THE HAUNTED HOUSE WITH ONLY ONE MISTAKE

by Kamron Klitgaard

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SYNOPSIS: A group of actors put on a play trying to make it through the production without making any mistakes, which they have never done before. The play they perform is about Mike and Karen who lead a gang of teenagers on a dare to stay inside the local "haunted house" longer than the old record of 14 minutes. However, unknown to the teenagers, a gang of criminal counterfeiters have set up shop inside the creepy old house and decide to dress up as ghosts to scare the teens away. Unknown to the counterfeiters, a gang of real ghosts resides in the creepy old house and decides to scare them all away. As introductions are made, the Host brags to the audience about how there is only one mistake in the entire show, but tonight, they are going to make no mistakes because, as their director taught them, if they can convincingly improvise their way around a mistake, then it is like there is no mistake at all.

DURATION: 25 minutes.
TIME: The present.
SETTING: A haunted house.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 1 male, 13 either)

THE TEENAGERS

MIKE (m)..... Teenage Football Jock. *(30 lines)*
KAREN (f)..... Teenage Prom Queen. *(25 lines)*
BLAKE (m/f)..... Doesn't believe in ghosts. *(19 lines)*
CHARLIE (m/f)..... Ghost Tracker. *(26 lines)*
ANGEL (m/f)..... Scaredy cat. *(23 lines)*

THE COUNTERFEITERS

NAILS (m/f)..... Talks like an old 1930's gangster. *(9 lines)*
LUCKY (m/f)..... Coin flipper. *(10 lines)*
LITTLE FINGER (m/f) ..... Has a little finger. *(14 lines)*
RINO (m/f)..... Low intelligence. *(12 lines)*
CAGNEY (m/f)..... The boss. *(29 lines)*

THE GHOSTS

HOST (m/f)..... Ghostly host. Never exits and occasionally participates. *(21 lines)*
STOWAWAY (m/f)..... Hitchhiker. *(11 lines)*
YODELER (m/f)..... Terrible Yodeler. *(7 lines)*
SHOEBOX (m/f) ..... Likes shoeboxes. *(11 lines)*
POPUP (m/f)..... Likes to pop up to scare. *(8 lines)*

FLEXIBLE CASTING NOTE: All characters, except Mike and Karen, can be either male or female with only minor pronoun changes.

COSTUMES

TEENAGERS – Mike wears a football jersey with shoulder pads and normal pants to add to the ridiculousness of his costume. Karen wears a prom dress. The others wear their school's colors.
COUNTERFEITERS – Old-style gangster clothing.
GHOSTS – Old clothes with a ghostly appearance: white clothes or clothes with a dusting of white spray paint. Makeup and hair should be ghostly as well.

SET DESCRIPTION

A bare stage. A small table will be brought on and off to indicate different rooms. Any other set dressing or pieces are optional.

SOUND FX

- duck quacking sound
- thunder sound

PROPS

- ghost tracker (a contraption that looks like a scanner)
- wire whisk
- small table
- 5 sheets with eyeholes
- small broken piece of wood (crate lid)

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The trick with this show is to remember that the mistakes must look like real mistakes. Remember that the actors are not trying to make mistakes; they are trying not to make mistakes. When there's an obvious mistake, characters can subtly look at the audience to see if they noticed. Be sure not to overdo it. Make it look like you're trying to hide or cover the mistake from the audience.

AT RISE: *A dimly lit street. HOST enters.*

HOST: *(Spooky voice.)* Good evening… Muhahahahahaha! *(Smiles and nods braggingly at the audience because it was such a great laugh.)* You're probably wondering why I laughed like that. Well, have you ever seen a haunted house? You will. For, in this very space, tonight's terrifying tale will recreate a haunted house right before your very eyes.

(Matter of fact voice.) And the best part of this tale is, that within it, there is only one mistake. We have rehearsed and rehearsed and got all the mistakes out… except for one. I won't tell you which character makes this mistake because that would be… rude. But I will tell you that at one point he… or she forgets to say his… or her line. The play just stops, and no one says anything. It's kind of awkward. Who knows, maybe he… or she won't forget this time. We hope! Because it's an important line. But actually, our director, Mrs. Day *[Or insert name of real director]*, told us that if a mistake happens and you cover it or make it make sense, as it were, it doesn't count as a mistake. So, if we're able to ad-lib around the mistake, then you'll see a play with no mistakes. Wouldn't that be nice.

