

AMPHETAMINE



A GHOST STORY

Croucho Jones

Amphetamine

A Ghost Story

Groucho Jones

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Third edition, 2026

Paperback ISBN: 9798369649244

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Published by Dream Radio

Cover art by Vilkasss

Cover design by Groucho Jones

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6jones.world

For my son, Nick.

*C is for charlie, the consummate conman.
A is for acid, all addled and bright.
K is for ketamine, horse tranquiliser,
E is for ecstasy, dancing all night,
and S is for speed, our old Billy the whizz,
It just takes a dab to make everything right.*

Characters

A WOMAN: Forceful and sharp.

A MAN: Streetwise, dangerously clever.

A GHOST: Nondescript.

Script

Amphetamine is a short play set in London's free party scene of the nineties. WARNING: it contains bad language and drug references, and is therefore indistinguishable from anything else in the long, strange trip we call life.

Scene:

A room, above an illegal free party, somewhere in London.

Time:

Before dawn, during the summer of 1998.

The GHOST sits in the chair, his back to a large open window. He is beautifully dressed but his clothes are disheveled and his tie is askew. There are bruises and abrasions on his hands and face. The curtains are blowing in the wind. There is a flicker of lightning. A streetlight casts ambiguous shadows on the walls.

GHOST

There's safety in numbers, so let's have some numbers.

Pope Benedict IX was eleven years old on his ascension to the throne of St Peter. At Nishapur, in 1221, Genghis Khan killed 1,748,000 people in a single hour. The orgasm of a pig lasts thirty minutes.

Thirty minutes. Can you believe it?

(Pauses.)

Oh yes, I may be dead, but I'm smart.

(Pauses. Winces. Struggles with his words.)

They say at dawn you can move between the worlds. The clubs close. Morning rides through on his pale horse.

Linger too long and you can be trapped.

(Electronic music wells up from below. He smiles.)

In London, before dawn, you can always hear the sound of distant house music.

(He gestures round the room.)

A room, in London. 1998. Enter a girl from stage left.

The WOMAN dances into the room, to music that swells and fades through an unseen door swinging open and shut. She is wearing a diaphanous top, short skirt and high boots. She holds a Jack Daniel's bottle and a glass in one hand. She dances round until the music stops, then sits on the arm of the GHOST's chair. She speaks in a cultured English voice, mixed with the inflections of the street.

WOMAN

You know, it's not like it seems.

GHOST

What's not?

WOMAN

I'm not really a whore, just dressed as one.

GHOST

All that we are is the result of what we've thought. What we think we become. The world is everything that is the case.

WOMAN

In that case, let's have a drink. The bourbon's real. Would you like some?

GHOST

Thanks, yes I would.

She splashes him a generous drink. He raises the glass in a toast. He drinks it down with panache. She laughs. He hands it back to her.

She takes the glass and pours one for herself.

WOMAN

(Wryly.)

An armchair philosopher, eh? My man's a philosopher. He spouts reams of that shit every day.

Who are you? Why are you spouting it too?

GHOST

It seemed like a good enough place to start.

So it begins.

WOMAN

Why are you here in my room? What has happened to your face?

There is the sudden hubbub of a crowd. A ceiling light flicks on. The MAN backslides into the room, dressed stylishly for partying.

MAN

(Shouting hoarsely in a South London accent, back towards the unseen door.)

Sorted!

The door slams shut. The hubbub dies. The MAN spins around, and grins, and points at the WOMAN and the GHOST in a neat dance move. He continues to shout, in a voice made of vodka and cigarettes.

MAN

What's this?

WOMAN

Look, he's hurt.

The MAN leans down and peers at the GHOST.

MAN

(Shouting.)

Mate, how must that feel?

WOMAN

There's no need to shout. We're just here.

He grins at her.

MAN

(Sheepishly.)

Sorry, luv.

(More gently to the GHOST.)

Sorry Guv. Did it happen here? Downstairs?

(To the WOMAN.)

It's fully kicking off down there. Some fights.

(Dancing a fighting move.)

But nothing I can't handle, innit?

WOMAN

So why are you here, when it's happening there?

