

Ghost Cat
By
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CHARACTERS

AMY Almost 40. Not a happy camper.

RUTH Amy's mother, 60s-70s. Educated and emotionally oblivious.

HOUSEKEEPER

ROOM SERVICE

SETTING

A supposedly haunted hotel in the American Southwest

TIME

October

NOTE

This is a play for actors who can make bold character choices quickly, and in the moment, and are comfortable with improvisation.

Silence is a good thing--let the pauses breathe and find their own placement where not noted. I'm also a fan of crosstalk and jumping on the other actor's lines when emotionally necessary.

Please feel free to use as much creativity as possible to signify the more supernatural insinuations of this play, as you see fit.

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SCENE 1- CHECKING IN

A hotel room in an old mining ghost town, somewhere in the Southwest, USA. It is nicely appointed, a mixture of the old and the modern, with a bed centered between two side tables that faces a closet containing a Murphy bed. Between these two beds are a huge chest of drawers with a giant, ornate gilded mirror, and a small coffee table with two cushioned chairs. Large windows line the opposite wall. A door leads to a quaint, tiled bathroom, and another entryway leads to a pitch dark kitchen nook with red light coming from it, from a microwave or a digital clock.. Any sense of eeriness that can be conveyed in this room would be grand.

We hear the sounds of an old Otis elevator cage door opening, heavy and noisy. Then the door to the room opens and two women enter, the younger carrying way too much luggage. They are AMY and RUTH, daughter and mother on an epic road trip across the Southwest. AMY is filming their trip from the elevator with her phone.

AMY

That elevator is fucking awesome! It's the original 1928 Otis, did you see that Mom?

(She struggles mightily with her load of luggage, dropping most of it on the master bed.)

Wow, this is SO cool. What a beautiful room! Where's the second bed? Shit, I thought we asked for two beds.

RUTH

Huh. You're certainly right. We did ask for two beds. HmMMM.

(Depositing her bag, RUTH looks around the room and then crosses to the closet, flinging the doors open.)

Hey! Whaddya know? It's one of those hideaway beds. A Murphy bed.

AMY

Ohhhhh, wow. Ok. I'll sleep in it, Mom. You take the big bed.

RUTH

Look at the valley view! Wow. Beautiful! I'm glad we got a room with a view, even for just one night. Look at those mesas in the distance!

AMY

(Looking into the kitchen nook.)

Holy shit. This is a terrifying kitchen. Jesus! Don't go in there, Mom.

RUTH

What? Why? It's just a little kitchen.

AMY

It's way too creepy. Look at how dark it is in there-- like a cavern. I get a bad vibe.

RUTH

Oh honey. Well, we don't even need a kitchen. It's the most modern thing about this room, I'll tell you that. It's cute.

(AMY starts to assemble the bed, pulling it down and setting it up.)

AMY

Ok. There. I'm gonna go back down to the car and grab my other bags.

RUTH

You really need all that stuff for one night?

AMY

Yes, Mother, I really do. Where are the car keys?

RUTH

In my purse. Hold on, let me go to the bathroom. My bladder is bursting.

(She enters the bathroom quickly and shuts the door. It swings back open.)

AMY

Mom! Don't pee with the door open! I don't want to hear or see that! Just give me the keys and I'll go down there.

(She runs and shuts the bathroom door, then starts looking for the keys.)

RUTH

(Through the door.)

Oh come on, it's just a body. I gave birth to you! Look in my purse. Did you find my keys?

AMY

Yeah, I'll be right back!

(AMY exits. RUTH comes out of the bathroom, shuts it with a click, and begins unpacking her bag/ogling the view/etc. She takes out some tourist books, maps, a box of Kleenex, a foldable hiking hat, some slippers, etc. The lights flicker softly. She glances up, nonchalant. Goes back to rummaging. Finally, settles on the bed with the tourist guide and flips through it. Presently, the bathroom door softly swings open. RUTH doesn't notice. She glances at her cell phone, plugs it into the wall to charge. As AMY returns, as we again hear the sounds of the old elevator moving and opening. Other than that sound, there is a very noticeable silence to the place. Very quiet, almost too quiet, like noise gets swallowed up in the room. AMY enters, breathing a bit heavily as she lugs several more misc. sized bags into the room.)

AMY

Whew. That's a damn trek... did you notice how quiet it is in the hallway? It's so still!

RUTH

No, I didn't. But I was just reading the hotel brochure and it says that this room used to be the x-ray and surgery room back in the late 1800s, when this was the town hospital.

AMY

Yeah, they say over 6,000 people have died in this place since it was built-- most from the Spanish Flu in World War 1. It also used to have an insane asylum wing. A lot of weird deaths. One guy tossed himself out the window on the top floor, and a caretaker was found crushed under the elevator in the elevator shaft.

RUTH

Ohh-eeewww--how gruesome.

