

HELLO HOUSE

Dramatis Personae:

Daniel, mid-30s, getting a little doughy

Antonia, 11 years old, athletic and wiry

Leo the Locksmith, a real-life psychopath made (at least) interesting, late 20s, Hispanic

The Scene

This is your standard sitcom set-up: living room/dining room with a wooden staircase between the two.

The front door is stage left; it's wide open.

Enter ANTONIA through the front door. She is practicing a ball-handling soccer drill.

ANTONIA

Hey, Dad! Watch this.

Enter DANIEL through the front door. He carries soccer practice gear.

DANIEL

OK, but be careful, Toni. There are a lot of breakables in here.

Antonia gives him a thumbs-up, starts a maneuver that gets out of control. The ball goes flying and knocks over a funeral urn.

See, I knew something like this was going to happen. You're lucky it was only Grandma's ashes.

ANTONIA

Daddy, daddy, I'm sorry.

DANIEL

It's okay, slugger. Why don't you try it again?

ANTONIA

For real? You mean it? It's really cool when I actually get it.

Same deal. Ball goes flying. Knocks over a different funeral urn.

DANIEL

Jumpin' Jehosephat on a pogo stick!

ANTONIA

Oh, daddy, daddy, I am so sorry.

DANIEL

It's all right, sweetie. I've been meaning to move your Mom's ashes someplace more suitable. And, it looks like you have given me that kick-in-the-pants. Wanna give it another go? I could tell you were really onto something.

ANTONIA

Oh, daddy. I felt the same. Ok, just one more try. I know I'm going to nail it this time.

Slightly better effort, but it still gets away from her and knocks down a third funeral urn.

DANIEL

Ding dong! *Who's there?! Knock knock joke!*

ANTONIA

Oh, daddy. That was a tough one. I felt myself standing right on the edge. One side, we have success. On the other, messing up. And I reached up to lean into success, but I lost my balance. Making a mess-up.

DANIEL

Hey, come here. Look at me. See this. These are just my dad's ashes. A man I never met, never spoke a word to. Never even laid eyes on.

ANTONIA

Not even a picture?

DANIEL

Not even a picture. You know, sometimes it takes a perfectly contrived series of events to cement a much bigger moral.

ANTONIA

Oodles of kadoodles! We did do that. We made a moral! Dang, dad, you never miss a teaching moment.

DANIEL

Well, pumpkin spice latte with lactose-free milk, that is what home schooling is all about.

ANTONIA

Where's Firecracker? I want to tell her about the lesson we learned.

DANIEL

She's your cat, little one. Think she got out when you opened the door?

ANTONIA

But, the door was open when we came home.

DANIEL

No, that can't be. When we left for the park, I went through the whole story of how the house feels when it gets locked. Remember? We turn the knob from the inside to show the inside. And we use the key on the outside to show the outside. And we get down on one knee to say a prayer for every minute that we are away to protect all the things that need protecting when we can't be here to protect them.

ANTONIA

Oh, that's right. We did all that stuff. So, how come the door was open?

DANIEL

Hmmm. The only answer is it couldn't have been open.

ANTONIA

But, it was. I'm not lying.

DANIEL

No one said you were lying.

ANTONIA

I miss Firecracker. You always say, if she gets out, we'll never see her again.

DANIEL

Well, let's just hope she didn't get out of this perfectly locked house with its truly closed door.

ANTONIA

Let's hope! What's for dinner?

DANIEL

You tell me. It's Monday.

ANTONIA

Hunh. That's when I cook, right?

DANIEL

You know the rules. It's been this way since we moved in.

ANTONIA

I guess...we'll have fish sticks with ketchup and microwave mac and cheese. Again.

DANIEL

That suits me fine. My job isn't to teach you how to cook for Cordon Bleu, just how to take care of yourself.

ANTONIA

I'll get everything cooked. You set the table.

DANIEL

You are so grown-up.

Exit ANTONIA through the dining area.

It really is something the way stuff just piles up in a new house. And that little girl is growing up right before my eyes. Oh, it's like the years just pile up on top of her.

He deals with these different messes.

ANTONIA (OS)

I found Firecracker. She was in the pantry. Trying to get to her food. Ha ha. She makes me laugh.

