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THE GHOST TRAIN

REVISED

by Arnold Ridley

Adapted by Jocelyn & Nicolas Ridley

SAMUEL FRENCH

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THE GHOST TRAIN was first produced at the St. Martin's Theatre, London, 23rd November 1925 with the following cast:

(in order of their apperance)

SAUL HODGKIN ..... Caleb Porter
RICHARD WINTHROP ..... G. H. Mulcaster
ELSIE WINTHROP ..... Edith Saville
CHARLES MURDOCK ..... Basil Howes
PEGGY MURDOCK ..... 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

CHARACTERS

SAUL HODGKIN – stationmaster at Fal Vale station
RICHARD WINTHROP
ELSIE WINTHROP – his wife
CHARLES MURDOCK – junior partner in Murdoch & Son
PEGGY MURDOCK – his newly-married wife
MISS BOURNE – spinster elderly lady
TEDDIE DEAKIN
JULIA PRICE
JOHN STERLING
JACKSON – a policeman

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in waiting-room at Fal Vale, a wayside station on the South Cornwall Joint Railway.

TIME

Over the course of four hours
ACT ONE ten p.m.
ACT TWO eleven thirty p.m.
ACT THREE twelve thirty a.m.

The year is 1925.

A NOTE ON THE ADAPTATION

The theatre professionals we've invited to read our adaptation of *The Ghost Train* have asked us what it is we've changed. This is exactly what we were hoping for. It was never our intention to re-write or modernise a play that's been a firm favourite for almost a hundred years. The plot is perfect. The characters are credible and engaging. The dramatic structure is a model for well-made plays of the era. Our aim has been simply to refresh some elements of the dialogue to make the piece easier for a modern cast to perform and a modern audience to enjoy.

The Ghost Train is a comedy-thriller and not a farce. It needs to be played with sincerity and – at certain points – with a degree of seriousness. This is the way that the true comedy of the piece can best be enjoyed, and the rather touching drama that runs through parts of the play can be shown in the most affecting light. As importantly, it's only when the characters (and actors) on stage believe in the perils they are facing that the true horror of the night's events can be seen and believed by the audience.

It's not been our wish in any way to 'update' the dialogue, but there are expressions and modes of speech in the original that, being unfamiliar, can appear puzzling or unintentionally comic. These can distract the audience, disconcert the actor and disrupt the flow of the play. Wherever we have felt it helpful to make substitutions, we have tried to be true to the language of the period and to retain the rhythm of the original dialogue.

An issue we have tried to address is the relationship between the sexes. The attitudes of men and women in the 1920s were very different from those of today. This doesn't, of course, justify any attempt to disguise or reform such attitudes but the language in which they're expressed may jar. We have therefore re-phrased certain exchanges to make them more readily acceptable to a modern audience.

Would Arnold Ridley approve of the changes we've made? We're confident he would. He was, above all, a man of the theatre. A play for him was what occurred on the stage and much more than what was written on the page. His maxim was always if it works do it. Copies of *The Ghost Train* in his archive show evidence of any number of tweaks and re-writes made to suit the requirements of a particular production. We hope that our adaptation will bring new life to a play that's given so much enjoyment to so many people for so long.

Jocelyn and Nicolas Ridley

ACT ONE

(SETTING: The waiting-room at Fal Vale, a small railway station in Cornwall. A door leading to the platform is centre stage back. Another door upstage right leads to the ticket office. Below this door is a small ticket window and a wooden barrier. On either side of the door at the back are heavily barred windows looking onto the platform. Downstage left is a fireplace where a smoky fire is on its last legs. A table, with a flask of water and thick glasses and timetables, stands a little to the left of the stage. The only other furniture consists of a few wooden benches and uncomfortable leather-covered chairs.)

(When the curtain rises, the room presents a most depressing scene. The fire is smoking, and a single gas-jet burns faintly, throwing gloomy shadows about the room. 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 into the station. Lines off: "All change!". Doors slam.)

(The sound of another whistle and the train moves slowly out of the station. Through the

windows, lights from the carriages can again be seen as the train leaves the platform.)