AMY

Do you get any kind of vibe about the place?

RUTH

No. Nothing. It's nice and peaceful. I'd stay here again, for at least a few nights next time. There's not enough time to really explore the town on this trip.

AMY

I was reading the register in the lobby, and some of the guests who stayed in this room mentioned a ghost cat who'll jump on your bed at night, and who scratches at doors to be let in. I guess he used to live on this floor.

RUTH

How fitting for us then.

AMY

I know. I miss my babies! I hope they're ok without me. I've never been away from them for so long!

RUTH

I'm sure they're doing just fine. Nick will take good care of them.

AMY

Uh-huh. I'm sure he will. I'll call him later tonight.

(AMY rifles through her bag, unpacking toiletries and taking out a large ziplock full of medication containers. She sets them down on the bed one by one. RUTH looks at her, eyes widening.)

RUTH

What are those?

AMY

My meds.

RUTH

What kind of meds?

AMY

Bupropion for my depression, buspirone for my anxiety, adderall for my ADHD, propranolol for my blood pressure, ummm, a muscle relaxer for my back spasms, my allergy pills, some migraine meds...--

(RUTH slowly sets down whatever she's doing. A deep sigh. A pause, then:)

RUTH

Where did I go wrong?

AMY

What are you talking about, 'where did you go wrong?'

RUTH

I mean, what did your father and I do that you're on so many medications?

AMY

I've been on these for forever. Years now. Don't you remember, Mom? I *have* mentioned that I'm in therapy before.

RUTH

Yes-- I remember. You don't talk about it much.

AMY

I just don't want to bother you, or add to your stress. Plus, you usually avoid mental health conversations like the plague.

RUTH

No, I don't. Why do you say that?

AMY

You just get very uncomfortable looking. When Aunt Rooney tried to commit suicide and was open about it afterwards you pretended it never happened and if anyone asked how she was doing, you just acted like it was all fine and dandy. You wouldn't even talk to *her* about it. It's like, if you say it out loud, then it really happened, but if you don't mention it, you can't bring it to life.

RUTH

Well, it's not something that was talked about in the open when I was growing up. Both your grandparents--my mom and dad--were very depressed people, but they covered it up-- sadly with alcohol most of the time--and never discussed it. I figure if you want to tell me something, you will. Is that wrong?

AMY

But Margo and I have both tried to talk to you and dad about our problems-- Dad gets defensive, and you avoid the real meat of the issue. It's like having an outward appearance of normalcy superseded everything else about our childhood, and growing up. You had to have this pristine public image as a D.A. and you needed us to fall in line behind you. Like, the judgment of what other people think is the most damning thing in the world. It's probably why I very rarely want to discuss it. But, here I am, with all my pills and shit-- and you immediately want to make it about you.

RUTH

That's not true honey-- I...

(She can't finish the sentence. Beat.)

Well, what do you and the therapist talk about?

AMY

I'm exploring my childhood traumas.

RUTH

Trauma? What kind of trauma? You had a great childhood. You girls both did!

AMY

In some respects, yes. But, the more I go back and look at things that happened, the more I see patterns of trauma that have persisted into adulthood. If you can call it adulthood. I still feel like a kid.

RUTH

Ok but-- what happened that traumatized you? I know we have depression in the family, on both sides. My mom, my dad, your aunt obviously. And of course, your dad is depressed... and your sister. You dad's mom was too mean to be depressed-- she just made everyone else miserable. I'm the only one who isn't depressed! Though I do worry a lot.

AMY

I was a very fearful kid. I was scared to be alone. I thought I was going to get abducted by aliens, or get kidnapped.

RUTH

You never wanted to sleep over at friends houses-- I recall that. And you hated scary stories and movies. I know you didn't like your dad talking about UFOs---

AMY

I am still terrified of aliens, Mom! Everytime I see a plane in the night sky, lights flashing, I always harken back to Dad saying that those were UFOs.

RUTH

Come one-- you're not *still* scared of that, are you? Really?
(*Beat as AMY gives RUTH a death stare.*)

AMY

Good talk, Mom. Thanks for being so sensitive. See? This is why I can't talk to you!

RUTH

Oh, honey... well. I had no idea you were *still* scared of that. You got scared looking at the cover of Communion by Whitley Strieber-- whis *is* very creepy, I know... those big black eyes-
(*AMY can interject here- like, "FUCK THAT," or something similarly colorful.*)

--and then of course, your father and his fascination with the supernatural. But--

AMY

But what?

RUTH

You don't think they're real, do you? Aliens? Oh, honey--

AMY

--YES! That's the point. I am *paranoid*. I'm almost 40 and I still can't sleep with my head above the covers. Nick thinks I'm nuts. But it's merely an amusing minor phobia to him. I *obviously* believe they're real. You and dad always told me they were!

RUTH

(Scoffs slightly, tries to hide it.)