(Spooky voice.) Now, you know the kind of haunted house I'm talking about. It's the last house on a dead-end street. No one is ever seen going in or out. There's a rickety old fence that strains to keep its secrets inside.

(Matter of fact voice.) Oh, and I should probably tell you that the play is a bit too long, so we've had to cut some of the lines. But no one wanted to have their lines cut, so we just cut some of the endings of lines. No big deal.

(Spooky voice.) And now, sit back and lower your expectations as we take you into the world of the horrifying with… The Haunted House… with no mistakes!

HOST stands to the side as MIKE and KAREN enter. MIKE wears a football jersey with shoulder pads and KAREN wears a prom dress.

KAREN: It sure was fun going to the prom… *(Examines MIKE'S uniform and then looks at audience.)* …after the football game.

MIKE: Yeah, that way, it makes sense that we're dressed like this, so it's not even a mistake.

KAREN: But why have you led us down this dimly lit street?

Lights go completely out.

KAREN: I mean, this completely dark street?

Lights go on full, including house lights.

KAREN: I mean, this super bright street?

MIKE: That's funny, the streetlights must be malfunctioning.

Lights go back to dimly lit.

MIKE: Ah, that's better. We're supposed to meet the gang here after the game slash prom. Remember?

KAREN: The challenge?

MIKE: You got it. The challenge.

KAREN: No one has ever completed the challenge. Which house is it?

MIKE: The one at the end. The one with the high iron gate. They should be here any minute.

HOST: *(Walks center.)* As Mike and Karen waited for their friends, thunder rolled across the sky. *(Looks up but there's no sound. Louder.)* Thunder rolled across the sky!

Duck quacking Sound FX.

HOST: *(Irritated.)* As a duck flew by overhead. *(Scary voice.)* Soon, the two teenagers were joined by—

Thunder Sound FX.

HOST: Muhahahahaha!

HOST walks to the other side. BLAKE enters, running from the opposite side of the stage that MIKE and KAREN are on, and stops. CHARLIE enters running and stops just before running into BLAKE. ANGEL enters running but doesn't stop until running into CHARLIE, who bumps into BLAKE, who falls to the ground, an obvious mistake.

BLAKE: *(Whispers to CHARLIE and ANGEL.)* Cover!
CHARLIE: Uh… Tag, you're it.
BLAKE: *(Stands.)* Yes, uh… you got me. I'm "it." But that's enough playing bumper tag for now. We're supposed to meet Mike and Karen here at the end of…
ANGEL: What?

CHARLIE and ANGEL look at BLAKE as to have BLAKE finish the line.

ANGEL: Here at the end of… what?
BLAKE: *(Whispers.)* We cut the rest to save time, remember?
CHARLIE: Oh, yeah!

The lights turn on full for a few seconds, then go back to normal.

ANGEL: Yikes, did you see that? A flash of lightning.
CHARLIE: Oh! Nice one. Yes, that was a flash of lightning. But lightning is always followed by—

THEY ALL look up. Duck quack Sound FX.

ANGEL: I'm scared. I don't like thunder.
CHARLIE: The thunder tonight sounds different… like a… something… different.
BLAKE: Never mind about that!

MIKE and KAREN approach BLAKE.

BLAKE: We're supposed to meet Mike and Karen right there. *(Points directly at MIKE and KAREN.)* But they're nowhere to be found.

BLAKE, still pointing, CHARLIE and ANGEL look at MIKE and KAREN. They freeze, trying to figure out how to cover for this mistake.

CHARLIE: Found 'em.
KAREN: Hi, gang!
MIKE: Are you ready for "the challenge?"
CHARLIE: I'm game. But no one has ever… *(CHARLIE looks at the audience like he knows it was silly to cut the end of his line.)*
MIKE: That's right, not ever.
ANGEL: I can understand that. It's such a creepy old…
KAREN: Because that house is…
BLAKE: Ah, come on! There's no such thing as ghosts.
CHARLIE: Yes, there is! My uncle saw one once.

NAILS, LUCKY, LITTLE FINGER, RINO, and CAGNEY enter dresses as ghosts with sheets over their heads. They make ghostly noises and whisp around the street, circling the teenage gang. They come to a stop in front of MIKE but still making noises and wisping their sheets. MIKE and the OTHER TEENAGERS just stare at them. Finally, they stop their noises and are still, looking back at MIKE through eyeholes cut in the sheets.

