

THEATRE GHOSTS:

HAUNTING RIGHTS

a play

by

Michael Perlmutter



Michael Perlmutter
805-469-2897
lmjdj@msn.com
www.DirectingHamlet.com

THEATRE GHOSTS is a collection of plays for ‘after-hours’ theatre.

With so much theatre being created for 90 minutes or less presentations, theatre houses often close their doors by ten at night. Leaving venues dark, yet presumably available to create additional revenue and/or bring in a new audience; one that doesn’t even consider night life starting till after 9:00 pm.

Each piece is a stand-alone one act play, roughly forty-five to seventy-five minutes in length, intended to be performed on a stage already in place for another production, regardless whether that production be *Noises off*, *Music Man*, *As You Like It* or *Raisin in the Sun*. The *Theatre Ghosts* plays utilize each venue as a theatre space—generally the same theatre space itself that the audience is attending...any dialogue pertaining to location or venue may and should be adjusted to match the venue.

CHARACTERS

DEREK MITCHELL	a ghost - (40s/60s) - died recently (this year)
JOHN “Johnny” KENNEDY	(no, not <i>that</i> John Kennedy) a ghost – (30s/60s) - died 1948
MARY	a ghost – (20s/40s) - died 1971
FRAN	a ghost – (20s/40s) - died 1971

THE SETTING

The theatre space itself as is.

THE TIME

After hours.

SYNOPSIS

Two GHOSTS vie for space.

For the purposes of our READING:

Any stage directions or dialogue highlighted in grey will NOT be read aloud.

These people talk over each other consistently...do not be afraid to overlap.

A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:

1. A slash “ / “ indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets “ [] ” is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ () ” is spoken aloud but is an aside.
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

SCENE 1

(A ghost light illuminates an otherwise empty theatre. The stage itself is set for whatever play befits the venue's schedule.)

A haunting melody echoes in followed by the sound of a bell ring—the style heard at a boxing event. A beat.

DEREK MITCHELL enters and surveys the space both on and offstage. He wafts a cigarette and eventually presses its unlit end up to the bulb of the ghost light going through the motions of lighting up in vain. He continues the charade as if to inhale and exhale...living only in the sense memory of it all...)

DEREK

(God, what I'd give for it just once)

(DEREK looks around and allows himself to yawn: a long, prolonged yawn—the type that brings about a deeper yawn that once realized has to be seen through to the end. That done. He sits down on the stage and again looks about.)

A beat.)

A VOICE (from elsewhere in the theatre)

Alright. I'm here. Time to go.

(DEREK looks around for the voice.)

VOICE

Yes. You. Go.

DEREK

Can—can you see me?

VOICE

Sure as shit, I can see you. You have to go.

DEREK

Holy shit. I haven't seen—Where are you?

(JOHNNY, the body behind the voice, enters from anywhere in the theatre. His attire is circa 1940s.)

JOHNNY

(Speaking as he enters:)

Now you see me. Now you don't. Go.

DEREK

Derek. Derek Mitchell. And you are?

JOHNNY

Your worst nightmare. Leave.

DEREK

Leave? I haven't seen anybody in—I... We're both dead, right?

JOHNNY

And?

DEREK

(Lightly amused and even more thrilled to have someone to talk to:)

And so [I mean, what're you gonna do to me if I don't]?

This is great. I figured I died in the lobby. It's the last time I remember feeling [anything physical]. I think it was a heart attack.

JOHNNY

I know. I saw. I was there.

DEREK

You / were?

JOHNNY

I fell off a scaffolding. Good to meet you, now, you can leave.

DEREK

Why—why do you want to get rid of me so fast?

JOHNNY

“So fast”? You know how long you been here?

DEREK

..January?

JOHNNY

Ok, so you know: long enough. I'm tired of pretending you're not here, it's time for you to go.

DEREK

Why would you...

JOHNNY

(Picking at his nose:)

I want to be alone, ok? I prefer it.

DEREK

(You realize you're picking your...)

JOHNNY

Yes. I realize it. And I wanna pick my nose if I wanna pick my nose. Or scratch my balls or masturbate if I feel like it.

DEREK

..Can you still feel...

JOHNNY

No. Can you smoke?

DEREK

I can't even light it.

JOHNNY

Exactly. But I like to maybe go through the motions.

DEREK

Why? That just sounds so..pathetic.

JOHNNY

This. This is why I want you gone.

DEREK

I died here, if I'm not / mistaken.

JOHNNY

So did I.

DEREK

Did you see the show last night?

JOHNNY

Yeah...it's not really theatre if you ask me.

DEREK

I kinda liked it.

JOHNNY

I'm not I'm not having this conversation.

DEREK

Where is it you expect me to go?

JOHNNY

I really I really don't care.

