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Spirited Folk

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Spirited Folk
A One-Act Play by
Emily Oldham

Cast

Ed (*Caucasian, early 20's*): A kind, expressive young man who has an interest in ghosts. An empathetic sort, his emotions often get the better of him, and though bright, he tends to not completely think through things in stressful situations. When giving sarcastic remarks, his delivery is so light that it can easily be mistaken for sincerity. He and Janet are extremely close and have known each-other for a long time, and he is very fond of her company, but there is absolutely nothing romantic between them.

Janet (*African-American, early to mid 20's*): A collected sort, Janet flows through life on the waves of endless faith and boundless self-confidence. These factors sometimes get to the point where she can come off as detached at best and insensitive at worst. This could not be further from the truth. She also shares an interest in ghosts, and has been in the business of searching for them for a lot longer than Ed has. She and Ed are extremely close, and she is very fond of his company, but there is absolutely nothing romantic between them.

Setting

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, somewhere on the outskirts of the battlefield by a dusty road on a cool mid-summer night. A bench is there for the sake of folk waiting for the ghost tours to come along and pick them up.

Scene 1

*(We open on **Ed** and **Janet** sitting together on a bench in the middle of the night. They sit quietly for a moment, periodically either checking the time or looking around, but the only other sign of life are crickets.)*

Ed: *(Somewhat irritated)* So, on average, how long do you think we've been sitting here?

Janet: *(Patiently)* Well, we left early to try and find this spot, since we can't see anything and this place is huge, and that took about ten minutes, and we waited for another ten minutes, and the tour is *(She checks the time)* about ten minutes late.

Ed: So we've been out here for half an hour waiting for a ghost tour.

Janet: That's about how it looks, yes.

Ed: Would we have been better off if we just went out on our own?

Janet: I don't think so, lot of things like to wander around here at night and I personally just wanna worry about the ghosts. 'Sides, we get the lay of the land with the tour.

Ed: Haven't you been here before though?

Janet: C'mon, it's been like, a hundred years. *(Jokingly)* I can't remember everything from my days as a lone wanderer, ya know.

Ed: Yeah, that's fair.

Janet: And ya know, we did see that big tour bus come by earlier-- maybe that's what's keeping 'em?

Ed: Sounds about right...think they could be in any trouble?

Janet: *(Casually)* Nah, we'd hear 'em. I think we should give it another ten minutes or so, to keep things even.

Ed: Okay.

(They sit in silence for a moment)

Ed: Ya know, Janet, I've been thinking...isn't this kinda ghoulish?

Janet: What?

Ed: (*He makes a circle-y gesture*) Like, this.

Janet: You mean the town? Gettysburg's always been like this, it's just that they're using it to draw in tourists now.

Ed: No, well, yes, that, but I mean, like, *all* of this.

Janet: (*Sighing*) Ed, darlin', I love you, but you can't be getting cold feet on this trip already! We just started!

Ed: I'm not getting cold feet, I've just been kinda thinking about it is all. I mean, isn't it a little weird that there's a ghost tour anyway? And that a whole busload of people might've gone on it?

Janet: Well, tourism in general is kinda weird when you think about it.

Ed: Yeah, but--

Janet: Lot of butter cows out there...

Ed: For the record, that was at the state fair, that's different, but my point is that, I dunno, is it like, disrespectful or something? To make a battlefield a tourist attraction?

Janet: (*She shrugs*) Well, so long as folk learn something from coming by, I think it's worth something at least.

Ed: For the ghost stories though?

Janet: Oh, *especially* for the ghost stories! People have been obsessed with ghosts for *ages* around here, I mean, it's been like that for at least two-hundred years, give or take.

Ed: But, has it always been such a spectacle?

Janet: I don't think a rickety old cart driving around a field in the middle of the night is much of a spectacle.

Ed: You know what I mean.

Janet: Well, yeah, it was that way from the beginning too. I mean, the whole thing basically got started when the Fox sisters got popular. Their house up in New York is also a possible stop, by the way, I'm just throwing it out there.