MIKE: *(Irritated.)* Not yet.

NAILS, LUCKY, LITTLE FINGER, RINO, and CAGNEY realize they've entered too soon and exit by walking normally. MIKE turns to KAREN for her to say her line.

ANGEL: I hope <u>we</u> don't see any ghosts.

NAILS, LUCKY, LITTLE FINGER, RINO, and CAGNEY enter again dressed as ghosts with sheets over their heads. They make ghostly noises and whisp around the street, circling the teenage gang, then they whisp away.

MIKE: Don't worry, we won't.
CHARLIE: Well, if there are any ghosts, we can use this!

CHARLIE holds up a wire whisk.

ANGEL: What's that?
CHARLIE: It's my invention. I call it a ghost tracker.
ANGEL: It looks like a—
CHARLIE: *(Sings to ANGEL through teeth.)* Just go with it. Someone took the tracker. This is all I could find.
KAREN: Oh! A ghost tracker! Yes, I think I saw one exactly like that on that show *Ghost Encounters.*
MIKE: Yes, that's great. Now, let's get up on the porch before it starts to rain.

THE TEENAGERS look up at the sky. Duck quacking sound FX.

MIKE: …starts to rain duck poop. And from there, we can find a way in to complete the…

THE TEENAGERS exit.

HOST: Mike and Karen, and the rest of the gang ran to the old porch for protection… from the ducks.

NAILS, LUCKY, LITTLE FINGER, RINO, and CAGNEY enter, taking off the sheets that were over their heads. CAGNEY brings on a small table and sets it down. They set their sheets on the table. They gather around the table.

CAGNEY: Alright, everyone, gather around the table.

No one moves because they are already gathered around the table.

CAGNEY: Uh, good. Now. Nails, go check on the dye. It should almost be ready.
NAILS: Right, Boss. I'll be right back, see.

NAILS exits. LUCKY flips a coin in the air and catches it.

CAGNEY: Lucky, Little Finger, make sure the coast is clear. Check the front and the back.

LUCKY and LITTLE FINGER: Right, Boss.

LUCKY and LITTLE FINGER exit.

CAGNEY: Rino—

RINO: Yes, Boss Cagney?

CAGNEY: I told you, Rino, don't call me Boss Cagney. It sounds pettifogging. Call me Boss, or Cagney. Not Boss Cagney. No more pettifogging.

RINO: *(Trying to sound smart.)* Oh, pettifogging. Hmm. Yeah, now that you mention it, it does sound pettifogging. *(Listening to himself.)* Boss Cagney, Boss Cagney. Yep, that does sound pettifogging. Definitely pettifogging. It seems so obvious now. Ha, ha. Pettifogging.

CAGNEY: Rino, do you know what pettifogging means?

RINO: Uh, sure, of course I do. Everyone knows what pettifogging means. Pettifogging is, you know, when you pettifog something…. Could you use it in a sentence?

CAGNEY: Go, get the crate in the other room.

RINO: Right, Boss CaaaaBoss.

RINO exits. There's a loud crashing noise and RINO yells "ouch!" NAILS enters with a bowl, stirring it with a Ghost Detector device.

NAILS: Here's the dye, Boss. It looks like it's brewed up nicely. Just needs a little more stirring, see.

CAGNEY: *(Grabs the bowl and the Ghost Detector.)* Let me have it. You need to really give a good… *(Notices he's holding the Ghost Detector instead of the wire whisk.)* …whisking. *(CAGNEY whisks the dye with the wire whisk, then hands it back.)* There. This will be perfect for making counterfeit money, here in our hideout.

LUCKY and LITTLE FINGER enter running.

LUCKY: *(Flips a coin and catches it.)* Boss, there's a bunch of teenagers hanging about on the porch.

LITTLE FINGER: They're either on their way to a football game or a prom.

CAGNEY: What are they doing?

LUCKY: *(Flips a coin and catches it.)* It looks like they're being nosey!

LITTLE FINGER: And meddling. What if they discover our counterfeiting ring?!

CAGNEY: Alright, don't panic. It just so happens that we are prepared for this. Rino is bringing in our solution.

LUCKY: *(To Little Finger.)* Hey, watch this trick.

LUCKY flips the coin in the air but misses it, and it falls to the ground. LUCKY and LITTLE FINGER look at the coin then to each other.

