HALLIE, COME ON

A Ghost Play

By Jonathan Payne
**Characters:**

Arnold Gragston (Black), 40 & 30, M  
Ploughman; Stoic, Dark, Brooding.

Edgar Bell (Black), 84 & 42, M  
Fieldhand; Nervous, Handsome, Weak.

Emily Anderson (Black), 27, F  
Stockwoman; Spirited, Romantic, Hopeful.

**Setting:**

Dover, Kentucky. On the Ohio River.

- Scene 1 – Ripley, Ohio (Fall, 1905)
- Scene 2 – Ohio River (Fall, 1863)
- Scene 3 – Dover, Kentucky (Fall, 1853)

**Time:**

1853-1905.

**Author’s Note:**

The play takes place in a parlor (or living room) that transforms from scene to scene. The staging of it suggests some intricate elements, but the trick is to keep it simplistic. It’s a ghost story, so much like a spirit, it need only the impression of these elements. For the second scene, Arnold Gragston could be standing on a chair with a long wooden rod to simulate the ferryboat, as Edgar Bell sits on additional chair below him.

There is also a field holler throughout the play, usually used to call farm animals in from grazing. In the play it is used to create an eerie feeling, as if it is a call from the beyond. I imagine it to be long and wispy. I imagine the play darkly lit.

“Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. I'll not lie there by myself: they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest till you are with me. I never will!”

~Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë
Pitch black.

At the height of expectancy it happens.

**A loud and raucous banging on a door.**

A face out of the darkness appears.

It’s Fall, 1905. EDGAR, seated in a waning parlor, listens for a moment.

EDGAR

Hear that?

He waits.

‘Course you don’t...Folks ain’t got ears, less it’s in front of ‘em. Most got eyes, won’t see...

A call is heard in the distance.

Ah...you hear it.

The call grows in intensity. It is the call of a lady of the fields, and it fills the space with a longing desperation. It is slow and deliberate.

EMILY (O.S.)

EE-YI-HOO, EE-YI-HOO, OO-HEEH, OO-HEEH, HALLIE, COME ON!

He continues to listen, and then:

EDGAR

Sperits? You wanna know ‘bout the power people tells you I has. I scairt of them. I can always tell when sperits is roun’. Got a queer scent. They fulled up--got too much feelin’. No where’s to put it! I’m used to 'em. But they'll devil you, too. They don't do nothin' to me; only talk at me. How I learnt such? It am forty years ago or so now when I first fully realize that I has de power. Lef' my wife on the plantation. Took a boat 'cross the Ohi'an river to freedom.

That’s when I first saw her...or it--Her...Then I knew. History’s a ghost we just love to ignore...It’ll remind ya, though. One time to another, my time to your time...Forty years ago it was. Night I cross that river...somebody died...

**There’s a loud raucous banging on a door.**

ARNOLD is revealed, standing at the bow of a tiny boat, steering Edgar down a river.
It's Fall, 1863. It's raining.

ARNOLD
There's s'posed to be two of ya'.

EDGAR
I tole you she ain't comin'.

ARNOLD
She ya wife.

EDGAR
She was too scared to come.

ARNOLD
You 'sposed to be her backbone.

EDGAR
She was too scared, I said. How I force that woman to do anything? Keep mentionin' me, love. I got duties to her. But it ain't no true love. Ain't no nigga South of Ohio talkin' love--

ARNOLD
I only out here once an' again! When the moon got it's back to us, s'posed to take as many as I can.

EDGAR
Calm ya'self! I'se scared enough. You been the devil all night. I gets ya! Now I 'ppreciates ya takin me 'cross this here river. You done save my life...

ARNOLD
Coulda saved another.

EDGAR
Oh, alright... (Long beat.) How you come to do this?

ARNOLD
(sharply)
Regret. Regrets brought me to this river. Somethin' I shoulda done a time ago.

EDGAR
Why you say it to me like that? All 'cusitory like.

ARNOLD
Maybe I been where you been.

EDGAR
You been where I been? Sure you been in my toes you do the same damn thing. I hear slaves a chatterin' 'bout this here boat on the Ohio, no way I miss it. A slave grow a foot taller in the North. That's, that.
The boat dips.

ARNOLD

Hol' on now...

EDGAR

River's lively... How you know where we goin' anyway? Rain's bad enough. Cain't see past my nose.

ARNOLD

There's a light down yonder. See it?

EDGAR

So we headin' to the light.

ARNOLD

Yes'suh.

EDGAR

Headin' to the light. That's funny. I prays for I come here. Iffin my ma hear me talk Jesus. She was a "Conger", and they was all scared of her. Couldn't give her the bible...

ARNOLD

That so.

EDGAR

Folk tie her up, they forget to whip her.

You foolin’.

EDGAR

I ain't no lie. A conger she was. Had whites doin' what she want.

ARNOLD

Storytellin’.

EDGAR

There things can't be explained.

ARNOLD

You eatin' your fingers.

EDGAR

Guessin' I'm scared. Feel's sick...

ARNOLD

Moon's gone. It's a black night. No one lookin' for slaves out here.

