

HOUSE OF SMALL WOES

MAGICAL REALISM
ROLEPLAYING GAME



BERIN KINSMAN
A LIGHTSPRESS BOOK



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Sample file

Sample file

Introduction

You didn't choose the house. It opened.

The house notices before anyone speaks. The light moves across the kitchen table as if it remembers something. A drawer opens when a name is spoken aloud. A photograph curls at the edges when the truth settles into a room.

House of Small Woes is a magical realism roleplaying game set in a place shaped by feeling. The house holds what others leave behind. A box no one remembers packing. A song that plays too quietly to name. A letter addressed in familiar handwriting. These aren't puzzles. They're answers already waiting.

You take the part of someone who arrives at a moment of change. A cousin returning with unfinished thoughts. A friend who promised never to come back. A stranger carrying someone else's memory. They enter the house without being called. They stay because something shifts. Not through force, but through recognition. The hallway grows longer when a conversation's avoided. The door sticks until someone's ready. The weather changes when a feeling takes shape.

This book's got everything you need to begin. Inside are the rooms of the house, each marked by memory and motion. The rules follow the Simple Approach, a character-first structure built for emotion, intimacy, and the unspoken. You'll shape your character through memory, longing, silence, and response. Seasonal patterns guide each story. Visitors, forgotten objects, and impossible moments provide direction without removing choice. The house offers what's needed. The rest's up to you.

The house doesn't explain itself. It waits. And this time, it opened because of you.

The Simple Approach

This game uses *The Simple Approach*, a trait-based storytelling system that centers character intention, narrative choice, and emotional cause-and-effect. There are no hit points or rigid mechanics here. You'll use Traits rated from 1 to 5 to describe who you are, what you can do, what drives you, and what complicates your life.

The Book Contains

Inside you'll find the following and more:

A House That Responds: Explore the house's layout, history, and influence. Learn how rooms shift, doors react, and weather mirrors emotion. The house shapes the story by listening.

A Story Built from Feeling: Use seasonal rhythms and narrative beats like *The Repetition*, *The Favor*, and *The Watching* to guide each session. Let emotion set the pace.

Characters Made from Memory: Create characters using traits built from silence, longing, and lived experience. Each character includes strengths, weaknesses, and a driving force that ties them to the house.

Rules That Stay Out of the Way: Use a few traits, a handful of six-sided dice, and a focus on intention. The Simple Approach keeps mechanics light so emotion stays central.

Ways to Run Without Controlling: Learn how to support tension, focus scenes, and follow what matters to the players. Use prompts instead of prep. Let the story breathe.

Tools to Support the Table: Includes full trait lists, object and room inspiration, glossary terms, and narrative structure guidance. Everything exists to support emotion, tone, and choice.

What is Magical Realism?

The phrase magical realism appeared in 1925. German art critic Franz Roh used it to describe paintings that showed everyday subjects with intense clarity. The scenes felt ordinary but carried something more. A window held stillness. A shadow seemed to listen. A bowl of fruit appeared too heavy for what it was. The moment asked to be noticed.

Writers began using the same term to describe fiction where impossible things happened in familiar places. A woman folds laundry and begins to rise. A ghost enters the kitchen and sits down. These events don't surprise the characters. They don't need explanation. They follow the same logic as memory or weather. They feel true because someone in the story already understands what they mean.

The term became widely used in Latin America during the mid-twentieth century. Authors living through censorship, colonial legacy, and political upheaval used magical realism to speak through history, family, grief, and belief. Their stories carried what official language couldn't hold. The world stayed present. Its shape changed through memory, silence, and return.

Why the Stories Took Root

Writers across Latin America used magical realism to tell stories shaped by memory, belief, silence, and survival. Many of them lived in places where colonization, dictatorship, and displacement changed how truth was preserved. Official documents didn't carry everything people needed to remember. Families passed stories in songs, gestures, and kitchen conversations. Magical realism gave those moments a place on the page.

Their work reflected how people already lived. Time didn't move in a straight line. The dead remained nearby. Objects remembered what had happened. In these stories, a name might call back a lost relative. A child might carry someone else's dream. A room might grow colder when an old photograph is opened.

The supernatural didn't arrive as an event. It stayed in the setting, in the language, in the details no one questioned. Characters didn't explain what happened. They recognized it. A mirror changed shape. A bird followed someone for days. A garden bloomed in winter. These moments weren't inventions. They revealed how memory and emotion continued to move through daily life.

Magical realism gave shape to what people already carried. It helped preserve what couldn't be written down any other way. The stories stayed grounded in place, family, and return. The magic followed what mattered. It

remained in the land, in the rooms, and in the stories that waited to be told again.

Who Shaped the Genre

Gabriel García Márquez gave magical realism its most recognized voice. His novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* followed the Buendía family across generations as memory looped, time bent, and the town of Macondo blurred the line between history and myth. A plague of forgetting swept through the streets. A woman rose into the sky while folding laundry. The dead remained present. The world responded to grief and desire with movement, silence, and transformation. García Márquez wrote from a tradition already carried by others.

Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* explored the Haitian Revolution through the idea of the marvelous real, where political change and spiritual presence moved through the same event. Elena Garro's *Recollections of Things to Come* combined political violence and personal memory in a town shaped by vision, return, and distortion. Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* brought voices of the dead into a landscape that remembered more than it revealed. These authors gave shape to worlds where the past continued to move. Their stories didn't separate myth and fact. They allowed both to remain.

Isabel Allende carried magical realism into family histories shaped by revolution and resilience. In *The House of the Spirits*, she followed generations haunted by memory, silence, and unfinished love. Her characters lived through social change and personal loss without losing their connection to those who had gone before. Her writing gave emotional weight to political memory and let homes transform under the pressure of inheritance.

Laura Esquivel used food to carry longing across generations. Her novel *Like Water for Chocolate* gave each recipe more than flavor. Grief changed the temperature of the kitchen. Desire burned into the air. Her work showed how memory could enter the body and remain. The emotional life of her characters shaped what the world allowed to happen.

Toni Morrison wrote through a legacy shaped by displacement, survival, and return. In *Beloved*, the past remained inside the house. The structure remembered. The characters carried names that had been taken from them and shaped new ones in their place. Morrison's language made room for what history refused to contain. Her stories never labeled their magic. They moved through it. *Song of Solomon*, *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye* each carried memory, presence, and power through ordinary places made extraordinary by attention.

These writers shaped magical realism by honoring what couldn't be erased. They wrote memory as structure. They let the emotional world change what was

possible. They didn't frame the strange as spectacle. They gave it space to breathe.

Where Alice Hoffman Fits

Alice Hoffman wrote magical realism into contemporary American fiction through stories centered on love, loss, and generational knowledge. Her characters lived in familiar towns and quiet homes, surrounded by objects that noticed things and rooms that shifted with emotion. The magic in her stories followed feeling. It waited in gardens, lingered in teacups, and responded to choices made with care or hesitation. Her work treated everyday spaces as responsive, sensitive, and shaped by what had been carried across time.

Practical Magic introduced the Owens family and their long history of intuition, heartbreak, and quiet resistance. The house in that novel listened closely. The rules passed between generations weren't explained. They were followed because they had always been there. Hoffman expanded that world in *The Rules of Magic*, *Magic Lessons*, and *The Book of Magic*, each one reaching backward and forward through time. Her writing gave texture to memory. She let grief settle into soil. She allowed rituals to remain private but present.

Her approach placed magical realism in domestic and emotional settings. She focused on the interior lives of women and the ways family shapes what remains unsaid. Magic followed sorrow, desire, and protection. A candle flickered when someone changed their mind. A bird returned when someone was ready. The world noticed and responded.

Hoffman's work often appears in conversations about magical realism, especially within American literature. Some scholars place her within the genre's evolution rather than its origin. Her stories don't emerge from postcolonial history or political trauma. They come from family inheritance, cultural memory, and unspoken grief. Her contribution is one of tone, space, and attention. She wrote through intuition. She built patterns. Her fiction helped readers recognize the supernatural as part of daily experience.

Her legacy shaped how magical realism reached new readers. She showed that a house could respond to heartbreak, that a garden could hold memory, and that a single decision could change the air in the room. She didn't treat magic as revelation. She let it return with the wind.

How the Supernatural Works

In magical realism, the supernatural appears when something in the world notices. It doesn't ask to be named. It follows emotion the way shadows follow light. A drawer stays closed until someone's ready. A song plays from an empty room when a question settles. A garden grows where no one speaks the truth

aloud. These events respond to feeling, not command. They mark the moment something important has taken shape.

The magic isn't separate from the story. It reflects what the character carries. When grief remains unfinished, the room grows colder. When forgiveness begins, a letter arrives with no postmark. These details don't explain themselves. They live in the rhythm of daily life. A cup cracks when a name returns. A window won't open until someone stops pretending they aren't listening.

The supernatural in magical realism doesn't transform the world. It reveals what's already been held inside it. A hallway stretches when silence grows too wide. A key appears when someone decides to stay. These are signs, but they're not messages. They don't direct the character. They reflect them.

Magic in this form works like memory. It stays in the objects, the walls, the quiet patterns of attention. It responds to care, fear, guilt, longing, and return. Nothing needs to be summoned. The world's already listening.