MAN

I'm a lover, not a fighter, don't you know?

(Grinning.)

Make love, not war.

A flash of lightning lights the room, brighter than before. The room light flickers. After a few moments, soft thunder rattles the window panes. The GHOST gets up and goes to the window. The atmosphere is electric.

GHOST

Can you hear it?

Sirens. Can you hear them? Distant traffic.

An argument, something about a dog.

He laughs.

Can you believe it? A dog!

The sound of no rain falling.

It's like a beating heart, the city at night.

Meanwhile, the MAN and the WOMAN look at each other. There is an instant sexual tension. Another flash of lightning lights the room.

MAN

The shepherd's brow, fronting forked lightning, owns

The horror and the havoc and the glory.

WOMAN

Don't get me started.

MAN

Can you feel it?

The electricity?

WOMAN

(Seductively.)

Do you feel it too?

A thumping doof-doof fills the room: the beat from below; not quite music, more an industrial hum.

GHOST

What's going on down there?

WOMAN

A party.

MAN

Our party.

GHOST

A house party? Is this your house?

MAN

A rave, mate. We're promoters.

GHOST

Nightclub promoters?

MAN

(Grinning.)

You could say that. I'm the talent. She's the money. The church comes for free.

GHOST

A rave in a church?

MAN

Closer to God, innit.

GHOST

Isn't it rude, to leave your own party?

WOMAN

We always bug out near the end, let the boys take care of things.

GHOST

You have boys?

MAN

Boys, from the hood, ya know what I mean?

WOMAN

It's not a hood, dear, it's a manor. We're in Brixton, not Brooklyn.
And our boys are Yardies. Afro-Caribbean gangsters.

MAN

Yeah, well it's relativistic, innit?

WOMAN

(Laughing, not kindly.)

What, like in the speed of light?

MAN

(Amused.)

You know what I mean?

WOMAN

Darling, no I don't know what you mean, especially on club nights.
Sometimes it's like the tower of Babel in here.

The GHOST stares out the window, speaks over his shoulder.

GHOST

Have you taken drugs?

WOMAN

Me? No, I'm on a natural high. Me and captain Jack here.

MAN

I might've taken a pill.

WOMAN

A pill? And the rest. Don't look so coy. My boy here's quite the psychonaut.

GHOST

You live above your own party?

MAN

(Laughing.)

Man, this place is like the fucking anteroom to heaven.

WOMAN

(Sharing a joke.)

We have an arrangement.

MAN

With the polis.

Pause.

GHOST

Why am I here?

MAN

(Pause.)

Good question, Guv. It's the question du jour.

Why the fuck are you here, in our casa?

Amnesia?

GHOST

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

How can I know what I don't remember?

MAN

Very good point.

WOMAN

There would be gaps, like your name. Can you remember it?

GHOST

What's in a name?

WOMAN

(Primly.)

It doesn't matter what's in it. It matters if you can remember it.

Do you remember your name?

MAN

(Grinning.)

She's made for this shit. Sherlock fucking Holmes.

WOMAN

(Irritated.)

Can you remember anything at all?

GHOST

I remember I have an injury.

MAN

(Apologetic.)

Yeah, you really need to get that sorted.

It happened downstairs. I'm sure of it. Mate, you shouldn't be messing round at free parties, not dressed like that. We get some right villains in here.

WOMAN

How about your wallet? You got a phone?

GHOST

Nothing.

MAN

He was robbed. I know it.

WOMAN

Shut up, you know nothing at all.

The GHOST examines his own hand.

GHOST

I have a feeling I'm not really here.

WOMAN

You've taken a knock to the head.

MAN

Or he's a ghost.

WOMAN

Darling, please shut up.

MAN

(Mockingly.)

I have this straaange sensation.

WOMAN

(To the GHOST.)

He fucks about like this because he can't deal with the real world.

GHOST

Is that so bad?

If that's the worst a man does?

To escape from reality?

MAN

Well thank you, mister ghost!

I reckon Banquo here should just go with the flow. Be who he wants. Like in the movies. At least till his memory comes in. How about it, Banquo? Fancy a bit of Mahatma Gandhi? Some Marlon fucking Brando? Tony fucking Blair?

