

Ghosts of Ocean House

by
Michael Kimball

To inherit their family seaside mansion, three adult siblings, estranged remnants of a once aristocratic New England family, must spend a week together in Ocean House for each of ten years--or else lose the house to bulldozers and a public town beach. This is their final year, their final week. But the newest family member, a flighty, fragile young bride named Darlene, harbors a dark, mysterious past--as does the quiet old house--and when they come together, ghosts begin awakening. Edgar Award Finalist.

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CHARACTERS

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MARTIN: | 40, lawyer; church deacon; twice divorced, newly married |
| DARLENE: | 25, Martin's new wife; impossibly cheery |
| SUNSHINE: | 43, Martin's older sister; a divorced, retired psychiatrist |
| PATSY: | 34, the young sister; registered nurse |
| OLIVER: | 40, Patsy's husband; urbane; mathematics professor; trying to be less disdainful. |
| GHOST WOMAN: | Two brief, non-speaking appearances. |

SETTING: A Victorian oceanfront mansion

TIME: Present

The stage consists of two areas: 1) The interior Library and 2) the adjacent, exterior Deck. These locations are part of an immense Victorian oceanfront mansion. From the Library, two doors lead out to: 1) the house interior; and 2) the deck. In the library is an ornate cushioned bench, an upholstered chair, and a small table and two ornate chairs--all covered in bed sheets. There is also a bookcase, a hat tree, a chiming clock, and a first-generation cordless telephone. The Deck has a railing and a deck light.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

LIBRARY--DUSK

(At Rise, we ponder the covered furniture. A door opens. PATSY enters upset, a suitcase in one hand, her cell phone in the other.)

PATSY

(furtively, on her phone)

I need to be sure. I-- Hello?

(Suddenly alone, she stops tentatively, listening...)

Martin? Sunshine? Anyone?

(OLIVER comes in behind her, carrying a suitcase and grocery bags.)

PATSY (Continued)

Something about being alone in this place.

(She turns on a lamp.)

OLIVER

You're not alone, technically.

PATSY

I wonder what's keeping Martin.

OLIVER

Mr. Punctual must be slipping.

PATSY

Maybe his new bride has a backbone.

OLIVER

Punctuality, I thought, was a good thing.

PATSY

But not the best thing.

OLIVER

No.

PATSY

I'm sure she's nice.

OLIVER

Upstanding. Decent. Religious.

(In bursts DARLENE, dressed for the beach.)

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 2

DARLENE

Oh my God! OH MY GOD!! Windows! I LOVE windows. And I don't even introduce myself... which is Darlene. Wait, don't tell me! You got to be Oliver. Well, 'cause you're the only guy besides Martin.

OLIVER

Excellent. How 'bout I bring the vittles to the kitchen and let you wimin-folk get acquainted? Or-- or why don't I just-- Yeah.

(Oliver exits to kitchen.)

DARLENE

And you must be...

PATSY

Patsy?

DARLENE

I was gonna say, you don't look like a "Sunshine."

(Martin enters in a matching beach outfit, laden with grocery bags. His forearm is wrapped in bandage.)

MARTIN

Hey there, Pats! I see you've met Darlene--

DARLENE

--Martin, this is the biggest house I've ever seen! Oh my God. Wait.

(She exits to the bedrooms.)

PATSY

(to Martin)

What happened to your arm?

MARTIN

Just a little bruise. So how was the drive? Must be nice getting out of New York.

OLIVER

(entering with an unlit pipe in his mouth)

Actually, the city is quite pleasant this time of year--

MARTIN

Separate cars?

PATSY

Oliver had a conference in Boston.

MARTIN

Well, hey. Great to see you--both. So, anyone hear from little Miss Sunshine?

PATSY

You talked to her, didn't you?

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 3

DARLENE

(returning)

Oh my God. Doors, doors. I've never seen so many doors!

MARTIN

Darlene?

DARLENE

He don't like me saying "Oh my God." Says it's taking the Lord's name in vain, which I don't think. So anyway, Oh my stars! How many rooms you got in this place?

PATSY

Nineteen. Thirteen stay locked up--

MARTIN

--so they don't need cleaning.

OLIVER

And so we don't lose ourselves--and enjoy a little peace and quiet.

DARLENE

Peace and quiet? We're all by ourselves up on these rocks, no other house in sight!

PATSY

(checks her cell phone)

No TV, no internet, no smoking--

DARLENE

No smoking, Ollie.

OLIVER

It's not lit.

MARTIN

No cell phones.

PATSY

In case of emergencies. I'm the new Director of Nursing.

(pocketing the phone)

MARTIN

No music, radios, or other electric entertainment. Dictates of the estate.

OLIVER

Yes. And no whiskey.

DARLENE

I don't drink anyway. Clean and sober eleven months, almost.

MARTIN

Okay, Darlene.

PATSY

Martin, you didn't answer me. Did you talk to Sunshine?

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 4

DARLENE

I love that name. Sunshine. Especially on a psychiatrist. It's so sad, though, about her patient--

MARTIN

(over)

Sunshine will be here, don't worry. She needs to make an entrance. Now what say we get settled in? Us guys'll bring the luggage upstairs, you girls uncover the furniture.

