

THEM/US
(a friendly ghost story)

by James Still

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stilljamesdean@gmail.com

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Representation:

Bruce Ostler, Bret Adams Ltd. 212-765-5630

NOTE ON CASTING: Everything tells a story. In the same spirit in which I wrote the play, characters may/can/should be played by actors of any age, race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever ways the play is cast, it will tell the story of three ghosts in search of an audience.

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We're in a dark, empty theater.

Oh, wait. How to tell a ghost story set in a dark, empty theater -- and doing it without ever having to leave your house.

This play is written for THREE GHOSTS and TWO HUMANS. If you don't have any playful ghosts hanging around, humans can also play the ghosts. However you do it, there are FIVE CHARACTERS.

Be inventive about your set. Be as elaborate or as simple as you wish. Maybe you gather every chair in the house to make theater seats. Maybe the stage is a coffee table. Maybe you have a concession stand (with free drinks).

Or maybe you all simply gather around a big table together and perform the play for each other as a kind of concert.

It would be great if you turned off all the lights. Except for the ghost light. A ghost light is like a campfire for theaters. There should definitely be a ghost light -- every theater has a ghost light... maybe for your production you simply light a candle. Or you use a flashlight. Or a lamp. The important thing is that you create atmosphere. This is a (friendly) ghost story after all.

GHOST 1

(official and playful)

Good evening, theatergoers, and thank you for coming to see our play. Due to unforeseen circumstances, none of the actors scheduled to appear in the play will be appearing in the play. Not a one of 'em.

GHOST 2

How many times are you going to say all that? Night after night -- it's getting old.

GHOST 1

Fine. I'm just trying to lighten things up. It's no fun being a ghost who hangs out in a theater when there's no one coming to the theater. Who can we make mischief with?

GHOST 2

Each other?

GHOST 1

It's not the same.

GHOST 2

Then it's an existential crisis.

GHOST 1

What does that even mean?

GHOST 2

It's like a midlife crisis without the red sports car.

GHOST 3

Are people ever going to come back? Will it ever be like it used to be -- all those humans sitting close to one another in the dark, breathing in and out as one tender creature while a story unfolds in front of them on a stage?

(...)

GHOST 3 (CONT'D)

I miss them.

GHOST 1

Who?

GHOST 3

Them. The audience. I miss the audience.

GHOST 2

What about the actors?

GHOST 3

I miss them too. But the actors can do a play whether there's an audience or not. But how can the audience be the audience if there's not a place where they can gather, if there's not a play for them to see...

GHOST 2

We could do a play!

GHOST 3

But there isn't an audience!

GHOST 2

(broad and joyful)

Prithee see there! / Behold! look!

GHOST 3

I'm in no mood for Shakespeare.

GHOST 2

Behold! look!

GHOST 3

I told you --

GHOST 2

Look!

GHOST 3

Where?

GHOST 2

There! See?

GHOST 1

No. You do bend your eye on vacancy.

GHOST 2

Is it some god, some angel, or some devil?

GHOST 3

It is nothing!

GHOST 2

Oh but the spirit that I have seen / May be a dev'l , and the dev'l hath power
/ To assume a pleasing shape.

GHOST 3

Stop it, both of you. There's no shape, there's nothing there! There are no
actors, there is no audience, and there is no theater. We're closed,
remember?

GHOST 1

Shall we throw a pity party with you as the guest of honor?

GHOST 3

This is why I don't like hanging around the two of you, you drive me freakin' crazy! You always want to make drama. Here's an idea: try being regular ol' ghosts -- the kind who haunt the theater! Let's just do what we usually do and float around like we don't have anything better to do.

(...)

GHOST 1

We could pretend there's an audience.

GHOST 2

I love to pretend!

GHOST 3 is unconvinced.

GHOST 2 (CONT'D)

Come on, it'll be fun.

GHOST 1 AND GHOST 2 throw themselves into the game, maybe eating popcorn too:

GHOST 1

Look at that woman on the far side in the cheap seats who keeps dabbing her eyes.

