

The Divine Visitor

written by
David L. Williams

Copyright:
David Williams
2011
Version 2.2 - Updated July 2012
template

Contact:
David Williams
451 Gregory Lane
Bellefonte, PA 16823a

(646) 250-6392
PlaywrightDavid@gmail.com

"The Divine Visitor"

Dramatis Personae

MR. WHITESTONE: A rake. The former owner of the Wolf & Fox Inn and Public House.

MR. WREN: A former sailor. A friend of Mr. Whitestone and the current owner of the Wolf & Fox.

MR. ALDEN: The town constable of Langfoss-on-the-Stow.

REV. SOUNDFORTH: A minister of the Church of England.

MRS. CATHERINE BIRCH: A former paramour of Mr. Whitestone.

MRS. CECILY LIGHTFOOT: A prominent citizen.

MRS. MARGOT RAMSHAW: A widow schoolteacher.

MISS MACKENZIE WELLS: An unexpected guest.

The Wolf & Fox Inn and Public House, Langfoss-on-the-Stow,
1665.

Act IScene 1

The sitting room of the Wolf & Fox Inn and Public House. MR. WHITESTONE is standing at a window, peeking out the drawn curtain. A bell rings. MR. WREN enters, wearing a black suit.

WREN

What are you hoping to see out there?

WHITESTONE

(Not turning around)

Shh.

WREN

You keep that up and you're likely to be seen yourself.

WHITESTONE

Quiet please, Mr. Wren.

WREN

These walls are thick, Mr. Whitestone, as you well know. No one can hear us.

WHITESTONE

(Finally turning around)

A carriage full of mourners just arrived. I'm trying to read their lips, but I can hardly do that with you prattling away

WREN

They are doing what all mourners do: remembering the deceased's good qualities and conveniently forgetting his faults.

WHITESTONE

If it were your funeral, you would want to know what was said.

WREN

If it were my funeral, I imagine I would not care.

(WHITESTONE comes away from the window.)

WHITESTONE

How was my funeral?

WREN

A sight to behold. You've never seen so many beautiful women weeping. It turned out to be the social event of the year.

WHITESTONE

Sorry I could not attend. No suspicions?

WREN

Why would there be?

WHITESTONE

When a man so deeply in debt disappears, there are always suspicions.

WREN

That was the genius of the plan, Whitestone. Being the last one to see you, I heard nothing but questions about your demeanor. And I told them you were giddy.

WHITESTONE

What?? Why?

WREN

I informed them that I purchased this public house and inn from you, paying you a generous sum for such a fine establishment. Further, I let them know that I offered to pay off your creditors and give you the difference.

WHITESTONE

I wager I did not like that.

WREN

Oh, you wanted no part of it. You said you would pay them yourself. And then, you took off in your carriage, but going the other way. The way out of town.

WHITESTONE

With that aforementioned giddy look in my eye.

WREN

Indeed. You seemed the picture of a reckless man. The kind of man who would lose the reins near the embankment on the way out of town, toppling horse, carriage and self into the raging river. Horse and carriage found but said reckless body was carried away by the current, never to be seen again.

WHITESTONE

I shall miss me.

WREN

As will all those beautiful mourners.

(Slight pause)

WREN (CONT'D)

Could you see the strange lights last night from your room?

WHITESTONE
(Distracted)

When was this?

WREN

Midnight or so. It was the oddest series of lights coming from across the river. Something queer in the atmosphere, I imagine. But I have never seen anything like it.

WHITESTONE

Perhaps it was the angels coming to assume my spirit.

WREN

It was disturbing, Whitestone.

WHITESTONE

Speak to Constable Alden about it. If you are lucky enough to find him sober, he will investigate.

(Slight pause)

Wren? How many beautiful mourners were in attendance?

WREN

You expected me to count?

WHITESTONE

Estimating.

WREN

Any woman in town fit to look at was there.

WHITESTONE

Even the ones who have claimed to hate me? You're sure it wasn't tears of joy?

WREN

One can never be sure, but I would say no. They were grieved. What does it matter?

WHITESTONE

They secretly loved and forgave me. They miss me.

WREN

Whitestone.

WHITESTONE

What?

WREN

What does it matter that they miss you? You're on your way out of town and out of their lives.

(Pause)

WHITESTONE

How is the inn portion of the business proceeding? Any vacancies?

WREN

You've stayed here since you died. You know very well we still have available rooms.

WHITESTONE

How much for the month?

WREN

What?

WHITESTONE

I want to rent a room for the month.

WREN

I have a strict policy against renting to the dead.

WHITESTONE

Wren, I am being serious.

