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SF PERUSALS

THE GHOST TRAIN

A Drama in Three Acts

by Arnold Ridley

SAMUEL FRENCH

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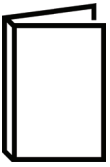
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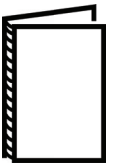
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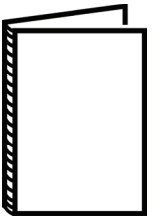
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

For my sins, I've attended many dress rehearsals and performances of *The Ghost Train* – some excellent, some reasonably good and some of them pretty awful and what follows could be described as "general conclusions".

First. Two musts. A period production and live effects. It has proved over and over again that recordings – however good they may be – don't come off. There is a lack of essential vibration for one thing and another is that the introduction of a modern technique is right against the old-fashioned nature of the play.

Next. Sincerity is all-important. Play *The Train* as nearly as possible as it was produced in 1925 and it will be as big a success as it then was. An attempt to "send it up" will spell failure. Exaggeration should be avoided also, both as regards clothes and movement. Dress the characters exactly in the period without trying to make them figures of fun – women's clothes of that period were horrible enough. And the cast should give no sign that they consider themselves "funnily" dressed. I saw a production recently in which the women walked about as if wearing crinolines and the men strutted the stage with swinging shoulders and hips, with bent elbows held well from their sides in the melodrama of the 1880s. Consequently, the whole thing became utterly unreal and both drama and comedy largely lost.

The dialogue itself is now period. Leave it at that.

Next. A successful performance of the play today needs *courage* – both on the part of the director and the cast. The actors and actresses must really believe in their ability to hold the dramatic moments. If they funk it, they're lost. It's a hard play for the actors – especially the two married couples who are on-stage the whole time and have to keep up the tension throughout.

They should remember they are rather like a Greek Chorus – a connecting link with the audience. If they are not genuinely scared by the grim circumstances and genuinely frustrated and angered by Teddie's silly interruptions, then the audience won't be either. Atmosphere is vital – especially at the start.

And I don't think atmosphere can be established at speed. I've often noticed a dangerous tendency to play *The Train* too quickly, without what I would describe as "beat – gaps" dividing the comedy and drama, or, better still, the drama and the comedy. If the comedy dives in too quickly before the drama is established both are lost. *The Ghost Train* is a layer cake and not an apple-charlotte – the divisions between drama and comedy should be sharply defined as the markings on a pedigree Siamese cat. No blurred edges! The cast must never be afraid of "wrong laughs". They won't come if the right laughs come in the right places. Timidity – by which I mean trying to skate over a danger-spot by "rushing the jumps" – will defeat its own ends.

And examples of the essential sincerity. We must really be concerned about the young couple who are to be parted for years after the end of their brief honeymoon. There's real pathos here that's valuable to the drama if it's played sincerely. And the scene between the husbands which I've seen get good laughs when it is remembered by them that they are strangers to each other forced by circumstances into conversation and not glibly chatting to each other re-capping things as if they were life-long friends. The same also applied to Miss Bourne early in Act II when she says "Living with my dear sister at Truro I never thought anything terrible could happen to me!" We must be sorry for the poor old trout. It may appear difficult to treat her as a real person after the nonsense about the egg in Act I, but it can be done.

Peggy is left alone by Charles. She must not hurry this scene. The fact that she is alone should dawn on her gradually with apprehension leading to fear en route for utter panic.

Charles comes back and throws the outer door shut behind him. At the absolute split second Teddie – shouting "I say" – bounces out of the ticket office slamming that door behind him. If this is properly timed, the "Jack-in-the-box" is not only the biggest laugh in the play but also the biggest I've ever heard in any theatre ever.

I don't think I need emphasise to what extent Teddie should be "hidden" during the drama scenes. The more he is hidden the bigger the laugh when he bounces back into the action.

Finally a few technical points:

If the play is played against a background of black drapes, doors etc. this can be worked by an ASM wearing black gloves and black sleeves. They will be invisible and this avoids having to tinker around with wires and springs.

With a good dimmer available, the lights can be faded slowly in and out to suit the mood of various scenes.

Opening scenes. A reflection on the windows of the green and red signal lamps is useful.