WOMAN

And if it doesn't come back?

His memories?

MAN

Then he's a new man.

WOMAN

Humph.

Pause.

MAN

So Sherlock, why's he not a ghost?

WOMAN

Are you being serious?

MAN

Damn right I'm serious. When am I never serious? Not that I think he's a ghost. That's insane. But why not?

She thinks, pours another Jack Daniel's.

WOMAN

Why did you say he was robbed?

MAN

It's a lesson for us?

What do the bead-rattlers say?

A parable?

WOMAN

You think his being beaten up has some moral purpose?

MAN

We don't take care of anyone here. You know what I mean? The boys are none too gentle themselves.

WOMAN

They're gangsters, what do you expect?

Street violence is the most likely explanation.

MAN

But a ghost isn't?

WOMAN

Occam's razor.

Pause.

MAN

A ghost'd be good.

WOMAN

(Amused.)

Good for who?

Good for us?

MAN

I guess.

But not for him.

(Laughs.)

Everyone needs a little death in their lives.

(Pauses.)

Look at the chances we take.

WOMAN

What has chance got to do with anything?

MAN

We think we're safe. You come up here. There's a geezer. With blood on his face. Could be anyone. Could be the old bill. Could be the devil. How do you know? You give him a drink. Think about it.

We become what we think. Lay it on with a towel. Pathology of acceptance.

WOMAN

(Incredulous.)

What the fuck?

MAN

It's all these drugs we take.

The WOMAN gestures at the GHOST.

WOMAN

You're blaming the pills?

For him?

Ecstasy makes you want him to be dead?

The MAN grins.

MAN

Alcohol makes people blurry.

Fucked, innit?

(To the GHOST.)

Come on, work with us here.

GHOST

You want help with the questions I pose?

The moral conundrum?

Metaphysics?

MAN

Yeah.

Exactly.

WOMAN

(Laughing.)

You just want some easy spirituality.

(She mimics a phone.)

Chicken karma please. Light on the spices. How long will that be?

Half a lifetime? Half an hour?

She gestures at the GHOST.

WOMAN

And he's your delivery man.

The GHOST remains silent. After a while the WOMAN smiles.

WOMAN

Unlike you, I live in a predictable world.

The MAN grins.

MAN

You think you do.

WOMAN

What's that supposed to mean?

The MAN holds up his hand, mimicking the GHOST.

MAN

You think this is too solid flesh? Fuck you. Look inside the molecules, it's empty space. Go right down, inside the nuclei, it's energy.

Energy all the way down.

Nothing solid at all.

The fact is, Neo, there's no fucking spoon.

WOMAN

(Smirking.)

Lovely rhetoric darling, but what has that got to do with my logic?

MAN

Babe, what I'm saying is you think you see things the way they are, but you don't. The whole world's a theory. I'm a theory. You're a theory. Logic's a fucking theory.

GHOST

I don't think that quite follows.

MAN

That's the spirit, Banquo!

WOMAN

(To the GHOST.)

My man thinks non sequiturs are things you prune roses with.

MAN

(Placatingly.)

Alright, I'll concede I'm talking shit. But so what? Logic's your poison, not mine.

WOMAN

(Laughing.)

You know you're infuriating?

MAN

(Laughing.)

Innit?

The WOMAN looks outside and gasps. She turns away and covers her eyes.

MAN

The strangest things happen to people on drugs.

GHOST

Tell me what's happening there. I don't understand.

MAN

(Extremely amused.)

What I wouldn't pay, to be down there right now.

The MAN gestures up at the view.

MAN

You can see forever from here. This room is right under the eaves. From inside, you'd never know it was here.

GHOST

How is it so quiet, with a rave going on?

WOMAN

Our party is mostly below street level, in a complex of abandoned meat lockers.

MAN

We're the London Underground.

WOMAN

But faster.

MAN

(Sniggering.)

The vaults go as far as the eye can see. We've hardly started to explore them yet. It's insane. Destroyed by a fire in 1851.

WOMAN

People died.

MAN

The local meatpacking glitterati. You think it would smell, but it's dust.