WREN

No, you are not. You should be getting your things together and leaving town on the first horse you can steal. That's what a man who was being serious would do.

WHITESTONE

Would this serious kind of man fake his own demise to escape his debts?

WREN

He would if he knew his creditors were just as serious. If not more so.

WHITESTONE

I want to rent a room for a month.

WREN

No.

WHITESTONE

If you get a spate of guests, I shall be more than happy to give it up without a word of protestation, but I seriously

WHITESTONE (CONT'D)

doubt you will. It's not the season for it, plus the pub always makes more than the inn.

WREN

And when you are discovered to be a fraud, everyone will believe I conspired with you and run me out of town. Or worse.

WHITESTONE

You did conspire with me, Wren.

WREN

Yes, and now I want you to be smart and leave.

WHITESTONE

I shall fashion some sort of disguise. If I am discovered, and I have strong doubts that that will ever happen, you will have an excuse you can give to the masses who are out for blood.

WREN

Not for blood, but money. Much more precious than blood.

WHITESTONE

I confounded them before, Wren. I can do it again.

WREN

But why, Whitestone? You have a purse full of money, no outstanding debts, and the whole countryside at your disposal. Why stay here where there is only trouble?

WHITESTONE

The largest gathering of beautiful mourning women you have ever seen. Someone needs to be here to comfort them.

WREN

You're mad.

WHITESTONE

I'm not.

WREN

You are, Whitestone. To believe even one of those women can keep a secret, let alone several women.

WHITESTONE

You misunderstand me, Wren. I shall not present myself as Samuel Whitestone, the man who cheated death. No, I shall go as the restless ghost of Samuel, a wandering spirit who has yet one more task to complete before he can be taken to his final, celestial reward.

WREN

This task being?

WHITESTONE

To finally tell the love of my too-short life that she was my everlasting soul mate, and, of course, to consummate that sacred relationship.

WREN

And which lady do you mean?

WHITESTONE

Why, all of them, Wren.

(A bell rings.)

WHITESTONE (CONT'D)

There's the first one now.

WREN

Conceal yourself!

(WHITESTONE smiles and hides behind a curtain. CATHERINE, a beautiful woman, enters.)

WREN (CONT'D)

Welcome to the Wolf & Fox Inn and Public House.

CATHERINE

Thank you. Would you tell me, is Mr. Wren here?

WREN

At your service, madam.

CATHERINE

Do you have any rooms available, Mr. Wren?

WREN

We have a few. You're in need of one, Miss?

CATHERINE

Mrs. Mrs. Birch. And yes, I do.

WREN

Will you and your husband just need it for the night?

CATHERINE

What? Oh, no, Mr. Birch is still at our home. I came in town for the funeral. I was hoping to head back tonight, but my driver informs me that the weather is not favorable. We'd be best to depart tomorrow. Can you help me, Mr. Wren?

WREN

Only if you start by calling me Walter.

CATHERINE

Yes. How kind, of course, Walter. I'm Catherine.

WREN

A pleasure.

CATHERINE

You're not from here, yes? Originally, I mean.

WREN

No. I take it you are.

CATHERINE

Yes. I grew up here. Did you know Samuel Whitestone?

WREN

Ah. Not really, no. Just enough to do business with him. I've heard ... many things about him.

CATHERINE

We were quite a pair as youths.

WREN

I'm sorry for your loss.

CATHERINE

Thank you. I'm not certain why I came. We parted on bad terms. Perhaps I was hoping by coming here I could recapture some part of ... who can say?

WREN

Mourning makes us strangers to our very selves.

(HE makes a notation in his ledger.)

You'll be in the room right at the top of the stairs, Mrs. Birch. I'll speak with your driver about getting your bags up there. Why don't you go and lie down?

CATHERINE

Thank you for your kindness, Walter, on a very dark day.

(SHE exits up. WHITESTONE comes out.)

WHITESTONE

Do you have any idea who that was?

WREN

Catherine Birch.

WHITESTONE

Catherine Hunt. The first girl I ever kissed. The first girl I ever ... more than kissed.

WREN

Does Mr. Birch know that?

WHITESTONE

I don't imagine she'd be Mrs. Birch if he did.

WREN

She doesn't seem like the kind of woman to spend her time cavorting with a man she wouldn't marry.

WHITESTONE

Oh, she was laboring under the delusion that she would be marrying me someday.

WREN

And why was that?

WHITESTONE

Well, proposing to her didn't help.

WREN

Whitestone.

WHITESTONE

You saw her, Wren. I'd have been a fool to do anything other than set my mind on getting to touch that beautiful face of hers, that porcelain skin, those amazing ... hands.

WREN

And how did it end?

