

"The Ten Minute Haunt"
an original short screenplay by
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FADE IN:

1 EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT

We're in a carnival, we know this because we can hear the SOUNDS of the fairground rides (O.S.) and PEOPLE LAUGHING and SCREAMING on the rides (O.S.).

A young couple, IAIN and HEATHER, stop outside a gaudily painted carnival attraction.

A bored CARNIVAL MAN lounges in the attraction's entrance. He appears to be asleep. The words "The World Famous Ten Minute Haunt" is painted across the facade, along with crude ghouls and ghosts. A TV set built into the front of the attraction has a video on loop.

ON THE TV:

We see a stately house.

VOICE ON TV

Have you the courage to enter the
world famous Ten Minute Haunt?
Meet the white lady.

ON THE TV we see the ghostly WHITE LADY walking through a graveyard, rattling chains and MOANING.

VOICE ON TV (CONT'D)

Shake hands with the headless monk.

ON THE TV the scene changes to a MONK whose hood is completely blank. We hear him LAUGH SPOOKILY.

VOICE ON TV (CONT'D)

And we dare you to look into the
eyes of the screaming skull.

Yup, ON THE TV a skull SCREAMS, it's eyes lighting up.

Iain and Heather look at each other. She smiles but he looks a little uncertain. They enter the attraction, but the CARNIVAL MAN doesn't even seem to notice them pass.

2 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Heather and Iain enter what appears to be a narrow living room built in the Victorian era, although in truth it originates from a much older time.

There are a few hints that this is actually a carnival attraction: the three TV monitors, one at each end of the room and one in the middle, which relay information at different points in the attraction; the blanked out windows and a few "surprises" that will be revealed as we go on. Otherwise the room looks normal, with a fireplace (complete with fake fire), family portraits of the Harthing family, a bookcase and a dining table set with plates and cutlery.

All of the light comes from candles dotted around the place, although the flames are actually flickering light bulbs, not naked flames.

Heather is excited to be here while Iain looks apprehensive and nervous. He doesn't like spooky things.

HEATHER

So what do you think's going to happen?

IAIN

Either something's going to jump out of a closet and make a really loud noise, or it'll be an actor dressed up as Frankenstein rattling chains ... like in that haunted house last year.

HEATHER

You mean Frankenstein's monster.

IAIN

You and your horror movies.

HEATHER

What's wrong with horror movies?

IAIN

Too many cats jumping out of doorways.

The first TV monitor shows a series of old black and white photos, some of Harthing House throughout its long history, the others ghostly images. As the couple near it the picture changes to the NARRATOR, who is clearly in the Vincent Price mould.

NARRATOR

(in a ghoulish voice)

Welcome friends to the Ten-Minute Haunt, home of the world famous screaming skull. We dare you to look into its eyes, but whatever you do, don't touch it...or you'll be sorry.

(laughs ghoulishly)

Right now you are standing in the living room of what was once the most haunted house in the world. Harthing House was originally an Abby, built in Dartmoor, England, in 1401. In 1901 it was bought and converted into a family home by Conrad William Harthing, a well renowned spiritualist of the day, and by the time it was demolished in 2004 it was haunted by no less

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

than eight malevolent spooks.
Rather than allow such a place of
concentrated evil go to waste, we
shipped the ruins, brick by brick,
stone by stone, back here at great
expense and rebuilt it for your
... pleasure.

(laughs evilly)

The first death was the nanny of
Harthing's only daughter, Anna.
It is said that she saw something
in the arboretum; something that
disturbed her mind so much she
threw herself on a pair of garden
shears.

HEATHER

Nice.

A spotlight picks out a rusty pair of garden shears, covered
in blood. There is a CHILLING SHRIEK. Iain jumps, but
Heather simply LAUGHS in delight.

NARRATOR

Maybe it was the spirit of Abbot
Thomas she saw. Beheaded by King
Henry's men in 1539, he walks the
grounds, seeking revenge against
those who wronged him. The problem
is he doesn't know the difference
between those who wronged him and
... well ... you.

(laughs)

A door bursts open and a monk stands there. His hood is
empty and he raises a mechanical hand and MOANS. After a
moment the door shuts. The TV changes to a picture of a
skeletal hand pointing to the right.

IAIN

(sighs)

Okay, so it's going to be just
like the haunted house last year.
Cheap jumps.

HEATHER

Well I enjoyed that, so I think
I'm going to love this.

IAIN

You know, I've never understood
why you like ghoulish things so
much.