Well, we never said that... or, I never said that. Your father... he just has a big imagination, like you girls. But it was all in good fun! He just went... *overboard*, I guess.

(Beat. RUTH seems like she's at a loss.)

I never knew you had so many...*things* going on.

AMY

I've tried to talk to you about this stuff! All you do is change the subject. And I don't like to bother you. It wasn't *all* bad, Mom...but childhood is a hugely formative part of life and everything sticks in the brain at that age. And when scary shit happens to a kid, and we don't feel protected... Do you believe in aliens, Mom?

RUTH

Well, I... I think... The universe is a big place and is probably inhabited by other lifeforms, but I don't think they're coming to get you in the middle of the night. I mean, there isn't even anywhere to land near our house! We told you that, remember?

AMY

(Getting very heated at the memories.)

I just don't know why you guys allowed me to fully believe that aliens were going to sneak into my room, stand over my goddamn bed, paralyze me, and then float me out to their spaceship to probe my asshole. That is seriously traumatic for a 6-year old! Dad couldn't wait to get abducted-- he thought it was 'totally awesome!' You guys had all those horrible books on eyewitness accounts and abductees... with *terrifying as shit* cover art. And you let us look at them! What the fuck, Mom?

RUTH

I'm sorry, honey. I didn't think you'd take them to heart as much as you did. I mean, that is kind of scary, even to me now, but it's much more fascinating than fearful, don't you agree? You girls always liked hearing stories like that, and campfire stories and legends. You both had extremely vivid imaginations. I did too, when I was your age and I didn't have kids or a husband to worry about.

AMY

Mom, I am not some extension of you or your personality. I'm *me*. I'm fucked up, but I am me. So, just because you're comfortable with all that shit, doesn't mean I am, or I was. And especially as a kid who trusted you and Dad to take care of me and protect me.

(AMY is fuming hard and is very agitated. RUTH looks on, uncomfortable and incredulous as AMY continues.)

Remember when that girl got kidnapped right out of her room in the same neighborhood as Grandma's house? I was even more terrified of abductions after that. I'd have panic attacks if I saw fat bearded men, like that fucking psycho who killed her. And Dad got mad at me when I collected the newspaper clippings about it-- he yelled at me and said I was disturbed. I didn't know why, but I was absolutely fixated on it happening to me. You guys even sent me to that child psychologist because I freaked out so much!

(Beat as AMY fumes.)

RUTH

Yes, that kidnapping was very sad-- that girl was your sister's age at the time. You were a bit younger. I know you were scared after that. I probably shouldn't have read so many true crimes books...those serial killer profile books scared you, too, I recall.

AMY

And do you remember how I said that that weird friend of Dads reminded me of the killer and then Dad went and told him? I must have been 10 years old at the time. That creepy friend, Tim, or whatever his stupid name was-- A male nurse-- yeah right. And when Tim confronted me about it, he *and Dad* both laughed at me. I remember being so embarrassed and not knowing what to say. Dad put me on the spot. Who does that to their own kid? Huh? I was a scared shitless child, and now I'm a scared shitless adult. That's anxiety, Mom.

RUTH

I know you have anxiety. I understand. I remember just a few years ago when you didn't get on the plane to Germany with your sister and I. How you just sat there at the boarding gate, not moving. I couldn't believe it.

AMY

And I couldn't believe it when you went and blabbed about it to your friends afterwards, when I explicitly told you to keep it a secret. Like it was some sensational story that you just saw happen and had to gossip about. "Look at this poor sad sack who's too terrified to get on an airplane. Isn't it fantastically sick?"

(AMY is getting very worked up.)

I was so fucking ashamed, Mom. And you told everyone about it. Just like Dad told that perv. Just like all the other times. I obviously can't trust you.

RUTH

(Does one of her signature long ass sighs.)

Oh honey, I didn't mean anything by it. Everyone kept on asking me how the trip was-- how could I tell them you didn't go just because you're scared of flying? It was a once in a lifetime trip-- I guess I was just hurt that you didn't end up going with us.

AMY

I will be apologizing for that for the rest of my life, won't I? I don't want to talk about this anymore. It's too fucking depressing. I'm sorry. I'm just trying to explain to you, because *you* asked, why I'm taking all *these*.

(She indicates her pill bottles again, in a grand angry gesture, then sinks down on the bed, defeated.)

I've been dealing with it forever, and it's only been a few years now that I've been getting some real help. As a kid, I just thought it was normal to be worried and self-conscious! But everytime I did something embarrassing, I couldn't let it go and it would just stick in my mind and I'd play it over and over. I was scared to be called out in public, or blamed for something. It's like I was constantly in flight mode. That's also very traumatic for a young kid, I've learned.

RUTH

Well. Let's try and make this trip a nice one. It's why we're here... to make up for Germany.

(Pauses. Sighs. Then:)

And anyways, if you're so scared of all that...why are we staying in a supposedly haunted hotel?