DEREK

Do you have a stutter?

JOHNNY

No. I'm I'm not used to talking to people. It's been a while.

DEREK

(Offering his hand:)

Derek. Derek Mitchell.

JOHNNY

Listen, Dirk.

DEREK

Derek.

JOHNNY

Whoever. This is not going to work. I'm not taking the lobby and you take the dressing rooms and we share the stage, ok? I've been down this road before and you're going.

DEREK

How? Where?

JOHNNY

I was here first. Didn't want to have to pull that card but.. you forced me into it.

(There is a slight pause.)

DEREK

And if I don't go?

JOHNNY

You don't wanna know.

DEREK

What're you gonna do to me? I'm already dead.

JOHNNY

Not you. Your memory. This isn't my first rodeo, pal. People generally..eventually, see things my way and they move on.

DEREK

Aren't I tied to this place? Cosmically or ...?

JOHNNY

Yeah that can be a little uncomfortable but it can happen. It's kinda like..an exorcism.

DEREK

I didn't—I didn't catch that movie, I'm not really into horror films.

JOHNNY

It's a classic. How can you have not seen it?

DEREK

Well, how did you—how long've you been [dead]...?

JOHNNY

You can leave and come back for a time. Like..going out to lunch.

DEREK

Is that where you were? At the movies?

JOHNNY

I was in the bathroom if you have to know.

DEREK

Taking a dump?

JOHNNY

I'm...I'm not going through this with you. I'm back. Your gone. Have to go. I live here alone.

DEREK

Technically [you're not alive]—

JOHNNY

I will haunt your family.

DEREK

What?

JOHNNY

For as long as it takes.

DEREK

Why?

JOHNNY

I get what I want.

DEREK

Were you always a bully?

JOHNNY

Names [sticks and stones].

DEREK

What is your problem?

(MARY and FRAN, two more ghosts, both dressed circa 1960s, saunter through.)

MARY

Johnny! You're back.

FRAN

Hey, Johnny.

JOHNNY

(hi.)

MARY

(an innocent question:)

Who's your friend?

DEREK

(After Johnny fails to respond...)

We're not exactly.

MARY

You die here?

DEREK

Derek. Derek Mitchell. I think...yeah. Yeah...in the lobby, I think.

MARY

You don't know?

(All DEREK can do is shrug; "best I can figure.")

FRAN

(Amused—to Mary:)

That was you.

MARY

shuddup.

FRAN

She didn't know either.

MARY

We were traveling.

FRAN

We were in a car.

(Slams her hands to show the force of:)

Hit a light pole. She was high, that's how she doesn't know.

MARY

You were driving.

FRAN
I was high too.

DEREK
This is all new to me.

FRAN
We went through a window somewhere around here.

MARY
(They rebuilt.)

FRAN
You'll get used to it.

MARY
What show're they doing now?

DEREK
(NAME OF CURRENT SHOW for our purposes let's say)¹ Fuddy Meers

MARY
Is it any good?

DEREK
/ I liked it.

JOHNNY
Nope.

FRAN
You saw it together?

JOHNNY
No. Daryl was / just—

DEREK
Derek.

JOHNNY (Continuing:)
—leaving;—

MARY
Johnny prefers the classics.

¹ The name of the actual show currently being produced at the venue in prime-time.

JOHNNY (Continuing:)

—take him with you.

FRAN

He does that.

DEREK

The classics?

FRAN

Plays with your name like that. It's cause he doesn't like his own.

DEREK

“John”?

MARY

Kennedy. John Kennedy—not *that* Kennedy. Don't you love it?

FRAN

So, we call him Johnny.

MARY

Johnny has a very particular taste. He likes Shakespeare, doesn't like Chekhov, and he hates pretty much anything written after Arthur Miller.

FRAN

“It's not theatre”, he says.

MARY

And don't get him started on Musicals.

FRAN

Or Mamet.

JOHNNY

Mamet isn't even...[I'm not getting into it with you]

MARY

Really?

JOHNNY

Really.

Really? MARY

Really. JOHNNY

Really? MARY

Really? FRAN

Really. JOHNNY

Really? MARY

JOHNNY
Reall—(ok, I see what you're doing there.)

DEREK
If if you don't even like theatre why are you even here?

FRAN
Oh, this wasn't always a theatre here, I don't think.

MARY
Johnny helped build this place.

FRAN
He's a builder. He builds things.

MARY
A contractor.

FRAN
He / was—

MARY
He was working on the ceiling when one of the legs gave way / and

FRAN

of the / scaffolding.

MARY

of the scaffolding and / he—

FRAN

Broke your neck, didn't you, big guy?

JOHNNY

Like I said, I was here first.

FRAN

Yeah, this place used to be a... what did it used to be?