Why These Stories Matter

Magical realism matters because it creates story from feeling. It turns emotion into setting and memory into action. A hallway stretches because someone avoids the truth. A letter arrives because someone's ready to remember. These aren't embellishments. They are structure. They carry the same weight as dialogue, pacing, or cause.

The genre offers a way to tell stories where the supernatural responds, not intrudes. It reflects the world as shaped by longing, silence, care, and inheritance. The magic follows the story's emotional current. It doesn't redirect it. A mirror clouds when a promise is broken. A key appears when someone decides to return. These moments don't solve problems. They make the consequences visible.

Writers use magical realism to give form to what remains unfinished. The past lives in the present. The unsaid becomes a room someone has to walk through. A house might shift slightly each time the wrong name is spoken. A storm might settle over the town until someone names the real reason they stayed. These aren't metaphors. They are moments the character must move through. The story unfolds because the world has begun to react.

Magical realism helps storytellers hold tension without disruption. The surreal elements do not break the narrative. They sustain it. They allow internal change to become external movement. A crack in the ceiling deepens across chapters. A drawer refuses to open until the character understands what they've carried. This kind of storytelling honors subtlety. It rewards attention. It gives space for memory to change the pace of a scene.

These stories stay with readers because they don't ask for proof. They ask for recognition. A feeling remembered. A moment noticed. A detail that meant something, even if no one said it aloud. They let the world act with quiet certainty. They make the emotional visible. They let the reader return to a sentence and see that something had already started. The stories remain because they knew where the silence lived. And they waited.

What the Genre Offers

Magical realism offers a way to play where emotion shapes what happens. Every character action matters, not because of power or conflict, but because the world is paying attention. The supernatural responds to what characters carry. If someone speaks a name they've avoided, the weather might shift. If someone tells the truth too late, the room might change shape.

This genre supports stories that move slowly and hold weight. Pacing comes from memory, hesitation, recognition, and return. Characters don't need to solve problems to move forward. They need to feel something fully, or name something they've buried. What matters is whether they notice what's already changed around them.

For players, magical realism encourages choices rooted in presence. Sit with a moment. Follow a feeling. Let your character stay in the same room until something happens. The story will move, even when no one pushes it.

For facilitators, this genre builds story through reflection. A map doesn't need to be accurate. A room doesn't need to stay the same. The house remembers what the characters forget. Let the world echo what's unresolved. Let the space hold what hasn't been said.

Magical realism offers play that honors silence, patience, and memory. It gives characters room to change without needing to win or prove anything. The story begins when someone notices. The house already has. The world is already listening.

The House of Small Woes

This chapter tells the story of the house that sees but doesn't speak, that remembers but doesn't judge. It's not simply a building. It's the quiet rhythm at the center of a family line that's forgotten how many roots it has.

The house has always been there, according to those who live within it. No one remembers a time before its windows watched the sun rise over Heathcliff's tangled hedgerows. The town grew around it, politely, like it understood something ancient had already claimed that land.

This isn't the story of ownership, but of inheritance. Some say the house chose its first residents. Others say the land did. What's known is this: if your name can be traced to a birth, a binding, or a blessing that happened under its roof, then you're welcome. The moment you step through the door, something quiet inside you settles, like a book finding its way back to the shelf.

Inside, generations linger. Cousins trade stories in stairwells. Aunts pass recipes without writing them down. Children chase shadows no one else sees and learn not to mention them at dinner. Magic clings to the doorframes like old varnish.

What follows is the record of how the house's shape has shifted and held, how it's known its people across seasons, silences, and names. It keeps count, even if no one else does.

Origins and Foundation

Begin with the beginning, even if no one can quite agree on when that was. The stories don't match, but they all start in the same season, with the same wind, and a man whose silence carried more weight than most people's promises. What matters is that something began, and that it's still here.

The Builder

Credited to Elias Putnam, who arrived in Heathcliff before the town had a name and stayed after others moved on. He built the house for his sisters, his mother, and the daughter who bore no resemblance to any of them. No plans survive, only a sketch in the church ledger and a prayer written backward in the margins.

He was a stoneworker by trade but called himself a listener. Neighbors remembered him as kind, though none could recall him laughing. Some said he built the cellar first and slept there through the first winter, waiting for the house to tell him what came next.

Elias wore a charm of elder bark on a leather cord and spoke to trees when he passed them. He carried river stones in his pockets, always in pairs, though

no one asked why. When he worked, he hummed without tune or pattern, and the sound drifted across the fields like bees moving through clover.

His daughter, Mercy, was pale and sharp-eyed and kept her shoes clean even in the wet. She read storm signs in the garden and wouldn't speak on Tuesdays. The others followed her lead without being told, and when she painted the lintels red one spring, no one questioned it.

The cellar still bears his marks, carved in the places where candlelight doesn't reach. Some say the house remembers his hands. Others say it remembers what he buried beneath the hearth, though no one's dared to lift the stone to find out.

The Land

The house stands on a slight rise between the woods and the salt marsh, where fog clings low to the ground and lilies bloom in the off-season. No deed was ever recorded, but no one else has laid claim to it. Some say it was built atop an older dwelling, but the foundation refuses to speak of it.

The ground remembers what people forget. Roots break stone where they must, and moss climbs where hands won't reach. It's the kind of land that holds warmth long after the fire's gone out and carries footsteps longer than they should echo.

Children born there walk early and speak late. Spells buried in the garden sprout wild, twisting around trellis and tree without waiting to be named. Crows gather in threes, then sevens, then threes again, but never come closer than the fence unless invited.

The marsh hums at dusk. Not with insects, but with something older, deeper, patient. When storms pass over Heathcliff, this is where the lightning touches down. The earth opens just enough to drink and then seals itself again before morning.

Those who leave always know how to find their way back. The land doesn't forget its own. It waits.

First Residents

Elias's mother, Tabitha, was the first to cross the threshold. She walked the perimeter three times before stepping through the door and left a braid of rosemary and bone hung over the lintel. She slept by the hearth with one hand on the floorboards and claimed to dream in languages no one taught her.

His sisters, Remember and Silence, arrived days later with a wagon of linens and a cat that wouldn't stay indoors. They kept the upstairs windows shuttered for months, refusing to explain why. Silence wrote notes in a language she made up herself, but Remember understood every one.

Mercy, the daughter, lived in the attic. She chose it without being offered. Her room was the smallest and the brightest, with a view of both the trees and the tide. She spoke to birds through the broken panes and kept a box of river glass hidden behind the chimney stone.

Early Rooms

The first room built was the kitchen, square and low, with a wide fireplace and hooks already set into the ceiling beam. The fire never fully went out, even before the chimney was finished. Morning bread was left in the hearth embers overnight, and no one ever admitted to setting the dough.

The upstairs hallway was built longer than the house seemed to allow. At night, the floor creaked in ways that didn't match anyone's steps. The doors weren't numbered, but everyone knew which was theirs.

A room without a door appeared at the end of the first spring. It wasn't on the plans, but no one had written any. No one remembers building it, but it stayed.

Materials

Stone from the streambed held the cellar in place, each piece chosen for the way it rang when struck. Floorboards came from an orchard that burned one autumn and left every tree sweet with smoke. The walls were packed with lamb's wool and lavender, though no one remembers buying either.

Windows came from three different counties and never quite matched. The glass shifts with the season, warping the view just enough to make you second-guess what you saw. Nails were scarce, so joints were made to lock without them, tight enough to last through quarrels and storms.

The house was made to hold people, not impress them. Nothing was wasted, and nothing was explained. It stands because it wants to.

Structure and Shifts

The house has grown, not through expansion but absorption. What's built becomes memory, and what's remembered becomes part of the house. Change happens slowly, or all at once, depending on whether you're watching.

The Additions

A wing was added in 1847, though no record shows who added it. A second staircase appeared during the Great War, and the garden wall rebuilt itself after the storm of '63. What begins as renovation becomes remembrance.

The 1847 wing has thirteen windows but only eleven rooms. Two are believed to exist between floors, accessible only when needed. The staircase twists tighter the more it's used, though it never creaks and never wakes sleeping children.

The garden wall grows thicker with each telling of its fall. After the 1963 storm, stones turned up in odd places, tucked into closets and cupboards. One morning, the wall stood whole again, smoother than before, and no one spoke of it.

Architecture

The house is not symmetrical. Rooms vanish and reappear. One door opens onto the orchard for decades, then onto a sewing room that no one recalls furnishing.

The east-facing corridor grows shorter when guests overstay. A parlor once used for mourning now welcomes births, but the mirror hasn't changed its frame. Floorplans drawn in winter curl and crumble by spring, as if the paper knows it's wrong.

Some chimneys don't match any fireplaces. A pantry once led to a bedroom, briefly. Attics appear in places with no roofs above them. No one complains.

The Attentive Design

No one calls it magic. But no one is surprised when a window fogs over at the exact moment a name is spoken. The plumbing hums with lullabies, and the walls lean in to listen.

Rain falls softer when someone inside is grieving. Light bends around the nursery even on the cloudiest days. Stairs pause mid-creak when secrets are being whispered.

The house doesn't intervene, but it understands. It keeps things steady without holding them still. Whatever it notices, it keeps.