AMY

I don't know-- it goes back to my morbid fascination with scary shit. I'm both terrified and fascinated by all this stuff. It makes me feel manic almost-- like I'm trying to prove to myself that it isn't real, but I also *want* it to be.

(Beat, ramping up again.)

I am obsessed with death and dying. I was traumatized as a child-- it developed into some weird obsession. Don't you believe in ghosts?

RUTH

Well, I told you about that experience your father and I had when we first moved into the house, before you girls were born. But, I'm not too concerned with ghosts, no.

(Beat. Hedging:)

The way our environment is collapsing is much more terrifying than any ghost.

AMY

And that's another thing! Look at how fucked the world is! We've got these daily threats of a looming civil war, we've got literal Nazis in government, we're killing everything on the planet, and I'll *die* in debt because of my student loans. And you wonder why we don't wanna have a kid. My very own nephew is gonna end up in some Beyond Thunderdome wasteland because of climate change. I feel so sorry for all the young kids out there, Mom. We're depending on them to save the world-- but it's already too late.

RUTH

You sound just like your Dad. Doom and gloom, and the world going to hell in a handbasket.

AMY

DON'T compare me to him. He's a raging narcissist.

RUTH

Amy! He's your father!

AMY

I should sue you guys for even having me in the first place. I didn't ask to be born during the pre-apocalypse.

RUTH

Oh honey! I know your Dad is overdramatic, but he took care of you girls while I worked! He gave up a good job to stay at home with you and drive you to your various play practices and what not. He kept you clothed and fed.

AMY

Yeah. So, the bare minimum. Wow. Give the guy a medal.

RUTH

Ok, ok, ok, ok, ok, **OK**-- I get it. You have never gotten along with your father. I'm sorry about that.

(Uncomfortable silence-- give it space to breathe. AMY furiously takes a box of cheesy sandwich crackers from one of her bags and starts munching loudly.)

Amy, don't ruin your appetite! We're going to a nice dinner! When do you want to eat? I like to eat before 7 PM.

AMY

Jesus. Fine, we can eat whenever you want. I usually eat way later than that, but it's fine.

RUTH

(Eagerly changing the subject.)

Ok... how about 7 PM exactly? We can walk around, look in the shops, and then go to dinner. You can have one of your whiskey sours!

AMY

Sounds great.

(Mutters.)

I'll probably need 4 or 5 of them.

(Beat.)

I'm gonna call the front desk to get some extra pillows and blankets brought up because there aren't any in the closet.

(AMY picks up the phone and waits for a bit while RUTH fiddles around with her cell phone, swiping through pictures in overly large and very noticeable gestures-- she's not terribly savvy with technology. AMY just stares, annoyed to her core.)

AMY

Hello, I am in Room 9-- would it be ok to get a few more pillows and an extra blanket? Great! Thanks so much. Bye bye.

RUTH

You always had nice phone skills as a child. Everyone always said you were so polite.

AMY

Fabulous.

RUTH

What? You did. Jesus, Amy-- I'm just giving you a complement. You're so difficult sometimes. So obtuse.

(RUTH sighs deeply and goes back into the bathroom to freshen up, the door swinging open behind her-- she doesn't notice. AMY gives more murderous stares as RUTH fiddles around noisily, dropping things on the floor with loud exclamations, etc. Finally AMY gets up and shuts the bathroom door herself. We hear the sounds of the elevator. A knock on the door. AMY leaps up and runs to it. The ROOM SERVICE person hands a pile to AMY, makes some generic polite statements as they do so.)

AMY

Thank you so much! I appreciate it.

ROOM SERVICE

You're welcome. Anything else you need?

AMY

Mmmm, not that I can think of. *(Beat)* Hey... umm, I know you probably get this a lot. BUT. Have you ever seen anything here in the hotel? Like a ghost? Or is this all just hokum and b.s.?

ROOM SERVICE

(A chuckle.)... I do get that question a lot, you're right. The hotel has a long history. I've never seen anything definitive, but others certainly say they have. In the lobby there's a large binder with all the encounters people have had-- some even have pictures. You should take a look when you go down there. Have a nice night!

AMY

Thank you for the tip! I'll uh, I'll have to check it out.

(Shuts the door.)

RUTH

(From the bathroom.)

What, honey?

AMY

(Loudly as she gets her stuff ready/freshens herself up, etc. She once again starts munching on snacks.)

I'm just talking to Room Service, Mo-ther! They- have -brought -us -pillows -and -blankets!

(Mutters something under her breath as she makes up the Murphy bed. RUTH comes out of the bathroom in a fresh ensemble.)

RUTH

Sorry, I didn't hear a knock or anything. That was quick. Oh! I should have asked if we needed a reservation for dinner.

AMY

They're probably still out in the hall--

(AMY opens the door and looks both ways into the hall. We hear the clanging of the elevator as it opens and the sounds of a group of people exit. AMY nods to them, says hi, etc. We don't see them. She closes the door.)