(But JOHNNY is not contributing:)

It's been a number of things. But, yeah, Jonny was here first.

MARY

He's part of the foundation.

DEREK

Like Jimmy Hoffa?

MARY

What? No. But yeah... he's ... he's a fixture.

DEREK

And how are you both here? Aren't you "fixed" somewhere?

FRAN

Oh, no, we're not. We were moving. Nothing to attach to.

MARY

Car was totaled.

FRAN

So, we drift around a lot. It's kinda our thing. She wanted to stop.

MARY

We were traveling through—

(To Derek:)

—(like we do)—

(Back to Johnny:)

—and...thought we would visit. Didn't know you'd be in a mood.

DEREK

Is ... Is this..a [booty call]...?

MARY

Oh my god, no. We can't bump uglies. We just talk about it.

FRAN

(a lot)

DEREK

So, this this is why you wanted your privacy? You.. you could've / just—

FRAN

(To Mary—then Derek—then Johnny:)

Did you tell him we were coming?—He try to kick you out?—How many is that now?

DEREK

So, he's done this before? Where would I [end up going]... ?

FRAN

It can get messy but...[no, I don't wanna scare you—maybe I should just stop talking now—or maybe I can put it this way:] It's kinda like losing an arm or..so I've heard.

MARY

Oh my god, Johnny. Already?

(To Derek:)

(Wha'd you do?) I guess he's upped his game.

JOHNNY

Time is short.

MARY

No, Johnny, time is long. Life is short.

DEREK

I'm sorry. But I died here, too, I figure, I have rights.

FRAN

Are you an actor?

DEREK

I'm a..dentist.

FRAN

[Oh, so you're] Audience.

DEREK

Well yes. But *I* do like the theatre and I wouldn't mind watching a show or two.

MARY

Or three thousand.

DEREK

If it gets to that. My daughter

FRAN

Is an actress? I knew it. What have we seen her in?

JOHNNY

Here. She was performing here. / She's—

MARY

And you threatened her? He threaten your family? Johnny, you're better than that. You promised.

JOHNNY

I was tired and she was screaming her lines.

MARY

You need to be more creative. Remember how you got rid of the cat? *That* was art.

FRAN

She was allergic [when she was alive]. Turned into a phobia. Johnny was her hero.

DEREK

I would like to see my daughter—Julia—and .. she comes here to ... I've heard her talk to me here and I don't want to miss out on that.

FRAN

Awwwwwwwwww: he's got a daughter.

JOHNNY

I have a...

FRAN

Great-great-grandson? No, not really the same. He's never met you. I think he lives somewhere back in Idaho anyways.

MARY

(Family is family.)

FRAN

(Just cause *you* never had a kid.)

MARY

(Who're you, Mother Theresa?—

(Implying Johnny:)

—Maybe if we met before.)

FRAN

(He died when you were three. That would make him a pervert. Or you.)

MARY

(The heart wants what the heart wants.)

FRAN

('Cuz the body ain't there no more.)

JOHNNY

I'm right here. I can hear every word you're saying.

FRAN

And yet you don't make a move.

JOHNNY

How am I supposed to [never mind, it's not worth having this argument again]...

FRAN

All bark and no bite. (Forever)

JOHNNY

You came to m—... These are my grounds. This is my space. I have a claim.

FRAN

He has a daughter.

JOHNNY

I was here first.

FRAN

You know you sound three?

JOHNNY

Mary?

(MARY shrugs: "she's right, you do sound three".)

FRAN

Maybe we should look it up in the handbook?

DEREK

There's a handbook?

MARY

No.

JOHNNY

No.

FRAN

No; I just like stirring the pot.

MARY

I have an idea. They could wrestle for it.

DEREK

..I don't think that's how...

MARY

Maybe Twenty Questions?

FRAN

When were you born?

JOHNNY

Is that the first question?

ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE:

Part of the concept of THEATRE GHOSTS is to adapt the script to the actual venue of the given production.

Therefore, building descriptions & histories, locations (Des Moines, Idaho, Dodger Stadium, Disneyland, Sereno Del Mar, Big Sur). Calendar dates, character traits and talents, may be adapted to match the venue, time of year and/or actors involved in any given production.

Details follow.

- pg 2 The month of January is arbitrary but should be changed according to the time of year the play is actually presented. Bottom line being that the character of Derek has been dead for at least 5 months*
- pg 8 The "Current Show". Should indeed be the title of the play or concert that is currently in production at the same venue..that the stage itself is otherwise dressed for*
- pg 10-11 Reference to the history of the building (venue) the play is being presented in may be edited if/as needed.*
- pg 14 Idaho. Johnny's great-great-grandson should be living at least two states geographically away from the production venue ...adjust accordingly.*