Not too much smoke from the fire. Only very little or the audience becomes too interested in it as an effect. If so, they don't listen to the dialogue.

And to any director or cast involved – Good Luck!

Arnold Ridley
1970

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The playwright, author and actor, Arnold Ridley, was born in Bath and educated at Bristol University. Having been severely wounded during the Battle of The Somme, he was discharged from the British Army in 1917 and began his theatrical career with the Birmingham Repertory Company. Following a series of setbacks and disappointments in his early acting career, he began writing plays while working in his father's boot shop. *The Ghost Train* was his first play to be produced and enjoyed extraordinary success in London's West End and beyond. There have been three film versions of *The Ghost Train* which has been translated into seventeen languages and which continues to be produced successfully by both professional and amateur companies in the UK and elsewhere. *The Ghost Train* was later followed by more than thirty plays. In 1940, Arnold Ridley was evacuated from France, discharged wounded from the British Army for a second time and then joined the Local Defence Volunteers, the precursor of the Home Guard. In the post-war years he returned to acting. His radio and television work included parts in *The Archers*, *Crossroads* and *Coronation Street*. From 1968 he played Private Godfrey, the oldest member of the Walmington-on-Sea platoon, in the long-running and perenennially popular television programme, *Dad's Army*. Arnold Ridley was appointed OBE in 1982.

THE GHOST TRAIN

Produced at the St. Martin's Theatre, London, 23rd November, 1925, with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

SAUL HODGKIN, stationmaster at Fal Vale Station	Caleb Porter
RICHARD WINTHROP	G. H. Mulcaster
ELSIE, his wife	Edith Saville
CHARLES MURDOCK, junior partner in Murdock & Son	Basil Howes
PEGGY MURDOCK, his newly married wife	Edna Davies
MISS BOURNE	Gladys Ffolliott
TEDDIE DEAKIN	Frederick. T. Cooper
JULIA PRICE	Mary Clare
HERBERT PRICE	Neville Brook
JOHN STERLING	Vincent Holman
JACKSON	Walter Pemberton
SMITH	Wilfred Langley

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in the small General Waiting-room at Fal Vale, a wayside station on the South Cornwall Joint Railway, during the course of four hours.

ACT I	10 p.m.
ACT II	11:30 p.m.
ACT III	12:30 a.m.

Time – the present

ACT I

***SCENE**. The general waiting-room at Fal Vale, a small branch railway station in Cornwall.*

A door leading to the platform is in the centre of the back of the stage and another door up right leads to the ticket office. (Both doors should be counter-weighted so that they will remain open when not actually latched) Below this door is a small ticket window and the usual wooden barrier. On either side of the door at the back there are heavily barred windows looking on to the platform. Down left is a fireplace where a smoky fire is on its last legs. A table, with the inevitable flask of water and thick glass and time-tables, stands a little to the left of stage. The only other furniture consists of a few wooden benches and leather-covered, uncomfortable chairs.

See Ground Plan of Scene (page 107).

When the curtain rises, the room presents a most depressing scene. The fire is smoking, and a single gas-jet burns faintly and throws gloomy shadows about the room. It is not light enough to read, and outside the rain falls heavily. Everything seems damp and clammy and strips of the drab wallpaper hang from the walls. Outside there is the sound of a whistle, and through the windows lights from railway carriages can be seen as a train moves slowly out of the station. Or Whistle twice. Signal bell.

SAUL HODGKIN *enters, turns up gas; exits centre. (Business: Train arrives and departs; lines of "All change!" and door slams) Voices are heard and then*

the door opens and **RICHARD WINTHROP** *and his wife,* **ELSIE,** *come into the room.* **RICHARD** *is a rather bad-tempered looking young man of twenty-eight, and* **ELSIE** *a somewhat sulky girl of twenty-five.*

ELSIE *(entering from door centre with* **RICHARD***)* I suppose this *is* the waiting-room? *(Crossing left)*

RICHARD It looks like it—damnably like it. *(Putting bag on the table and then going down right to barrier)*

ELSIE What smoke! Just the kind of place you would bring me to. *(Coming to the form in front of the table)*

RICHARD Bring you! I like that!

ELSIE It's cold, wet and disagreeable. *(Sitting on form)*

RICHARD It's disagreeable right enough.

ELSIE And a lot you care.