That's weird.

RUTH

What's weird, honey?

AMY

The elevator hadn't gone back down yet- yet people just got off it. It has to get called to each floor from the lobby floor. I guess the Room Service took the stairs back down, but still, the elevator should have been going down, not opening back up on our floor...weird shit.

RUTH

Huh.

(She shrugs nonchalantly.)

Well, are you ready? Do I look ok? You're not afraid to be seen in public with the old bag are you?

AMY

You look fine, Mom. Of course I'm not afraid to be seen in public with you. Look at me! I look exhausted.

RUTH

You do look a bit tired, honey. You've got dark circles under your eyes. You need a good night's sleep.

AMY

(Gives a death stare.)

Thanks so much. C'mon. Let's take the stairs- it's quicker. And I need that drink.

(They exit, locking the door the old fashioned way- with a real key. The bedside table lamp, which had been on, now turns off and we hear a little scratching noise from somewhere in the room. Blackout.)

SCENE 2- BEDTIME

We hear the trusty old Otis again. The room is dark. Fumbling of keys at the door and AMY and RUTH enter. AMY is a wee bit tipsy. RUTH is yawning and tired.

RUTH

I could have sworn I left that table lamp on.

AMY

Yeah-I thought you did too.

RUTH

Probably just a really old outlet. Hey-- what did the bartender mean: "I'll see you tomorrow?" We're not going to be here tomorrow- we're going to Sedona.

AMY

(Snorts loudly.)

It was a pickup line, Mom. He was flirting with me.

RUTH

Oh? That's what it was? That's cute. He was really nice to us the whole night. I like eating at the bar! You get better service than at a table.

AMY

Yeah, and quicker drinks, too.

RUTH

Why was he flirting with you? Didn't he see your wedding ring?

AMY

Because he thought I was hot, Mom. HAWT. Rings never stopped a man from flirting before.

RUTH

You're very cute, I agree.

AMY

I said HOT, Mom. He didn't think I was just cute. I'm almost 40. Cute is for babies and puppies.

RUTH

You were always darling in high school. Yet you couldn't get any dates to the dances.

AMY

Thanks Mom! I didn't get dates *because* I was *just* cute. No one wants the cute girl. Cute means plain. I was always the girl with the beautiful friends.

RUTH

Well, I don't think it does. Who was considered beautiful out of your friends?

AMY

Jenn. Celine. Audrey. Kelly. ALL of them but me.

RUTH

Celine? I thought she was slow. Like, developmentally slow.

AMY

What are you talking about?

RUTH

Didn't she have a learning disability?

AMY

Jesus christ, Mom. NO. She was very bright. She got good grades- she was in the culinary program and choir! What the hell?

RUTH

Oh. I thought she was in Special Ed.. And Jenn? She's darling, but she isn't a great beauty! I never know why you always said she got so much attention. I don't remember the other girls, but I'm sure they weren't beautiful.

AMY

Well, great, cuz neither was I. I definitely think I look better now that I've aged.

RUTH

You were a bit chubby in high school. You lost a lot of weight in college.

AMY
Mom!

RUTH
Well, it's true.

AMY
And now what am I? A whale?

RUTH
No! I didn't say that. You're still very...cute.

AMY
Ugh, Mom. stop. with. the. cute. stuff. I need to call Nick and check in.

RUTH
Ok, hon. I'll give you some privacy. I'm going to go get some herbal tea from the lobby. My allergies are killing me! Want anything?

AMY
No thanks.
(RUTH exits and AMY dials NICK on her cell.)

AMY
Hey. It's me. How are you? How are the babies? Moby--is she ok? How about Ruffers, how's he doing? Uh-huh. And what about Potsticker, how's my little man doing? Can you put him on the phone?

(Assumes a very weird voice to talk to her cat.)
Hey you motherfucker! It's me, bitch! What up, bitch? Daddy's being mean to me. He won't feed me more food. I miss my Mom. MOMMY!

(Goes back to her normal voice.)
Thanks babe. Oh, I know... I'm just missing everyone. And you of course. Yeah, everything is fine. We're staying in the supposedly haunted hotel tonight. Yeah, it's a bit creepy. The room is really nice. Beautiful view of the valley. No! I'm not going to stay up and *try* to see a ghost. Stop-- you're freaking me out. We just ate dinner down in the restaurant. Chicken caesar salad. It was good, but they put sprouts on it for some ungodly reason. My Mom is obsessed with the fact that I drink whiskey sours. Yeah. Every bar we walked by today she's like, "Want to go get a whiskey sour?" I *am* being nice to her! She won't even let me drive the car. No, I'm not joking. I *did* ask her if I could drive-- she kinda ignored it. AND, this is the only hotel we're staying at that isn't a Best Western. She wants to use her AAA discount or something. Is this what I have to look forward to in my golden years? Dinner at 2 PM and AAA discounts? I am being nice to her! Don't take her side.