Attic Lore

The attic is the highest room, but no one calls it that. They call it Mercy's Room, even though Mercy was the first to leave and never came back. It's never been locked, but no one enters without knocking first.

There's no dust. Even when the rest of the house gathers it like a second skin, the attic stays clean. The air smells faintly of fennel and forgotten letters, and the light never falls the same way twice.

Boxes appear and disappear depending on who's asking. The rocking chair shifts between windows when no one's looking. A journal once found there named no author, but every entry ended with the same phrase: *I am still here.*

On clear nights, stars press close to the glass like they're listening. The floorboards don't creak, but they hum, softly, like someone breathing in the walls. Every child who's slept there has woken with a story they weren't taught.

People don't remember what they brought into the attic, only what they left behind. The room doesn't keep things, it keeps impressions. Some say it's the

house's memory, where feelings go when there's nowhere else for them to settle.

The Cellar

The cellar came first. Elias dug it with his own hands, stone by stone, lining the walls with river rock that hummed when the light caught them right. He slept there through one whole winter before the house had a roof, waiting for something to answer back.

It's cool year-round and always slightly damp, no matter the weather. Candles burn longer there, and clocks tick slower, but only by a little. People who speak too loudly down there often forget why they came.

There's a shelf that never stays in place. Jars labeled in handwriting no one recognizes contain things that still glow faintly. In the back corner, beneath the slanted beam, a single chair waits facing the wall. It's always there, no matter how many times it's carried out.

The family keeps preserves in the north alcove and silence in the south. When storms roll in, the cellar doors rattle once, then still. Those who descend without permission often come back with their names slightly different.

The Guest Rooms

There are always exactly three guest rooms, though no one can agree on where. One is always upstairs, one is always off the hall that leads nowhere, and one is somewhere that doesn't make sense but still feels right. Guests don't ask, they're shown.

Beds make themselves after midnight. The water in the pitchers is always cold, and the mirrors never reflect what's behind you. When visitors wake, they remember dreams that aren't their own, always gentle, always unfinished.

Some guests never leave entirely. A scarf reappears years after it was lost, still carrying perfume. A pressed flower rests inside a book someone swears they never opened. The house remembers every guest who's ever passed through, but it won't say their names aloud unless asked kindly.

The Garden and Grounds

Everything that grows here remembers something. There are stories braided into the roots, names spelled in petals, and laughter pressed between the leaves. No one plans the garden. It unfolds.

The Orchard

The orchard slopes behind the house, where the land dips before the marsh begins. Apples appear in varieties no one can name, ripening early or late depending on who's expected. Some trees blossom when letters arrive, others when footsteps return.

The farthest row shifts slightly each spring. Fences creak, though no wind stirs them. In the hollow trunk near the well, children leave questions scratched on bark, and by morning, the marks are gone.

No one remembers planting the vines that climb the orchard's center tree, but they bear fruit in years marked by sorrow. The juice stains deep. It doesn't wash out.

The Greenhouse

The greenhouse was rebuilt in 1911 by L. Nurse and her twin niece and nephew, using salvaged beams and green-painted nails. One pane of glass always frosts from the inside. The plants closest to it bloom more brightly than the rest.

Even when empty, the space feels occupied. A black cat was once trapped inside for three days but emerged cleaner than it entered. The ledger kept on the main table documents growth, weather, and dreams, though the handwriting never stays the same.

Some nights, the greenhouse glows faintly, as if remembering sunlight. On those nights, seedlings planted in silence tend to take root. Nothing spoken aloud lasts long in that soil.

The Groundskeepers' Legacy

Every generation, someone tends the land without needing to be told. They recognize soil by scent, speak to trees in short, thoughtful phrases, and never carry gloves. You'll know them by the way the ivy lifts when they pass.

The most recent was Calla, who knew when to prune by the ache in her shoulder. She never raised her voice, but the nettles backed off when she stared too long. She planted a ring of poppies in the west field that never bowed in the wind.

The house never calls them gardeners. It remembers them as translators. Their footsteps linger longer than their names.

The Family Rule

Everyone with the blood is welcome, but the house only opens for those it chooses. It doesn't explain itself. A cousin might pass by a dozen times before the door unlocks. Another might arrive unannounced and find a lamp already lit in the attic.

There's no roll call. No master list. If the blood remembers you, the house does too.

Open Door, Heavy Expectations

No one sends invitations. They wouldn't mean much if they did. The house knows when someone needs to return, and it readies itself in quiet ways, warm

sheets, a light touch on the bannister, a door that opens smoother than it should.

Every arrival carries a cost, but not one that's paid in money. You're expected to notice things. A child who's outgrown their boots. A cupboard that's begun to stick. The unspoken tension between cousins at breakfast.

People come back for a reason, even if they don't know what it is yet. The house waits for them to figure it out.

Earning Your Keep

No one pays rent. Everyone contributes. You live here by being part of what holds it together. That might mean splitting wood or mending curtains. It might mean waiting up with someone who hasn't cried in years and suddenly can't stop.

Jobs aren't assigned. They surface. One person starts hanging the laundry, another brings it in when rain threatens. A third notices that the youngest hasn't spoken all day and gently, carefully, sits beside them.

To stay here is to carry part of someone else's weight without needing to be asked.

Old Names, Old Threads

The names come back, but they change as they do. Bishopson. Elsie Nurse. Mary Proctor who now goes by Maples. Each one carries a trace of what was, twisted gently into something new.

Sometimes the name returns before the person does. A child might hum a lullaby no one's taught them. A teen might claim the attic without knowing why it feels familiar.

The line isn't straight. It curls, loops, forgets, and finds itself again. The house doesn't keep track like a record book. It holds memory like a garden holds seeds, quietly, faithfully, until the moment's right.

Occupants and Echoes

Some stay forever. Some visit once. The house remembers both. It doesn't measure time in years, but in names spoken aloud, doors opened with care, and how often a soul looks back before crossing the threshold.

The Lifelong Residents

Some were born in the house, stepped into adulthood beneath its eaves, and now rock on its porches waiting to be asked for stories. They know which stair groans out of habit and which one sighs in warning. They're the ones who hush a kettle without lifting a finger, who can coax violets back to bloom with a hum and a well-placed glance.

Their days follow the quiet rhythm of the house itself. They tend herbs that no one else remembers planting and mend clothes that were folded years before they tore. They don't speak much about the past, but when they do, it feels like the wallpaper leans in to listen.

The Returners

Others leave and come back, sometimes decades later. They find their old rooms subtly changed to suit who they are now, a bookshelf shifted, a mirror moved, a bed that seems lower to the ground than they remembered. The house doesn't judge their absence. It just makes space for what's returned.

They unpack slowly, unsure at first if they've really been welcomed. Then a quilt appears that matches their childhood one stitch for stitch, and the hesitation fades. The house doesn't offer explanations. It offers belonging.

The Strangers by Blood

Cousins who've never met still know which chair feels most like theirs. They arrive skeptical, tugging at sleeves, squinting at photos in the hallway. But the hallway always shows them something they recognize.

The house learns fast. It remembers preferences they don't recall sharing, a certain jam, a certain tea, a certain way the light filters through curtains at exactly the right moment to calm a restless mind.

By the second morning, they stop asking how the house knows. They start setting extra places at the table instead.

Cycles and Memory

The house doesn't keep calendars. It remembers through movement, through warmth left behind, through names spoken aloud when no one's listening. It tracks time by the way a hallway shifts, or how a familiar smell lingers one day longer than it should.

Each moment settles into place, held with quiet attention. The house always knows when a season has changed.

The Departed

Grief moves gently here. The house slows, then stills. Mirrors dim, water runs cooler, and the wind turns away from the porch.

A drawer resists opening. A door stays closed until someone arrives who feels ready to cross its threshold. Light falls softer across the floor, gathering near the baseboards like it's keeping watch.

Rooms once used by the departed wait with patience. The air remains warm. Beds hold their shape. Someone always finds a reason to pause at the doorway, even when they don't know why.

The Newly Arrived

When a child is born, the house prepares. Curtains rise in the breeze before the windows are opened. A quilt is folded and set out before anyone reaches the linen chest.

The nursery reveals itself. One room quiets, softens, brightens. A cradle waits without needing to be placed there. Shelves find old toys and gently return them to view.

The house breathes in time with small footsteps. It holds the lullaby longer than the voice that first sang it. Each corner offers comfort. Each floorboard welcomes every hour of the night.

The Dreamers

Dreams shape the rooms between rooms. A child wakes with a story they've never been told. A cousin writes down a song they don't remember hearing. Words drift through hallways like leaves on still air.

Some dreams offer questions. Others return long-settled thoughts with new clarity. The house listens with every wall, every floorboard, every space where light meets shadow.

Dream journals fill with handwriting that shifts between entries. Footsteps follow a remembered rhythm from someone who once lived two generations ago. The house remembers the dreamers. It welcomes what they carry.

The Whispered Stories

Stories grow here like vines. They stretch across seasons, curling around moments of laughter, tears, silence, and return.

A phrase spoken in the garden echoes back in a recipe passed down without paper. A child speaks a name they've never heard, and the weather shifts in quiet reply.

These stories don't require telling to survive. They live in the scent of old books, in the way a rug always finds its place, in how a photograph leans ever so slightly toward the nearest chair.