EDGAR

It's the ghost that scares me, 'sides the runnin'...
Ain’t been caught yet. Folks cross the river got it planned.

You hear me, ain’t ya?

What?

The ghost. (Beat.) Is it truth? I hear talk there’s a spirit in this here river.

What I hear. Ain' seen her yet. Been on this river 'long time.

She a angry spirit. She was in love, with the wrong man, what I hear. Her massa takes a big long knife and cuts her head plumb off.

I hear--

Ties a great, heavy weight to her, and makes her lover toss her in this here river.

I hear, I said.

She only come durin' the weatherin'. You hear her callin' in the night--

(suddenly angry)

You hush that nonsense! I 'cross this river a year, ain' seen nothin' yet!

Edgar stands.

I'm tired of your mouth mister! Don't know why you so vex--

Arnold forces Edgar back down.

Boat to freedom. ‘Spectin’ somebody more friendly.
What you say?

ARNOLD

You hear that?

EDGAR

Hear what?

ARNOLD

Edgar strains to listen. Arnold is oddly interested.

What you hearin'?

EDGAR

Listen.

A few minutes pass.

ARNOLD

Rain on the water, all it is.

EDGAR

Don’t...know...

ARNOLD

Maybe it your wife come to fix ya.

EDGAR

I lef' her. All there is, is me. Me, now. That's that.

ARNOLD

You guilty!

EDGAR

Guilt last as long as you think on it.

VOICE (O.S.)

(chanted through the rest of the scene)

EE-YI-HOO, EE-YI-HOO, OO-HEEH, OO-HEEH, HALLIE, COME ON!

A figure appears from far off.

Hear that?

EDGAR

Yeah! Yeah I do!

ARNOLD

Water's risin'!
ARNOLD
Lord...in...heaven...

EDGAR
The weatherin' done picked up!

After a few moments.

Look there! I sees her. She's...there...

ARNOLD
EMILY!!! I sees ya! I sees ya! Take me with ya, I'm ready now!

EDGAR
What you talkin’?

ARNOLD
Forgive me--

EDGAR
You gonna knock this boat--

I'm ready now!

EDGAR
She's comin'...

ARNOLD
Forgive me! I’m ready!

EDGAR
She comin’ cross the water!

Before they can utter another word, there’s a loud crash, a flash of light, and the boat capsizes, throwing the men into the swelling river.

Blackout.

A loud and raucous knocking on a door.

Lights up on Arnold’s slave quarters. Emily enters. It's the Fall, 1853.

ARNOLD
You're soaked to the bone.

EMILY
It's rainin' wild. (Beat.) I come to ask ya to leave.
ARNOLD
You married now. Best leave my quarters.

EMILY
Arnold, there's a woman, who helps folk up the Ohio to freedom. Let's leave here.

ARNOLD
You found here, you'll end up in the river.

EMILY
My husb--he don't know I'm here. (Beat.) He sleep. On the floor. "You's teched in the head," I tole' em. He tryin' to sleep with me. So's I puts my feet 'gainst him and give him a shove and out he go on the floor. Dat nigga jump up and he mad. He look like de wild bear--

ARNOLD
I ain't runnin', Emily. You hear what he done to runners when he catch' em.

EMILY
You got to come with me--

ARNOLD
He fill the Ohi'an he would.

EMILY
We can make it! I know we can.

ARNOLD
You got to leave!

HE checks the window.

Stormin' outside, cain't see a thing. Please Emily.

HE places a blanket around her shoulders.

You take this. Get on back to your...husband!

EMILY
I brought the book.

ARNOLD
Emily. Cain't be doin' this now!

EMILY
The poems we been sharin'--

ARNOLD
Emily!
EMILY
We the only people 'wake in this world.

ARNOLD
Don't start in on that.

EMILY
Them words you read me. I got them with me--

ARNOLD
Things different now.

EMILY
Ain't nothin' done changed. I still love--

ARNOLD
Don't say that now. That word stay nowhere round here!

EMILY
You tole me such.

ARNOLD
Then I don't know what it means. (Beat.) You can't be comin' 'round here that word comin' out your mouth! That word don't belong to nobody like us!

EMILY
Then who it belong to?

ARNOLD
Don't know. I'm made for plowin', and you made for tendin' animals!

EMILY
Thought love and freedom don't know what death is. You say it's the stubborn rock.

ARNOLD
That's just storytellin'.

EMILY
Then what we mean, Arnold? That just storytellin' to you?

ARNOLD
...Emily...

EMILY
You scared is what you is! Coward! A big ole fool of a--

There's a loud raucous banging on the door.

ARNOLD
Look what you done--Tail it out the back!
More banging, slowly increasing.

(Beat.) Either we leave or he kill us.

Go on out the back...

More pounding. Arnold stands against the door.

We both be sperits.

Emily, please.

Let’em come on, then.

You gots to stop this!

Love is the stubborn rock is what you tole me.

I lied to ya! I lied...Please go...

Come in! Come in!

Emily--

Come on in! You hear me--

The door is forced open. The storm blows out the candle light.

The chant is all that remains.

EE-YI-HOO, EE-YI-HOO, OO-HEEH, OO-HEEH, HALLIE, COME ON!

THE END