GHOST 2

Maybe she just broke up with someone she no longer loves.

GHOST 1

Or maybe they broke up with HER.

GHOST 2

Do you see the those two men in the third row kissing?

GHOST 1

Get a room! Jeez.

GHOST 2

It's kind of sweet.

GHOST 1

Oh look! That man over by you -- him -- the one who's sleeping. Blow in his ear! Do it!

GHOST 2 blows in an imaginary man's ear.

GHOST 1

His wife just elbowed him and he's awake again.

GHOST 2

For now.

GHOST 1

Warning in Row J -- left-middle. I see a phone! And he's -- he's checking football scores? Horror! Oh my god! Do something!

GHOST 2

What shall I do? I don't know what to do!

GHOST 1

Turn off his phone! Smash it to smithereens!

GHOST 3

Are the two of you quite finished?

GHOST 2

With what?

GHOST 3

With harassing the audience!

GHOST 1

It's hardly harassment if they aren't really here. Gee. It's all pretend, you know. There is no audience.

GHOST 2

It's just a game.

GHOST 3

Wait. Hello? Prithee see there! / Behold! look!

GHOST 2

We tried that already and you were the one who shot it down.

GHOST 3

(whispering loudly)

No! Look!

The THREE GHOSTS see TWO HUMANS sitting in the very back row in the shadows.

GHOST 1
(whispering)

What are they?

GHOST 3
(whispering)

Humans.

GHOST 2
(whispering)

No, I know. But what are they doing here?

GHOST 3

Maybe they're lost.

GHOST 1

But why are they sitting all the way in the back row?

GHOST 2

Latecomers? Parking around here can be a real hassle.

GHOST 3

Maybe they're the audience.

GHOST 2

An audience of two?

GHOST 3

It's two more than we've had for months.

GHOST 2

True.

GHOST 1

But how do we know they're not ghosts?

GHOST 2

Because in this play WE'RE the ghosts.

GHOST 3

They must be the audience.

GHOST 1

Maybe they're the GHOST of the audience.

The THREE GHOSTS think it over.

GHOST 3

Naaah. They aren't ghosts. We're the ghosts and they're the audience.

GHOST 2

Which means they've come to see a play. Let's put on a play!

GHOST 3

But we're not actors, we're ghosts.

GHOST 2

(insulted)

Who are you not calling an actor? I was an actor before I was a ghost!

GHOST 1

(topping)

Well I once played a ghost on TV.

GHOST 2

(not to be outdone)

And I once played the ghost of an actor on TV.

GHOST 3

What? Focus! Please. We need to focus.

GHOST 2

They're looking at us!

GHOST 3

Act natural.

GHOST 1

We're ghosts, we only know how to be SUPER-natural.

GHOST 3

No! I know. Just -- just dial it back.

GHOST 2

Dial it back??? Is that a note??? And what's the point of being a ghost if I don't get to be supernatural?

GHOST 1

(brilliant idea)

Let's have a sword fight!

GHOST 2

I love sword fights!

GHOST 3

What? No!

GHOST 2

If they're the audience then they're going to want a show.

GHOST 3

There is no show! The theater is closed.

Buzzkill.

AUDIENCE 1

I'm so confused. Is this a play about ghosts?

AUDIENCE 2

No, honey, there are some ghosts here, but I think they live here, they must haunt the place.

AUDIENCE 1

Does that make them good ghosts or bad ghosts?

AUDIENCE 2

They seem friendly enough.

AUDIENCE 1

I don't think I like this play.

AUDIENCE 2

It's unusual, give it a chance. Besides, it's better than nothing so let's just sit here awhile longer and see what happens.

AUDIENCE 1

But what if they really are ghosts -- the bad kind -- the kind that turns you into ashes or something.

AUDIENCE 2

I don't think ghosts do that.

AUDIENCE 1

I don't even think I believe in ghosts. I think this is the play.

AUDIENCE 2

Maybe WE'RE the play and they're the audience.

(...)

Maybe we're all ghosts. For now.

GHOST 3
Hello?

AUDIENCE 2
What? Are you talking to us?

GHOST 3
Ah, so you CAN hear me.

AUDIENCE 2
Yes, we've heard everything you've said.

AUDIENCE 1
I'm not sure I understand your play but, you know -- it's something.

GHOST 1
What are you doing here?

AUDIENCE 1
What are YOU doing here?

GHOST 1
I asked first!

AUDIENCE 1
We miss the theater.

GHOST 2
So do we!

AUDIENCE 2
We miss coming to the theater, we didn't know how much we missed coming to the theater until we couldn't come to the theater. Everything closed down.

GHOST 3
What do you miss most?

AUDIENCE 1
I miss laughing.

AUDIENCE 2
I miss crying.

AUDIENCE 1
We've been watching plays at home on our computers and phones -- but it doesn't feel the same. Don't get me wrong -- it's convenient and sometimes
(MORE)

AUDIENCE 1 (CONT'D)

it's nice to watch a play in your PJs... but... sometimes you just want to get up off of your couch, you know?

AUDIENCE 2

I miss feeling like I'm in on it, that I'm part of something, part of something that will never be the same twice, part of something where my attention and reactions MATTER, something that brings people together.

AUDIENCE 1

I miss the actors, I miss seeing them in person. I miss seeing them sweat because they're working so hard, I miss feeling like they're doing the play just for me.

AUDIENCE 2

The plays! I miss the plays, I miss the words, I miss that it's LIVE which means I miss the mistakes that happen -- the forgotten line, the late entrance, the missed light cue, the scenery that misbehaves at the worst possible time... All of those mistakes that are so hopelessly -- human, you know?

(...)

Going to the theater makes me feel human, achingly human. I miss that.

GHOST 3

So you broke into the theater just so you could sit in the audience again?

AUDIENCE 1

I told him we were asking for trouble.

AUDIENCE 2

We didn't break in. There was a door --

AUDIENCE 1

It seemed like some kind of portal --

AUDIENCE 2

It was just an open door. We won't stay long. We just wanted to -- be here for a little while. We promise not to stay long.

GHOST 2

Maybe you want to go on stage? You could be the actors and put on a play! We could all put on a play together!

AUDIENCE 2

No thanks. We're not actors. We're the audience. We just love being the audience.

GHOST 3

Right.

AUDIENCE 1

You can sit with us if you want.

The THREE GHOSTS sit in scattered theater seats. Now all five of them are the audience.

GHOST 1

(official and playful)

Good evening, theatergoers, and thank you for coming to see our play. Due to unforeseen circumstances, none of the actors scheduled to appear in the play will be appearing in the play. Not a one of 'em. There is no play. The theater is closed.

AUDIENCE 2 tries to cover their emotion.

GHOST 3

Are you alright? Are you crying?

AUDIENCE 2

We should probably go.

GHOST 2

But you just got here.

GHOST 1

Stay a little while longer. Please?

GHOST 3

It's nice having an audience here again.

AUDIENCE 2

It's nice being an audience again.

The five of them sit in silence, full of feelings for everything they miss.

AUDIENCE 1

What's that light called -- the one on stage there.

GHOST 2

Oh that's a ghost light. It's a tradition, every theater has one.

AUDIENCE 1

So you really are ghosts?

GHOST 3

(gently)

Shhhh. Let's just sit together for awhile.

(...)

AUDIENCE 1

Are theaters ever going to open up again?

GHOST 3

Yes.

AUDIENCE 2

When?

No one answers, no one knows.

In silence, this last part of the play is about longing. Sometimes longing takes a long time. Sit together as long as you need to, as long as you want.

When the play is over, make a meal and celebrate being together.

And maybe you can talk about the plays and productions and theater experiences that you've loved (or hated) the most. Which ones made you feel achingly human?

Leave the ghost light on.