*(***SAUL HODGKIN***, the Stationmaster, enters from the door to the platform, turns up the gas and then exits.)*

(Voices are heard and then the door to the platform opens and **RICHARD WINTHROP** *and his wife,* **ELSIE***, enter the waiting room.* **RICHARD** *is a rather bad-tempered looking man of twenty-eight, and* **ELSIE** *a somewhat sulky woman of twenty-five.)*

ELSIE. I suppose this *is* the waiting-room?

RICHARD. It looks like it. Damnably like it.

ELSIE. Just the kind of place you *would* bring me to.

RICHARD. Bring you to? I like that!

ELSIE. It's cold, wet and disagreeable.

RICHARD. It's disagreeable right enough.

ELSIE. And a lot you care.

RICHARD. Hang it all, Elsie. It's not my fault, is it? I'm not managing director of the infernal railway company. It's that young fool's fault, losing his wretched hat and then pulling the blasted communication cord. If it hadn't been for him, we'd have caught the damn connection.

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

RICHARD. I've had plenty of opportunities for swearing already, thank you very much. *(Going to the door to the ticket office and opening it.)* What's in here?

*(***RICHARD** *exits to the ticket office and* **ELSIE** *follows.)*

(The door to the platform is opened again by **SAUL HODGKIN**. **SAUL** *is a short, bearded man of about sixty, dressed in a worn, 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 waiting room. They are a honeymoon couple 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.)* Hey! You! Where you be going? Not that way!

*(***SAUL** *exits by the door to the platform.)*

CHARLES. This looks a cheery place, I don't think.

PEGGY. *(Sitting.)* Never mind, darling.

*(***CHARLES** *moves to* **PEGGY**.*)*

CHARLES. *(Kissing* **PEGGY**.*)* But I do mind. I mean this is our wedding night, isn't it?

PEGGY. Yes…

CHARLES. We don't want to hang about here too long. They'll be wondering what's happened to us if we don't turn up at the hotel.

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

CHARLES. What a joke! No, hang it all. It's not a 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'd be late.

CHARLES. Hang that chap and his wretched hat! Only a fool would stop a train because he'd lost his hat. Damn and blast him!

PEGGY. Steady!

CHARLES. I'm sorry but I'm angry. We only have this one week and then I have to leave you and go abroad. I begrudge every single moment that's wasted.

PEGGY. Let's forget about it, Charlie. Let's just pretend we'll be together always.

CHARLES. I'm sorry, Peggy. I won't grumble any more. Not tonight of all nights. *(Looking round.)* There is one good thing though. Everyone else seems to have cleared off and we're alone. Give me a kiss and I'll smile again.

*(***CHARLES** *and* **PEGGY** *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** *separate quickly.)*

I do beg your pardon, both of you.

CHARLES. That's all right.

MISS BOURNE. *(Turning to* **SAUL**.*)* This is the waiting-room, I suppose?

SAUL. Ah!

*(***RICHARD** *and* **ELSIE** *return from the ticket office.)*

CHARLES. Here are some more of us.

MISS BOURNE. Phew! What a horrible smell of smoke.

CHARLES. *(Looking at the fireplace.)* They do say that where there's smoke there's fire, but it doesn't seem to be borne out here.

SAUL. I'm sure it's a nice fire for the time o' night.

PEGGY. We shall have to make do with it until the next train.

SAUL. I keeps on telling you. There bain't no next train.

CHARLES. What?

SAUL. There bain't no more trains till seven tomorrer morning.

CHARLES. Look here. I simply must get this young lady – my wife – to Truro tonight.

SAUL. Sorry, sir, but you can't.

CHARLES. We'll have to 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 go anywhere tonight, you'll 'ave to walk.

CHARLES. Good Lord! *(To* **PEGGY**.*)* I'm terribly sorry, Pegs. I'm afraid we're in a bit of a mess.

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

RICHARD. Now, look here, porter…

SAUL. 'Scuse me, sir. Stationmaster.

