

ONE: THE GHOST LIGHT

Complete and utter darkness, both on stage and in the theater. Perhaps a slight breeze. A beat or three.

A door creaks open. Then closes. We hear the steady tread of someone (we hope it's someone), moving slowly and deliberately toward us. They get closer and closer. They stop.

A GHOST LIGHT downstage center clicks on. WILL stands behind it, his face illuminated from below like that of a classic campfire storyteller.

WILL

The Ghost Light. A lonely sentinel standing guard against whatever lurks among the shadows of the darkened theater after the players have played their parts. This light and others like it have been used for centuries to protect the lowly stagehands, the tired actors, the forgetful props-master from the peril that can befall those of us who dare to trod these boards or witness those who do.

The “Man in Grey” at the Drury Lane Theatre in London. The white-gowned cellist at the Palace Theatre in New York. The “Wailing Woman” at the St. James Theatre in New Zealand. It seems every theater has a ghost, doesn't it? Perhaps – just like us – they come back night after night, hoping to understand a little bit better what it means to have a soul.

Or.

Maybe they're here for something more nefarious.

The Ghost Light is as old as theater itself, and it is the first line of defense against those spirits, ghouls, and other forces of the strange that may attempt to enter this pagan temple of illusions we call a theater.

The story we present tonight is based on actual events. And like all true but unexplained phenomena, there are no easy answers. There are no explanations. Some of the people you will see depicted are no longer with us, but their tortured spirits still lurk in the shadows and the wings, eager for the chance to hear their stories one more time lest they be forgotten forever.

And that is why we have this. The Ghost Light is a precaution. And a reminder.

The theater is a dangerous place. It can awaken within you a primal instinct. We may call it fear. But there are other forces – stranger forces – that call it food. And we are confident that tonight will produce a most appetizing meal.

He looks at the audience, then at the Ghost Light. He switches it off. Absolute darkness on stage.

A long beat.

He switches the light on again.

WILL

Spooky, right?

He chuckles

WILL

So, okay. Hi. I'm Will Dagger, one of the actors in the play you're about to see tonight, which is called *This Place Is Definitely Haunted*.

During the early part of this process, one of the things we would do is we would take scary stories that we knew, or that we had heard, or that had happened to us, or that we'd like, read somewhere, and we'd sit in a room and we'd turn out all the lights, and we'd hold up flashlights to our faces and we'd tell them to each other.

Just so you know. That's where this play came from. Just a bunch of dumb stories that we told in the dark. And that's basically what you're going to see. A bunch of dumb stories that we'll tell in the dark.

Now, some of you may not like scary stories. And that's okay. If you're one of those people, all you have to remember is that every single aspect of what you're about to see tonight is totally and completely made up. Okay?

But if you like scary stories. If you're here to open yourself up to the potential for danger with a room full of strangers, well... Then just know this:

Every single aspect of what you're about to see tonight...
Is totally and completely true.

He winks.

WILL

Including the story on which this play is based.
Totally. And Completely. True.

There's a town called Livingston. It's in upstate New York.
It's a small town – less than 5,000 people – and it's in the Catskill Mountains, which means lots of woods. It's quite beautiful, if you haven't been.

This was a factory town. In its heyday, Schenker's Farms had a processing plant up there that employed around 40% of the residents. But in 1989, the plant closed and a lot of people lost their livelihoods.

This led to a bunch of abandoned homes. Old, falling apart. Boarded windows, overgrown lawns. You know the sort. And naturally, neighborhood kids would break into them so they could drink, hang out. Do, you know, teenaged things.

And every so often, something at one of these houses would go wrong. Someone would fall through a rotting floorboard or step on a nail. But that didn't stop the local kids from flocking to these houses on weekend evenings. After all, if there's any demographic that truly believes they're invincible, it's teenagers.

But on one late June night in 2007, at one particular house set some ways back into the woods behind the town post office... Well, something worse happened. Something worse than a broken collarbone or a possible case of tetanus.

And depending on who you ask, well...
This wasn't just a case of some rotting floorboards.

A pause. Will lets out a wistful sigh.

But you can be the judge of that.

I want to warn you that this story will not have a satisfying ending. No one knows what really went on, and we won't presume to guess. Like all the best stories of the shadows and the unknown, any sort of tidy resolution will always remain just beyond our grasp.

This play is dedicated to the memory of Calista Jane Reynolds. She loved scary stuff, and if we did our jobs right, she would have loved this play, too. Enjoy.

He clicks off the Ghost Light, and we're plunged back into darkness. We hear him retreat off stage, and then nothing.