Ed: I don't know, I mean, now, refresh my memory on this, but didn't one of them say the whole thing was fake?

Janet: Yeah, but it didn't stop anything. Spiritualism was a thing before them-- what with Andrew Jackson Davis and his whole thing about communication with spirits and all-- but they made it *big* and suddenly people were "knocking" and holding these big seances and trying to learn how to be mediums, and it was just... *(She trails off for a moment)* It was a lot of stuff and a lot of theatrics. Didn't hurt things when there was a war, of course, made it all very personal.

Ed: Of course.

Janet: It spread everywhere back in those days, got as far as the White House even, what with--

Ed: Mary Todd, yeah...

Janet: I was gonna say Jane Pierce, since she actually got the Fox Sisters to do a seance with her, but yeah, Todd too.

Ed: *(Wistful)* She stuck with it for the rest of her life...lot of seances, a *lot* of seances...

Janet: Do you think that's why people think the White House is so haunted?

Ed: No, no, it's genuinely haunted, don't make any mistake of that.

Janet: What makes you say that?

Ed: *(Embarrassed)* I, uh...I tried going in on my own a few years ago, just to get a look, ya know? Long story short, it started with a nice tour and ended with Abigail Adams stringing me up by my ankles in the East Room.

Janet: *(She barely manages to hold in her laughter, and tries to put on a straight face as she asks)* How in the world did you manage that?

Ed: Well, the old urban legend is that the place is filled with ghosts, so I went to investigate, I saw Abigail with her laundry-- as the story goes-- and I snuck off to follow her and see what happened and *that* happened.

Janet: I don't think I remember hearing that part of the story.

Ed: Yeah, well, there're a lot of stories where details are left out.

Janet: Still, how'd you manage your way out of that one?

Ed: Well, some security folk found me and were kind enough to cut me down. Apparently it's happened before, they told me that I was lucky it was *just* Abigail.

Janet: As opposed to?

Ed: Andrew Jackson, for starters.

Janet: He's still hangin' around there?

Ed: Believe me, I wasn't going to stick around long enough to find out but, apparently, yes. And still getting into fights, from what I hear.

Janet: Well, what else is he supposed to do? Anyone else?

Ed: More than you'd think, actually. A lot of people have claimed to see Abraham Lincoln, of course, and apparently Dolley Madison threatened a bunch of workers who were gonna dig up her rose garden one time, so she's probably still around, but I personally only ran into Abigail Adams.

Janet: So I take it the White House tour is off the list for future stops on the trip?

Ed: *(Somewhat haunted)* I don't think Abigail's forgotten me yet, so no.

Janet: That's plenty fair.

Ed: I'll say this for the experience though, it definitely got me to start second-guessing the legend-ness of urban legends.

Janet: *(Amused)* We're probably the last people who should be doubting ghost stories really.

Ed: Well, you know how these things get. Spiritualism might not be as big as it was in the 1860's, but the stories it left behind are still floating around, that sort of thing.

Janet: That's folktales for ya! Most of 'em start off in a real place and then get progressively further and further from believability, sometimes not as far as we think. America's just full of stories like that – it's part of the culture and stuff.

Ed: Explains all the ghost hunting shows.

Janet: Yeah, partly anyway. Like I said, America's obsessed with ghosts and ghost stories.

Ed: Which is why we're on this trip, right?

Janet: I wouldn't say it's the only reason, but chasing those stories is certainly one of 'em. I think it's a fun thing to do.

Ed: So, to return to the question of the hour-- are we being ghoulish?

Janet: Eh, maybe a little. Certainly no more than everyone else.

Ed: *(Looking off)* Yeah, speaking of –

Janet: Is the tour finally on its way?

Ed: No, but I think –

(There's the sound of a cannon firing in the distance, followed by some freaked out tourists who come running past)

Ed: I think we should get going.

Janet: A little walking never hurt anyone. Let's go chat with some urban legends.

(They run offstage towards where the tourists had been running from, and the lights go out)

End

References

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