PATSY

You're the boss.

MARTIN

Just a suggestion, Pats.

*(As Martin and Oliver carry their bags upstairs,
Patsy and Darlene begin uncovering the furniture.)*

DARLENE

So I'm in recovery, Martin must've told you all about it, the rehab and all.

PATSY

No. But, good. That's good. I guess we can start here.

*(Patsy begins taking the sheets off the furniture and
folding them. Darlene helps.)*

DARLENE

Coffee, cigarettes, you name it, I had that constant craving. Ten, eleven years old, first with the pot, then Daddy ran off to Mexico, or he was kidnapped, who knows what to believe with all the drugs? Step-Daddy, actually. Step-step.

PATSY

Things get so musty over the winter.

DARLENE

Then I ran away, not like runnin'. Momma just packed my bag and said good riddance. Can't blame her, I was such a handful.

(Patsy's cell TEXT-TONE RINGS--a musical tone)

PATSY

Excuse me.

(Patsy moves to the corner to read a text.)

DARLENE

Thirteen years old, off to see the world. Miami. Disneyworld--that didn't last long. Atlantic City, Bridgeport, Dorchester. Then came the long arm of the law--which I like to call my helpin' hand--because it brought me straight to Martin... and the Lord--

*(Darlene goes to pull the sheet off a stuffed chair, but
THE SHEET SLITHERS OFF before she reaches it.
Darlene stares at it, paralyzed.)*

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 5

PATSY

(noticing the silence)

I'm listening. Martin was your lawyer--?

(studying Darlene, who stands in a trance)

Hello?

(She touches Darlene--)

DARLENE

(physically)

Get off!

PATSY

I'm sorry!

DARLENE

Oh, I shoulda warned you. Sometimes I space out.

PATSY

Space out?

DARLENE

One minute I'll be yakkin' away, next minute, "Calling Ground Control!"

PATSY

So... you're back--?

DARLENE

Oh yeah. Nothin' to worry about. 'Course, when I drive, I do like to keep it under a hundred.

(to Patsy's look)

Gotcha! Oh, Martin don't let me drive. He's my chauffeur. Him and Jesus. Imagine if I was to fall asleep and run over an innocent child? Not that they're all that innocent--

PATSY

I need the bathroom. Excuse me, I'll be-- You gonna be okay?

DARLENE

(as Patsy exits)

Oh, no, fine. Sometimes when I'm home alone, well, you never know when it's gonna hit. Tumble down the stairs, split your head open.

(As Darlene uncovers more furniture, SUNSHINE walks in behind her, unseen.)

DARLENE (Continued)

(louder, still to Patsy)

Flop over on the stove and catch your hair on fire--which is why Martin got me the new G.E. Glass-Top--General Electric--plus they're a dream to clean.

(seeing Sunshine, Darlene continues, talking to her now)

You never know how long you'll be out. Minute. Hour. Poor Martin, he'll tell you. I can be a grumpy waker-upper. Oh, hi, you must be Sunshine.

SUNSHINE

Who the hell are you?

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 6

DARLENE

Oh, listen to me blabbin'. I'm Darl-- I'm sorry, I don't respond to anger language.

(Darlene goes back to work. Martin returns.)

MARTIN

(to Sunshine, stopping short of a hug)

There she is! Always good to see you, Sunshine. Hey, you look great.

SUNSHINE

Same rooms?

DARLENE

(still to Sunshine)

Oh, hon, I don't doubt you got issues of your own. Martin told me about your patient who killed his family--

MARTIN

Hut!

DARLENE

Family secrets. I know. But we're all family now.

(Patsy enters, sees Sunshine. They have history.)

PATSY

Oh. Everyone's here.

(Martin retrieves an envelope from his pocket, takes out a legal document.)

MARTIN

Okay, then, might as well take care of business--

DARLENE

(still talking to Sunshine)

You ever try those anti-depressants? Listen to me, telling you.

MARTIN

(over)

--as soon as Oliver joins us.

DARLENE

Personally speaking, I don't take drugs no more, not even the medicine kind. Martin took me off the Prozac and all the rest, I was such a mess--

MARTIN

Darlene?

DARLENE

(goes to the door and calls)

Ollie? Ollie-Ollie-In-Free!

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 7

MARTIN

She's been pretty keyed up about meeting you all.

SUNSHINE

You took her off Prozac?

MARTIN

Which is not your concern.

SUNSHINE

You're a lawyer, Martin, not a doctor.

MARTIN

Neither are you. Anymore.

SUNSHINE

I don't know if I can do this.

MARTIN

Seven days, Sunshine. You can manage.

PATSY

Same thing every year.

SUNSHINE

What happened to your arm?

DARLENE

Little radio accident's all. Blame Miss Klutz for that one. Mrs. Klutz.

MARTIN

You don't need to go into it.

DARLENE

Poor Martin. We were in bed last night--sleepin'? Right, Martin? Just sleepin'.
(wink)

MARTIN

Don't--

DARLENE

I didn't. Anyway, off goes his radio, which I thought was, I don't know what, some woman jibber-jabberin' in my ear, so I start swingin' like a fool, and BLAMMO, the cord gets caught up in my fingers, and here comes that radio. Incomin'!