DANIEL

If we think too much, we're liable to let our minds play tricks on us. I'm gonna watch TV. You holler when soup's on.

He sets the table for two.

ANTONIA (OS)

I'm not making soup.

Daniel sighs and turns on the TV. He sinks into his mid-80's easy chair.

Enter LEO THE LOCKSMITH from upstairs. He silently glides down through the living room. His steps masked by the din of the TV program.

He unlocks the front door and opens it. He tiptoes back upstairs.

After a spell, a gust from the open door blows some papers across the room.

DANIEL

Well, now, look at me. I got so involved with those soccer kicks and then the funeral urns and the ashes inside them and the people those ashes used to be that I forgot to lock the front door and tell the house what I was doing.

He mutes the TV and walks over to the front door

Hallowed house, you are a husk. A shell. Still, you possess potential meanings that transcend all you appear to be. I fill you with me and the things I love. And only the things I love. I am closing you and locking you. Amen.

He unmutes the TV, orders those papers, sinks back into his favorite chair.

Leo, back to his frustrated limp-dick bullshit, sneaks down, unlocks the front door, sneaks back to the shit-soaked lair he made for himself upstairs.

After a briefer spell, papers whoosh. Daniel cranes around to notice the again open door.

Tricks and tracks and trucks and such! I just told the house the story of itself! Okay, this is gonna require a new tactic.

Daniel mutes the TV, goes back to the door, grabbing those stray papers on his trip.

Dear door, you are like the planet Earth, possessing two sides. One light, the other dark. And, as we strive to experience an eternity of sunshine, you keep all that outdoor nighttime at bay. Yours is the wall with hinges. Namaste.

Daniel unmutes the TV. Finally, he can get some peace and quiet.

Leo starts sneaking down the stairs. Yes, a-fucking-gain!

ANTONIA (OS)

I hope you're hungry!

Daniel turns to the sound of his daughter's voice, catches Leo on the last step.

DANIEL

Who the fuck are you?

LEO

I came with the house.

DANIEL

Ohhhhhh. Sweetie, do you think there's enough there for three plates?

Enter Antonia from the kitchen door holding a serving platter piled high with fish sticks and 5 different receptacles of ketchup. Never mind about the mac and cheese. She's a little girl; it's still in the microwave.

ANTONIA

I hope so. Oh, hey.

DANIEL

Sweetheart. This is...

LEO

Leo.

DANIEL

He came with the house.

ANTONIA

Wow.

DANIEL

Let's eat. I'm famished. I could eat a house. Did you hear me?

ANTONIA

You said house.

DANIEL

Paging Dr. House. Did they ever page him on that show?

ANTONIA

Past my bedtime.

DANIEL

But, Netflix... Anyway...

They sit. Antonia, by herself, facing the front door. Daniel and Leo facing the kitchen door, with Daniel more downstage.

LEO

That was funny how you said eat a house.

ANTONIA

Yeah. You're s'posed to eat a horse.

LEO

No, that's what I do. I eat a house. I'm like a termite. I'm a guy. I'm a human, but termite-like.

DANIEL

I don't really get that. Tell us more.

LEO

Well, you know how when you eat something, it gets like consumed and turned into something else?

DANIEL

Sure.

ANTONIA

I sure do.

LEO

So, you folks get it. Sorry. Do you have a bathroom?

ANTONIA

We do.

DANIEL

It's right up the stairs and on your left. The lightswitch is on the right side.

LEO

Oh. Great. Excuse me.

Leo stands, scoots around Daniel and makes his way to the stairs, which he bypasses to unlock and open that fucking front door.

On his way back to the table, Leo knocks over a funeral urn.

Antonia looks up from her eating, gestures behind her father.

Daniel pivots around, looks, waits for Leo to get back to the table before speaking.

DANIEL

Did you find the bathroom okay?

LEO

Um-hmm.

Daniel takes his fork that still has a ketchupy fish finger on it and plunges it into Leo's neck. An arc of jugular blood paints the fill lights.

LEO

I'm gonna be going now.

DANIEL

You fucking better.

Exit Leo, drenched in blood, out the front door, leaving it open.

ANTONIA

Daddy, did we—

DANIEL

Not this time.

End of play.