

William & James -

A Ghost Story

by
Gina R. Tracy

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

© Copyright 2021 by Gina Russell Tracy

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to genekato@nextstagepress.com

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

LOVE NEVER DIES

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

CHARACTERS

William Gillette, 46, Playwright and Actor
James O’Neill, 51, Matinee Idol

Time

11:00pm on November 8th, 1899

Place

The Players, A Certain Club on Gramercy Park,
a decade after its opening by Edwin Booth.

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

ACT 1

Lights slowly rise on two chairs and side tables on either side of a large mantelpiece upstage center; a third sits down left with simple Christmas decorations along with a decanter and glasses on its table, while a steamer trunk stands down right with props and costumes. We hear the outer door open onto an early winter's night in the city as a tall, slender figure enters, removing items from within his voluminous coat and placing them and it on the table and coat rack at the entrance.

WILLIAM. Timepiece. Scarf. Gloves. Pipe. Matches. Handkerchief, Paper. Pen. Cane. Flask. Violin. Bow. Rosin. Tarot Cards. Compass. Magnifying Glass. Evidence! *(He pulls out a program and smooths it to read.)* November sixth... 1899. The Garrick Theatre. Four Acts. I am tired. Someday, two act plays. Sherlock, my friend, I shall bid you goodnight as I settle in with drink in hand awaiting the notices which shall determine my fate as playwright, actor, detective and solver of crimes. Pity... the Club is empty. Perhaps they all await my appearance at the Stage Door for a glimpse of swagger, the toss of a scarf, a tip of the hat, a puff from my pipe into the chill night air. David Garrick and Richard Mansfield, I imagine you here with me, with your two legendary Richard the Thirds. Master Booth, a toast: a life in the theatre! I owe you all. I shall not be known for "Hamlet"; I leave that legacy to you and your command of Will Shakespeare's towering works. Yet I am forever indebted to you, Edwin, for forming this Club, this ode to our profession, this gathering place of souls, this temple, this portal where time is invisible. Men who have gained and lost fortunes come back here for you to welcome us home. Shakespeare was surely its founding

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

father, be he not in the flesh. Someday I will read all his Sonnets; I owe him that. There are those who believe we owe the dead nothing; the madman believes we owe the dead all. Had I known you would leave us so unexpectedly, I should have lingered longer, basking in your stories of the theatre... but it was not to be. Thus I find myself here, awaiting notices which secure my future or erase my past. The power of the pen, dear man: it's mightier than an ambush of bloodthirsty rebels. I longed to be a writer – to have voice. Do you know why I gave credit to Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle at tonight's opening of "Sherlock Holmes"? True: I wrote the play. False: I interpreted. He gave it birth; I but raised the child as my own. I am not the surgeon, but rather the patient. And yet the stage was mine: every gesture, every detail, mine. The ladies swooned; the gentlemen contemplated my logic. Would they be criminal, or victim? As Sir Conan Doyle once said, "The most dangerous condition for a man or a nation is when his intellectual side is more developed than his spiritual." Is that not exactly the condition of the world today? "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow..." So many lines, etched deep into my brain. Sitting here, alone... and yet not alone, am I? Surrounded by my loves. A dozen years, my Helen. You would have loved my performance tonight. I was silent when I felt you watching. I wanted to walk off the stage and hold you in my arms, kiss your tiny hands. My lines were etched in my head, and yet there you were. I forged ahead. They loved me, didn't they, love? I moved them in some spiritual way. I don't really understand it myself at times. In the darkness we connect... it's a mystery. I think that I shall spend my life unraveling the great mysteries. Foremost among them: why were you taken from me? What did I do wrong? Had I not been so stubborn, would you have seen a doctor in that summer before? Why didn't I listen to you? Was it my wealth? My upbringing? My ego? I gave speeches... I didn't listen. I will try to listen more... though too late for you, my love. I lost you. Perhaps you will attend my next performance. See if I do better. There has got to be a better approach, a better style of acting than this melodramatic knowing all the answers, sounding witty, being clever... I need to slow down. Build my castle one stone at a time. I need to study people... figure them out. I have been looking only at the