MARTIN

Thrill a minute with this one.

DARLENE

Oh, stop. You love it.

(Oliver enters, takes down the thickest book from the bookcase, and sits beside Patsy.)

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 8

OLIVER

Don't mind me.

(Patsy gets up, goes to a bookcase and looks through the games, books, and puzzles.)

MARTIN

Good. All present and accounted for. So, hey-- We made it. Ten years. How about we take a minute for the reading of the codicil?

SUNSHINE

Aren't moderators usually elected?

PATSY

Oh, let him read.

MARTIN

Sunshine, would you like to read?

SUNSHINE

We know it by heart.

DARLENE

Quiet, everybody, Martin's gonna read. Read what?

MARTIN

(to Darlene)

The codicil--addendum--to our father's will. I'll paraphrase and Sunshine will correct me if I'm wrong. Joking. Same as every year, we're required to stay together from Saturday to Saturday, every day from nine a.m. to nine at night, harmoniously--

DARLENE

(joining Patsy at the bookcase)

Oh my God, is that the old family Bible you all grew up with?

(It's high in the bookcase.)

Martin, can you get it down?

MARTIN

Pay attention, please. Spouses are subject to the same rules as us siblings--

DARLENE

Spouses, Ollie!

MARTIN

--except spouses don't get a vote. If a majority of the siblings vote to hang out in the library, we all hang out in the library. If we vote for the kitchen, then it's the kitchen.

DARLENE

I vote for the beach.

MARTIN

You don't get a vote, as I just explained--but you are free to make suggestions.

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 9

DARLENE

I suggest the beach. Come on, girls, vote.

MARTIN

Sweetie?

DARLENE

(Darlene sits.)

I love the beach.

MARTIN

This year, to make our final week go by harmoniously as possible, I'd like to propose an addendum of my own. No politics.

PATSY

Thank God.

MARTIN

I thought you'd like that.

DARLENE

No politics?

MARTIN

Oliver and I sometimes enjoy debating the issues of the day. Last year it was gay marriage. The war.

OLIVER

Ah, the war. The carnage, the riches.

MARTIN

Gun control.

OLIVER

Again, the carnage, the riches.

MARTIN

I couldn't agree more, criminals have way too many guns--so don't tell me I can't carry a gun to protect my family.

OLIVER

Somebody talk to him.

SUNSHINE

He's your dance partner.

DARLENE

I love to dance. Don't I, Martin?

MARTIN

(over, upturning a hat on the table)

And because not everyone shares our passion--shh--I hereby propose that anyone talking politics--

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 10

PATSY

--Or religion.

MARTIN

Or religion--

OLIVER

Atheism is not a religion.

MARTIN

--will put a dollar in the pot, to pay for our final night's lobster feast. Okay?

PATSY

Make it five.

SUNSHINE

Make it ten.

(Martin and Oliver share a glance.)

OLIVER

Five.

MARTIN

Five. Agreed?

(During the preceding, Patsy takes a jigsaw puzzle out of the bookcase and returns to the table where she dumps out the pieces and starts turning them right-side up.)

DARLENE

Patsy, is that a jigsaw puzzle? I've never done one--finished one. Come on, Ollie! Everybody help.

(Darlene moves to Patsy's table.)

OLIVER

I'm sorry, I wasn't aware we had an "Ollie."

DARLENE

I like "Ollie." Not so stiff. "Oliver." Sounds like a turtle.

OLIVER

Seven more days. No, eight. Eight days, nine minutes.

PATSY

Oliver is a mathematician.

DARLENE

I'm not surprised. He sounds so intelligent.

MARTIN

How about that. Now, assuming we make it through the week without killing each other, Ocean House will finally belong to us--the three siblings--to do with as we wish.

SUNSHINE

Could we not call the house by name?

KIMBALL -- GHOSTS OF OCEAN HOUSE - 11

MARTIN

Just to see where we stand: Do we vote to sell Ocean House and divvy up the money? Latest appraisal: six million and change. Or keep Ocean House and figure some way of insuring and maintaining the beast?

SUNSHINE

Or leave right now and let the town bulldoze the beast into the sand. All options on the table.

DARLENE

Bulldoze--this?

PATSY

If we don't make it.

DARLENE

Make it what?

PATSY

If we don't stay the whole week--all of us together--then the house gets torn down.

SUNSHINE

--and the property donated to the town for a public beach.

DARLENE

All we have to do is stay together?

(The HOUSE SETTLES with a RUMBLE. Darlene looks at Martin.)

PATSY

Oh, don't mind our ghost.

DARLENE

I knew it!

MARTIN

Don't tell her that!

DARLENE

I told Martin the minute I saw this house--

(to Martin's look)

--nothing.

MARTIN

It's an old house. It makes noise.

PATSY

Our mother used to see a woman in her bedroom--the "Mad Woman," she said, sitting on her bed, trying to tell her something. She swore she did.

MARTIN

(over)

She did not see a woman--