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Dramatic Publishing

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

The Inexperienced Ghost

by

MARKLAND J. TAYLOR

Based on the Short Story by

H. G. WELLS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE INEXPERIENCED GHOST)

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THE INEXPERIENCED GHOST

A Play in One Act

For Five Men and Five Women

CHARACTERS

THE INEXPERIENCED GHOST

NIGEL CLAYTON

ESTELLE CLAYTON, his wife

CHRISTOPHER EVANS

MARGARET EVANS, his wife

MICHAEL WISHFORT

ANGELA WISHFORT, his wife

ANDREW SANDERSON

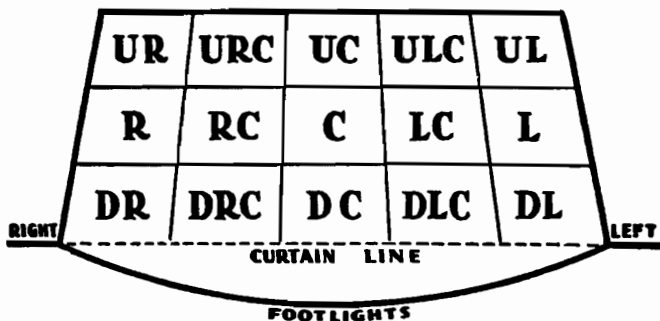
ELOISE SANDERSON, his wife

BURTON, the Claytons' maid

PLACE: *The sitting room of the Clayton home.
England.*

TIME: *The Twentieth Century. The actual period
in which this play is performed is left to
the choice of those performing it--early in
the century (as Wells himself would have
it), or the present day.*

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Fireplace, fireplace accessories (fire irons, kindling, logs, etc.), large easy chairs, sofas, coffee tables, mirror, liquor cabinet with decanter and glasses, bell-pull. Vases of flowers, ash-trays, cigars, cigarettes, lighters placed about room. Other furnishings as desired.

BURTON: Coffee cups, cream and sugar, and other coffee items on tray; waste paper; tray with large coffee pot on it.

The Inexperienced Ghost

SCENE: The comfortable sitting room of the Claytons' large English country home. Grouped around a fireplace are large, easy chairs and sofas, together with a coffee table or two with vases of flowers, ash trays, etc. on them. A mirror hangs over the fireplace. The setting can be as simple or elaborate as you and your resources allow it to be, as long as it suggests the English countryside, comfort, and discreet wealth. Black drapes may be used to facilitate the appearance and disappearance of the ghost.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: BURTON is placing coffee cups, cream and sugar from the tray she is carrying on to a coffee table, preparing for the serving of after-dinner coffee. She has almost finished when NIGEL CLAYTON enters the room.

NIGEL

Oh, here you are, Burton. Mrs. Clayton is showing the guests the west wing now that the alterations are nearly finished, so we won't be serving the coffee for five or ten minutes. Would you mind seeing that it's kept hot until we need it?

BURTON

Certainly, sir.

NIGEL

Thank you, Burton. And while you're in the kitchen would you mind getting some waste paper for me? I see the fire has almost gone out. I'll have to re-light it.

BURTON

All right, sir. Do you need any matches?

NIGEL

No, thank you, Burton.

(BURTON goes out. NIGEL squats down in front of the fire, pokes at it with the fire irons and spreads out the ashes. BURTON returns with the waste paper)

BURTON

Here you are, sir.

NIGEL

Thank you, Burton. Mrs. Clayton will ring for you when she wants to serve the coffee.

BURTON

Very well, sir.

(BURTON goes out again. NIGEL crumples up several sheets of paper and places them in the fireplace, together with a few pieces of kindling and some larger logs. His back is to the room as he does this, and finally relights the fire)

(The GHOST appears as he is doing this. Depending on the set, he can simply walk through the door, or appear as if he walked through the wall. Also, if practicable, a

green spotlight could be played upon him to make it obvious from the start that he is, in fact, a ghost. [The ghost is the ghost of a young cockney, lean, with a little head, scrubby hair, and rather bad ears. His shoulders are narrow, and his trousers baggy and a little frayed at the heels. He looks seedy and unsure of himself.] As he notices NIGEL, whose back is to him, he stops, startled. He stands for a moment or two indecisively wondering what to do. Then, remembering his calling, he gathers what little wits he has about him, raises his arms above him in approved ghost fashion, draws himself up to his full height, and emits a faint, drawn-out "boo-oo-oo." It is not a frightening "boo" by any means; rather, it is sad and piteous)

NIGEL

(Turning around and getting up from the fire at the same time; he is totally unafraid and unsurprised, dusting his hands together as he addresses the ghost)

Boo, yourself. What nonsense. Come to think of it, you don't belong in this place, do you? What the devil are you doing here?

GHOST

(Winces, and looks upset)

Boo-oo-oo.

(Even less frighteningly)

NIGEL

Boo--be hanged. Stop behaving so idiotically. You're not one of the workmen, are you? They all went home hours ago.

GHOST

(Looking very crestfallen)

No, I'm not one of the workmen--I'm a ghost.

(By this time he has dropped his arms and stands there abashed and awkward, the ghost of a weak, silly, aimless young man)

NIGEL

(With ironic disbelief)

Oh, so you're a ghost, are you! Well, that doesn't give you the run of my home, you know. Is there anyone you want to see, or anything of that sort?

GHOST

(In a small, weak voice)

No.

NIGEL

Well, what *are* you doing here?

GHOST

(In a silly, aimless voice)

I'm haunting.

NIGEL

But you haven't any business to.

GHOST

(Defensively)

I'm a ghost, aren't I?

NIGEL

So you keep telling me. But as it happens, I don't believe in ghosts. And in any case, you've no business getting up to such silly tricks in this house. It's a respectable private home; friends of ours often stop here with their children, and, going about

in the careless way you do, some poor little mite could easily come upon you and be scared out of her wits. I suppose you didn't think of that, did you?

GHOST

No, sir. I didn't.

NIGEL

Well, you should have done. Now why don't you just run along home, and we'll forget all about it. I'm willing to believe that you're not a thief and haven't stolen anything, but my wife and I have guests here for the week end, and I don't want them bumping into the likes of you.

GHOST

I'd willingly go if I could, sir. But the fact is, sir, that--somehow--I can't.

NIGEL

What do you mean, you can't?

GHOST

Well, sir; whether you believe in ghosts or not, the fact is I *am* one, and I've forgotten just exactly how to get back to the other side.

NIGEL

Oh, come now, young man. Let's drop all this nonsense about ghosts and haunting. I've already told you I don't believe in ghosts, and you're the last person to make me believe in them.

GHOST

I know it's difficult to believe me, sir. As a matter of fact I didn't believe in ghosts, either, when I was

alive. But it's true, sir, I am a ghost.

(Slight pause, as the GHOST tries to think
of a way to prove his ghostliness)

Come over here, sir, and shake my hand. Maybe
you'll believe I'm a ghost after that.

NIGEL

(Taking the ghost's hand, and dropping it
quickly)

My God, man, you're as cold as death.

GHOST

Exactly, sir. I'm as cold as death. Now do you
believe me?

NIGEL

(He shakes his head and mutters to him-
self, his disbelief obviously shaken)

Well, I don't know--I just don't know.

(Suddenly, to the GHOST)

You haven't any claim on this place, have you? You
weren't murdered here, or anything of that sort,
were you?

GHOST

No, sir, I wasn't. But I thought as it was old and
oak-paneled . . .

NIGEL

That's no excuse. Your coming here was a mistake--
ghost or not.

(Firmly)

Now, young man; if I were you I wouldn't wait for
cockcrow, I'd vanish right away.

GHOST

But I've already told you, sir, I can't.

NIGEL

You can't?

GHOST

No, sir. There's some little thing I've forgotten. I've been hanging about here since midnight last night, hiding in the cupboards of the empty bedrooms and things like that. I'm flurried. I've never come haunting before, and it seems to put me out.

NIGEL

Put you out?

GHOST

Yes, sir. I've tried to disappear several times, and it doesn't come off. There's something or other that's slipped my memory, and I can't get back.
(The GHOST looks very, very sad and helpless)

NIGEL

(After a second or two thinking the matter over)

Come over here and sit down. Then you can tell me all about it. It seems to me you've got yourself into a jolly awkward position, old chap.

GHOST

I won't sit down, if you don't mind, sir. I'd prefer to flit up and down the room if it's all the same to you.

(Throughout the remainder of the scene the GHOST wanders nervously about the room)

NIGEL

Please, make yourself at home.