(RUTH opens the door with her cup of tea.)

Ok baby, I'm gonna get ready for bed. Yup. We're headed to Sedona tomorrow to stay with Mom's best friend, Annie. Yeah, you met her. Be EXTRA nice to Potsticker, he's just a boy. (*Assumes weird voice again.*) I'm three! I'm just a little man. Don't make me cut you, bitch! (*Drops voice.*) Ok, love you. Goodnight.
(*Hangs up.*)

RUTH
How's Nick doing? How are your babies?

AMY
Everyone is good. Everyone is fine.

RUTH
That's good. Did you tell him where we're staying?

AMY
Yeah- he says we have to wait for dark and then stay up and watch for ghosts.

RUTH
He's so silly. Oh, I met a gentleman down in the lobby-- he says he stays here every October, and always in a different room. I was telling him about your little ghost obsession. He says that he never saw any ghosts or anything, but he did say he heard taps on the bedroom windows in Room 25, I think it was. He's staying in Room 18 tonight and he always records the room for any sounds.

AMY
Recording is a good idea, actually.

RUTH
He also said the kind of hauntings that take place here act like they're on a loop. One long endless loop. Nothing that the ghosts suffered when they were alive ever got resolved, so the spirits can't move on.

AMY
Well, how do they resolve their unfinished business? I guess that's what it's called.

RUTH
Well, he said-- he kind of went on and on, but this is the just of it-- he said that the spirits would have to be recognized and acknowledged by someone, either living or dead, having to do with their history, so that they can finally get peace of mind. And when they have peace of mind, they feel safe enough to move on.

AMY

So, like, two ghosts could meet up and resolve their issues, if they were responsible for the demise of one another? Like, meet up in the same astral plane or some shit?

RUTH

Err, right. I guess. This man was really into it, clearly fixated on it. He was pretty intense. No one else in the lobby even looked at him-- probably because they didn't want to get caught in a conversation about this stuff.

(She laughs a bit nervously.)

AMY

Ok, but, that's an interesting theory. Sounds like ghosts can affect one another like living humans do. That's SO weird.

(She pauses, thinking intently and eagerly, wanting to know more and fueled by her whiskey sours.)

Ok, so what if some ancestor of one of the ghosts could communicate with them? Would that resolve the unfinished business so the ghost could move on?

RUTH

I don't know honey. It's pretty convoluted sounding. Why don't you go down there and talk to that man? Jacob was his name.

AMY

I'm too shy. Plus, he sounds like a creeper. But, it's *interesting*... the ghosts.

RUTH

Well, I'm taking 3 Benadryl and going to bed. My allergies are getting out of control. It must be the dry desert air or something. We've got another long drive in the morning.

AMY

Hey, are you going to let me drive at all on this trip? I'm a grown woman, Mom. I'm a good driver.

RUTH

I like driving. Plus, I need you to look at the map and navigate.

AMY

Why can't you just use your GPS on your phone? You know, plug in the address and viola!

RUTH

Map reading is a good skill to have, Amy.

AMY

I know how to read a map. I'm just saying, it's more convenient and waaay easier to use GPS.

RUTH

I know, I know. I'll drive us, ok?

AMY

Yes, Mother. Fine. Hey, since you're going to bed now, and I'm gonna stay up a bit, can we switch beds so I can use the bedside table? I wanna watch something.

RUTH

Sure, hon. What are you watching?

AMY

It's a show called Family Guy. It's the Yacht Rocks episode-- it's hilarious. I'll turn the volume down.

RUTH

What are yacht rocks?

(AMY rolls her eyes. Then, suddenly, they hear what sounds like a herd of elephants running down the hall, vibrations and everything.)

What was that?

AMY

(Rushes to door and looks out in hallway.)

I don't know! There's nothing out here. Maybe it was that drunk couple we saw in the stairwell? She was dressed as a flapper, and he was dressed as a gangster. They were *ham-mered!* They're probably doing some murder mystery theatre thing.

RUTH

Well, it is October-- I'm sure the hotel plays pranks on guests to "up" the atmosphere.

AMY

You don't feel anything odd here? Just totally normal vibes?

RUTH

Nope, nothing. It's a really nice hotel, Amy. You're just spooking yourself because you've read so much about it.

AMY

I'm not spooking myself-- I...nevermind. I'll be quiet so you can sleep.

(They've switched over their things to the opposite beds now, and AMY goes to the bathroom. RUTH is almost back to the Murphy bed when she trips over something unseen, stumbling a bit. She looks around her feet, seeing nothing.)

RUTH

What the---?

AMY

(Peeking in from the bathroom.)

What?

RUTH

Nothing! Just tripped over the carpet. Goodnight.

