

# *The Ghost of Jerry Bundler*



Adapted from the short story by W.W. Jacob

**Heather Lynn**

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Norman Maine Publishing

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*The Ghost of Jerry Bundler* was first produced at St. James's Theatre, London, June 20, 1899.

**HIRST:** Cyril Maude

**PENFOLD:** Holman Clarke

**MALCOLM:** Holmes Gore

**SOMERS:** Frank Gillmore

**BELDON:** Cecil Ramsay

**DR. LEEK:** C.M. Hallard

**GEORGE:** Mark Kinghorne

## *The Ghost of Jerry Bundler*

**CLASSIC HORROR.** Adapted from the short story by W.W. Jacob. As guests at a small country inn pass the evening telling ghost stories, they discover that the inn has its own resident ghost, Jerry Bundler, who is known for strangling his victims while they sleep. Two of the guests proclaim they don't believe in ghosts. An actor staying at the inn decides to put them to the test by betting one gold coin that he can scare them before the night is up. This captivating, spellbinding play offers two possible endings—comedic or tragic. You decide!

**Performance time:** Approximately 30 minutes.



W.W. Jacobs (1863-1943)

### *About the Story*

English author William Wymark Jacobs is best known for his horror stories, though most of his works are humorous in tone. Jacobs was born in London and his mother died when he was a young boy. His father worked as a wharf manager and the family had little money. After his first short story collection *Many Cargoes* was published in 1896, Jacobs was able to quit his job as a civil service clerk. He married Agnes Eleanor in 1900 and the couple had five children. Jacobs published 13 collections of short stories, six novels, and several one-act plays.

## *Characters*

(3 M, 4 flexible)

**HIRST:** Amateur actor staying at the inn who loves acting and practical jokes; male.

**SOMERS:** Amateur actor who is staying at the inn; male.

**PENFOLD:** Merchant whose father saw the ghost of Jerry Bundler at the inn; flexible.

**MALCOLM:** Wool merchant who bets Hirst that he can't scare him; flexible.

**BELDON:** Merchant who doesn't believe in ghosts; flexible.

**DR. LEEK:** Medical doctor who believes ghosts are the invention of weak-minded idiots; male.

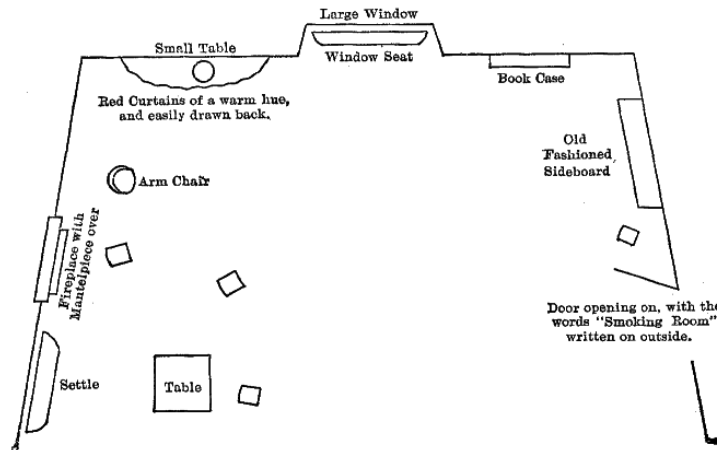
**GEORGE/GEORGINA:** Waiter or maid who works at the inn; flexible.

**NOTE:** For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

## Setting

An old-fashioned inn in a small country town.

### Set



**Parlor of an old-fashioned inn.** The room has an air of old-fashioned comfort with old sporting prints on the walls. On the table UCS are six old-fashioned candlesticks with candle snuffers. Red curtains cover the window and there are shutters or blinds on the windows. There is an armchair and six other chairs in the room as well as an old-fashioned settee. There is a small table and a fireplace with mantel. A hanging chandelier or lamps are positioned at the side of mantelpiece. There is a clock and a decanter of water and six cider glasses.

## **Props**

Kettle	Pocket watch, for Dr. Leek
Coat, cap, and muffler, for Dr. Leek	Revolver (toy)
6 Glasses for hot apple cider	Dark breeches, white stockings, buckled shoes, white shirt, for Hirst
Decanter	Long white or spotted handkerchief
Serving tray	Red wig
Serviette	
Candles	
Matches	

## **Special Effects**

Opening scary music	Low murmurs
Ruddy glow from the fireplace	Smothered cry
Moonlight streaming through a window shutter SR	Quick pattering of footsteps
Clock ticking	Clock chimes three-quarters
Wind	Footsteps
Church clock chiming	Clock striking midnight
	Sound of a door handle opening
	Gunshot



*“Ghosts can't hurt you.  
For my own part,  
I should rather like  
to see one...”*

*—Penfold*

## *The Ghost of Jerry Bundler*

*(AT RISE: Old-fashioned inn in a small country town. Opening music. The stage is dark except for a ruddy glow from the fire and moonlight streaming in through a window shutter SR. There is a kettle on the fire. Dr. Leek's coat and muffler are lying on a chair USL. His cap is on the fireplace mantelpiece. The ticking of a clock is heard. Wind is heard and then a church clock chimes. Low murmurs are heard and Somers' voice tops them all. As the lights come up slowly, the murmurs gradually get louder and all are revealed except George, who is not onstage. Penfold is sitting in an armchair USL of the fireplace. Dr. Leek is standing above the fireplace and leaning on the mantel. Hirst is sitting on the settee and is nearest to the audience. Somers is seated on the settee with Hirst. Malcolm and Beldon are seated on chairs SR, facing the fireplace. Somers has just finished telling a story. Others adlib, "Oh, I say, that sounds impossible," etc.)*

SOMERS: Haunted or not haunted, the fact remains that no one stays at this inn long. It's been let to several tenants since the time of the murder, but they never completed their tenancy. The last tenant held out for a month but, at last, he gave up like the rest and cleared out, although he had done the place up thoroughly and must have been out plenty of money.