RICHARD. Very well. Look here, stationmaster. Do you really mean we can't get any further tonight?

SAUL. That's what I said.

RICHARD. Then where's the nearest hotel?

SAUL. 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 you must live somewhere?

SAUL. I bicycles to Truro.

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

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

SAUL. *(Moving to the door to the platform, opening it and then closing it again.)* There be another gen'leman outside.

CHARLES. Let's hope he stays there. I'll kick him in the backside if he comes in here.

RICHARD. We certainly have him to thank for our predicament. Him and his wretched hat.

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

(The door to the platform opens and **TEDDIE DEAKIN** *enters, unobserved. He is a dandified figure, complete with eyeglass and a long cigarette holder.)*

RICHARD. He's an imbecile.

CHARLES. Worse than that. He's a…

TEDDIE. Hello.

(They all turn to look at **TEDDIE**.*)*

What a topping little spot. Here we all are, then. What are you doing? Having some sort of argument?

RICHARD. Not at all. We're all in complete agreement on the subject under discussion.

TEDDIE. Are you? How remarkable. So, we're here till morning, eh?

CHARLES. Yes!

TEDDIE. I think it's rather priceless. A little adventure to relieve the tedium of life.

CHARLES. That's all very well for you, sir. It leaves us in a hell of a mess.

TEDDIE. What a pity. 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. I say. You're not miffed, are you?

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

TEDDIE. My good woman…

MISS BOURNE. I'm not a good woman. What I mean to say is: Please do not address me with such unwarranted familiarity.

TEDDIE. I'm sorry. *(Turning to* **RICHARD**.*)* Look here. Be fair. I couldn't help my hat blowing away.

RICHARD. If you lean out of the window, it's what 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. 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 always wanted to pull the communication-cord. Haven't you?

RICHARD. You don't seem to appreciate the facts of the case.

TEDDIE. I hate facts.

RICHARD. Then it will give me great pleasure to provide you with some. First of all, you stick your head out of the window, like the silly ass that you are. And then, when your wretched hat blows off, you pull the communication-cord and stop the train on an incline. As a result, we miss our connection and find ourselves in this God-forsaken hole. And now, instead of expressing regret, you waltz around as though you've done us all a favour.

TEDDIE. I say. You don't seem to like me very much, do you?

RICHARD. If I were to give you my candid opinion…

ELSIE. Oh don't argue, Richard. Surely the situation is bad enough without a quarrel. Whatever you say now won't do any good. Here we are, and here we'll have to stay.

SAUL. Beg pardon, ma'am, but you can't stop here.

ELSIE. What?

RICHARD. Eh?

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

RICHARD. What the devil do you mean?

SAUL. There not being no traffic on the lines, 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 do you expect us to 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 going to prevent us?

SAUL. I be.

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

SAUL. I suppose I shall have to.

RICHARD. Very well. You can start with me.

TEDDIE. I say, this is all perfectly priceless. Seconds out of the ring! Round one! Ting-a-ling!

MISS BOURNE. Be silent, sir

TEDDIE. Sorry.

*(***RICHARD** *moves to* **SAUL**.*)*

SAUL. *(Moving back.)* Now, look 'ere sir. Don't you lay your 'ands on me…

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

CHARLES. Come along now. We're going to stay. Why not make the best of it? We'll see that you don't get into any trouble.

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

CHARLES. That's the spirit. 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.

CHARLES. Let's go and see, Peggy.

*(***SAUL** *exits into the ticket office followed by* **CHARLES** *and* **PEGGY**. **MISS BOURNE** *stands and is about to exit but, as she gets to the door, she remembers her parrot-cage. She returns and snatches it from* **TEDDIE**, *who is examining it. She exits into the ticket office and* **TEDDIE** *follows.)*

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

ELSIE. Not much. You should be in your element, though.

RICHARD. I don't follow you.

ELSIE. Doesn't it give you a splendid chance to shout at everyone? You've already threatened to fight the station master 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?

ELSIE. I thought you'd like it.

RICHARD. Can't we forget what happened and start again?