HEATHER

Because I can't take them seriously.
Not now.

(MORE)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

(grins)

Have you ever thought that the reason I like you so much is because there's something a little ghoulish about you?

Iain gives her a look of exasperation and then attempts to pick up a book lying on the table, only he can't.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

IAIN

It's stuck down.

(tries a few other items)

Everything is. I guess they got bored with people walking off with the haunted pot plants.

Heather reaches her hand around and taps him on the far shoulder. He jumps like a cat.

IAIN (CONT'D)

Jesus, Heather, don't do that!

HEATHER

You're not scared are you?

IAIN

No. I just don't like jumps, that's all. You know what its like, you wait for it, knowing it's going to happen any time soon... it's going to happen... going to happen... and then BANG!

(fakes jump)

And I feel like a chump because it's cheap. There's no skill in making people jump. Makes me feel like I'm six years.

HEATHER

I like jumps. They get my heart beating. Makes me feel alive.

(whispers)

Gets me hot.

She gives him seductive look. After a few seconds he backs off, shaking his head.

IAIN

No, no. Not here. No way!

He walks on and Heather, after a moment, follows, smiling to herself.

HEATHER

Iain, it's okay to be scared. I used to be scared of everything and then... after the accident I thought, to hell will everything. There's many different types of courage.

IAIN

So what sort of courage do you want from me?

HEATHER

You've got to figure that out for yourself.

Heather looks at him, willing him to get up the guts to ask her to marry him. It seems the question is on the tip of his tongue, only for him to turn away awkwardly. For a moment Heather's frustration shows.

IAIN

Hey, look at this.

They are at another TV set. Alongside it there is a life-size black and white photograph of Conrad and his much younger wife, Constance, on their wedding day in 1905.

NARRATOR

Say hello to Conrad and his new wife, Constance. Don't they look happy? Little do they know that misery awaits them two years later in the horror that is Harthing House. Please, be so kind as to step in front of the photographs.

Heather steps in front of Conrad's photo and LAUGHS. Iain is forced to stand before Constance's photo. The lights darken and for a moment (in the photo's reflection) it look as if Heather is wearing Conrad's suit and top hat, while Iain is wearing Constance's wedding dress. The WEDDING MARCH PLAYS.

HEATHER

(in manly, English voice)

I say, my dear, would you agree, by any chance, to be my betrothed, what?

IAIN

(in female voice)

To the end of eternity, my love.
To the end of eternity.

HEATHER

Do you mean that?

The WEDDING MARCH plays.

HEATHER reaches out and takes IAIN's hand. She smiles at him, wishing that they weren't joking.

Then the light changes to a ghoulish green and Heather and Iain's reflections turn into grinning skeletons. The WEDDING MARCH turns into a SHRIEK.

After a moment the lights come back on and everything is back to normal.

IAIN
(shivering)
Wow! That gave me the creeps.

For some reason this irks Heather and she rounds on him angrily.

HEATHER
You know what your problem is,
Iain? You're chicken!

Iain looks hurt at this and Heather realizes she's been too hard on him. She reaches out to him, but before she can touch him...

NARRATOR
Soon after they married, Constance gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl, only for the boy to die the next day. Some have suggested that Constance murdered the child, believing that he had been possessed by a spirit of Abbot Thomas.

HEATHER
Now *that's* sick.

Beside them a heavy Victorian cradle begins to rock, from which comes a horrible strangled CRY.

They look at it, aghast.

Inside the cradle the baby is completely covered with a crocheted shroud.

NARRATOR
They laid his little body in this
very room, in that crib yonder.
Can you hear his pitiful cries?

Heather reaches out a hand to take the shawl away, but Iain stops her.

IAIN
Don't.

HEATHER

Why not?

IAIN

I don't know, I've just got a bad feeling about it.

She rips the shroud away. The baby is a creepy old doll with flashing eyes.

HEATHER

See. There's nothing to be scared of. It's just an old doll.

IAIN

I wasn't scared.

HEATHER

Then why are you sweating?

He wipes his face.

IAIN

It's hot in here.

HEATHER

No it's not.

When he looks away, ashamed, she smiles at him, understanding why he's scared.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Hey, hold me.

He awkwardly takes her in his arms.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

I like it when you hold me, protect me; then I know nothing can go wrong. I feel safe.

IAIN

Can I remind you it was you who saved me from the spider in the bathtub last Friday night, not the other way around.

She thumps him lightly on the arm.

HEATHER

Hey, don't spoil the moment!
(hugs him)

I like it how you're protecting me right now.