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

superficial: the costumes, the props. It's time to be a true detective, my dear, is it not? I shall never find another... you. Over eleven years, and no one comes remotely near. They say I should get a cat, like Gus, or Sir Henry. Maybe two... maybe three. I will think on that. (*The offstage door opens and a stocky man strides briskly in, hanging his hat and coat by the entrance.*)

JAMES. William? I do hope that I am not intruding. I came by the stage door, but they would not permit me to pass. The coachman waited – I told him you would be joining us and he said he'd heard all about you, but never seen you in performance. I fear I wasn't terribly persuasive. He said that Christmas was coming and he wasn't sure if his horses would survive the winter. He sent his regrets – and took a rather handsome couple uptown, I noted. I must admit that carriages have been remarkably few and far between this evening. I walked the fifteen blocks down Broadway to Madison Square Gardens, and if it wasn't for the snow and ice across the path I should have arrived on time. Looks like you're closing the place down here... but I did make it.

WILLIAM. Never worry, James: the gaslights are on into the wee hours of the morning. It is customary for me to sleep all day after an opening night, but I am truly honored to see that you made the trip. I have missed you, my friend. The club looks festive, no? Soon we shall see a new century; hard to imagine, is it not, after the century we leave behind? Good riddance! Have a drink, and let us begin our holiday tradition!

JAMES. Let me make the toast: I knew that you would start with me - age before beauty, and all that – so I had something prepared: I straightaway must congratulate you, my dear boy, on your spectacular special effects! I heard many gasps from the front row! You succeeded magnificently in scaring them, and I kept my smelling salts close at hand in case we lost one or two!

WILLIAM. Fine line! Had I but left it to fate, I am quite certain that the lights, would have gone out altogether. You liked it – that is everything! I don't intend to do this role forever! Perhaps a year – perhaps two – then on to Shakespeare, quite? Did you bring your diary? You should record tonight's... adventures!

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

JAMES. I would like your autograph – for Gene. I brought the book. He fancies himself a poet... his mother fancies him a priest.

WILLIAM. Your wife is back at the hotel?

JAMES. Yes. I have a stage hand with her. She doesn't... deal well with all the dramatics. It's strange: she fell in love with an actor... but she didn't dream of what that would mean. She fancied me the Prince I played, not the Irish gypsy I was. It's better she be safe with someone who can care for her. The ghost stories would be far too much for her delicate condition, I fear: she doesn't drink.

WILLIAM. The New Year is almost upon us, my friend, and with it a New Century! The evergreens are beautiful, don't you think? They seem to put them up earlier every year. Edwin must have loved that smell...

JAMES. You can smell them? I only smell the fire.

WILLIAM. I can. I want to be enveloped by that sweet smell, surrounded by trees and freshly cut wood...

JAMES. What are you drinking? Your glass is empty.

WILLIAM. They had a decanter awaiting me. Would you like a glass? Say the word and I'll gladly pour...

JAMES. I drink too much. So says Ella, anyway.

WILLIAM. And do you?

JAMES. Do you?

WILLIAM. You answer my question with the same question in reply.

JAMES. I have two living sons and a third taken by the measles years ago, along with a wife of two decades and more who should have married... someone else.

WILLIAM. Is that the spirits talking?

JAMES. No... no. I drag her around from stage to stage, from dirty hotel room to filthy train compartment. She thought she'd married a Prince... hitched her fortunes to a Star.

WILLIAM. And so she had. We need a little Shakespeare to help us shuffle off this mortal coil. Look around at what Edwin bequeathed us: this lovely temple. It's been such a long while since we shared a glass together in this place. Communing with our mentors... our ancestors. We will long remember this opening night... When were you here last? Do the memories of that visit remain? If I close my eyes, it's as if I never

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

left. The Past... the Present... the Future, all at once. Lightning in a bottle... So speak the speech, I pray you!

