JAKE

You read my book?

JJ

I'm your biggest fan!

JAKE

Why, thank you, little fella -

GABI

What about the super, all-powerful, evil poltergeist??

JAKE

Oh! The super, all-powerful, evil poltergeist goes by many names. In the Far East it known as Onibaba; in South American legends, it is called El Chupacabra; and here in the U.S. of A... it goes by the name of "Grandma Otis".

BROOKE

Grandma Otis? Really?

JAKE

This is one hell-spawn demon you do not want to mess with, I tell you what.

CHLOE

What can Grandma Otis do?

As Jake speaks, the wind picks up.

JAKE

What it always does! Steal the souls of children to put into the most diabolical baked goods this side of the Rio Grandido!

HELLEN

How would we know if she's here?

JAKE

Because you would hear such a racket from all the other spirits! Even they're scared of this bad mamma-jamma!

Thunder! Lightning! All the ghosts make ghost sounds as the curtains billow, the door opens and shuts, and the piano plays.

GRANDMA OTIS enters.

GRANDMA OTIS

Yo, yo, yo! Ghoulies and ghosties, I have found a camera.

Black out. The living characters exit. The ghosts remain in their spots.

SCENE 4

Lights rise; the ghosts speak to the audience.

GRANDMA OTIS

It's your favorite ghostie, Grandma Otis McStinkle Pickle Burger. That's the full name, get it right. What happened to Bill the Cameraman? Don't bore me with trivial questions. I've been around for about fifty trillion years, baby.

And I'm back to haunt on some orphan kids and turn them into sugar cookies. Mmmmm, I love me some sugar cookies. What's the recipe? I make them from the ground up with a dash of cinnamon, a pinch of garlic, and a whole lot of yummy child, know what I'm sayin'? I'm about to bake 'em and take their souls today. So get outta the way, Grandma Otis do not play.

Grandma Otis exits.

STANLEY

Grandma Otis is weird and crazy. She's like a clown.

(admitting)

I kind of want to be friends with her... is that okay?

(beat)

Sorry. Hi. My name is Stanley. Some people call me Bobo. I used to be a clown so that's where I got the nickname from. I just want to make people laugh. My dad always said, "making people laugh for a living is not a good job. You will be living on the street in a cardboard box in a few days." Look where I am now dad! I'm Bobo! Oh... wait... I'm also dead...

(beat)

Can you just cut that part out?

BABY JIGSAW

Hello, I am Baby Jigsaw Vodka III. I am a Russian spy sent here to find Grandma Otis and bring her to Russia for her crimes. This morning I got a ping on my radar and tracked her down to Salem. But I have been

BABY JIGSAW (cont'd)

struggling to catch her, so I've been haunting bars in the meantime... the irony is, I died by drinking vodka... or wait, was it the 100 rounds of bullets shot into me by the Germans who hunted me down? Just because I sent an airstrike on their base?

(beat)

As for the children, I do not care about them. I think they should live life.

ELIZABETH

Hi, my name is Elizabeth. Before I died, I was a princess. But then I was assassinated along with my father, King James. It's about the only thing we ever had in common... We never really got along... How did it happen? We were at war with another country, I don't remember which one, but clearly we lost... um... I don't want to talk about how I died anymore.

KING JAMES

(to the Audience)

Thou shall knowest how we died! And my daughter must face the reality of our demise. Behold! The sword stuck in my chest.

ELIZABETH

Father! You're embarrassing me!

(to the Audience)

My goal now is to help the kids escape this haunted house because I feel everyone deserves to live a good life.

KING JAMES

These modern children knowest nothing! Oh, how they annoy me with their insane acts! If I could still order executions, I would! And don't get me started on the modern world! All this tech... and kindness... is so odd. The world should have stayed the same! The hierarchy should never change! I am a great ruler and thou shall suffer my wrath!

ATHENA

Hello, I am Athena Petra. I used to be a famous singer. I loved to sing to my fans and they loved me and my voice. They came to all of my shows. Until some turned into haters and stabbed me in the heart...

(beat)

But how do I feel about these kids? Oh, I love that they're here! That means I can sing to a few of them and get back to my happy place!

Light on Briar; she is in the attic with Annie hanging out.

BRIAR

My name is Briar Wintone and I am a ghost. All the other ghosts call me paranoid and afraid of everything. But even if they're right, it's good to be wary of people, because they could be coming to attack you with an axe. Or two axes! I grew up in the 1500s and worked for His Majesty King James. That's actually how I died... I messed up too many meals and lost... my... head... The other ghosts sewed it back on. Sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself. The only ones I trust are the other ghosts. Except Grandma Otis... She scares me, and even more than the kids of Salem. They're strange and yet... I kind of want to be friends with them.

Lights rise on all; the living characters enter in a panic.

CHLOE

I knew this house was haunted!

JJ

Did you see it, did you see it!

HELLEN

This is going to be perfect footage!

BROOKE

It was just the wind!

CAMERON

The Specter-Catcher 9000 was definitely getting a signal!

GABI

Everyone stop!

They stop. She does a head count.

Oh no.

HELLEN

Where's Jake Williams, the Ghost Hunter??

JJ finds Jake hiding under the piano.

JJ

He's under the piano!

JAKE

Just, uh, checking for uh, you know, the undead. Coast is clear.

GABI

I don't care about him, where's Annie??

CHLOE

Grandma Otis must have snatched her!

GABI

I can't believe this! I'm in so much trouble!

JJ

We'll find her! We have the greatest ghost hunter in the world!

JAKE

Slow your spurs there, amigo.

BROOKE

Yeah, if you even are the greatest!

CHLOE

Please save Annie! I'll help!

CAMERON

I'll help!

HELLEN

And the whole world will watch!

JJ

Please, Mr. Jake Williams, Ghost Hunter. You're my hero.

Beat.

JAKE

Well, alright... this ain't my first rodeo. You can hang your hat on that. Just lemme adjust this...

Jake readies his ghost-catching equipment. The ghosts look at each other. King James shouts:

KING JAMES

Stop! Thou wicked mortal!

The kids all back up as King James approaches Jake, who is scared stiff.

JAKE

Well butter my butt and call me a biscuit. It's a... it's a...

ALL LIVING

Ghost!

KING JAMES
(to the living)

Silence!

(to Jake)

Thou dardest assassinate the King and his friends?!

JAKE

No, no, no, no, no, no, no...

KING JAMES

I have only one word for you!

ELIZABETH

Father, don't say it!

King James is face-to-face with Jake, who is frozen with fear.

JAKE

No. no. no, no...

King James takes an enormous breath and says:

KING JAMES

Boo!

Jake has a heart attack and pleads for help.

JAKE

(to kids)

Help me!

(to the Audience)

Help me!

(to Brooke and Chloe)

Help me!