

COUCH TOMB

By Maggie Smith

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Draft Three

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THE CHARACTERS

ELMER - 12, not as smart as he thinks, braver than he should be

IDA - 12, always up for an adventure

LAURA - 13, knows more than everyone else and won't shut up about it

NELLIE - 14, just... Nellie

EDGAR - 11, desperately wants to fit in

ALICE - 14, too much of a working moral compass to let anyone out of her sight

FRANK MAYELL - 43, missing

WHERE

Couch Tomb, 1888. Chicago, Illinois. Nighttime.

NOTES

I'd recommend looking into the history of the Lincoln Park Vampire Hunters. Absolutely wild. Lincoln Park as a whole, absolutely wild. The tuberculosis, also wild. There are pictures of Couch Tomb from around the era the actual events took place, and they're seriously creepy, and haunt me to this very moment. Check them out.

As usual, don't limit the diversity of a cast based on what you think is "historically accurate." You're not accurate. You're just mean. Performers for any role can be of any race. All roles can be played by any gender identity, and I personally don't mind characters' names and pronouns being changed

Though the characters are between eleven and fourteen, adults can certainly play the roles. I only ask that the emotions are focused on, rather than the ages. I don't think anyone can "play young," so to speak and I think you would do a disservice to yourself to attempt that.

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

[We're barely in a city. Not the one that you know today, at least. No bright lights or tall buildings. It's 1880's simple. The center of the stage is a mausoleum- Couch Tomb. You'll get to know it later. For now, all you need to know is that the world of Chicago in 1888 is full of humor, tuberculosis, and the potential threat of vampires. The tomb itself doesn't really have a set location, it can be facing in any direction. Around the tomb there's a black, iron fence. There aren't any other graves, so don't give into the temptation to make any extra tombstones. In reality, there's some trees around the tomb, but that can be up to you. There's one kid on the stage- LAURA TICE. She's impatient. She has a lantern in one hand, and a pocket watch, stolen from her father, in the other. Devious. She takes a look at the pocket watch every so often. She walks around the tomb, never going over the fence. ELMER MARLEE stumbles through the grass, carrying a satchel. He freezes upon seeing LAURA.]

LAURA

You're late.

ELMER

Your watch is early.

LAURA

Father's watch isn't ever early.

ELMER

Well, I'm never late.

LAURA

Shut up. *[Beat]* What'd you bring?

ELMER

Food. From the kitchen. Mom put it on the table to package it away. Didn't put it away in time, though.

LAURA

But what food?

[ELMER pulls food from his bag. Bread. Bread. Bread again. Something else. More bread? It is. LAURA is Not in the Mood.]

LAURA

Anything that isn't a carbohydrate?

ELMER

There's some butter in here somewhere. Probably soft by now. Real easy to spread.

LAURA

I refuse to eat bread and butter for the next twelve hours.

ELMER

[Already stuffing bread in his mouth] Suit yourself.

[Rustling. NELLIE GRIMM and ALICE POMROY enter, both carrying a large mound of thick blankets.]

LAURA

Late.

NELLIE

We never set a time.

LAURA

We said we'd be here at 8:00. It's 8:30.

ALICE

You said we would. I never said anything.

NELLIE

Me neither. So guess who's not late.

LAURA

What if Edgar came early? We'd look sloppy.

ALICE

We are sloppy.

NELLIE

Is that bread?

[ELMER throws some bread to NELLIE. There's more than enough left.]

LAURA

What if Edgar doesn't want to join anymore because we're all a nightmare?

ELMER

I thought you said we can't invite him to join us.

LAURA

I didn't say that. I said we have to pretend like we don't want him to join. So then he wants it more.

ALICE

That seems malicious.

NELLIE

Do you have any butter?

[ELMER shoves the bag over to NELLIE. NELLIE doesn't need further instruction. She looks in the bag.]

NELLIE

Beautiful.

LAURA

It's not malicious, it's calculated. I'm being smart about this, I don't want people to come and join if they aren't dedicated.

ALICE

Dedication doesn't have anything to do with this. And besides, we need someone new. Your tyranny already drove Thomas away.