JAMES. As I pronounced it to you: trippingly on the tongue!

WILLIAM. We must keep up our skills... else we will be old news, and the Romeos will fancy themselves Hamlets, and we will be left with Prospero, Lear, the Gravedigger, Hamlet's Father's Ghost!

JAMES. I, for one, would like a stab at Puck. Ariel.

WILLIAM. That's a good thought: you? As Puck? Ariel? That is comedy.

JAMES. You question my nimbleness? My strength of form? My artful footwork, my airy essence?

WILLIAM. When you put it that way... Affirmative.

JAMES. And I suppose you think you have the skills to even understudy my D'Artagnan, do you? Have another drink, Will; your puffing on a crooked pipe could hardly be called "swashbuckling", now, could it? Touche!

WILLIAM. So it has come to this, has it? A competition: on this, the eve of my glorious opening, taking advantage of my depleted condition following a four act tour de force designed to reinforce my popularity through the ages? Raising your blade and moaning in agony is hardly "spectacular".

JAMES. That's rather pompous of you... here in the home of Edwin Booth. I do hope he isn't listening. Lighting a pipe isn't "dashing" – it's simply smoke and mirrors.

WILLIAM. Bringing Edwin into this is hardly sporting, wouldn't you agree?

JAMES. Agreed. Let's keep this between friends, according to Queensbury Rules: shall we start with canes?

WILLIAM. You seem to need yours for walking, whereas mine is for show. Shall we? Age before beauty.

JAMES. Again? I am for you!

WILLIAM. First let us establish the rules: no poking out of eyes, no breaking of canes, no spilt drinks nor snuffed candles.

JAMES. Must we keep it to just one of his plays, or shall we let it flow?

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

WILLIAM. Have you any dice?

JAMES. Not a full set... no.

WILLIAM. You're not playing with a full set: first point given for wit. Clever, but it bodes poorly for you in the match... Sir.

JAMES. You wanted to call me "old man" – I heard it in your voice.

WILLIAM. Point taken.

JAMES. Point gained. Are we keeping count?

WILLIAM. I think not. En garde...

JAMES. Did we settle the issue of one play or the whole body of work?

WILLIAM. Yes, we skipped that part – "No dice". I got a point in, remember? I drew first blood, so... the entire canon.

JAMES. As you wish. I haven't read the entire canon... have you?

WILLIAM. Silly question – seriously?

JAMES. Don't tell me you have – have you?

WILLIAM. Good God, I don't even know if Edwin had. Is it even possible? That would surely lead a man to drink. Did he?

JAMES. Cheers! Have at it, old man – we shall see.

WILLIAM. Shall we do this blindfolded?

JAMES. Nonsense! You have a trick sword – one with a mirror attached so as not to trip on a chair, a table – what are you thinking, man? Foils are weapons – deadly in a master's hands. What have you been putting into that silly little pipe?

WILLIAM. Little?

JAMES. Yes, it curves like a madman's invention with no grace at all.

WILLIAM. It was my invention. Genius, actually.

JAMES. No offense, but it's rather childish.

WILLIAM. It can be seen from the back of the house.

JAMES. It is a choice of convenience. No one will remember who chose that silly toy.

WILLIAM. Toy? I agonized over that choice.

JAMES. Is it in the book? The author's original intent?

WILLIAM. So now you're a playwright? "Author's intent."

JAMES. Comic prop. Child's toy.

WILLIAM. Comic prop? As judged by that great comic actor James O'Neill...

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

JAMES. You would never catch me with that silly goose necked pipe hanging from my mouth, losing every other line. Your fans wondered what you were saying. Lost lines – dreadful. Another disadvantage of directing oneself. And you upstaged yourself far too often. Let me offer some advice from a classically trained actor: take that silly thing out of your mouth. Do you think you're creating drama? No: comedy.

Audiences want romance, beautiful costumes, swordplay, fantastical stories of revenge and heroes rising up from the ashes. Take my Count of Monte Cristo. Or D'Artagnan.