They stay close to those who need them. The house remembers which ears are ready. When the moment comes, the story is already nearby, waiting to be heard.

The House as Character

This section reinforces the central conceit: the house doesn't haunt, it holds. Its presence is constant but never imposed. It listens more than it speaks and remembers more than it reveals. Those who live within it don't fear its silence. They grow into it.

The house shapes itself through what it has kept. Not objects, but impressions. It gathers rhythm from footsteps, language from breath, and intention from how long someone lingers before opening a door.

It isn't alive in the way people are. It's alive in the way rivers are, or orchards, or faith.

Memory as Architecture

Arguments leave echoes in the wallpaper. The same words return when the room is repainted, softer but still shaped by heat. A hallway once used for pacing now creaks with a rhythm that feels like apology.

Grief stains the baseboards. Not in color, but in stillness. One room draws more dust than the others, even with the windows open. A drawer sticks on anniversaries and opens easily the day after.

Joy lingers in the smell of bread no one's baked for years. It hides in corners that catch the morning sun and stay warm past dusk. The coat hooks near the door always feel ready, even when no one's visiting.

Response, Not Resistance

The house doesn't stop people from leaving. It opens the door, but it watches which way they look before stepping outside. Some pause. Some don't. Either way, the light in the stairwell always adjusts itself.

It closes a window just before the storm hits. It shifts the wind so the front gate swings once and then stills. A loose shutter stays in place while someone inside is making a hard decision.

When someone's name is about to be said, the lights flicker. Not to interrupt, but to prepare the room. A chair is already turned slightly toward the doorway. A photo straightens itself without drawing attention.

Sacred Mundanity

It isn't grand, but it is enormous. Not because of size, but because of what it carries. No room is empty, even when it's unoccupied. No gesture goes unnoticed, even the smallest ones.

The kettle whistles when someone needs to pause. A misplaced sock appears just as the conversation turns. Cabinets remember how far to swing open for each person who's used them more than once.

The sacred lives in the ordinary. The texture of well-worn stairs. The exact pressure needed to close a door without waking anyone. The way a drawer opens to reveal not what was lost, but what was needed.

The People of the House

This chapter gathers the living branches of a family too large for a single name. They hold different pieces of the same story, passed down through cedar chests and spoken softly across the years. Some have heard it from birth, others find their way to it by instinct, but every thread carries the same pull: toward the house, toward each other, toward the work.

Surnames shift, but many echo the old land records carved into stone along the town line. A few match those etched into heirlooms hidden beneath the eaves, passed from aunt to niece with no explanation. Not everyone arrives knowing their place, but those who do the work are never turned away. They mend, they plant, they stir, and the house marks their presence in its own quiet ways.

The family holds gifts the way some hold habits, with ease, with reverence, with repetition. One might know when apples will sour on the branch. Another might walk the path behind the orchard and meet someone long gone, waiting with a riddle. Gatherings happen when they are needed. Porch steps become altars. The laundry line becomes a signal. The garden beds become conversations.

The people of the house do not carry their history in documents. They remember with salt jars, seed packets, and the hush that falls when certain songs play on the radio. They may quarrel over chores or whose turn it is to pick up the mail, but they stand shoulder to shoulder when the lights flicker twice. Memory moves between them like breath, steady and shared.

Some have always lived here, leaving only to walk the grounds or fetch rhubarb. Others return carrying letters, birth announcements, or grief. The timing varies, but the return never fails. Every chair finds a sitter. Every name finds its echo in another room. The house listens, and the people gather.

Who Belongs

The house gathers people the way trees gather wind. Some are born to it, their names whispered through hallways before they ever arrive. Others are recognized by the way the floorboards settle beneath their steps. Belonging isn't declared. It's lived.

The Lineage Rule

Anyone of the blood may stay. The house doesn't measure closeness or track names through paper. A great-niece who never met her kin still finds the right key on the hook. A cousin raised two states away feels the floor warm beneath her feet as she crosses the threshold. Their presence fits. Their work begins on the second day, without needing to be told.

A photo might tilt on the wall when one of them arrives. A long-sealed drawer opens. Someone finds their handwriting already in a family recipe book. These aren't signs. They're acknowledgments. The house remembers what others forget.

Chosen by the House

Some come without blood ties. They carry no stories passed down, no names that match the ledgers. Still, the house knows them. They sweep the porch without being asked. They hum the tune the clock chimes at noon. They speak to the stove like it's an old friend, and it answers with steady heat.

Their place isn't assigned. It forms around them. A coat hook appears beside the back door. A nameplate with no surname is tucked into the mail basket. No one questions it. The house has already settled the matter.

Arrival and Recognition

There aren't any announcements. No one makes speeches or reads names aloud. Still, the shift is felt. Someone pours an extra cup of coffee. A quilt with their favorite color is folded at the end of the bed. The mirror shows their face clearly, even when the bathroom fills with steam.

They unpack without instructions. The house has already moved things to make room. Their place at the table is steady. Their chore is understood. Nothing's explained. Everything's in motion.

The Ones Who Stay

Some never leave. Some leave and return before the sheets cool. Some grow into the walls without ever meaning to. They're not assigned roles. The house shapes itself around what they already do.

The Quiet Matriarch

She's not the oldest. She's not the loudest. But when the kettle whistles for no reason, she's already in the kitchen. She knows who needs the attic room before they say a word. She always finds the lost scarf, the unopened letter, the photograph that someone meant to ask about but didn't. She doesn't tell people what to do, but when she speaks, no one interrupts.

She remembers birthdays without a calendar and leaves envelopes in coat pockets with notes that say "yes" or "not yet." She's often found near a window, not watching but waiting. Her keys are kept in a bowl no one else touches. When she goes away for a day, the whole house feels off-balance until her steps return.

The Fixers and Tenders

They don't ask what needs doing. They notice. One keeps the pantry sorted and adds the exact right thing to the shopping list. Another remembers the

wattage of every bulb and replaces them before anyone notices they've dimmed. Someone sharpens the knives once a week and folds towels the way the house likes.

They mend shirts, tuck a hot water bottle into the guest bed, sweep the leaves before they pile too deep. They're the ones who water the basil and untangle the cords behind the record player. They read aloud in the den to whoever's nearby, even when no one admits to listening. They hum while folding laundry and leave fresh soap in the guest bathroom. Their work is constant and quiet, like breath.

The Stay-Agains

They left with ceremony, or in the middle of the night, or without telling anyone at all. Some chased jobs, others lovers, a few escape. None of that matters once they're back. They return to the chair they always sat in, the tea they always drank, the shelf where their book still waits.

They might unpack slowly or not at all. They might speak about the years away, or they might not mention them. No one asks. The house never closed their room. Their name was never taken off the board by the door. A new robe appears on the hook. Their place returns without discussion. So do they.

The Ones Who Come and Go

Not everyone stays. Some pass through in the middle of something. Some arrive for a season. Some return again and again, like tidewater, smoothing out the edges before pulling back. Every room has been borrowed by someone whose story didn't end here. The sheets hold their shape a little longer. The house remembers their footsteps, even if they never reach the attic.

The Summer Kin

They arrive when the weather warms, all windchimes and sandals, notebooks half-full and plans half-made. They say they'll stay for a few weeks, long enough to rest, long enough to finish the thing they never started. Some leave as promised, with thank-you notes and tearful breakfasts. Some stay through the first frost. A few forget to leave entirely.

They take over the porch swing, learn the names of the neighbor's cats, and always have strong opinions about breakfast. Their charm is easy, their rooms light-filled and cluttered by day two. They bring new music, new friends, new postcards from places they still want to go. Even when they're gone, their laughter lingers in the bathroom mirror. The extra plates they bought stay in rotation.

The Drifters by Need

These ones arrive during breaks. Not vacations, breaks in jobs, in love, in confidence. The house never asks why they've come. It opens the guest room,

warms the water, and leaves a cardigan folded on the end of the bed. They often say little the first night, but the next day they're chopping vegetables or sweeping the back step like they've lived there all along.

They don't stay forever, but they leave things behind. A painted border around the kitchen window. A new soup recipe that becomes part of the house rotation. A story half-finished, tucked into a drawer with a pen still inside. They leave when they're steadier. Sometimes they write. Sometimes they return. The house is always ready either way.

The Vanishers

No one sees them go. The bed is made, the tea towel is folded, but the person is gone. Sometimes they leave a note on the breadbox. Sometimes their coat is still hanging by the door. Sometimes there's nothing at all. They walk into the orchard or take the shortcut behind the shed and don't come back.

No one calls it abandonment. No one labels it wrong. The house doesn't take it personally. Their name stays on the calendar. Their favorite mug is moved but never discarded. If they return, they'll find the lamp plugged in and the window open. If they don't, their place still counts. They're part of the story, even from far away.

Family Without Uniformity

They don't match. They don't agree. They don't gather under one banner or trace a single line. Still, they hold. The house keeps them close not by order, but by rhythm. What binds them isn't structure. It's repetition, pattern, and the quiet knowing passed from hand to hand.

The Surnames

Certain names repeat like birdsong in spring. Corey, Wildes, Bradbury, English. They show up on letters, stitched into quilts, carved into the underside of drawers. Sometimes they're hyphenated, sometimes tucked into middle names, sometimes used only in garden journals and recipes no one shares outside the house. They're not formal. They're familiar.