LITTLE FINGER: I'll bet you can't do that again.

LUCKY: Oh yeah? Watch.

LUCKY looks at the audience apprehensively and then flips an imaginary coin into the air and catches it.

NAILS: That's some trick, see.

RINO enters carrying only a small piece of a broken lid of a crate.

RINO: Here's the crate, Boss. *(CAGNEY gives him a where's-the-crate look. RINO whispers back.)* I fell on it. *(Normally.)* Could I get some help? This is heavy.

CAGNEY: Lucky, Little Finger, help him with the crate.

LUCKY and LITTLE FINGER approach RINO and pantomime lifting and holding an imaginary crate.

LUCKY and LITTLE FINGER: Got it, Boss.

CAGNEY: *(Approaches the imaginary crate.)* Inside this crate is the answer to our little teenager problem.

CAGNEY grabs the piece of the lid from RINO and holds it where the lid would be and then "opens" the lid. RINO makes a creaking lid sound with mouth. CAGNEY reaches into the crate and feels around but can't find anything.

CAGNEY: I can't reach the sheets.

NAILS jumps into action and puts the bowl and Ghost Detector down on the table and grabs one sheet and turns around to see the audience, then hides the sheet behind back and side steps to behind the imaginary crate, then sneakily feeds the sheet through the bottom of the imaginary crate, where CAGNEY reaches in and grabs it and pulls it out of the imaginary crate.

CAGNEY: Got one! Only four more to go.

NAILS jumps again but this time is stopped.

CAGNEY: No!!! Let's put the crate on the table, eh?

LUCKY and LITTLE FINGER with CAGNEY holding the lid, pantomime carrying the crate over to the table and setting it down over the pile of sheets.

LUCKY: Perfectly positioned.

CAGNEY lifts the "lid," as RINO makes creaking sounds, reaches into the crate and pulls out the remaining sheets.

CAGNEY: There, one for each of you.
LITTLE FINGER: What are these for?
NAILS: I know! We put these on, see, and pretend to be ghosts, see, scaring away all the…

THEY ALL look at NAILS, waiting for the rest of the line. Finally…

CAGNEY: *(Quickly.)* I forgot we cut that to save time.

RINO: *(To LITTLE FINGER.)* Hey, Little Finger, how did you get the nickname Little Finger?
LITTLE FINGER: Because one of my fingers is shorter than the others.
RINO: Which one?
LITTLE FINGER: The pinky.

RINO holds up his hand and studies it with confusion.

CAGNEY: Alright, everyone put the sheets on and follow me.

THEY put the sheets over their heads and exit, taking the table with them.

HOST: *(Steps a little further onstage.)* As the bad guys headed off to scare away the teenage meddlers with their ghost costumes, several disembodied entities appeared on the other side of the room.

HOST looks to the other side of the room, but STOWAWAY, YODELER, SHOEBOX, and POPUP enter behind him. They are dressed as real ghosts and wear ghoulish makeup. SHOEBOX carries a shoebox.

HOST: *(To The GHOSTS.)* The other other side of the room.

STOWAWAY, YODELER, SHOEBOX, and POPUP move to the other side of the room.

STOWAWAY: It looks like we got us a bunch of intruders again.
YODELER: I like it when there are intruders. It's the only excitement we ever get.
SHOEBOX: Yeah, it gets pretty boring around—
STOWAWAY: Wait a minute! There are only four of us. We're missing someone.

STOWAWAY, YODELER, SHOEBOX, and POPUP all look over at HOST. HOST finally gets it and joins them.

HOST: Oh! Sorry about that. I forgot that I'm a ghost too.

POPUP: Now that we're all here, how are we going to scare these guys away? Clank?

SHOEBOX: Uh, don't call me Clank anymore. I wanna be called Shoebox.

YODELER: Shoebox? That's not a very scary name for a ghost.

SHOEBOX: That's just it. I got a new way to scare people. *(Spooky voice.)* First, I materialize in front of them holding this shoebox. Then the shoes on my feet disappear and then they reappear in the shoebox. Then they disappear from the shoebox and then reappear back on my feet. *(Regular voice.)* I figure I'll build up a reputation, and everyone that I scare will say, "Don't go in that house, that's the home of the Shoebox Ghost." You guys can just call me Shoebox for short. What do you think?

STOWAWAY: That is… awesome! It would scare me if I wasn't already a ghost.