(RUTH turns off the main room lights and gets into the Murphy bed with her box of Kleenex, blowing her nose loudly. AMY cringes as she firmly shuts the bathroom door behind her. Blackout.)

INTERMISSION

SCENE 3- SWEET DREAMS

Lights up softly on AMY, who has finally fallen asleep. RUTH is snoring soundly in her bed. It's quiet, and dark except for the moonlight coming in dimly. Maybe a few plops from the bathroom sink: Drip. Drip. Drip. The deep cavernous kitchen nook looks even worse at night. We see a little flash of light coming from it- once, twice, three times... A few beats go by. Suddenly, AMY gives a half-asleep scream and leaps out of bed. She stands heaving for a few seconds, looking wildly around. She goes to the foot of her bed, patting around the edge of it. She flings on the bedside lamp, then the main room light. It's bright. Still nothing from RUTH. AMY stares at her mom, then creeps over to her, hissing:

AMY

Mom! Mom! Wake up! Mom!

RUTH continues snoring. AMY is more awake now, goes to shake her mom, but decides against it. She mutters some curse words ("Fucking Benadryl," or something like that) and turns the main light off, climbing nervously back into bed. She takes the bedside lamp and sets it on the floor, keeping it on. She props herself up on pillows and glances around the room some more. She tries to settle in. A lighting change/ shadows effect can signify the passage of the night: a few hours go by as AMY tosses and turns and RUTH sleeps like a log. Finally, the light getting a tad brighter from the outside reveals that AMY has fallen back to sleep.

It's 4 AM. Suddenly, AMY jumps out of bed, with another tortured yell. She again glances wildly around, looks at RUTH, and repeats what she did before. AMY creeps back to bed after pulling back the curtain to let the very early dawn light peek into the room. RUTH slumbers on.

5 AM. RUTH stirs, moves groggily out of bed to the bathroom. AMY is still sitting upright with the light on. RUTH doesn't see this, goes into the bathroom. AMY continues sitting up in bed, in an exhausted and paranoid watch. RUTH ambles heavily out of the bathroom, under the influence of Benadryl. She sees AMY.

RUTH

Whater are your doings awake? Whys is the lights on?

AMY

I had an experience.

RUTH

What's are you talking about? What experiences-es?

AMY

A cat jumped on the end of the bed, on my feet. Did it twice. I'm not lying.
(RUTH is still obviously drugged and bleary-eyed.)

RUTH

Reallys? Whoaaaa... yer just dreaming. Gets some sleeps honey. Long drive 'morrow.
(RUTH shuffles back to the bed without another word and plops heavily down, almost immediately snoring. AMY is delirious and continues her vigil. Now it is 5:30 AM. We hear AMY and RUTH both snoring in a duel. Then: An absolutely blood curdling scream rips through the air, muffled by the walls, but clearly audible. AMY bolts upright and freezes, listening. The sound of clattering can be heard, like someone is forcefully clearing dishes and silverware off a long banquet table. AMY is frozen. RUTH is knocked out. Silence follows. Drip-drip-drip goes the bathroom sink. AMY gets up and creeps to the door, peeking into the hall. A few beats. AMY goes back to bed, looking exhausted and weary. Blackout.)

SCENE 4- MORNING AFTER

Lights come up on RUTH getting ready to check-out, sipping some coffee and packing quietly so as not to disturb AMY, who is out cold from exhaustion. RUTH is walking to the bathroom when again she trips over

something unseen, knocking the chair into the table, or some other loud noise inducing action. AMY bolts up in bed with a start.

AMY

Jesus Christ!

RUTH

Sorry, honey. I was trying to be quiet. How did you sleep?

AMY

Mom. I barely slept at all. Don't you remember getting up and finding me sitting here with all the lights on?

(AMY rustles out of bed and starts getting dressed.)

RUTH

What? No. No, I don't recall that at all. Huh. But you know, I did take some Benadryl. I slept like the dead! You didn't get any sleep?

AMY

Maybe 2 hours at most. I told you when you went to the bathroom that I had a fucking ghost cat jump on me. On my feet. Twice.

RUTH

Really? Twice huh?

AMY

Yes. I'm not lying! Right here on the end of the bed! Like, a pounce. Just like when one of my cats does the same thing at home. It's a very distinctive feeling.

RUTH

I know the feeling, sure. Really? I don't remember even getting up.

AMY

And then, early this morning, while it was still dark, I heard a horrific scream coming from somewhere in the hotel. Maybe on another floor. Like, absolutely shrill and piercing. Like someone was being attacked.

RUTH

How did you hear all this? I slept so soundly! It's a really comfortable bed. I wonder what kind of mattress--

AMY

I'm not lying, Mom!

RUTH

I didn't say you were honey. Well, that's interesting. You'll have to tell Annie when we get to her house. She's into numerology.

AMY

Ok...umm. What does numerology have to do with this?

