CHARACTERS:

**Ladybug Jackson** (aka Malik Jackson) 11 years old, dressed as a First Lady, and using an anachronistic, and exceedingly proper accent and diction.

**Grandfather** 83 years old. A self-taught, militant brother, who lives with his daughter and grandchild.

**Mama** 44 years old. A nurse's aid.

OBJECTS:

Two sheets of notebook paper with block print lettering:
- one that says “THE WHITE HOUSE”
- the other that says FIRST LADY LADYBUG JACKSON

A power drill

A broom or mop

A chipped ceramic cereal bowl half-full of M&Ms candies

A bottle of hand-sanitizer

A sheet of notebook paper with a series of menu items written in cursive writing

A carton of generic “Clorox” Wipes

One pair of well-worn hospital scrubs

SETTING:

This play is to be experienced as though through the camera of a smartphone, sometimes clumsily focused (it is an 11 year old operating it) sometimes going dark, sometimes being dropped, etc.

NOTE:

Just as Ladybug repurposes his home for the White House, you can repurpose yours for this tour. You can use the objects described above, or substitute others. I invite anyone to play any of these characters in your home theatre. You can try it as a filmed on the phone experience. You can read it aloud like a radio play with stage directions, etc. Your choice.

(Phone camera focuses on a sign that reads “THE WHITE HOUSE”)

LADYBUG  
(In the voice of the announcer)

And now, a Live Streaming Special. *A Tour of the White House...*
(Ladybug's hand enters frame to flip the page to the page that reads “FIRST LADY LADYBUG JACKSON”)

...with Ladybug Jackson.

(Ladybug hums a fake Classical music melody that would belong as the intro music to such a special. They step gracefully into frame. Ladybug Jackson is Malik Jackson, who is wearing their mother’s 2nd best Church wig, a simple navy blue dress that he probably took from a box of his older sister who now lives in Cleveland’s stuff, and a pair of his mother’s patent leather flats with brass buckles.)

(as herself)

I once was like you, stepping across the threshold for the very first time. I first came to the White House huddled in a school tour group... imagine being that close to anyone in this day and age. I lingered behind, at the far edge of each public State Room, to catch glimpses of the workers setting down a fine bouquet of flowers in a silver vase, or running a chamois duster over the gilt edge of a portrait. The runnings of this house fascinated me. I later kept newspaper clippings in a pretty scrapbook, to track the preservation efforts and redecorations of each administration. And I vowed to myself if I were to ever find myself here, in this position, from which I now greet you, I would consider you, all of you, my most cherished visitors, and keep it all in tip-top shape, so you might experience the luster and the majesty of this house that belongs to you as much as to me. It is, truly, our house.

(Loud knocking at the door. Ladybug steps to the side, stands quietly. Knocking again. Again. Then gone. Picking back up...)

And now, here we are. This new Administration and its First Lady welcome you. Won't you come in?

(The phone camera sweeps to show the tiny hallway of a well-worn house, with doorways leading off of it and a narrow staircase leading upstairs)

The Grand Foyer will be familiar to you from the televised news broadcasts. It is the well-loved site for the reception of any number of world leaders for a State Dinner, the formal greetings between outgoing Presidents and the Presidents-elect...

(Loud knocking from above, the camera drops slightly as Ladybug looks over their shoulder, momentarily distracted. Then back to business.)

...And, of course, jolly celebrations for seasonal holidays like Halloween and Christmas.

GRANDFATHER

(Yelling from above our heads)

Don't forget Kwanzaa, boy!
LADYBUG
There's always something going on behind closed doors here at this new White House. Planning, construction...

(Ladybug holds up a power drill, and lets it rip for a second or two)

...installing new locks, or some other activities. Pay no mind to what you hear from behind those closed doors. That’s a useful piece of advice not only for this tour, but also for life in general. As you can see, now, we are in between holiday displays, although I’m told there may be a birthday among you all out there? Yes? Wave if it’s your birthday! I know what you’re thinking. This isn’t the Grand Foyer I am used to. That is true. It is, rather, a new Foyer, given the circumstances. I hope you can all fit

(Ladybug smiles and winks)

Given our limited time, I thought I would take you right to the private, intimate spaces that are rarely glimpsed by the public. Now, let’s proceed. We may even catch a glimpse of the President. I can't say for certain. I cannot say. The Chief Elevator operator is indisposed and so you will see something rarely seen by anyone—the First Lady operating her own elevator ride. Come along!