The WOMAN points out into the night.

WOMAN

Over there are markets by day. In the week the vans would already be here.

Now they're all dead.

A crackling flash of lightning lights the room. The electricity is palpable. They wait, but there is no thunder.

WOMAN

Where is that storm? Why isn't it here?

London's such an old place. Even the weather's worn down.

MAN

We try too hard.

WOMAN

We do?

MAN

We want it all.

It's like that butterfly.

All the people in China, jumping up and down at the same time.

WOMAN

(Sarcastically, to the GHOST.)

He's off on one.

MAN

It flaps its wings and there's a storm. What's that one called?

WOMAN

You already know what it's called. The butterfly effect.

MAN

Yeah, that's the one.

Well from the point of view of the cosmos, wouldn't it be better if the butterfly just stayed still? Isn't that where we're all headed anyway? Heat death? Entropy? Why fuck around?

WOMAN

So what, we shouldn't try?

MAN

I don't see the point. We're all gonna die. The only question's when.

Pause.

MAN

In the meantime we party. Can't have no entropy without no ecstasy!

Pause.

MAN

Banquo, you obviously like your philosophy straight. How's this?

He recites, beautifully.

MAN

The story I have to tell is the history of the next two centuries. For a long time now our whole civilization has been driving, with a tortured intensity growing from decade to decade, as if towards a catastrophe: restlessly, violently, tempestuously, like a mighty river desiring the end of its journey, without pausing to reflect, indeed fearful of reflection.

Where we live, soon nobody will be able to exist. Any clues?

The GHOST shakes his head.

MAN

A sadly underrated race, the Krauts. More than just Hitler and beer.

The MAN recites beautifully again.

MAN

There will be wars, such as have never been waged on earth. I foresee something terrible, chaos everywhere. Nothing left which is of any value; nothing which commands: Thou shalt!

Man, that stuff is like fucking electricity!

GHOST

And this person, you feel like he does?

MAN

I fucking do. I know I come across as a right geezer, but this shit matters to me.

The WOMAN watches from the arm of the GHOST's chair.

She leans across and refills the GHOST's glass.

MAN

Banquo, what do you think about God? I mean, you're half way there. What do you see?

I'll tell you my favourite graffiti. Saw it once on a pisshouse wall:

God is dead, signed Nietzsche. Nietzsche's dead, signed God.

That fucking cracks me up. I write it everywhere. You see that on the wall of Wandsworth nick, you'll know it was me.

GHOST

Is that what he meant? God lived and died?

MAN

Fuck knows. I can't make head nor tail of it. I like the look of the words on the page.

They settle down to watch the scene unfold outside.

MAN

London at night. What a funny old dancefloor it is.

GHOST

I've no idea what's going on down there. It just looks like a mess to me.

MAN

A mess? Mate, what's going on down there is life! What's the alternative? You wanna be on your death bed, regretting all the things you haven't done?

WOMAN

Oh, it can be beautiful too.

MAN

(Smiling.)

A club queue at dawn, snow falling on your face.

WOMAN

A thousand strangers, moving as one.

MAN

We chose this. No one makes us do it. It's strange as fuck, but fuck me, it's an experience.

WOMAN

It's like we're in another world. Sometimes we're in the last place open at night.

The MAN recites, beautifully.

MAN

To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.

The GHOST looks at him quizzically.

WOMAN

Oh, the magpie swoops.

(To the GHOST.)

He's right, you know, it's a strange old place, London. It's in the fog. It's been here for a million years. I sometimes think of Boudicca, out there in the dark, all woad and death and blood.

It frightens me sometimes.

(She looks over at the MAN.)

And he's strange too. But beautiful as well.

GHOST

Perhaps he's a prophet.

WOMAN

Maybe it's true.

He's constructed an alternative reality out of a few magazine philosophers and the script of the Matrix. He lives in it now. But it isn't all good. Sometimes I'm frightened.

The MAN turns his head to look at them. The WOMAN looks intently back.

WOMAN

Sometimes, he's like some kind of fucking space cadet.

Strobing blue lights play across the room. The MAN backs away from the window.

