HUGHES and MINCKS: Ghost Detectives

Ghost Writer- (or, (<u>Don't fear</u>) the <u>Reader</u>, 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

-Glamourous?

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?

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

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.

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?

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)
Ghostwrite

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 ghosty-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.

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.

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.