LAURA

Tyranny is a strong word.

ALICE

At his last meeting you told him it was a good thing we were standing next to a tomb because you were going to kill him if he kept up his act.

LAURA

It was clearly a metaphor.

ALICE

You grabbed a shovel you brought, threw it at him, and told him to “Start digging.”

LAURA

It wasn't that bad.

ELMER

Can I have the butter back?

[NELLIE pushes the bag back to ELMER.]

ELMER

What are the cards saying tonight?

NELLIE

They weren't happy when I left. They almost told me not to come at all.

LAURA

Nellie, I don't want to hear about the spirits tonight.

ALICE

You'd better be kind to him. He's small.

LAURA

He's eleven. He's basically the man of the house.

ALICE

But he still acts older than Elmer.

LAURA

That's not saying much.

[Rustle.]

ELMER

What was that?

[Rustle. Rustle.]

NELLIE

Could be a dog.

[Loud thud.]

NELLIE

Maybe a big dog.

[A dark figure can be seen.]

NELLIE

A small bear?

[It's EDGAR BRUERE, holding an unlit lantern.]

EDGAR

I'm here.

[IDA BRUERE enters, directly behind EDGAR, clutching a journal, carrying a bag.]

IDA

He ran the whole way.

EDGAR

I'm not even out of breath.

[He is. ELMER uses a match to light EDGAR's lantern.]

IDA

He's said that five times now.

EDGAR

And each time it's been true.

LAURA

Looks like we're all here, then. Thank you all for being late.

IDA

I thought we never agreed on a / time.

LAURA

Okay, obviously we had to agree on a time otherwise no one would have shown up in the first place, so I'm right, you're all wrong, let's start with the meeting. *[Beat]* Secretary Bruere, start the meeting.

IDA

First names, please.

LAURA

Secretary Ida doesn't sound as good.

IDA

Well, I like my first name better than my last.

ALICE

Ida, just start the damn meeting.

IDA

Fine. I, Secretary Ida Bruere, officially call this meeting of the Unnamed Children's Protection League of Adolescent Vigilantes to order.

ELMER

We have to fix that name.

IDA

Item one on the agenda... Fix the name.

LAURA

No. No. Initiation has to come first.

IDA

When we were making the itinerary you said-

LAURA

Forget what I said. We have to discuss the Edgar Issue first.

EDGAR

Wait, the Edgar “Issue?”

IDA

The interrogation process may commence.

EDGAR

What?

[The following questions should overlap in a way that they're all still audible and distinct, but unable to be answered by EDGAR. Questions can be ad-libbed if necessary, but ELMER'S question should be last, loudest, and verbatim.]

ALICE

What prayers do you say before bed?

NELLIE

How old were you when you witnessed death for the first time?

LAURA

Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

IDA

What's been your closest encounter with cholera?

LAURA

What's the worst mark you've ever gotten on a test?

ALICE

Have you ever seen a ghost?

NELLIE

How old were you the second time you witnessed death?

IDA

Why didn't you eat all of the corn on your plate last night? Follow up question: Is it because you think Mom isn't good at cooking?

ELMER

What clues do you use to spot a vampire?

[The children are silent, all agreeing that ELMER has asked the best question. They watch EDGAR, expectantly.]

EDGAR

Well, the, uh, teeth. They're sharp. And the claws will scratch at you. And then there's blood around the mouth, because they suck blood. From necks. They suck blood from necks. And they're really pale. And tall. And they wear black and look old and come out from graves to kill us.

[A beat.]

ELMER

Okay, I say he's in.

LAURA

No!

ELMER

Come on, Laura, he knows all the vampire facts. He should be a part of the team.

LAURA

I don't know if he's dedicated enough...

EDGAR

I am! Please, I am!

LAURA

Prove it.

EDGAR

I won't leave the tomb until the sun comes up. I promise. I'll stand guard and keep eyes open at all times. I won't sleep at all. I'll watch. I'll be ready to protect. I won't even let food distract me!

LAURA

Swear.

EDGAR

On what?

LAURA

Swear on the tomb.

**[END OF SAMPLE. FOR THE FULL WORK, PLEASE CONTACT:
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