RICHARD *(right of the table)* Perhaps I'm used to it.

ELSIE Thank you.

RICHARD Well, hang it all, it's not my fault, is it? I'm not managing director of the infernal company, am I? It's that young fool's fault, losing his beastly hat and then pulling the blasted communication-cord. But for him, we should have caught the damned connection all right.

ELSIE And you would have missed a fine opportunity for swearing.

RICHARD Not at all. Opportunity for swearing, especially in this climate, is superfluous... *(Going to the door right and opening it)* What's this damned hole?

Goes into ticket office and is followed by **ELSIE.**

The outer door is opened again by **SAUL HODGKIN,** *the station-master and general factotum of the Fal Vale station staff.* **SAUL** *is a short, bearded man of about sixty, dressed in a worn and out-of-date uniform.*

SAUL Well, all I says is this 'ere— it bain't *my* fault.

CHARLES MURDOCK *and* **PEGGY**, *his young wife, enter the room from the centre door. They are a honeymoon couple, terribly splendid in new clothes.* **CHARLES** *is a good-looking young man of twenty-five, and* **PEGGY** *a pretty girl of twenty.*

CHARLES *(looking round the room)* Good Lord! What a hole!

PEGGY Oh, Charlie!

SAUL *(speaking to someone off)* Ay! Ay! Where be you going? Not that way! *(Exit by the centre door)*

CHARLES *(putting his bags on the table)* This looks a cheery place, I don't think. *(Crossing to the door centre and shutting it)*

PEGGY Never mind, dear. *(Sitting on chair left of the table)*

CHARLES *comes down and kisses* **PEGGY.**

(repeats) Never mind, dear.

CHARLES But I do mind. *(Sitting on the table, at the back of* **PEGGY***)* Bless my soul, this is my wedding night, isn't it?

PEGGY Y-yes.

CHARLES We don't want to hang about here long. They'll wonder what has happened, at the hotel, if we don't turn up.

PEGGY I hope they won't think that you funked it and changed your mind.

CHARLES What a joke! *(Singing softly)*

"THERE WAS I A-WAITING AT THE CHURCH, A-WAITING AT THE CHURCH."

No, hang it all, it's no joke. I'm hungry and you're tired, and we want to get to—our hotel. It was bad enough missing that train at Exeter.

PEGGY That was mother's fault. I knew we should be late.

CHARLES What I say is: Hang that chap and his hat! No one but a born fool would stop a train because he'd lost his hat. Damn him!

PEGGY Naughty! Naughty!

CHARLES I'm deuced angry. When we've only just this one week before I have to leave you and go abroad I begrudge every moment wasted.

PEGGY Let's forget about that, dear. Let's pretend we shall always be together.

CHARLES I'm sorry, old thing. I won't grouse to-night of all nights. *(Getting off the table, looking round)* There's one thing about it; all those other people seem to have cleared off; we are alone, anyway. Give me a kiss and I'll smile again.

They kiss twice. Just at that moment the door opens again, and **MISS BOURNE** *enters, followed by* **SAUL. MISS BOURNE** *is an elderly lady, carrying a parrot-cage.*

MISS BOURNE Oh! Love-birds!

CHARLES *and* **PEGGY** *start apart and cross in front of table towards barrier down right.*

I beg your pardon! *(Turning to* **SAUL***)* This is the waiting-room, I suppose?

SAUL Ah!

MISS BOURNE I beg your pardon—both of you.

CHARLES Oh—er—er—not at all.

RICHARD *and* **ELSIE** *return from ticket office.*

Hello, here's some more of 'em. *(Moving up centre with* **PEGGY***)*

MISS BOURNE What a horrible smell of smoke. Phew! Phew! *(Coming down left of the table and sitting on form)*

CHARLES *(behind table and viewing fireplace)* They do say, that where there's smoke there's fire, but it doesn't seem to be borne out here. *(Crossing to below fire)*

SAUL *(crossing to left centre by fire)* I'm sure it's a nice fire for the time o' night.

PEGGY *(crossing down left to below* **CHARLES***)* We shall have to make do with it until the next train.

SAUL I keeps on telling ye, there bain't no next train.

CHARLES What?

SAUL There bain't no more trains till seven to-morrer morning.