WILLIAM. We had our fill of revenge in "Hamlet". Enough. Prison, escape, revenge... Gentlemen want to use their minds, their education, their erudition: solve riddles, be witty, see through disguises, find the clues. Logic: the finer tuning of a common mind.

JAMES. Never work. Blood, sweat, revenge: "Hamlet". The perfect play. Edwin would surely agree.

WILLIAM. Edwin? Well, of course! He had a human skull for a prop. Who can match that?

JAMES. Times have changed. The ladies want to see handsome juveniles, dashing attire, princely behavior.

WILLIAM. Is that what you think you're doing? Playing a Prince? In that silly hat with its common feather?

JAMES. Common?

WILLIAM. Not everyone gets to play Iago, do they?

JAMES. Othello and Iago. With Edwin Booth...

WILLIAM. Does that mean we can never change our style? Do more than simply act out our repressed sexuality in our overly melodramatic fashion? Is that it? As though we're nothing more than repressed wild beasts...

JAMES. When you're a dirt poor Irishman scraping in the dirt for anything to eat, then yes. Not all of us are to the manor born, old man. Some of us are classless commoners.

WILLIAM. Is this really about class? Have we been arguing about class?

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

JAMES. I'm not arguing, I'm merely quoting you. You don't want to "sell out", do you? You have the resources to be an artist, certainly, but perhaps you lack the temperament.

WILLIAM. And is that what you think I did tonight?

JAMES. It wasn't Shakespeare, was it?

WILLIAM. Oh, come now. Shakespeare is passe, predictable; won't stand the test of time. We need fresh material – less emotion – new grace.

JAMES. And you wonder why I drink? It dulls the pain derived from this new cage of torment, chasing the whims of the elite as if we were but trained monkeys wearing velvet skirts and playing the fool for a piece of banana, a pat on our matted heads, bowing and curtsying for the wealthy, the entitled. The stage is a temple, my dear boy, in which we speak to the Gods and they revere us. Even a deadly plague can't keep us down. We rise – we tell our stories of misfortune – we give hope. And what gives you hope, Will? It is that which you should pursue: hope. For the masses.

WILLIAM. A little fatherly advice to a child, eh, James?

JAMES. You are tired. We celebrate the coming holidays, my boy; let us do that. "This talk of dreams blows us from ourselves." Let us prepare for the holidays in the ancient way, the way of all good tellers of tales: with ghost stories.

WILLIAM. Ghosts... yes. Quite right.

JAMES. Christmases past. Do you remember?

WILLIAM. I do. "I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

JAMES. Yes.

WILLIAM. To Dickens!

JAMES. To Dickens...

WILLIAM. And a new beginning... thank God!

JAMES. Do you believe in ghosts, old man? We never really speak of our spiritual beliefs. About the veil, and our experiences with the supernatural, and lifting the veil. It's not yet midnight, is it?

WILLIAM. No; we have time. Oh, God! That's what I said to her.

JAMES. Who?

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

WILLIAM. Helen. My Helen. She wanted to see her veil. She'd packed it away. I told her, "We have time." As if it wasn't important. She knew, didn't she? She was trying to tell me. I wouldn't listen. I wanted to keep going. It's nothing.

JAMES. For God's sakes, man; it's not like you killed her. I'm sorry; I'm sure it's difficult to love so deeply and then lose her right before your eyes. You mustn't blame yourself.

WILLIAM. Handkerchief. Comes in handy now and again. I've only actually used it once. I refused to wash it since – here it is, hidden in an inner pocket. I keep it with me. Did you know that? Me, hiding a kerchief holding my tears blended with her perfume. I have a lock of her hair... in my watch...

JAMES. It won't bring her back though... will it?

WILLIAM. Have you seen the photographs of apparitions from around the world? Have you? I have. There are only two possibilities: real or fabricated. No middle ground; either or. If real... then they are all around us. So why do we feel such anguish? Does a loved one truly disappear? Is that – it? And if they are indeed fabricated...who would profit on another man's sorrow?