(Ladybird steps into the broom closet. A broom or mop falls out, they take it out, lean it against the wall and step in. The phone rings. Ladybird drops the voice.)

Hello? Hey, Aunt Juanita. No, she's asleep. I got her phone, yeah. No, Ma'am. That was you? Sorry I didn't answer. Yeah, he's asleep too. We still have a lot of both from the last time you went to Costco. I guess you can't have too much. I can have her... I can have her call... huh? Yes Ma'am. No. I can have her call you back, okay? Okay. Yeah, better not to leave them outside. Yeah, people are thieving. Thank you, Aunt Juanita. Thank you.

(Ladybird comes out, walks upstairs and fixes the camera back. We follow. At the top of the stairs, Ladybird pivots and is back in character.)

Through this door you will find a sitting room that is part of the First Family's private residence.

(Knocking from right behind the door Ladybug stands near)

GRANDFATHER
If I say it's my birthday, does it mean I can get something to eat up in here?

LADYBUG
Here we normally gather to celebrate events like the President’s State of the Union Address, inviting family friends for cocktails, and hot cocoa for their little ones. I know what you're thinking. No, this is not the sitting room you may have seen before, but it is a perfectly acceptable replacement. Why, under our feet, we see a fine if threadbare area rug of lavender and turquoise acrylic. This piece from the fine
American company JC Penny will perform its function just as well as any hand-woven wool rug that I might have had restored from the Kennedy administration.

(From behind the door on the opposite side of the space. Both doors have newly installed padlocks. Small piles of sawdust lay under each doorknob.)

MAMA
Malik, who are you talking to?

LADYBUG
We can all use our imaginations to substitute this well-loved recliner, folding chair, and set of almost matching t.v. trays for the reupholstered couches, chaise lounge, and sturdy mahogany tables that you will someday be enjoying. But for now, we all know, it's important to keep our distance. These current furnishings encourage such distance.

(The doorknob twists and jerks)

MAMA
Malik. I know you didn't lock me in this room!

(The other doorknob of Grandfather's door twists and jerks)

GRANDFATHER
You know he did.

MAMA
I thought that drilling was coming from next door. I had my earplugs in. Tell me you didn't put holes in my bedroom door. Malik!?

LADYBUG
There is no need for you to use your imaginations when it comes to snacks! Fun fact: you all know me by nickname, Ladybug. But you may not know that these colorful candies were personalized for the White House by the Mars Candy Company, featuring the first initial of my real first name, “M”.

(Ladybug holds up a bowl of M&M's candies)

But first we need to clean our hands.

(Ladybug sets down the bowl of candies then briefly shows, then sets down a pumps a squirt from a bottle of hand sanitizer into their free hand and wipes their fingers together)
Given the constant comings and goings this White House keeps its own supply of sanitizer. Rationed of course. Gone for now are the days of tourist bottles with the Presidential Insignia. But as long as I’m First Lady, there will always be snacks. Snacks, and music and dancing.

MAMA
Malik! I’m talking to you.

GRANDFATHER
He playing First Lady.

MAMA
Fuck he is. Malik! You better not have gotten in my wigs again.

(Ladybug walks to Grandfather’s door)

LADYBUG
This White House has its own resident historian. Mr. Jackson would you care to say hello to our visitors?

(Ladybug holds up the phone to the closed door)

GRANDFATHER
Hello. We ain’t never been safe in this God-forsaken excuse y’all call a country. Smallpox blankets. The Tuskegee Experiment. Internment, forced marches, and cold-blood close-range executions. This here the latest but this ain’t nothing new. You watching this livestream and they watching you. Slavers beget ex-ploi-tat-ors! Watching your every move. I been telling y’all how this was going to go down!

LADYBUG
Historians certainly are colorful characters.

GRANDFATHER
Alright, that good Malik? Can I get some food now?