They hug and kiss, then they look into each other's eyes and they can't deny their love for each other.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Is there something you want to ask me, Iain? If there is, I want you to be brave and just come out with it. You never know, I might say yes.

He looks like he's about to ask her to marry him when an unseen TV screen behind them flickers on. A GHOSTLY face leers at them and SHRIEKS, making Iain visibly jump.

GHOST

Please move on. Time is running short.

HEATHER

I think we'd better do as it asks.

Heather and Iain move on. Heather is LAUGHING while Iain looks ashamed.

IAIN

You see, even that made me jump. God, I'm useless.

She stops him and spins him around, makes him face her.

HEATHER

No, no you're not useless. You're far from useless and I love you. Promise me you'll never say that again, Iain. Promise me!

IAIN

I promise.

HEATHER

Come on, this place is starting to piss me off. Let's get out of here. I want a ride on that wheel thing that throws you upside down.

Before the exit they arrive at a cabinet, over which the last monitor finishes the story of the house.

NARRATOR

And finally we come to the most frightening and mysterious spirit of them all. In 1876 Conrad Harthing finally met his strange and horrifying end. He made himself a guillotine, and on one cold, clammy December morning, he climbed into it and pulled the string. In his will he stipulated that his skull should never be removed from this room, and who are we to deny him his last wish?

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

(laughs ghoulishly)

For many years the head sat on the mantelpiece above the fireplace, but in later years it was moved to a small purpose-made cupboard, with a peep-hole in the front, so that Conrad Harthing could observe... you.

Heather and Iain look at the cupboard. Indeed it has a peep-hole.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Legend has it that any man who stares into the skull's eyes will see his fate. But we warn you, don't touch it, or we can't be held responsible for what might happen.

HEATHER

Well, that's me off the hook.

IAIN

Shush!

NARRATOR

Do you have the nerve to look Conrad Harthing in the eye? Have you the guts to know your fate, mortal?

They stare at the cabinet, expecting something terrifying to happen. Nothing happens for a time.

Suddenly the cabinet doors pop open and a mechanical skull slides out. Its mouth opens and it would have screamed, only something has gone wrong with the recording because each scream is a squeaky CROAK CROAK CROAK. Each time it "screams" light bulbs in its eye sockets light up. The image is more funny than horrifying.

The couple stare at the skull and then BURST OUT LAUGHING.

IAIN

(laughing)

Did you feel the icy hand of death grip your shoulder?

HEATHER

No, but that curry I ate last night certainly moved.

IAIN

You're disgusting, you know that?

HEATHER

Just another one of my endearing traits that you love so much.

She looks at the skull closely.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Is that real?

IAIN

It doesn't look like its made of plastic.

Behind them in the corner of the room, the air starts to darken.

Feeling cold, Heather rubs her arms. She senses that something is wrong.

Ian reaches out a finger to touch the skull.

HEATHER

No, Iain, don't touch it!

IAIN

I asked you not to touch that crib and you didn't listen to me, now you don't want me not to touch this? Why?

HEATHER

I don't know, I just don't like it. You don't know where it's been.

IAIN

(laughs)

We know exactly where it's been, on Conrad Harthing.

HEATHER

I'm not sure that's Conrad's. If you love me, Iain, you won't touch it.

IAIN

If I'm ever going to stop being a scaredy-cat, I've got to start right now.

HEATHER

Iain, that's not the sort of courage I want. I just want you to tell me you want to...

He touches the skull.

Behind them there is a HISSSS.

They spin around. The corner of the room is pitch black, and from the darkness two angry eyes stare at them.

CLOSE on the evil eyes.

HEATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Oh my G...!

She is suddenly cut off. Everything goes black. There is, strangely, complete silence.

Another young couple, TONY and ANNE, enter the attraction, GIGGLING.

TONY

Do you think he'll realize and kick us out?

ANNE

I doubt it, he was out like a light. I think he's been drinking.

TONY

Oh well, it's his loss.

We swing around to take in the rest of the room, and it is completely empty. Heather and Iain are nowhere to be seen.

ANNE

I hope this isn't going to be too scary. I don't like scary things.

TONY

You can hold on to me. I'll protect you.

They arrive at the first TV screen, which begins the story from the start.

NARRATOR

(in a ghoulish voice)

Welcome friends to the Ten-Minute Haunt, home of the world famous screaming skull. We dare you to look into its eyes, but whatever you do, don't touch it...or you'll be sorry.

(laughs ghoulishly)

The end.