JAMES. It seems that we have.

WILLIAM. Have what?

JAMES. Profited from other's sorrows. Shakespeare himself, the master tragedian, wormed his way into our world and its lust for blood and war, pain and suffering. We trade in anguish and tears. Why? Because it sells tickets. The public yearns for feelings, and we feed our adoring fans with greed and corruption. The Greeks communed with beauty – they sought it in everything. Pity our current situation.

WILLIAM. You studied the ancient theatre? My surprise! Impressive.

JAMES. I can read, you know. I may be a common Irishman, afraid of the hungry poverty of my youth, but I can read.

WILLIAM. Do you truly think me condescending of you? The theatre surely does provide a lonely livelihood, does it not? We are indoors on a lovely Winter's night, away from the beauty of nature, communing with spirits long passed. Or those yet to come.

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

JAMES. We're escape artists. Illusionists. Mysteriarchs. Are we not? Running from our fears, our loneliness, ourselves.

WILLIAM. I suppose we are.

JAMES. We feel too deeply; we go 'round and 'round in our effort to find love, be loved. I suppose we're all running from something.

WILLIAM. Do you suppose Dickens was lonely? He wrote of Ebenezer as a lonely little boy, left on his own at Christmastime while all the other children went home to celebrate. To be loved. But not young Ebenezer.

JAMES. True – they all abandoned him. I'm no playwright, but I myself, alone at night, the room growing dark as my candle burns lower, imagine the echoes of ghosts' voices all around me. I am rather surprised the boy doesn't go quite mad with that cacophony of voices swirling 'round him, reminding him of all that could have been. And what was. You're a writer, old man: do they bother you?

WILLIAM. What was... Yes. They bother me, though I do what I can not to hear them. Late at night, though... they are with me. I hear the shots across the field, the cries of boys playing men as they fall to the ground. The bugles... the sound of their few possessions being packed... of horses pulling at reins, chomping at bits, snorting at flies... of mothers crying... Of the explosion at Fort Fisher that took two hundred Union soldiers and Confederate prisoners. Life stops. Yes, they visit me. They come and go as they wish. I can't stop them. I'll share a little secret: I hate being alone at Christmas. I hear the music. And I want to join in. I want to see my sister's smiling face. My brothers. Can you believe it – there were four of us. Gone. Nothing I could do. I can never bring them back. Every Christmas they visit and remind me I am utterly alone. Helen was my only chance to be a father. I was always working. I'm a rich man, they say. Money? My parents saw to that. They had too much. Oh, they sometimes spoke of needing more. Never enough for some people. Give you the shirt off their backs? No, they would rather take yours, thank you. Don't turn your back on them. Knife right in, twist, push, pull. They kick you when you're down. Can't simply step over you, look the other way; no: they kick. Life's about surviving the kicks, James. I know you know the feeling of a broken rib or two.

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

JAMES. A broken rib or two? You are a bit dramatic, Will. Perhaps you have a touch of the madman's curse. Perhaps your money sheltered you from the real fears of the world.

WILLIAM. The real fears? Do you think yours is the only class who fears? As if not having a potato or two causes delirium? You have all a man could possibly want: wife, sons, home, name...

JAMES. Now you sound pompous, Will; and lecturing a survivor like myself is... well, a bit "elementary", especially coming from you with your silver spoon still firmly in your cheek. Absurd, really. How many mouths have you fed? Two? One? Seriously, man, stop puffing on that silly pipe of nonsense and grow up. You know nothing of want. Look at you! A star of the theatre. Leading man. Successful playwright. You have it all. For all we know, your "Sherlock Holmes" which opened tonight will keep you employed for the balance of your life. Who knows: a thousand... five thousand... ten thousand performances. Any fool can see through your flirtations with sorrow. We came here tonight to say goodbye to the past, to look ahead to the future. And yet like Marley's Ghost you drag the past around, bringing up your little fears and tragedies as if... as if you were the center of the universe, and all life circled around you. Are you the only man to have lost a loved one? Or two? Or three? You were lucky to have parents, siblings, a loving spouse. Instead you expect us, your friends, to fill your void. For God's sakes, man, we have our own! Each and every one of us... every one.