WOMAN

He blasts his way into the spiritual world, armed with some half-baked ideas, expecting to find bliss, but instead he finds nothing.

Maybe there is nothing?

How can we have enlightenment without suffering?

She leans across as though to grasp the GHOST's shoulder, then hesitates, and lightly caresses his cheek.

She joins the MAN at the window.

WOMAN

I thought we had an arrangement?

With the police?

MAN

There's arrangements and there's arrangements. This lot are narcos, organised crime. Look, there's Agent Smith.

GHOST

So you're organised crime?

WOMAN

(Laughing.)

Do we look organised?

The MAN laughs.

GHOST

Tell me, if it's not a bad time to ask, why you're allowed to do what you do?

Why are you here?

WOMAN

Because raves are the least of their worries. We keep a few villains off the street. We're predictable.

MAN

A little bit of money changes hands. Oh shit oh shit oh shit.

WOMAN

They raid us occasionally.

MAN

But not like this. Look, they've closed off the street.

WOMAN

What should we do?

What the fuck is happening there?

MAN

I recommend panic.

They stand and watch the lights, careful to stay out of sight.

MAN

I hate the fucking law, you know? I hate the very idea of it. Not the filth, they're alright, corrupt as fuck, but hey. It's the laws themselves I hate. What gives anyone the right to tell me what to do?

Banquo, we talked about God. God is the law, he fucks with our minds.

GHOST

(Pensively.)

God's dead?

MAN

(Grimly.)

Nietzsche's fucking dead. You better fucking believe it.

After a while the MAN leans further out the window.

MAN

Alright, they've gone downstairs. I've thought it through. This room is hard to find. But just in case.

He crosses to the unseen door. From offstage there's a click. The lights go off.

MAN

We don't exist.

BLACKOUT

END

"Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present."

- Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 6.4311

Acknowledgements

"All that we are is the result of what we've thought. What we think we become."

is widely attributed to the Gautama Buddha.

"The shepherd's brow, fronting forked lightning, owns / The horror and the havoc and the glory."

is from The Shepherd's Brow, Fronting Forked Lightning, Owns by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

"The story I have to tell is the history of the next two centuries. For a long time now our whole civilization has been driving, with a tortured intensity growing from decade to decade, as if towards a catastrophe: restlessly, violently, tempestuously, like a mighty river desiring the end of its journey, without pausing to reflect, indeed fearful of reflection. Where we live, soon nobody will be able to exist."

and

"There will be wars, such as have never been waged on earth. I foresee something terrible, chaos everywhere. Nothing left which is of any value; nothing which commands: Thou shalt!"

are from Nietzsche's The Will to Power, as recounted by Erich Heller in The Importance of Nietzsche.

"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

and

"Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but

timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present."

are from Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.

"God is dead, signed Nietzsche. Nietzsche's dead, signed God."

is from a Sydney University urinal wall, circa 1985.

*"To see a world in a grain of sand / And heaven in a wild flower, /
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand / And eternity in an hour."*

is from Auguries of Innocence by William Blake.

My cover art is by Vilkasss

<https://pixabay.com/users/vilkasss-35420724>

This is a substantially revised text. The first version was written in 2011. A second edition was published in 2022. The third edition, 2026, restores the original's temperature and completes the structural work the earlier versions left unfinished. It's spent enough time locked in my basement.

About Groucho Jones

Groucho Jones lives by the sea in Western Australia. He's been a barman, van driver, cryptographer, software developer, tech CTO, and nightclub promoter. He has patents in cryptography and applied mathematics. He writes literary science fiction as well as plays.

Amphetamine is set in the world he came from. The names in his novels are real. So are the parties.

I wrote this play for my own therapy. If it entertains others, so much the better.

Perform It

Are you interested in performing Amphetamine? Please do. You have my permission. Let me know how it goes.

Adapt It

Interested in adapting the text for your own culture and milieu? Please do, as long as you credit Groucho Jones as the original author.

Find the novels

The Thousand Worlds Cycle - literary science fiction, free to read.
6jones.world

When he's not writing books, Groucho does AI research.
www.pnyxlabs.ai

Good luck.

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2026

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