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. But you must realise how worried I am just now, Parkinson dying suddenly like that.

ELSIE. Surely you can get another works manager.

RICHARD. I expect so, yes. But I need an expert. A man whom I can trust to be loyal and to keep his head in an emergency.

ELSIE. And because you can't find one, you're taking it out on me?

RICHARD. You must remember how exasperating you were being.

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

RICHARD. I didn't say so.

ELSIE. No, but you meant it.

RICHARD. We've only been married a year, Elsie. It seems a terrible shame to go on like this. Why not start afresh?

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

RICHARD. But...

ELSIE. It's no use going over it all again, Richard. We don't get on and we never will. As soon as we get away from here, I'm going back to London and you'll have to arrange for a separation

RICHARD. It seems such a pity.

ELSIE. Did you suggest a separation or did I?

RICHARD. I did, but...

ELSIE. There you are, then.

RICHARD. I was in a temper at the time. We were *both* in a temper.

ELSIE. I beg your pardon. I never lose my temper.

RICHARD. Not openly, I know, but...

ELSIE. Please stick to the truth.

RICHARD. Elsie, be reasonable.

ELSIE. Oh, what's the use of arguing. It's no good, Richard. I see you as some sort of cave-man.

RICHARD. A cave-man?

ELSIE. Yes.

RICHARD. Well, even cave-men have their uses.

ELSIE. I daresay they do, but 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've been all right. In return for your protection, she'd have looked up to you as her hero, and accepted your bullying manner. But it's different with me. I don't need protection, and I won't be bullied. I can look after myself. I've never been afraid of anything in my life.

RICHARD. That's just it, isn't it? You're so damnably independent, Elsie.

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. Elsie, for the last time. Let's start again.

ELSIE. No, Richard. I'm sorry. I've made up my mind.

*(***CHARLES** *enters from the ticket office, bumping into* **ELSIE**.*)*

CHARLES. I beg your pardon.

ELSIE. Not at all.

*(***ELSIE** *exits to the ticket office.)*

CHARLES. What a business this is!

RICHARD. Shocking, isn't it?

CHARLES. I should say so.

RICHARD. Oh, well. We'll just have to put up with it until the morning.

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

RICHARD. We all are. None of this is your fault or mine. That young fool's the only one to blame.

CHARLES. It's really very awkward.

RICHARD. Oh?

CHARLES. Of course, you've been married for some time, haven't you?

RICHARD. Yes.

CHARLES. That certainly makes things easier.

RICHARD. Well, yes.

CHARLES. You see my... my wife and I ... *(Pulling out a handkerchief to blow his nose whereupon a shower of confetti falls onto the floor.)* We've not been married very long. We...

RICHARD. *(Seeing the confetti.)* Oh. Right. Yes. I understand.

CHARLES. Eh? *(Seeing the confetti.)* That's rather torn it, hasn't it? Why, hang it all, I don't need to be ashamed. We... we only got married today. But please. For Heaven's sake, don't tell the others.

RICHARD. Of course not.

CHARLES. It's a wonderful thing being married, isn't it? To have someone to stand by you through thick and thin.

RICHARD. That's something you'll find out for yourself.

CHARLES. I have already. And a good thing, too, because Peggy and I don't have much time.

RICHARD. I thought you said you'd just got married.

CHARLES. Yes, but...

RICHARD. *(Looking round.)* What's the matter? Had a row?

CHARLES. Good Lord, no!

RICHARD. I beg your pardon.

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

RICHARD. Undoubtedly they do.

CHARLES. The thing is...

RICHARD. Yes?

CHARLES. My name's Murdock.

RICHARD. Murdock? Any relation to Murdock & Son?

CHARLES. Yes. I'm the son, worst luck.

RICHARD. Oh. I see.

CHARLES. Our crash 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. Are you? What a coincidence. Anyway, we're done for, all right. Murdock & Son is finished and I'm leaving the country next week.

RICHARD. Alone?

CHARLES. Yes. I couldn't possibly take my wife with me. We just have this little honeymoon together, and then that's it.

RICHARD. Must you go abroad?