CHARLES Look here, I simply must get this young lady—my wife—to Truro to-night.

SAUL Sorry, sir, but you can't.

CHARLES We must have a special.

SAUL There bain't no specials on this line; not for years there hasn't been.

CHARLES Then, where can we hire a car?

SAUL There bain't no cars round here.

CHARLES Well, what do you suggest?

SAUL If you wants to get anywhere to-night, you'll 'ave to walk. *(Moving to centre behind table)*

CHARLES Good heavens! *(To* **PEGGY***)* I say, I'm deuced sorry, Pegs; I'm afraid we're in a hell of a mess.

PEGGY It can't be helped, old man. I don't mind.

CHARLES Yes, but, hang it all, I mean to say—well, I *ask* you!

RICHARD Now, look here, porter—

SAUL 'Scuse me, sir, stationmaster.

RICHARD Well, look here, do you really mean that we can't get any further to-night?

SAUL That's what I said.

RICHARD Then, where's the nearest hotel?

SAUL Truro.

CHARLES 'Struth!

SAUL No. Truro.

RICHARD Surely there's some place or other where we can stay the night?

SAUL Bain't no houses here. There be a farm five miles along the road.

RICHARD But surely *you* live somewhere?

SAUL I bicycles to Truro.

RICHARD Well, ladies and gentlemen, it looks as if we shall have to stay here till morning.

ELSIE *sits on chair down right.*

CHARLES That silly ass! By the way, where is he?

SAUL *(going to the door centre and opening it and closing it again)* There be another gen'leman outside.

CHARLES Let's hope he stops there. I shall kick him if he comes in.

RICHARD We certainly have to thank him for this predicament; him and his rotten hat.

MISS BOURNE He ought to be summoned or something. Why couldn't he leave the communication-cord alone?

The door opens and **TEDDIE DEAKIN** *enters, unobserved. He is a dandified young man, complete with eyeglass and a long cigarette holder.*

RICHARD He's an imbecile.

CHARLES Worse than that. How my toe itches!

TEDDIE I say!

They all turn and look at **TEDDIE.**

(right of the table) What a topping little crib. Here we *all* are, then! What are you doing? Having an argument?

RICHARD *(down right by barrier)* Not at all. We were all perfectly unanimous on the subject under discussion.

TEDDIE How remarkable! So we're here till morning, eh?

CHARLES *(left of table)* Yes!

TEDDIE I think it's rather priceless. After all, it's a little adventure, something to relieve the ennui of life.

CHARLES That's all very well for you, sir. It puts us in a devil of a hole.

TEDDIE What a pity! As a matter of fact, I'm quite enjoying myself.

MISS BOURNE Young man, have you no sense of responsibility?

TEDDIE Responsibility? Whatever's that?

MISS BOURNE Your ignorance of the word hardly surprises me.

TEDDIE *(right of the table)* I say, you're not peeved with me, are you? *(Putting papers and periodicals on table)*

MISS BOURNE Your lack of concern is monstrous, considering you are the direct cause of this most unpleasant situation.

TEDDIE My good woman— *(Putting his air cushion on table)*

MISS BOURNE I'm not a good woman—I—I mean—please do not address me with such unwarranted familiarity.

TEDDIE Sorrow! *(Turning to* **RICHARD***)* Look here, you must be fair. How could I help my hat blowing away?

RICHARD If you lean out of the window it often happens.

TEDDIE But, my dear old thing, I was watching the sparks from the engine—awfully jolly!

CHARLES Losing your hat was no excuse for pulling the communication-cord.

TEDDIE *(moving his bag)* Don't you think so?

CHARLES No!

TEDDIE Well, I do. It was a jolly nice hat; I only bought it last week. Besides, I've often wanted to pull the communication-cord. It's such a refreshing idea; don't you think so?

RICHARD Damn it, sir, haven't you any sense of decency?

TEDDIE Decency? What do you mean?

RICHARD Listen to me. You don't seem to have realised the facts of the case.

TEDDIE I hate facts.

RICHARD Then giving you some will afford me great pleasure. First of all, you stick your head out of the window, like the silly ass that you are, and then, when your beastly hat blows off, you pull the communication-cord and stop the train on an incline. Consequently we miss our connection at the junction and find ourselves in this God-forsaken hole. Instead of expressing regret, you hike around us as though you'd done us all a favour.