LADYBUG
This is the printed menu for today’s state dinner. As an historian you will take interest in the fact that all the items were previously part of Obama State Dinners. Would you care to read this for our visitors? Just… going to wipe this down with sanitizer…

(Ladybug places the phone down, we probably see the ceiling, with a cobweb or a water stain or two, something regular you’d see on a normal ceiling. Then the sound of the paper being slid under the door. The camera, lifted, focuses on Grandfather’s closed door, with half of Ladybug’s face peeping in to listen, pleased with the menu, of course)

GRANDFATHER
American Caviar
Quail Eggs
Farm Fresh Blue Cheese
Baby Lamb Chops with Yukon Potato Dauphinoise
Boston Cream Pie with Chocolate Ganache

(The menu shoots out from under the door. Ladybug picks it up, gingerly)

GRANDFATHER
All that meat and dairy will kill you dead long before this thing gets you.

LADYBUG
Given the circumstances, of course we have had to adapt the menu.

GRANDFATHER
Sea Moss. Need to have that daily. Malik, did you order me my refill of Dr. Sebi's Sea Moss? There's enough radiation coming from your phone to cripple all our immune systems a thousand times over. Made us all sitting ducks.

LADYBUG
Instead, we will be enjoying finger sandwiches of Nut Butters and Jams. And water drawn from several taps throughout the house.

MAMA
Boy, you'd better not be scuffing my dress shoes! You'd better not be tangling up my wig! And you'd better open this damned door. I have a shift today. I'm not playing with you, Malik. And bring me my scrubs from the dryer, baby?

GRANDFATHER
Good luck getting him to do anything today.

MAMA
Malik. I'm telling you. Damn. is is what I get for teaching you how to use tools.

GRANDFATHER
I ain't saying nothing.

MAMA
At least he's playing something educational.

GRANDFATHER
Educational?!
MAMA
Malik, *tell me* you not running down the battery on my phone!

GRANDFATHER
Educational?! Miseducational! Didn't I teach y'all better than to be enamored of the Goddamned White House?

*(Ladybug shows us the battered washer and dryer. Props the phone up by a bottle of generic laundry detergent, pulls out a carton of generic Clorox wipes and removes one, which they use to wipe down the surface and handles of the dryer.)*

LADYBUG
This is the temporary laundry. We have to keep it spic and span. The tablecloths for the State Dinner are in the washer.

GRANDFATHER
Mind all twisted from all that bite-sized history on the innanets. No context.

MAMA
That's you, Daddy. All context. He locked you in too, huh?

*(Ladybug opens the dryer and removes their mother's hospital scrubs. They carefully fold them. Then, they place them on top of the dryer, pick up the phone and speak directly to us.)*

LADYBUG
These are garments for the on-site White House medical unit. The seamless communication between the Secret Service, the Military Office and this unit are necessary to keep everyone safe and healthy.

MAMA
Malik! I'm telling you I got my shift.

*(In the announcer voice)*

LADYBUG
We'll be right back after this brief commercial break.

*(Ladybug opens up the contacts on the phone and scrolls through. Ladybug speaks in a soft voice so no-one else can hear)*

*Hello? Yes, this is Malik Jackson. Hi Miss Zhao. Yeah, I'm well, thank you. I'm calling for my Mom… No, she's not… she's not sick like that. It's an emergency here at the apartment. My Mom can't come in for her shift today. She knows.*
She's sorry. Okay. Thank you. Tomorrow? I'll have to check with her. Thank you, Miss Zhao. I hope you and everybody there is okay, too. Goodbye.

(Ladybug stands. Adjusts their dress. Fixes their wig. Turns the camera back on.)

When the weather is warmer, I will invite you for a tour of the First Lady's vegetable garden and canning room. And I will even show you the survival bunker. For now, I certainly hope that you have enjoyed this tour. It has been sheer pleasure to host you.

(Ladybug walks to the middle of the sitting room, looking at both locked doors then back at us)

You know... In every iteration, this house has seen its share of tragedy. Fire. War. Terrorism. Assassination. And sickness. It is the First Lady's priority to keep the members of her household close and safe. And all of you, my friends. Safe in this house. Our house.

End.