WHITESTONE

She picked up a different delusion. That she wasn't the only one I was seeing. She ended the engagement because of it.

WREN

Where do these women get these mad thoughts?

WHITESTONE

Mock all you want, Wren, but I was faithful to Catherine.

WREN

Then why didn't you do everything you could to win her back?

WHITESTONE

Because that's what I wanted her to believe. I would apply a whiff of strange perfume to my collar, leave smudged love

WHITESTONE (CONT'D)
notes in my pocket, anything to make her believe I was straying. Women love a man who is wrongly accused.

(HE walks toward the stairs.)

WREN
Where are you going?

WHITESTONE
I must conceal myself before the lovely Miss Hunt returns.

WREN
It's Mrs. Birch now.

WHITESTONE
Too true. Well, perhaps I'll visit her this evening and remind her of what her life was like when she was just my Catherine, and I was doing the hunting.

(HE exits. Lights down.)

Scene 2

The main room, the next morning.
WREN is there, speaking with ALDEN,
the town constable.

ALDEN
So you saw it as well?

WREN
I am amazed at the tale of any man who claimed he did not.

ALDEN
I did not.

WREN
Were you asleep?

ALDEN
I was indisposed. How would you describe it?

WREN
It appeared to be a sword in the air with the point heading south. But not the size of a sword, no. It would have covered the county had it come to rest.

ALDEN

You saw this two nights ago?

WREN

No, this was last night. Two nights ago I simply saw lights over the river. A whole palate of colors that appeared to flash like some series of stars blinking out signals to the night. I thought it was merely shooting stars, but last night's images ... I don't know.

ALDEN

We've been visited by half the town the past two days. There was a line out the door when I came in this morning, all with similar tales to yours, and all of them telling me that they thought the sword was hovering over this inn like the star of Bethlehem announcing the nativity. You're not housing a messiah, are you, Mr. Wren?

WREN

If I were, I wouldn't put him out into the stable. We have plenty of rooms. What do you think this is, Constable?

ALDEN

I think it's nothing.

WREN

How could something that size, that brilliant be nothing?

ALDEN

I have seen sizable, so-called brilliant men turn out to be nothing. Perhaps this is no different.

WREN

Well, what are you going to do about it, Alden?

ALDEN

Do? Did the sword attack you?

WREN

No.

ALDEN

Did the lights do anything more than wake you up?

WREN

No.

ALDEN

Then I don't think I'm going to *do* anything.

WREN

So why are you here?

ALDEN

I was hoping for a drink. It's already been a very long morning.

WREN

It's only nine.

(A bell rings.)

ALDEN

All the more reason to steel myself for the day.

(WREN pours a drink for Alden. MARGOT RAMSHAW enters.)

MARGOT

Constable Alden, my word, are you drinking so early?

ALDEN

Mrs. Ramshaw, this drink is not for pleasure. I asked Mr. Wren here to pour one so that I could be certain that he, as new proprietor of this public house, is not defrauding our fair citizens of a proper drink. This is merely research.

MARGOT

When I was told that this is where you would be at such an early hour, I could not--

ALDEN

Research knows no time of day.

MARGOT

I want to speak with you about the disturbing light which roused me from my sleep last night.

ALDEN

Have you met Mrs. Ramshaw yet, Mr. Wren?

WREN

I haven't had the pleasure.

ALDEN

Mrs. Ramshaw is the schoolteacher for children in this area.

WREN

Do you have many students?

MARGOT

Thankfully no. They're all so ill-mannered around here, I might as well be teaching pigs how to read. But this light, Constable?

ALDEN

I have heard of it. From Mr. Wren and many citizens besides.

MARGOT

And what are you going to do about it, Constable?

(ALDEN drains his glass of beer.)

ALDEN

More research, Mrs. Ramshaw. Good day to you both.

(HE exits. A bell.)

MARGOT

My worst student is still smarter than that stout-fueled man.

WREN

You don't trust him to investigate?

MARGOT

If you are unlucky enough to find your public house robbed, Mr. Wren, I recommend calling on Reverend Soundforth before Constable Alden. You'll be praying for answers both ways, but at least with Soundforth you'll have a professional.

WREN

I'll remember that. What did Mr. Ramshaw say about the lights?

MARGOT

Very little, having been dead for ten years now.

WREN

I'm so sorry.

MARGOT

That's because you never met Mr. Ramshaw.

(CATHERINE comes down the stairs.)

MARGOT

Catherine? One of my favorite students. It's been far too long, my dear.

(THEY hug. MARGOT lingers.)

CATHERINE

You always were one for a prolonged embrace.

(THEY break off.)

WREN

Mrs. Birch was in town for the funeral.