TEDDIE I say, you don't seem quite to like me, do you?

RICHARD If I were to tell you my candid opinion—

ELSIE *(sitting down right)* Oh, don't haggle, Richard. Surely the situation is uncomfortable enough without a quarrel. Whatever you say now can do no good. Here we are, and here we shall have to stop.

TEDDIE *moves to right end of form up right centre and sits.*

SAUL Beg pardon, ma'am, but you can't stop here. *(Turning centre and working towards* **RICHARD***)*

ELSIE What?

RICHARD Eh?

SAUL I says as 'ow you can't stop here.

ELSIE *rises.*

RICHARD What the deuce do you mean?

SAUL There not being no traffic on the line, everythink shuts up for the night—signal boxes, station an' all. I'm off 'ome.

RICHARD Well?

SAUL And afore I goes I 'ave to lock all this yer up.

RICHARD Well, you can't lock up.

SAUL Them's my orders an' I got to obey 'em.

RICHARD Don't be so damned silly! What else can we do?

SAUL Dunno. Bain't no affair of mine. All I knows is that orders is orders. You might go to the farm.

RICHARD Do you expect these ladies to walk five miles along a country road on a night like this?

SAUL You can't stop here.

CHARLES Who's to prevent us?

SAUL I be.

CHARLES What are you going to do? Throw us out?

SAUL *(scratching his head)* I suppose I shall have to.

RICHARD *(taking off his overcoat)* Very well, you can start with me. *(Putting overcoat and hat on barrier)*

TEDDIE *(rising and coming down and sitting on the right end of form centre, facing up with his back to audience)* I say, this is all perfectly priceless. Seconds out of the ring! Round one! Ting-a-ling! *(Rising and backing and then sitting down on* **MISS BOURNE***'s knees)*

MISS BOURNE Be silent, sir.

TEDDIE Sorrow.

RICHARD *goes up to* **SAUL** *as if to spar.*

SAUL *(to* **RICHARD***, as he moves back to door centre)* Now, look 'ere, sir, don't you lay your 'ands on me—

RICHARD I'm not going to. I thought you were going to lay your hands on *me.*

CHARLES *(moving to left of centre, behind table)* Come along now, we're going to stay; make the best of it. We'll see that you don't get into any trouble.

SAUL Well, sir, I dunno—

CHARLES *(slipping two coins into* **SAUL***'s hand)* Everything's all right, isn't it?

SAUL Well, sir, I dunno—I 'aven't got no choice.

CHARLES That's the talk. *(Taking a couple of steps to left)* Come along now, let's see what we can do to make these ladies comfortable. For instance, this is a pretty rotten fire.

SAUL There be a fire 'ere in the ticket office; don't know if that be any better. *(Crossing to the door right)*

CHARLES Let's go and see, Peggy.

SAUL *leads the way through the door up right and* **CHARLES** *and* **PEGGY** *follow him into the ticket office. Then* **MISS BOURNE** *gets up from the form, and just as she gets to the door she remembers her parrot-cage; returns and snatches it from* **TEDDIE***, who is examining it; she then exits into the ticket office and is followed by* **TEDDIE***.*

ELSIE *and* **RICHARD** *remain.* **ELSIE** *crosses before they speak and throws her handbag on table.*

RICHARD Well, what do you think of this, Elsie?

ELSIE *(crossing left to chair by fireplace)* Not much. You should be in your element, though.

RICHARD *(right)* I don't follow you.

ELSIE Doesn't it give you a splendid chance to domineer everyone?

RICHARD *moves slightly towards the table.*

Already you've threatened to fight the stationmaster and lost your temper with that young fool who pulled the communication-cord. You must be enjoying yourself.

RICHARD Look here, Elsie, *must* we go on quarrelling like this? *(Putting one foot on form)*

ELSIE I thought you'd like it.

RICHARD Can't we forget it all?

ELSIE I can't forget what you said to me this morning, if that's what you mean.

RICHARD I'm sorry I lost my temper this morning. You must realise how worried I am just now—Parkinson dying suddenly like that.

ELSIE Surely you can get another works manager.

RICHARD Of a sort, yes. But I must have an expert; a man whom I can trust to be loyal and keep his head in an emergency.

ELSIE And because you couldn't get him, I had to suffer.

RICHARD You must remember how exasperating you were.

ELSIE Of course, it was my fault that you behaved like a pig. I might have known that.

RICHARD I didn't say so.

ELSIE No; but you meant it.

RICHARD We've only been married a year, Elsie; it seems a beastly shame to go on like this. Why not start afresh? *(Sitting on form)*

ELSIE It's too late. We must keep to our arrangement.

RICHARD But—

ELSIE It's no use going over it all again. We don't get on and we never shall. Directly we get away from here I shall go back to London, and you must arrange for a separation.

RICHARD It seems such a pity.

ELSIE Did you suggest a separation, or did I?

RICHARD I did, but—

ELSIE Very well, then.

RICHARD I was in a temper at the time, though. You must admit that. We were *both* in a temper.

ELSIE I beg your pardon, but I never lose my temper. *(Rising and moving in front of fireplace)*

RICHARD Not openly, I know, but—

ELSIE Then please speak the truth.

RICHARD Elsie, be reasonable.

ELSIE Oh, what's the use of argument. *(Crossing up centre behind table)* It's no good, Dick; I look upon you as a cave-man.

RICHARD Even cave-men have their uses.

ELSIE *(turning above him. Coming to chair left of table and turning it, facing the audience)* I daresay. The truth of the matter is, we're absolutely unsuited to each other. If you'd married a timid little mouse of a girl, it would have been all right. In return for your protection and shielding arm, she would have looked upon you as a god, and put up with your domineering ways. It's different with me. I don't need protection, and I won't be domineered. Your manly strength is no attraction to me because I can look after myself. I've never been afraid of anything in my life. *(Moving down stage left)*

RICHARD That's just it, Elsie; you're so damned self-reliant.

ELSIE There you are, you see; you're off again. I've had enough scenes for one day; I'm going into the other room.

RICHARD *stopping* **ELSIE**, *as she crosses him.*

RICHARD Elsie, for the last time, let's start again.

ELSIE No, Dick, *(crossing* **RICHARD** *up to door right)* I've made up my mind.

CHARLES *enters from the ticket office, and bumps into her.*

CHARLES I beg your pardon.

ELSIE Not at all. *(Goes into ticket office)*

CHARLES *crosses over towards* **RICHARD**, *who has sat on the form again.*

CHARLES I say, what a game!

RICHARD Perfectly beastly, isn't it?

CHARLES I should say so.

RICHARD We shall have to put up with it until the morning.

CHARLES It's not so bad for you, sir, but I'm in a devil of a mess.

RICHARD We all are. It's not your fault. That young fool is the only one to blame.

CHARLES It's devilish awkward. Of course, you've been married some time?

RICHARD Yes.

CHARLES That certainly makes things easier.

RICHARD I suppose it does.

CHARLES You see—er—we—my wife and I—we haven't been married very long—we— *(He is embarrassed, pulls handkerchief to blow his nose, and a shower of confetti falls on the floor)*

RICHARD *(noticing this)* I understand.

CHARLES Eh? *(Looking down and seeing the confetti)* I'm afraid that's rather torn it. Why, hang it all, I'm not ashamed of it; we—we were only married to-day. Only, for Heaven's sake, don't tell the others.

RICHARD *(rising and going left)* Of course not.

CHARLES It's a wonderful thing to be married, isn't it? To have someone to stand by one in every difficulty.

RICHARD You'll find that out for yourself.

CHARLES I have already. It's a good thing, too, because we haven't much time.

RICHARD I thought you said you'd just been married?

CHARLES Yes, but—

RICHARD *(looking round)* What's the trouble? Had a row?

CHARLES Good Lord, no!

RICHARD I beg your pardon.

CHARLES That's all right, sir. I suppose people *do* have rows sometimes?

RICHARD Undoubtedly.

CHARLES It's difficult to understand. As a matter of fact, my trouble is that my name's Murdock.

RICHARD Any relation to Murdock & Son?

CHARLES Yes; I'm the son, worse luck. *(Sitting on form centre)*

RICHARD Oh, I see.

CHARLES Our smash is pretty well known, isn't it?

RICHARD I took particular notice of it because I happen to be in the same line of business myself.

CHARLES By Jove, that's strange. Anyway, we're done for, all right. I'm clearing out of England next week.

RICHARD Alone?

CHARLES Yes. I couldn't possibly take the wife out there. Just this little honeymoon together and then—it's hell!

RICHARD Must you go abroad?

CHARLES What else can I do? I've tried everywhere in England for a job. It's been a devil of a business all through. Peggy and I were engaged before the crash came; her people wanted her to chuck me up, but she wouldn't, bless her! —I say, I don't know why I'm telling *you* all this—it must be fearfully boring.

RICHARD Not a bit.

CHARLES Isn't it strange how our frigid conventions break down in the face of a little common adversity. If it hadn't been for that silly ass pulling the communication-cord we should most likely be sitting opposite each other in a railway carriage, glaring like fighting cocks, and here I am boring you with my most intimate troubles.

PEGGY *(speaking off right, in ticket office)* Where are you, Charlie?

CHARLES *rises and runs up to the door and meets her as she enters.*

CHARLES Here I am, dear. *(To* **PEGGY***)* Did you manage to get a wash?

PEGGY Yes. Old Pooh-Bah managed to rake out a piece of soap and a towel, after all.

CHARLES *(both coming down stage)* Good. I've been having a chat with Mr—er—

RICHARD Winthrop is my name.

CHARLES Peggy, this is Mr Winthrop. Mr Winthrop, allow me to introduce you to Miss Peggy—er—my wife.

RICHARD *(crossing* **CHARLES** *to* **PEGGY***)* How do you do?

CHARLES *moves to left and* **PEGGY** *follows him.*

CHARLES We've just discovered that we're both in the same line of business—quite a coincidence.

RICHARD *(centre to right)* Yes, it's really very strange. *(Turning to right)*

PEGGY *(looking back at* **RICHARD***)* Please don't let me drive you away.

RICHARD Not at all, Mrs Murdock; there's something I want to say to my wife.

RICHARD *goes up right into ticket office and shuts door behind him.*

CHARLES *(embracing* **PEGGY***)* He seems quite a decent chap.

Both sit on form centre.

PEGGY Yes.

CHARLES I say, old girl, this is a business, isn't it?

PEGGY It can't be helped.

CHARLES I know. But to start one's honeymoon like this— If we were *always* going to be together it wouldn't be so bad.

PEGGY Don't say any more about that, old boy, please!

CHARLES I'm sorry, Pegs. It's all so unfair, though.

PEGGY Please!

CHARLES If only you *could* come—

PEGGY I'm willing to come, you know that.

CHARLES It's impossible. *(Shaking his head sadly)* There's no knowing how I may have to rough it.

PEGGY My man!

CHARLES It will be all right for me, Pegs; I'm fit and well; but for you it would be different.

PEGGY I'm fit and well, too, Charlie. *(Rising)*

CHARLES *(rising)* Yes, but—I couldn't even raise the passage money.

PEGGY We might borrow. I had a letter from a man only this morning, saying he was willing—

CHARLES No. Not that sort of a man, darling. It's no good. You'll have to stay in England with your people until things are better.

They embrace.

PEGGY You mustn't give up hope; things will come out all right in the end. When you are away and things are going badly, think of me and remember I shall be praying for you, my dear.

The sound of rain is heard.

CHARLES Darling! *(Taking her in his arms and kissing her)*

The flap of the ticket window flies up, and **TEDDIE** *pokes his head out.*

TEDDIE All change! All change! Get in your queue, please. Sorry, sold out of tickets to London. Nothing but Wigan excursions left! *(Seeing* **CHARLES** *and* **PEGGY***)* I say, I'm beastly sorry!

CHARLES Don't mention it. We're beginning to get quite used to you.

TEDDIE I believe someone likes me. *(Beginning to sing)*
"WHEN YOU ARE HAPPY, FRRRIEND OF MINE, AND ALL YOUR SKIES ARE BLUE—"

CHARLES Shut up!

TEDDIE Don't you like my voice?

CHARLES I do not.

TEDDIE Then book your tour with Wagon-Lits. *(Withdrawing his head and slamming down the window)*

CHARLES Well, I've met some prize asses in my time, but this one seems absolutely irrepressible. *(Going left with* **PEGGY***)*

RICHARD, ELSIE, MISS BOURNE *and* **SAUL** *come in from the ticket office, followed by* **TEDDIE,** *who sits on form under window up right centre.*

MISS BOURNE I was never at a worse-managed station in all my life. I shall most certainly write to the company. *(Going to the form centre and sitting down)*

SAUL *(above table, right of same)* I do wish you would, ma'am. I've written scores o' times about the conditions 'ere.

CHARLES What's the trouble?

RICHARD *(pointing to the ticket office)* The rain's coming through the roof in there; we've had to clear out.

PEGGY I'm frightfully hungry.

RICHARD Is there anything edible here?

SAUL Eh?

RICHARD Is there anything edible here?

SAUL Not a drop, sir—'cept water, an' one hardly counts that.

MISS BOURNE Good gracious! I don't know what my poor Joey will think of it. He's sleeping beautifully. *(Lifting the cover of the cage and making encouraging noises at her parrot)* He's laid an egg. Now I shall have to call him Clara.

CHARLES I think we had better draw up the forms to the fire and make ourselves as comfortable as we can.

RICHARD That's a good idea.

CHARLES *brings down chair left of table, then tries to lift form, and almost upsets* **MISS BOURNE. RICHARD** *fetches a chair from the ticket office. They draw up form to the fire.*

CHARLES That's better.

ELSIE *crosses to the fire and sits in chair brought by* **RICHARD**.

SAUL That chair don't come out of the office.

RICHARD Yes, it does. Look!

The ladies sit down.

TEDDIE Still hungry, ladies and gentlemen?

PEGGY Very.

TEDDIE I'll soon fix that.

RICHARD How?

CHARLES Can you?

TEDDIE *(takes a rug and spreads it on the table as tablecloth. Puts water-bottle in centre. Puts his handkerchief over his arm)* Just coming, sir. One moment, sir. *(Going to ticket window and raising the flap)* Six roast beef and Yorkshire, two veg. Just coming up on the lift. *(Flap falls down. He jumps back)* Sorry, sir, but the kitchen staff have gone boating. Oh, but never mind, there's a fly in the water-bottle.

MISS BOURNE Young man, do you ever take anything in life seriously?

TEDDIE Oh yes.

MISS BOURNE May I inquire what?

TEDDIE Whiskey.

MISS BOURNE Insolent fellow!

TEDDIE Flatterer! *(His eye catches the confetti on the floor)* Hello, hello, hello! Confetti! Crumbs! What a perfect scream! Ha! Ha! Ha! How absolutely too priceless. Now which of you is it? *(Looking at* **MISS BOURNE***)* No, not guilty.

MISS BOURNE Really!

TEDDIE *(crossing to left centre and surveying* **ELSIE** *and* **RICHARD***)* N-no, n-n-no! Hardly. *(His eye rests on* **CHARLES**

and **PEGGY***)* Ha! that blush! that angry eye! Bogey, bogey! Ha, ha, ha! Dammit, but this is the funniest ever. Ha, ha, ha! When I tell them about this at the club— *(Moving up right centre)*

CHARLES *(coming a little forward)* Damn you, sir!

TEDDIE *(turning)* Oh, naughty, naughty! Don't shock wifie. No offence.

CHARLES There *is* offence.

TEDDIE Oh, sorrow, only my little joke. After all, it is funny, isn't it? Don't you think so?

CHARLES No!

TEDDIE Oh! *(Pausing)* Well, perhaps you're right. *(Crossing down right and sitting on chair below barrier)*

SAUL Well, seeing as 'ow you've all settled to stay here, I'll be off 'ome. *(Moving towards the ticket office)*

RICHARD You're going?

SAUL *(turning)* You can stop 'ere since you've made up yer minds about it, but not me.

RICHARD Look here, I wish you'd stay; we might want something.

CHARLES Yes, you know where things are. We shan't forget you.

SAUL *(horrified)* What, *me* stay 'ere—*all night*?

CHARLES Why not?

SAUL *Me stay* at *Fal Vale Station all night?*

RICHARD That was the idea.

SAUL See 'ere, 'aven't you never heard tell about this station?

CHARLES No.

RICHARD Never even knew it was here.

PEGGY Well, *what* about it?

SAUL It's—it's '*aunted*, miss.

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