MALCOLM: Well, it's a capital ghost story, I admit. That is...as a story. But I, for one, can't swallow it.

HIRST: I don't know. It is not nearly so improbable as some I have heard. Of course, it's an old idea that spirits like the company of human beings. A man told me once that he travelled by train with a ghost as a fellow passenger and hadn't the slightest suspicion of it until the inspector came for tickets. My friend said the way that ghost tried to keep up appearances by feeling in all its pockets and even looking on the floor for its ticket was quite touching. Ultimately, it

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gave it up, and with a loud groan, vanished through the ventilator.

*(Somers, Malcolm, and Leek laugh heartily.)*

BELDON: Oh, I say, come now. That'll do.

PENFOLD: *(Seriously.)* Personally, I don't think it's a subject for jesting. I have never seen an apparition myself, but I have known people who have, and I consider that they form a very interesting link between us and the afterlife. There's a ghost story connected with this inn, you know.

*(Others adlib, "Eh!" "Oh?" "Really?!" etc. Malcolm rises, goes to the mantelpiece, and picks up his glass.)*

MALCOLM: Well, I have stayed at this inn for some years now. I travel for wool and come here regularly three times a year, and I've never heard of it. *(Sits down on a chair with his glass in hand.)*

LEEK: And I've been here pretty often too, though I have only been in practice here for a couple of years, and I have never heard it mentioned. And, I must say, I don't believe in anything of the sort. In my opinion, ghosts are the invention of weak-minded idiots.

PENFOLD: Weak-minded idiots or not, there is a ghost story connected with this inn, but it dates a long time back. *(Carrying a tray and serviette, George, the waiter, enters DSL.)* Oh, here's George. He'll bear me out. You've heard of Jerry Bundler, George?

GEORGE: Well, I've just heard odds and ends, sir, but I never put much count to 'em. There was one chap here who was under me when first I come. He said he seed it, and the guv'nor sacked him there and then.

*(George goes to table by the window, puts the tray down, takes up a glass and wipes it slowly. Others laugh.)*

PENFOLD: Well, my father was a native of this town, and he knew the story well. He was a truthful man and a steady churchgoer. But I heard him declare that he once saw the ghost of Jerry Bundler in this inn. Let me see... *(Slight pause.)* George, you remember my old dad, don't you?

*(George puts the glass down on the table.)*

GEORGE: No, sir. I come here 40 years ago next Easter. I fancy he was before my time.

PENFOLD: Yes, though not by long. He died when I was 20, but that's neither here nor there.

*(George goes to the table CS and begins tidying up as he listens in on the following conversation.)*

LEEK: Who was this Jerry Bundler?

PENFOLD: A London thief, pickpocket, highwayman—anything he could turn his dishonest hand to, and he died in this inn some 80 years ago. *(George puts a glass down and stands, listening.)* He had his last supper in this room. *(Leans forward. Beldon looks SL. Nervously.)* That night, soon after he had gone to bed, predecessors of our present detective force turned up here. They had followed him from London but had lost scent a bit, so they didn't arrive till late. After a word to the landlord—whose description of the stranger who had retired to rest pointed to the fact that he was the man they were after—detectives enlisted his aid and that of the male servants and stable hands. The officers crept quietly up to Jerry's bedroom and tried the door. It wouldn't budge. It was of heavy oak and bolted from within. *(Others lean forward, showing interest.)* Leaving his comrade and a couple of grooms to guard the bedroom door, the other officer went into the yard, and procuring a short ladder, reached the window of the room in which Jerry was sleeping. The servants and stable hands saw the officer get

onto the sill and try to open the window. Suddenly, there was a crash of glass, and with a cry, he fell in a heap onto the stones at their feet. Then in the moonlight, they saw the face of the highwayman peering over the sill. *(Others look uneasy.)* They sent for the blacksmith, and with his sledgehammer, he battered in the strong oak panels. And the first thing that met their eyes was the body of Jerry Bundler dangling from the top of the four-post bed by his own handkerchief.

*(Looking uneasy, the others sit back and take a deep breath. Slight pause.)*

SOMERS: *(Earnestly.)* I say, which bedroom was it?

PENFOLD: That I can't tell you, but the story goes that Jerry still haunts this inn, and my father used to declare positively that the last time he slept here, the ghost of Jerry Bundler lowered itself from the top of his four-post bed and tried to strangle him.

*(Beldon jumps up, gets behind his chair, and twists the chair around.)*

BELDON: *(Nervously.)* Oh, I say, that'll do. I wish you'd thought to ask your father which bedroom it was.

**[END OF FREEVIEW]**