A guest might notice them first in the handwriting on jam labels. Or in the way old photo frames bear initials that feel oddly current. The names don't claim status, but they gather weight. Spoken aloud, they seem to stir the floorboards. Written down, they hum a little before the ink dries.

The Gifts

No one calls them witches, not out loud. But everyone has a way. Some people coax bees from rafters with a hum. Some always know the exact right time to call someone they haven't spoken to in years. One aunt's preserves always lower a fever, no matter what fruit she uses. A cousin can walk into a room and know who's grieving, who's lying, and who's about to leave.

The gifts aren't taught. They're noticed. Someone names what they see, and someone else nods like they already knew. No one studies. They practice. By habit, by instinct, by remembering what their hands did the last time it worked.

The Unnamed Traditions

There are no written rules, but everyone seems to know them. You don't face away from the big pantry window. You always leave one spoonful in the pot for the one who's late. The last candle isn't blown out, it fades on its own. You never name the birds on the second floor windowsill. You leave the guestbook open, even if no one's signed it in weeks.

The reasons aren't explained. They don't need to be. You sweep toward the center of the room. You knock three times before opening the root cellar. You never whistle in the attic. When it's your turn to remember, you will. And the house will notice.

Roles That Emerge

The house doesn't assign tasks. It creates pressure points. A door sticks, and someone starts oiling hinges. A birthday's forgotten once, and never again. What the house needs, someone becomes. Not because they're told. Because no one else does it.

The Keeper of Calendars

They know what matters and when. Birthdays, yes. Anniversaries, yes. But also the day someone almost left. The morning someone didn't come downstairs. The week the garden went quiet after a loss. Their handwriting shows up on grocery lists, taped to mirrors, inside jacket pockets.

They're the reason the casserole goes in the oven before anyone says they're hungry. They're the reason a candle's lit three days before the worst day of the year. They never ask for help remembering. They already know.

The Listener

The house changes when they're in the room. Floorboards creak earlier. Clocks tick louder. People speak with more pauses. They're not always a child, but often. They're the one who listens so well the house starts speaking back.

They're the first to know when someone's going to cry. The only one who notices the suitcase packed two days too early. They don't ask questions. They make space for the answers to show up.

The Absent Thread

Every generation has one. Sometimes they leave early. Sometimes they never live here at all. Still, the house shapes around their absence like a missing stair tread, everyone adjusts without saying why.

Their name stays in conversations, never needing context. Their mug never disappears. The porch light clicks on around the time they'd usually arrive. No one waits at the window. But the curtains move. The house remembers how they breathed.

Growing Up in the House

Childhood starts the first time the house reacts to your presence. A window unlatches when you pass. A lamp flickers when your hand hesitates. You're watched, not judged. You're shaped by repetition.

Learning the House

The lessons begin early. You learn which steps to avoid when sneaking cocoa, and which stair creaks no matter how careful you are. You know which closets like to hold things and which ones return what's been lost. You never ask who made the rules for the games in the hallway. You play by instinct. The attic counts your footsteps. The mirror knows when to stay quiet.

Some rooms give you energy. Others take it. You don't need to be told which is which. You feel it in your skin before you name it.

Behavior That Stays With You

You learn to open the kettle with your knuckles instead of your palm. You learn to check on people by offering food, not questions. You wait until the rain lets up before asking for help. These habits don't get explained. They settle into the body. You copy how someone else folds a quilt and find yourself doing it that way forever.

The lilac tree teaches you where to sit when the world is too loud. The hallway teaches you when not to speak. No one shows you. You're expected to notice. You do.

When You're Grown

You don't get told. You notice the porch light needs replacing and you're the one who gets the bulb. You boil water when someone's gone quiet. You hang up a coat that isn't yours because the weight felt familiar. That's when the others stop watching and start trusting.

There's a shift. A cousin asks you where something's kept. The calendar on the fridge has your handwriting. A door you've never opened before swings wide, and the room beyond smells like memory. That's the moment. You've taken your place.

Sample Characters

Here are ten character concepts designed for use with *House of Small Woes*, each one grounded in magical realism and written with narrative flexibility in mind. You can use them as-is for quick character creation, treating each one as a complete starting point with a built-in tone and perspective. You can also treat them as templates, adjusting names, traits, or circumstances to suit a different play style, story focus, or character arc.

Each concept includes just enough information to anchor a backstory, hint at relationships, and suggest storylines that might unfold during play. Whether you're playing a one-shot or beginning a longer story, these concepts can get you started without needing a full character sheet. You can also use them as supporting characters—people who live in or around the house, each with their own past, routines, secrets, and roles to play. Because the house remembers everyone who passes through, even a character meant to be minor can leave a lasting impression.

You don't have to explain how the strange parts work. They're part of the house now.

Elsin Keywright

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

Born during a week when the doors wouldn't stay shut, Elsin was found curled beside the cellar hinge, already clutching her grandfather's smallest key. She doesn't use maps, doesn't knock, doesn't keep to hallways anyone else remembers. Some say she walks with purpose. Others say she walks where the house whispers.

Knows the Locks by Heart (3): Elsin can name every door in the house, even the ones that no longer open. She remembers which ones breathe heavy in winter, which ones don't like to be passed twice in the same day. Players can use this trait to open what should be closed, notice when something's been moved, or trace the shape of an event by the way the hinges catch.

Carries Impossible Keys (2): Her keyring holds glass, bone, clay, string, a rusted spoon, a church bullet. Some unlock silence, others unlock apologies. Players can use this trait to resolve a room's tension, reveal an object hidden by grief, or grant entry to a part of the house that doesn't exist until it's needed.

Knows the Short Way (3): Elsin is never seen on the stairs, but she's always where she's meant to be. She passes through closed parlors, unfinished attics, and forgotten servants' halls. Use this trait to arrive unexpectedly, bypass surveillance, or navigate space that no longer obeys blueprints.

Reads the Woodgrain (2): She presses her palm to a lintel and hears footsteps from twenty years ago. Some doors still echo. Players can use this trait to sense who was here last, feel the emotion clinging to a doorknob, or recognize when the threshold doesn't want to be crossed.

Opens Without Asking (2): Elsin doesn't mean to intrude, but she rarely waits. She steps into spaces people aren't ready to share. Players can use this trait to unsettle a conversation, prompt a memory out of hiding, or create conflict when someone feels exposed too soon.

Loses Her Own Door (1): She knows everyone else's way home, but her own room keeps shifting. Elsin forgets where she's supposed to be and wakes in places she didn't mean to visit. Use this trait to delay a meeting, forget an errand, or find yourself at the wrong threshold with the right key.

Follows the House's Mood (2): Elsin trusts what the floorboards say more than what people tell her. When the light flickers or the wallpaper curls, she listens. Use this drive when intuition overrides logic, when the space seems to respond, or when a moment depends on faith in something unspoken.

Magic

Elsin doesn't command, cast, or call. Her magic moves with breath and bone, with thresholds and tension. A door opens because it remembers her

hand. A lock clicks because it's tired of being alone. Sometimes the windows fog in patterns that match her thoughts. She never tries to make it happen. She only listens, and the house decides what to say back.

Material Things

She dresses like someone who expects to be stopped and never is.

Essential Gear: Her grandfather's oil-dark keyring, a bundle of waxed linen labels for marking forgotten rooms, a brass-handled flathead that tightens memory as well as screws.

Assistive Gear: A paper map of the house that redraws itself nightly, a pouch of crushed salt and crushed roses, and a broken chain that once belonged to the back stair lamp.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Knows the Locks by Heart) + 2 (Carries Impossible Keys) + 3 (Knows the Short Way) + 2 (Reads the Woodgrain) = 10 points. Weaknesses: 2 (Opens Without Asking) + 1 (Loses Her Own Door) = 3 points. Drive: 2 (Follows the House's Mood) = 2 points

Elsin's Role in the House of Small Woes

When something disappears, they call Elsin. When a door groans for the third time, when a keepsake won't stay buried, when a visitor stands in the wrong hall at the wrong moment, she's already walking. Elsin doesn't explain how she knows, and no one asks. The house trusts her with the stories it locks behind plaster and latches. Elsin opens carefully. Not to pry. To remember.

Iris Quell

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

She came to study seasonal bloom patterns in inherited soil but found something stranger rooted beneath the petunias. The grant ended. She stayed. Her notebooks are full of marginalia in pencil and pressed petals that sometimes hum when turned.

Catalogs What Blooms (3): Iris knows what grows and when, even when it should not. Her charts track not just light and moisture, but emotion, argument, silence. Use this trait to identify what changed in a space, diagnose shifts in household mood, or determine what presence might be nurturing a plant from beyond the living.

Talks to Green Things (2): She does not cast or summon. She checks in. A vine that slumps straightens when she speaks its name, and the dahlias don't bloom until she's had her tea. Use this trait to learn things left unsaid, interpret a plant's reaction to someone nearby, or offer calm through a garden's presence.

Stays Through the Off-Season (3): Iris lives in the greenhouse's back room, even when the pipes freeze. She knows what the house looks like in frost, in mildew, in low light. Players can use this trait to be present when no one else dares, survive figurative or literal cold, or witness what happens when grief settles and doesn't lift.

Records Without Flinching (2): Her notebooks are precise, even when the subjects resist. She's documented with calm what others refuse to name. Use this trait to notice the small change before it becomes dangerous, preserve the truth in unstable rooms, or ground supernatural shifts in mundane observation.

Forgets to Speak Aloud (2): Iris often mouths answers instead of saying them, especially when distracted by leaf shape or scent. Others find her remote or strange. Use this trait to create tension in conversations, miss social cues, or remain misunderstood despite good intentions.

Out Of Season (1): Her timing is always a little wrong. She brings summer seeds to winter meetings and starts planning things that won't grow yet. Use this trait to add confusion to group efforts, arrive with the wrong tools, or hold on to something long after it's meant to go.

Follows What Thrives (2): Iris stays where life insists on continuing. When something blooms in spite of itself, she listens. Players can use this drive to linger in emotionally fraught spaces, support someone who doesn't know they need it, or coax truth from something trying very hard to wilt unnoticed.

Magic

Her magic smells like mulch and moonlight. She doesn't cast spells. She repots grief and waters memory. Sometimes when she weeps, violets open. She never names it magic, but there's a reason nothing dies in her care unless it asks to.

Material Things

She dresses in linen and dirt, with a permanent line of soil beneath her fingernails.

Essential Gear: Botanical journal with timestamped notes and ghost-cataloging marks, a pencil tin with only one real pencil, a red watering can with initials etched in the handle.

Assistive Gear: Garden gloves with one missing fingertip, a scarf that always smells like lavender and firewood, a pressed flower between glass panes that never browns.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Catalogs What Blooms) + 2 (Talks to Green Things) + 3 (Stays Through the Off-Season) + 2 (Records Without Flinching) = 10 points. Weaknesses: 2 (Forgets to Speak Aloud) + 1 (Out of Season) = 3 points. Drive: 2 (Follows What Thrives) = 2 points

Iris's Role in the House of Small Woes

She doesn't fix, she tends. She's not the one they call when something breaks, but she's always there when it needs healing. Iris walks the garden paths barefoot and leaves pages tucked in toolboxes and kitchen drawers. Her handwriting never smudges, no matter the weather. Something about her makes things want to live.

Maple Thorne

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

She appeared at the kitchen door during a rain so hard it erased footprints. No one remembers inviting her in, but now there's a bedroll in the upstairs linen closet with her name stitched in red. Maple doesn't speak often. She draws. The house responds.

Draws What Shouldn't Be Seen (3): Maple sketches places she's never entered and faces no one's described. Her pictures include cracks no one else sees, and stains that don't appear until after. Use this trait when uncovering hidden truths, anticipating events, or revealing a space's emotional residue.

Knows When Something's Wrong (2): She pauses in hallways no one else finds strange. Sometimes she cries in rooms that used to be nurseries. Players can use this trait to identify discomfort others overlook, sense recent trauma in a space, or instinctively know when something has gone missing.

Wanders Without Waking Anyone (3): Maple moves barefoot through stairwells and closed doors without ever creaking a floorboard. She's seen the attic from underneath and the cellar from above. Use this trait to appear where she wasn't left, overhear whispered secrets, or bypass barriers unnoticed.

Dreams That Echo (2): When she sleeps, the house stirs. Doors open just a crack. The light in the hallway pulses with her breath. Use this trait to receive warnings, uncover long-forgotten events, or prompt the house to answer through flickers, drafts, and other subtle replies.

Can't Always Tell Now From Then (2): Maple sometimes talks about people who aren't alive as if they still visit. She gets lost between moments. Players can use this trait to add confusion to conversations, reveal something meant to be secret, or force others to confront timelines they've tried to ignore.

Doesn't Explain Herself (1): When asked questions, Maple draws pictures. She rarely clarifies. Use this trait when a delay causes complications, when silence intensifies suspicion, or when her insight remains misunderstood.

Tries to Keep Them Safe (2): Maple wants everyone to stay. She draws them in rooms with sun and music, hoping the house listens. Players can use this drive to repair harm, hold onto memory, or shape a moment that feels like home.

Magic

She doesn't mean to summon. Her pencil moves and the room sighs. What she draws often begins to exist, not all at once, but slowly, as a scent, a temperature, a new coat hook no one remembers installing. When she dreams of someone, they usually call the next day.

Material Things

Her dress is always wrinkled. Her pockets always full.

Essential Gear: A pencil stub worn to the size of her thumb, scraps of envelope back and grocery lists filled with charcoal lines, a threadbare messenger bag stitched with initials no one claims.

Assistive Gear: Tin of broken chalk that smells like candlewax, crumpled drawing of a house that isn't this one but almost is, a loose page labeled "Tuesday's ghosts" with seven faces drawn in neat rows.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Draws What Shouldn't Be Seen) + 2 (Knows When Something's Wrong) + 3 (Wanders Without Waking Anyone) + 2 (Dreams That Echo) = 10 points. Weaknesses: 2 (Can't Always Tell Now From Then) + 1 (Doesn't Explain Herself) = 3 points. Drive: 2 (Tries to Keep Them Safe) = 2 points

Maple's Role in the House of Small Woes

She's the child no one remembers arriving but everyone remembers tucking in. She leaves drawings under tea cups and folds messages into the backs of calendars. Maple doesn't predict or control, but her presence always means something is already in motion. When the house breathes differently, they check her sketches. She's not warning them. She's remembering forward.

Silas Proctor

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

He arrived during a lightning strike that lit up every mirror in the house. No one opened the door for him, but there he was, dripping on the entry rug, smiling like someone returning from a long trip no one remembers taking. Silas says he's family. He says it with such ease that the house hasn't disagreed.

Always Finds the Way In (3): Silas doesn't pick locks, he simply knows when a latch is ready to give. He drifts into sealed attics, walled-off bedrooms, and places no one's mapped. Use this trait to uncover secret histories, navigate the house's forgotten layers, or stumble upon someone else's moment at exactly the wrong time.

Knows Which Secrets Stick (2): He has an instinct for what people try to forget. Silas doesn't gossip, he observes, archives, and waits. Players can use this trait to press a hidden truth into the open, complicate someone's tidy narrative, or link past choices to present tension.

Bloodline or Bluff (3): He always has a name to drop, a birthmark to point out, a story to match someone else's memory. Even those who doubt him start to wonder. Use this trait to slip past suspicion, claim a seat at the table, or convince others of a connection that may or may not be real.

Storm-Damp Charm (2): His grin is too wide, his timing too perfect, and yet, people let him in. Even when they shouldn't. Use this trait to soften conflict, gain trust quickly, or delay someone's better judgment long enough for Silas to do what he came for.

Doesn't Know When to Stop (2): Silas pushes. If there's a loose thread, he pulls. If someone says no, he hears not yet. Players can use this trait to heighten conflict, trigger memories meant to stay buried, or escalate situations already fraying.

Wants In Too Badly (1): For all his ease, he's hungry for belonging. It shows in moments when no one's looking. Use this trait when neediness clouds judgment, when desperation leaks through charm, or when the house pushes back.

Dig Until It Bleeds (2): He doesn't mean to cause trouble, he means to know. Silas believes the house is holding something vital, and he won't stop until it surfaces. Use this drive when following a thread that leads to buried truths, when revealing what others deny, or when refusing to let silence win.

Magic

Silas doesn't call it magic. He calls it persistence. But sometimes the wallpaper bubbles where he leans, or the stairs change slope under his step.

Forgotten doors swell open at his touch. Photographs wrinkle when he passes. Something in the house recognizes his need to know.

Material Things

He travels light but always has what he shouldn't.

Essential Gear: A rain-slick coat that smells faintly of cedar and mildew, a dented silver lighter with no fuel, a dog-eared family tree where new names appear in ink no one remembers using.

Assistive Gear: Mismatched skeleton keys, a strip of old wallpaper with handwriting beneath the print, a velvet pouch filled with bone buttons and ticket stubs.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Always Finds the Way In) + 2 (Knows Which Secrets Stick) + 3 (Bloodline or Bluff) + 2 (Storm-Damp Charm) = 10 points. Weaknesses: 2 (Doesn't Know When to Stop) + 1 (Wants In Too Badly) = 3 points. Drive: 2 (Dig Until It Bleeds) = 2 points

Silas's Role in the House of Small Woes

He's the one they don't quite trust but still include. Silas gets into places no one else dares, and sometimes what he finds changes everything. When the house resists, he pushes harder. Not out of malice, but because he believes there's something true beneath the layers, and that he has the right to see it. Whether or not the house agrees is a story still unfolding.

Hester Doyle

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

She speaks softly, folds precisely, and walks like someone trying not to wake the past. Her sister, Tansy, died before the sun set that same day, but has never quite left. Hester doesn't speak to mirrors, but sometimes mirrors speak to her. What she says during threshold crossings doesn't always belong to her voice.

Folds What the Future Forgets (3): Hester tells fortunes by folding cloth, napkins, pillowcases, dish towels creased just so. What appears isn't symbolic, it's precise. Use this trait to reveal future moments in mundane materials, draw clarity from a domestic act, or open possibilities no one else was willing to name.

Carries Her Sister in Glass (2): When she touches mirrors, she hears things. Warnings, jokes, names not yet spoken aloud. Use this trait to uncover hidden intentions, receive a timely push from the other side, or draw comfort from a voice only she recognizes.

Crosses Without Hesitating (3): Hester always walks first. Over salt lines, beneath archways, into rooms that others avoid. Something about her makes thresholds behave. Use this trait to calm supernatural tension, enter places others fear, or invite the house to reveal something kept back.

Speaks the Right Wrong Words (2): She says things that later make sense. Or cause trouble. Or reopen something someone thought long buried. Players can use this trait to disturb the moment with prophecy, speak clarity into conflict, or stir memories no one expected to surface.

Startles the Living (2): Hester's silences stretch too long. Her timing is off in ways that feel deliberate. Use this trait when her presence creates discomfort, when her words arrive cold, or when others flinch without knowing why.

Doesn't Remember the Message (1): Once she's spoken, it's gone. She can't explain the meaning or who the words were meant for. Use this trait to create narrative drift, delay resolution, or deepen mystery after a moment of eerie precision.

Wants to Let Her Speak (2): Hester carries the ache of unfinished conversations. She folds carefully, walks slowly, hoping to hear her sister clearly one more time. Use this drive when trying to mediate between the seen and the unseen, when comforting someone haunted, or when asking a question only the house can answer.

Magic

Hester's magic lives in seams and spaces. It breathes through linen and silver, in the hush before a word is spoken. She doesn't conjure or cast, she listens, she folds, she repeats. When she speaks over thresholds, time tilts.

When she weeps near glass, reflections ripple. The house knows her as both one and two.

Material Things

She wears what her sister might've worn, if she'd lived long enough to choose.

Essential Gear: Bundle of clean linen folded so tight it keeps its shape when dropped, hand mirror wrapped in twine, silver thimble with initials carved on the inside.

Assistive Gear: Deck of cards no one taught her to use, iron ring she never takes off, list of names she doesn't remember writing.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Folds What the Future Forgets) + 2 (Carries Her Sister in Glass) + 3 (Crosses Without Hesitating) + 2 (Speaks the Right Wrong Words) = 10 points. Weaknesses: 2 (Startles the Living) + 1 (Doesn't Remember the Message) = 3 points. Drive: 2 (Wants to Let Her Speak) = 2 points

Hester's Role in the House of Small Woes

She's the one who sees what's carried between rooms. Her voice may not be fully her own, but what it reveals moves the story forward. When a secret chokes a hallway, when a door won't open without naming what was lost, Hester is already folding napkins at the kitchen table, listening to the breath behind the mirror. She doesn't solve anything. She reminds others what they've tried not to know.

Dr. Ada Bell

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

She arrived with a box of pens, three blank ledgers, and a firm handshake no one returned. Officially, she's here to create a complete record of the house and its residents. Unofficially, she hasn't filed a page that still exists in the morning, unless she bleeds on it. Ada drinks her tea in the attic, where the light bends and the air smells like memory.

Knows What Should Be Kept (3): Ada has a flawless sense for what matters. A cough in a hallway. The precise hour the wallpaper changed. Use this trait to retain critical details, capture an unnoticed moment, or draw connections between events others forgot happened.

Writes in Vanishing Ink (2): The house erases her work unless she sacrifices something of herself. Her notes in red stay put. Players can use this trait when trying to preserve memory, protect a vulnerable truth, or reveal what someone tried to make untraceable.

Speaks Filing System Fluently (3): Ada files whispers by temperature, scent, dustiness. She doesn't organize information, she contains it. Use this trait to recover a specific moment, retrieve sensory memory, or navigate the house's intangible records.

Tea with Shadows (2): The attic's shadows settle around her like company. They don't speak in words, but Ada listens anyway. Use this trait to receive quiet warnings, hear what no one else noticed, or calm restless parts of the house that resist change.

Can't Stop Documenting (2): She writes when she should sleep, when she should listen, when she should run. It's not a habit. It's a compulsion. Use this trait to create friction with others, miss part of a conversation, or reveal something too soon through notes someone else finds.

Lost Her Own Timeline (1): Dates blur, entries cross, time loops. Ada's notebooks contradict themselves, and so does her memory. Use this trait when confusion unspools her logic, when she forgets who told her what, or when a document reshapes itself without her consent.

Wants to Be Believed (2): She keeps trying, even after the ink fades. Ada wants proof. She wants someone else to read what the house keeps erasing. Use this drive to fight for forgotten truths, hold onto memory with stubborn clarity, or insist that the house's story can still be known.

Magic

Her magic is clerical. It lives in footnotes, marginalia, ink stains that don't wash out. When she signs her name in blood, the paper breathes. When she

files the smell of lilacs, a door opens. Ada doesn't call this magic. She calls it record-keeping.

Material Things

She dresses like a librarian who knows how to run.

Essential Gear: Ledger wrapped in beeswax cloth, fountain pen carved from bone, handkerchief with a smear of her own blood folded into the hem.

Assistive Gear: Porcelain teacup that never chips, pair of black gloves that hold scent like skin, ink bottle that refills only during thunderstorms.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Knows What Should Be Kept) + 2 (Writes in Vanishing Ink) + 3 (Speaks Filing System Fluently) + 2 (Tea with Shadows) = 10 points. Weaknesses: 2 (Can't Stop Documenting) + 1 (Lost Her Own Timeline) = 3 points. Drive: 2 (Wants to Be Believed) = 2 points

Ada's Role in the House of Small Woes

She's the one who keeps trying to make sense of it all. Even when the records vanish, even when the names reorder themselves, even when her own handwriting shifts, Ada keeps writing. Her notebooks are inconsistent, but they know more than she does. And when the house begins to forget on purpose, it's Ada who remembers anyway.

Father Ellis Ward

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

He says he left the priesthood on purpose, though he won't say when. Now he sleeps behind the flour bins and hears everything the pipes carry. People still confess to him, sometimes without meaning to. Ellis listens with the kind of silence that makes someone keep talking.

Blesses What's Broken (3): Ellis has a way with ruined things. Splintered chairs, fractured heirlooms, grief half-spoken, he lays hands, murmurs something soft, and the pieces begin to hold. Use this trait to repair more than materials, offer comfort where shame lingers, or give fractured people a reason to stay.

Keeps Confession Sacred (2): No one knows how he gets people talking. They speak to him in hallways, in kitchens, mid-disagreement. Use this trait to gather truths that want to be heard, ease the weight of guilt, or offer clarity that the confessor never asked for.

Sorrow Is His First Language (3): He knows how to sit beside pain without fixing it. His words aren't solutions, but they land where they're needed. Use this trait to steady someone unraveling, hold space during grief, or name what others tiptoe around.

Shelters Where No One Looks (2): He's carved a life in spaces too small to be noticed. The pantry. The alcove behind the linen chute. The crawlspace with the angel drawn on the wall. Use this trait to remain unseen, offer refuge, or overhear something never meant for ears.

Won't Speak the Name (2): There's something he did. Something that made him leave the collar. He won't say what. Use this trait when the past interferes with trust, when he's recognized by someone who shouldn't be there, or when silence carries weight no one else understands.

Doesn't Believe in Light (1): Ellis still performs blessings but no longer believes in salvation. He doesn't expect things to get better, only to hold a shape that lasts. Use this trait when hope feels hollow, when his presence turns heavy, or when he can't say the right thing at the right time.

Wants to Be of Use (2): He doesn't want forgiveness. He wants function. To fix what's cracked, to carry what others can't. Use this drive when he throws himself into someone else's burden, refuses to let go of a lost cause, or finds dignity in doing what needs to be done.

Magic

He doesn't call it grace, not anymore. His hands warm when held against wounds. Broken things sigh when he touches them. A whispered prayer in the

pantry can still turn the milk sweet before it spoils. Whatever power Ellis has left, it lingers like incense and regret.

Material Things

He dresses plainly, like someone who doesn't expect to be invited to dinner.

Essential Gear: Threadbare stole wrapped in oilcloth, flask etched with a forgotten saint's initials, set of rosary beads with one knot missing.

Assistive Gear: Dented pocket watch that chimes only for funerals, half-burnt hymnal filled with annotations, wooden cross carved from a pew no longer in the chapel.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Blesses What's Broken) + 2 (Keeps Confession Sacred) + 3 (Sorrow Is His First Language) + 2 (Shelters Where No One Looks) = 10 points. Weaknesses: 2 (Won't Speak the Name) + 1 (Doesn't Believe in Light) = 3 points. Drive: 2 (Wants to Be of Use) = 2 points

Ellis's Role in the House of Small Woes

He's not the priest of the house, but he fills the shape where one used to be. People seek him out without knowing why, then leave lighter. He doesn't lead prayers. He mends chairs and listens until the silence shifts. Ellis carries sorrow like a second skin, not to hide from it, but to remind others they're not alone.

Mrs. Mercy Pell

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

She wears yellow, always. Even her aprons have lace trim and sun-colored thread. Her husband died on the front steps the day after their twenty-second anniversary, but he never stopped visiting. Mercy sets two cups every Thursday and hums old songs the house hasn't forgotten.

Knows How to Welcome (3): Mercy opens the door before anyone knocks. She remembers names from three generations back and never forgets who takes sugar. Use this trait to diffuse tension with hospitality, invite trust without asking, or remind someone they were wanted all along.

Bakes Memory Into Batter (2): Her cakes make people cry, then laugh, then call someone they hadn't spoken to in years. Her hands know how to stir the past into sweetness. Use this trait to stir forgotten emotions, soften hardened hearts, or create peace at the exact moment it's most needed.

Pours Coffee That Confesses (3): No one lies over Mercy's coffee. Secrets slide out between sips, like cream in dark roast. Use this trait to prompt difficult truths, reveal withheld stories, or bring clarity to a moment wrapped in denial.

Still Married in Practice (2): Every Thursday evening, she sets his chair and listens for his knock. Sometimes the lights flicker when he's pleased. Use this trait to draw strength from love that lingers, ask questions only he would know, or feel when something's out of step with the house's rhythm.

Too Gracious to Interrupt (2): Mercy won't stop someone from talking, even when she knows they're wrong. She smiles and listens, even when it hurts. Use this trait to allow misunderstanding to grow, delay necessary correction, or remain silent until it's too late.

Carries His Last Words (1): She's never told anyone what he said as he died. It sits behind her smile, heavy as bone. Use this trait when memory burdens her choices, when silence becomes tension, or when her composure cracks at the worst time.

Wants People to Stay (2): Mercy believes no one should eat alone or cry behind closed doors. She tries to keep everyone near the kitchen, where the light is warm and the kettle sings. Use this drive to gather those who've drifted, repair fraying bonds, or keep the house feeling like a home.

Magic

She doesn't think of it as spellwork. But her pies never burn, her preserves never spoil, and the radio always finds the right song. Her husband's coat still hangs by the door, always dry. When she speaks to the stove, it listens. When she weeps into the batter, people remember what matters.

Material Things

She dresses like company's due at any moment, and maybe they are.

Essential Gear: Yellow apron stitched with forget-me-nots, cast iron teapot that never stains, embroidered recipe cards no one else can follow.

Assistive Gear: Bone-handled cake knife that slices silence as easily as sponge, silver locket holding a pressed petal and a thumb-smudged photo, set of teacups that never mismatch.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Knows How to Welcome) + 2 (Bakes Memory Into Batter) + 3 (Pours Coffee That Confesses) + 2 (Still Married in Practice) = 10 points. Weaknesses: 2 (Too Gracious to Interrupt) + 1 (Carries His Last Words) = 3 points. Drive: 2 (Wants People to Stay) = 2 points

Mercy's Role in the House of Small Woes

She keeps the house fed, warm, and gently haunted. People tell her things they didn't mean to say. She doesn't always reply, but the cakes she brings later always say enough. Mercy isn't trying to solve anything. She's trying to keep it whole. A slice of cake, a full pot of coffee, and a promise that the house remembers who you are, even when you've forgotten.

Professor Reed Manfred

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

He came from the college with a sabbatical letter and a question about lineage. The family trees on the attic walls interested him. The portrait that looked exactly like him unsettled him. Reed stays in the east study now, where the house creaks like it's clearing its throat before answering.

Knows Which Names Were Used (3): Reed speaks the older names. The ones written in iron-gall ink. The ones whispered in parlors when children were meant to be asleep. Use this trait to gain recognition from the house, access hidden records, or evoke memories sealed by misnaming.

Resembles the Unnamed (2): There are portraits of people who look exactly like him, none labeled clearly. Some are dated decades apart. Use this trait to access uncanny familiarity, earn unearned trust or fear, or unsettle spirits who think he's someone returned.

Builds Theories from Dust (3): Reed's mind doesn't stop. He assembles meaning from gaps, drafts, worn floorboards. Use this trait to connect abstract clues, develop explanations that make the strange seem structured, or notice the pattern no one else tracked.

Catalogs the Unprovable (2): He takes notes, even when ink blots or paper folds itself. Reed keeps records in margins, receipts, stitched threadlines. Use this trait to hold onto evidence others can't see, make useful leaps of logic, or preserve what the house tries to redact.

Can't Let the Pattern Go (2): Once something catches in his mind, he won't release it. He skips meals. Forgets days. Use this trait to cause conflict, become emotionally unavailable, or lose touch with present needs while following an intellectual trail.

Talks Like a Lecture (1): He doesn't always speak to be heard. Sometimes he's speaking to think. Use this trait when others lose patience, when urgency slips through long-windedness, or when clarity arrives too late.

Wants the House to Confirm (2): Reed doesn't need to be right, he needs the house to say he's right. He's here for the answer that breathes. Use this drive to push at thresholds, ask questions that shake the walls, or uncover something long kept quiet by shared agreement.

Magic

Reed doesn't cast spells. He draws conclusions so accurate they change the room. When he speaks an old name aloud, the air grows still. When he opens a book that was nailed shut, it turns its own pages. His notebooks don't stay in the order he wrote them. They reorganize.

Material Things

He dresses in tweed regardless of weather.

Essential Gear: Journal with red ribbon markers and marginalia in three inks, fountain pen he inherited but never filled himself, set of monogrammed index cards that smell faintly of mildew.

Assistive Gear: Spectacles with a chip in the left lens, wax pencil he uses for mirror-notes, library slip from a book the college denies owning.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Knows Which Names Were Used) + 2 (Resembles the Unnamed) + 3 (Builds Theories from Dust) + 2 (Catalogs the Unprovable) = 10 points, Weaknesses: 2 (Can't Let the Pattern Go) + 1 (Talks Like a Lecture) = 3 points, Drive: 2 (Wants the House to Confirm) = 2 points

Reed's Role in the House of Small Woes

He isn't family by blood, but the house hasn't corrected him. Reed asks the kind of questions that make doors groan and dust shift. He's not trying to unearth the truth for publication, he's trying to hear the house speak it. His presence changes which portraits fade. He's not the answer. He's the one who won't stop writing until the question opens itself.

Thorn Avery

Competent (3) Magical Realism Character

He was found curled in the center of the hedge maze, coat soaked, lashes fluttering but never lifting. No one saw him enter, but the crows watched him for hours before he stirred. Thorn speaks in half-whispers, walks like he's weightless, and smiles as if he's listening to something just overhead. The birds still follow him. The lies still don't land.

Feeds the Birds by Name (3): Thorn doesn't scatter seed, he delivers it personally. He knows which crow prefers ribbon, which magpie holds grudges. Use this trait to send messages, retrieve lost objects, or earn the attention of something that lives above eye level.

Knows When You Lie (2): His eyes never fully open, but he sees through everything. Thorn flinches when someone speaks falsehood near him. Use this trait to cut through deception, expose hidden intentions, or confront someone who thought they were safe in their silence.

Was Led Somewhere Else (3): He didn't mean to come here. Something brought him. And now, even when standing still, Thorn is following. Use this trait to appear in unexpected places, navigate intuition like compass-true direction, or move through the house as if answering a call.

Collects What Shouldn't Be Found (2): Feathers, broken keys, lost earrings, ticket stubs from events no one remembers hosting. Thorn has a pocket full of stories no one gave him. Use this trait to produce the missing piece, hold onto something important too early, or cause tension by revealing what he's not meant to have.

Doesn't Trust the Ground (2): Thorn walks quietly, but never confidently. He keeps to the edge of rugs, steps over cracks, and avoids certain stairs even when others insist they're safe. Use this trait to slow movement, miss opportunities, or give others the impression he's hiding something.

Never Opens His Eyes All the Way (1): He squints, tilts his head, blinks too slowly. Some find it unnerving. Others think he's not all the way present. Use this trait when others dismiss him, underestimate his awareness, or fail to realize he's listening.

Wants to Know Where He Came From (2): He doesn't ask directly. But Thorn's always listening for a name, a place, a reason. Players can use this drive when seeking connection, unlocking memories through action, or shaping identity through discovered truth.

Magic

Thorn's magic is subtle, migratory, and mostly borrowed. Birds linger where he stands. Shadows soften. Lost things turn up with small feathers stuck to

them. He never speaks to the crows aloud, but they seem to know what he wants. And sometimes, when he places a black feather beneath a pillow, a dream delivers what the waking world refuses.

Material Things

He wears layers that never quite match, with twine-tied cuffs and one shoe always damp.

Essential Gear: Small pouch of sunflower seeds mixed with broken quartz, coat lined with stitched-in feathers, pocket journal filled with bird names and dates he never wrote.

Assistive Gear: Scarf someone else left on a gatepost, red thread that tightens when wrapped around secrets, music box that only plays when no one's looking.

Character Creation Breakdown

Archetype, Strengths, and Identity: 3 (Feeds the Birds by Name) + 2 (Knows When You Lie) + 3 (Was Led Somewhere Else) + 2 (Collects What Shouldn't Be Found) = 10 points. Weaknesses: 2 (Doesn't Trust the Ground) + 1 (Never Opens His Eyes All the Way) = 3 points. Drive: 2 (Wants to Know Where He Came From) = 2 points

Thorn's Role in the House of Small Woes

He's the one people forget they're following. Thorn doesn't lead, but paths open when he walks. He hears things in silence, finds things in dust, and answers questions no one remembers asking. The crows know him. The house seems to hesitate before correcting him. Thorn doesn't press. He listens, gathers, and waits for the day when a voice calls him by the right name.