WILLIAM. So this is how it ends? No empathy – no shred of understanding? I have no one else to share my inner thoughts with, James – no one, not one soul.

JAMES. Well good God, man, bury them.

WILLIAM. Perhaps I have come back too early from my grief. You are quite right. I prance around and ask questions to stump the fools who play my game of deceit. I was a lonely child, was I not, James? I hid in my attic and occupied my thoughts with toys, trains, puppets, books, stories... puzzles.

JAMES. I think we should start over. That's it! Put on your cloak and gloves, take your cane, and come back in. We will forget this exchange

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

ever happened, and you will make your entrance and find me – your friend – here waiting for you.

WILLIAM. The ghosts don't just disappear, James.

JAMES. Are you listening to me? They will consume you. Do you think they stay to comfort you? It's you who are comforting them! You keep them here on this earthly plane. They worm their way into every conversation, every thought, until they live, and you have died. They replace your soul with theirs. Let them go. They have deceived you.

WILLIAM. Deceived me? No one deceives me! Harry Houdini – now he was a trickster. I am not one to be tricked.

JAMES. Arthur Conan Doyle? Trickster. Sherlock Holmes? Trickster. We are all tricksters! The ghosts are real – the ultimate tricksters. Masters of deception!

WILLIAM. Sometimes I want them to stay. They are all the company I have.

JAMES. I am warning you! You will die of grief. Theirs, not yours. Do you think I haven't seen my share of ghosts? Every time I perform that damned Shakespeare. Or play the Count of Monte Cristo. That damned, damp, dark prison calls them forth. Do you think I call them out so they can win? No I beat 'em down! I survive! The audiences cheer because I win! I banish them all.

WILLIAM. You overact. I reflect. I listen... to them.

JAMES. You empower them to whisper lies.

WILLIAM. No, they speak truth.

JAMES. You have not heard a single thing I've said, man. Have we been reading Dickens all these years? Did you learn anything? From *Want*, and *Ignorance* – a blessed thing? Well? Speak.

WILLIAM. They were... insignificant.

JAMES. Get your manuscript.

WILLIAM. And?

JAMES. Stave Three. *(The lights flicker)*

WILLIAM. He's here.

JAMES. Quite right.

WILLIAM. What does he want?

JAMES. Ask him.

WILLIAM & JAMES – A GHOST STORY

WILLIAM. You ask him. Age before beauty. Or are you afraid of ghosts?

JAMES. I am not afraid of ghosts.

WILLIAM. Offer him a drink.

JAMES. All right. Charles, would you care for a drink? (*Lights flicker again.*)

WILLIAM. What would he like? Charles... sir...what do you drink?

JAMES. He wants to know why we are jumping to Stave Three.

WILLIAM. It wasn't my idea.

JAMES. Don't let him intimidate you. Pick up a sword... or something. Recite some Shakespeare – that'll give him a chill.

WILLIAM. Recite... Shakespeare?

JAMES. Must I do everything? Ask him what he'd like to hear.

WILLIAM. Sir Charles... what would you like to hear? He says he's heard it all.

JAMES. There you have it: "Go your way." And a Merry Christmas to you. (*Lights flicker a third time.*)

WILLIAM. Are you mad? You told Charles Dickens to... leave? Just like that?

JAMES. He suggested we have a séance. He'll be back.

WILLIAM. I'm coming with you. A bit of cold air never hurt anyone. Five minutes – give me five. Ten. Give me ten minutes. Scarf, hat, cane, compass, pocket watch... violin... bow... magnifying glass. You will come back, won't you, Charles? I don't qualify for membership in the Ghost Club, but here at The Players we have many fascinating spirits indeed. I would much prefer your company. Ten minutes – give me ten. (*William exits as lights fade, leaving James seated with glass and half-full decanter.*)

INTERMISSION

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM***