

HUGHES and MINCKS: Ghost Detectives
Ghost Writer- (or, ([Don't fear](#)) [the Reader](#), or, Death of
the Author,)

Scene 1

HUGHES AND MINCKS: GHOST DETECTIVES OFFICE, MID-AFTERNOON

[SFX KEYBOARD CLACKING AWAY, A ROLLER CHAIR ROLLING BACK
AND FORWARD, GENERAL BOREDOM]

HUGHES sighs, MINCKS ignores them.

HUGHES sighs again, MINCKS gives an irritated grumble.

HUGHES sighs once more

MINCKS (holding back mild irritation)
Something on your mind there, bud?

HUGHES
Well, I've been thinking..

MINCKS
What a dangerous pastime...

HUGHES (ignoring their
remark)
When I imagined being a Ghost
Detective, I thought there would
be less-

MINCKS
-Paperwork?

HUGHES
Yes. And more-

MINCKS
-Ghost Detecting?

HUGHES
Well, naturally. Maybe it might
have been a bit more-

MINCKS
-Glamorous?

HUGHES

Stop that. But, yes. I thought there might be more... cases?

MINCKS (calmly and sagely)

Ay, there's the rub. Well kid, here's the thing. Our job is more of a waiting game than anything else. Ghosts won't just land in your lap like... like... things that land in your lap. [to themselves] Cats, maybe? [back to Hughes] Anyway, you have to have patience, a watched pot never boils. Find the patience within yourself to-

[SFX TELEPHONE RINGS]

MINCKS (suddenly shrieking with a hint of desperation)

Answer that phone!

HUGHES

Hello, Hughes and Mincks, Ghost Detectives, Hughes speaking! How can I help you today?

[SFX HIGH PITCHED CHATTER FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PHONE]

HUGHES

Yes, yes of course, Sir. Sir, please calm down. Sir, please! We'll be over as soon as we can. What was your address again?

[MORE HIGH PITCHED CHATTER]

HUGHES

Okay, Mr Marlowe, we shouldn't be more than half an hour. S-see you soon!

[HANGS UP]

HUGHES

Ha! Patience! Who needs it when you've got a good old-fashioned coincidence?

MINCKS

First of all, that was creepy. Can I reinforce that fact? That whole thing was very creepy. Second of all, what do we have this time? Third, can I meet you there? I need to pick up some dry cleaning.

CUT TO: NEXT SCENE

Scene 2

OUTSIDE, IN THE STREET, VERY BUSY STREET SOUNDS. MINCKS IS WALKING ALONE.

MINCKS (under their breath)

I can't believe I lost the little ticket! They're holding my best jacket hostage. "I can't give you back your clothing without a ticket... little blue piece of paper..." Yeah! I know what it looks like, you handed it to me! Paper is so loseable-

As Mincks steps onto the road, a squeal of tyres is heard, a thump. A moment of silence. Mincks draws in a very sudden breath, as if breathing after holding their breath for a long time, patting themselves down.

MINCKS (in shock)

I'm- Oh! I'm ok? I'm... no, I'm definitely ok. Legs, check. Toes, I can feel em. Arms, head, vision, yeah. Ok. Wow.

Someone gives a blood-curdling scream

MINCKS

No, No, I'm... fine! I-

The car speeds off into the distance

MINCKS

I'm- well, that was rude... and very irresponsible. I swear, people nowadays. Well, I'm fine, thanks for your concern(!)

Mincks dusts herself off, making their way to the client's flat

MINCKS

Well, today is not my day, is it?

Scene 3

OUTSIDE APARTMENT MODERATELY BUSY STREET

HUGHES

Mincks! Did you not get your dry cleaning? Where were you?

MINCKS

I tried! But they wouldn't let me away without the little... grrr... the little paper thing.

HUGHES

-The ticket?

MINCKS

Yeah! That little piece of paper!

HUGHES

Well, they are so easily losable...

MINCKS

That's what I said... Should have said... Imagined in my head after it had already happened.

HUGHES

Sure... well, you're here now

MINCKS

Yeah! And I nearly made more work for the both of us.

HUGHES

Wait. What?

MINCKS

Oh no, just an irresponsible driver, he didn't even hit me, but it was a close call.

HUGHES

God. People nowadays.

MINCKS

I know right? Anyway, let's see,
what do we have here?

HUGHES

Why don't we push the button and
see, eh?

[SFX DOORBELL DING DONG]

Door creaks open slightly, a voice comes from within

MR MARLOWE

Hello, how can I help you?

MINCKS

Mr Marlowe? We're Hughes and
Mincks, you requested our services
earlier today? We're here to see
about your... erm... pest issue?

MR MARLOWE

Pest issue...? Oh yes! I'm so sorry.
Do come in, please, please. You
could not have arrived at a better
time!

MINCKS (under their
breath)

Don't you dare say a word about
coincidence.

SHABBY APARTMENT, THE OCCASIONALLY NOISE OF WIND BLOWING,
FLOORBOARDS CREAKING UNDERFOOT, VOICES ECHO SLIGHTLY

MR MARLOWE IS A FAIRLY WELL SPOKEN
YOUNG MAN, SLIGHTLY FLUSTERED AT
ANY GIVEN POINT IN TIME.

MR MARLOWE

Just up here, I spotted him in my
studio apartment in the attic.
It's far from an elaborate affair
and I've barely just moved in. I
apologise for the boxes and
suitcases, it's never easy,
unpacking, is it?

HUGHES

Mr Marlowe, what exactly did you see?

[SFX ANOTHER HEAVY DOOR CREAKING OPEN] (sorry Caro, these are a lot of instructions)

MR MARLOWE

Well, it might be easier if you saw for yourself.

Door opens to absolute mayhem. Pens are scattering across the floor, flying through the air, notebooks are landing with heavy thuds on the floor. Sobbing and wailing coming from within the room.

MINCKS

What on earth is this?

MR MARLOWE

Oh Mincks! I fear that this beast isn't of Earth at all.. Isn't it terrifying? It started about a week ago with a book or two, I thought I was going positively mad! I nearly got impaled last night with my own Parker pen!

HUGHES

Well, that's just shoddy penmanship.

MINCKS

Hughes! Now is really not the time to making puns! Take a leaf out of my book. Can you not see that the rest of us have taken the opportunity to be more pen-sive? Oh. Oh no.

HUGHES

Mr Marlowe? Some exposition, please?

MR MARLOWE

Well, ah, yes. I know that I failed to mention this, but it appears that each time I bring a guest, or... erm... two I suppose, over to my apartment, they begin

to engage in some rather startling
wordplay.

MINCKS

Puns. They speak in puns. Well
isn't that pun-derful? Absolutely
pun-believable! Sophs, take notes!

HUGHES

I forgot my pen in the office!

MINCKS

No bother, just try to catch one
of the fifty pens that are
threatening to stab us both. At
this rate, this ghost will have
red in his ledger!

HUGHES

I don't even think that being...
impaled by a stray ballpoint could
be more pen-ful than these puns.

MINCKS

Pen puns? Did you hear that,
Hughes? Pen puns!

MR MARLOWE

I'm really sorry about this, I've
tried everything from priests,
promises and prayers. Will you
help me, please?

MINCKS

Of course, this seems like a
standard haunting, if maybe a bit
spine-chilling. I mean, it's not
as if we were fully booked.
Although, I'm far from happy with
the series of unfortunate events
regarding this ghost's effect.

HUGHES

Don't worry, we'll get to the
bottom of this, book-mark my
words. Now, have you ever actually
seen this ghost, beyond this
ink-redible stationary storm?

MR MARLOWE

Well, when he's being less...
irrational, sometimes I'll see him
sitting at the desk, but he always
seems so upset, I never quite know
what to do!

HUGHES

Well, a neurotic ghostly presence
with a penchant for stationery and
queasy quips. That's one for the
books!

MINCKS

I have to admit, that is quite a
novel concept.

MR MARLOWE

Erm... would you like me to try and
pacify him? He might listen to me,
I almost feel like we've built up
a bit of an unspoken rapport since
I've moved in. Perhaps we might be
able to reason with him?

MINCKS (pained)

If you would, please. It is
ink-possible to function like
this.

HUGHES (under their

breath)

God, they're getting worse.

MR MARLOWE

Okay, okay. [clears throat] Dear
incorporeal sir, as you may know,
this is my apartment, I pay rent,
and you do not, and I'm not
entirely sure why you are here,
but I think we need erm...

HUGHES (to MINCKS)

Why does it sound like he is
dictating a letter? Is this how
you're supposed to address ghosts?
Did I miss the memo? Was there a
ghost-hunting-community e-mail
that I didn't get?

MINCKS

No, I think he's just like that.

MR MARLOWE (continued)

I think that perhaps you would like to come out to us and I don't know... talk, talk about your feelings?

All the clatter and mayhem subsides. There is a stunned silence. Slowly the sound of wailing gets louder and louder. Everyone is slightly astounded that that worked.

GHOST

What do you want?

MR MARLOWE (stuttering)

Hello? Sir? Sorry to bother you. These two kind folks have a few questions for you.

HAROLD IS A WRITER WHO HAS DIED FROM CHOKING ON THE TOP OF HIS PEN WHILST HE WAS CHEWING ON IT. MIGHT HAVE A RASPY VOICE, VERY "WOE IS ME," MELODRAMATIC

HAROLD

Questions! Always with the questions! And you know what, they never ask, "How are you, Harold?" "How are you feeling?" "Have you any ideas or inspiration, goals or aspirations?" No. It's always "Where's my manuscript, Harold? I have a deadline to meet," or "Why did you write it like that? That's not what I told you, you incompetent fool!" Questions and demands! That's all I get! Questions and demands! It doesn't stop, even when you've shuffled off this mortal coil!

HUGHES

Well, that certainly explains the puns, it's the death of the author!

HAROLD wails again.

HAROLD

Yes! The great Harold Shelley!
Bested by his own pen lid, choked!
Struck down in his prime! Slain by
his own hubris and
absentmindedness, oh woe!

HUGHES

I guess the pen really is mightier
than the sword...

MINCKS

Harold Shelley? Are you Harold
Shelley, the writer?

HAROLD

Yes! Harold Shelley, ghostwriter
to the stars!

HUGHES (stifling a

laugh)
Ghostwriter to Writer ghost,
that's practically a promotion!

MINCKS

Harold, I'm afraid to break this
to you, but it appears that you
are stuck in a horrible state
between life and death. A... ghostly
realm as it were.

HAROLD

How would you know? What are you,
some kind of ghost experts? Should
you not have some form of
equipment?

MINCKS

Well, you say that, but yes, my
associate and I run an agency
called Hughes and Mincks: Ghost
Detectives. We were called out by
the current resident of this
apartment to investigate... you, and
to ease your write of passage.

HUGHES

And we did have one of those...
ghosty-beeper-detection-boys but
we got it off the internet and it

never stopped beeping! That's the danger of online shopping, I suppose, just something to note.

HAROLD

"The current resident?" I'm the only current resident worth his salt around here! This is my apartment, how dare you! These are my pens,

Pen scatters across the floor

My books!

Book thuds

And my whiskey!

Bottle smashes

How very very dare you think that this scoundrel could ever inhabit my home! It was never empty!

Harold wails again

MINCKS

Harold, I suppose we should just get to the (ball)point. The longer you stay in this realm, the more painful it will become. Time will come and go, your loved ones will get older and move on. You'll lose all sense of your humanity. Mortality will become a distant concept. I'm sorry Harold, but I'm afraid you're going to have to give up the ghost.

HAROLD

Do you mean I'm trapped here? Once trapped in life, now I lie trapped in death as well. What a terrible state of affairs! I suppose you are right, but how am I meant to move on? I don't have the first clue about all this ghostly-business. When I was alive, I wasn't even sure that there was

anything after death, I was a
stone-cold skeptic!

HUGHES

And now you're just stone-cold.

MINCKS

Don't worry, that's what we're
here for, Harold. We need to find
what is tying you here. Can you
think of any wrongs you need to
write? Pen-geance to deal? Any
Road Not Taken? Any grievance left
un-Eyre'd? Oh, a Jane Eyre
reference, that one's good!

HAROLD

Oh, I'm not sure, it's all been so
much, dying has really scrambled
my brain, well, I suppose it's not
my brain anymore, is it?

HUGHES

Harold, please, now is not the
time to get all philosophical
about the logistics of ghosts and
consciousness. Stick to the
script.

MR MARLOWE LIFTS UP A MANUSCRIPT AND STARTS
TO FLICK THROUGH THE PAGES

MR MARLOWE

Harold, what about this? This
doesn't look like anything else
you've written.

HAROLD

Ah, yes! My joke book!

HUGHES, MINCKS AND MR
MARLOWE (astounded)
Your what?

HAROLD

My joke book! As a child, I used
to adore those joke books that you
got from school book fairs and
charity shops. I always wanted to
write my own, but it turns out

that there really isn't any way to make money from joke books. So, instead I was shoe-horned into ghostwriting "autobiographies" for the moderately rich and vaguely famous. That's no way to live. There's neither the reward nor the notability that I had dreamt of. To be quite honest, I'm surprised you've heard of me, Mincks.

MINCKS (defensive)

I've lived a very... interesting life. I've just been... surveying my options.

HUGHES

Maybe start thinking about that once you've paid off that baguette you had for your lunch, Mincks.

MANUSCRIPT SNAPS CLOSED WITH A THUD

MR MARLOWE

Could that be what is keeping him here? Is this joke book his unfinished business?

MINCKS

I suppose it must be! Oh! It appears that his effect is wearing off already. Good job, team! All we needed to do was drop a print- Oh, it must be a more gradual process than I thought. But, yes. That should do the trick. I must admit, this pun thing really has caused a plot of bother.

HUGHES

I'm relieved that we got to the end of this. I thought that all these puns were going to be the death of us. I was pretty sure that we were going to be Dewey Deci-mated! Anyway, we could send this off to a publisher, if you like, then let you know how that goes?

MR MARLOWE (gaining
new-found courage)
I could do that for him. I feel
that this is partly my fault, I'm
sorry for moving into your home,
Mr Shelley. It would be my honour
to help you move on. A... last
write, as it were.

MINCKS
What do you think, Harold? Would
you be happy enough to let Mr
Marlowe send your joke book?

HAROLD
I suppose I don't entirely have
any other choice, do I? Oh, go on
then. Mr Marlowe, I would be more
than happy for you to fulfil this..
unfinished business... Last
request? on my behalf. And to hell
with my last publisher! He was a
scoundrel, a truly ghastly man. If
it weren't for him, I wouldn't be
in this position in the first
place. Well, I might have still
ended up dead, death by pen cap is
a fate that doesn't entirely come
with much forewarning-

MR MARLOWE
-Please, my name is Chris, Chris
Marlowe.

Awkward silence

HUGHES
Oh, I'm not even sure you can
shake hands with a ghost, can you?

MINCKS
The rules of ghostery-

HUGHES
-Paranormal occurrences-

MINCKS
-tend to be a bit slapdash than
what you might think, Chris.

HUGHES

Well, it seems like you folks have this covered. We should really bounce. Make sure to let us know how it goes. Oh and leave us a review online will you? And remember folks, don't fear the reader!

MINCKS

Hughes?

HUGHES

Mincks?

MINCKS

You're just beating a dead horse now. Get out.

HUGHES

Okay, yeah, fair enough.

SCENE 4. BACK AT THE OFFICE

MINCKS

Hey Hughes, I had some leftover biscuits from last night, do you want one?

HUGHES

Oh you know that I'll never pass up an opportunity for free food, pass one over.

MINCKS

Here, there's two left over anyway, we'll split them. Sorry, I unfortunately used up all the gravy last night, so you'll have to eat them dry, I'm afraid.

HUGHES

Um... Mincks?

Mincks gives a "uh huh?" noise with a mouth full of biscuit

HUGHES

Mincks, I thought you said you had biscuits. This appears to be some kind of scone.

MINCKS

Oh no no no, my young, naive,
innocent colleague. My
gummy-gumshoe, note-taking
partner. The youthful detective
that I have so kindly taken under
my wise, experienced wing-

HUGHES

Mincks, you're monologuing again.

MINCKS

Thank you. My point is that these
wondrous flaky backbones of a good
gravy-based meal are not mere
"scones"

HUGHES

Well, then, what do you call
normal biscuits?

MINCKS

Well, cookies, of course.

HUGHES

Why, because you "cook" them? Very
inventive.

MINCKS

Yes, shut up. Anyway, this morning
I bear more than simply these
crumbly disks of wonder.

[SFX A BOOK THUMPING ONTO A DESK]

HUGHES

Is that...

MINCKS

Yes! Do you remember that case
from about 3 months ago with the
ghost writer who got reported by
his living flatmate, but it turns
out that the true haunting was the
friendship they made along the
way?

HUGHES

That analogy barely makes sense,
but yes, yes I do.

MINCKS

Well... This was sitting outside the office this morning when I came in. From the look of it, it seems to be the manuscript of this alleged joke book that they had agreed to work on together. It must have been sitting there a while before I came in. I'm surprised you didn't notice it when you came in.

HUGHES

Uh huh... must have missed it. So, let's see this famous manuscript. "Harold Jenkins' Haunted Hilarity" well... maybe that could have been workshopped a little further..

HUGHES FLICKS THROUGH PAGES

Oh, oh I really like this one.

MINCKS

Which one?

HUGHES CLEARS THEIR THROAT, DRAMATICALLY

HUGHES

What do you call a ghostly bank robbery?

MINCKS

I don't know, what do you call a ghostly bank robbery?

HUGHES

A Polter-heist!

HUGHES AND MINCKS LAUGHS, BECAUSE OBVIOUSLY THIS JOKE IS HILARIOUS.

MINCKS

What about this one?

HUGHES

Hmmm?

MINCKS

What did the ghost say to her girlfriend?

HUGHES

I don't know, what did she say?

MINCKS

"You're boo-tiful!"

HUGHES (laughing)

Oh god, has a publisher actually picked this up?

MINCKS

Apparently so! According to the letter, Harold found a publisher about a week ago and the books should be printed sometime within the next year.

HUGHES

Oh that's nice for him, hopefully then he can move on- wait, what? There was a letter?

MINCKS

Yeah, Mr Marlowe, I mean Chris, wrote us a letter, it was taped to the front page. It's very short, just telling us the news, wishing us the best with the agency, saying that he and Harold are getting along like a house on fire, nice stuff like that.

HUGHES

Who would have thought it? A ghost and a living person, putting their differences aside and... writing a joke book together. I imagine that Chris might miss Harold when he finally moves on, but I suppose that moving on is better than the other alternative, isn't it?

MINCKS

Yes, it is. Their circumstances are very endearing, and yet, you can't even accept that these aren't scones!

HUGHES

So this is the thing that makes us
snap? Biscuits? After the ghosts,
ghouls and general madness we see
on a near-daily basis? It's these?

MINCKS (chuckling)

Oh I know Hughes, you just
couldn't write it!

END.