RUTH

I'm sorry you didn't sleep well. Let's go down and get some breakfast before we hit the road. They have a continental breakfast spread all set up in the lobby. I already got a coffee. Maybe I'll get a second cup to make sure I don't fall asleep on the drive.

AMY

I can drive. I know how.

RUTH

No honey. That's ok. You didn't sleep well. C'mon, get dressed and we'll go get a pastry.

AMY

Hold on, I wanna set up my phone recorder. I totally forgot last night. I want to see if we can capture any sounds while we're gone.

RUTH

What sounds?

AMY

I wanna see if we pick up any paranormal noises. Put that Do Not Disturb sign on the door handle, would you?

RUTH

Oh honey. Really?

AMY

Yes Mother. Really.

(AMY sets up her phone by the bedside lamp and they exit the room, locking it behind them. We hear them bickering lightly down the hall, followed by the elevator sounds again, and then going away as the elevator descends. All is very quiet. The bathroom door swings open slightly. Blackout.)

SCENE 5- THE PROOF

About 20 minutes has passed. The door opens abruptly, then swings shut again, latching. We hear the elevator arriving on the floor and the sounds of AMY and RUTH returning, both juggling cups of coffee and bags of goodies. They fumble coming into the room, which is exactly as they left it, save for the bathroom door. AMY sets her stuff down and goes to her phone. She stops the recording then goes back to listen, while RUTH eats a few bites as she packs and gets her bags situated and into the hallway. AMY shrieks.

AMY

Oh my god, Mom! It sounds like all hell broke loose in the room while we were gone! Listen to what I got on the mic!

(She puts the phone and speaker and presses play. We hear the sounds of AMY and RUTH going into the hallway, getting on the elevator, the noises growing fainter and fainter. Then a deep silence. The drip of the faucet can be heard. Suddenly, it sounds like a crowd of people have entered the room, with banging and clanging, footsteps, and doors opening and shutting, windows slamming, etc. Chaos, very loud chaos. No human voices. Get creative. The recording ends.)

RUTH

What was that? Housekeeping?

AMY

It kinda sounds like housekeeping, but nothing is different at all in here, plus we're checking out today so why would they come beforehand?

(She turns to RUTH, putting hands on her hips, challenging her agree.)

What the fuck?!!! How do you explain that, huh?

RUTH

I-- I don't know. I don't know how you explain that. But, I'm sure it was something completely normal. Like I said, the hotel probably capitalizes on its reputation, and probably even more so in October, before Halloween.

(AMY and RUTH both just look at one another, AMY with a little "I told you so" smirk on her face. RUTH looks more inscrutable, but a bit uncertain.)

AMY

You believe me, don't you Mom? I mean, you heard that all for yourself. What could it have been? No one was in this room while we were down in the lobby. COME ON MOM! You've gotta believe me.

RUTH

(Sensing another confrontation or meltdown.)

Oh, Amy-- really? You're very tired and you've worked yourself into a state. Whatever it was on the recording, you believe it was ghosts. That's all that matters, right? Why do you care what I believe?

AMY

Mom. Please. I just-- I just NEED you to believe me. Not say that you believe me, but actually *mean* it this time. Even if I am tired, even if I am in a state... just this once. Take me seriously.

RUTH

(Scrutinizes Amy closely, with worry.)

I believe you honey. Sure, I do. Come on, let's get on the road.

(RUTH gives AMY a motherly reassuring gesture and smiles at her, awkwardly touching her arm. AMY looks disappointed, and deflated, but doesn't push it. This argument will no doubt come up again and again. They get the rest of their stuff and lug it into the hallway. AMY backs out of the room placing the key on the dresser as she closes the door, with one last lingering scan. Blackout.)

SCENE 6- CHECKING OUT

The room is empty. The lights flicker as we hear the elevator door opening, and the sounds of a cleaning cart being wheeled in the hallway. A gentle knock on the door, and the HOUSEKEEPER announces, "Housekeeping!" The HOUSEKEEPER enters with their cart and begins the task of stripping the beds, emptying trash, etc. The bathroom door slowly swings open without the Housekeeper noticing. The HOUSEKEEPER checks their cart for fresh linens and mutters something about needing more, talking audibly so we can hear. This can be improvised.

HOUSEKEEPER

Now I need some more sheets. Ok...let's go get some then.

(They turn towards the door and abruptly stop, as if startled. A gasp followed by a sigh of relief.)

Oh! It's you! You scared me. Whew! C'mon, let's go get some sheets from storage. C'mon, you. Then we'll go find Jacob, alright?

(The HOUSEKEEPER shuffles to the door, looking down at their feet, stepping deliberately and carefully. They open the door and do a shooing motion, urging whatever they see to exit the room, making noises as if talking to a baby. The door closes and we hear footsteps fading down the hall. Quiet. The lights on the bedside table flicker on and off once. Then, fade to black.)

THE END