

THE GHOULS
CROQUIS DE CROQUE-MITAIN
PAR
ALEISTER CROWLEY

To Gwendolen Otter

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

STANISLAS WASKA, *a virtuoso*

FENELLA LOVELL, *his pupil, a gipsy girl*

M'PHERSON, *the doctor at Foyers*

An Undertaker

THE M'ALISTER, *laird of Boleskine and heritor of the burying-ground*

GEORGE FOSTER, *Fenella's lover*

THE GHOULS

SCENE I: *A bedroom in the hotel at Foyers. A large open window gives on Loch Ness and Meallfavournie, ablaze in the sun. In the bed lies Waska, propped with pillows, his face a ghastly ochre. He is absolutely bald and hairless; all his teeth are gone but the unnaturally long fangs of his canines. By the bed are medicine-bottles on a small table, and on the bed close to his hands, which lie like claws upon the sheets, is his violin-case.*

Over him bends the doctor, a red, burly Scot. By the window stands Fenella, fantastically dressed in red, yellow, and blue, her black hair wreathed with flowers. She is slight, thin, with very short skirts, her spider legs encased in pale blue stockings. Her golden shoes with their exaggerated heels have paste buckles. In her pale face her round black eyes blaze. She is rouged and powdered; her thin lips are painted heavily. Her shoulder-bones stare from her low-necked dress, and a diamond dog-collar clasps her shining throat. She is about seventeen years old. She is standing by a pot of blue china containing a hydrangea, tearing at the blossoms in her nervousness.

THE DOCTOR [*rising and addressing her*]. There is very little likelihood of his regaining consciousness.

FENELLA. He's done for, then?

M'PHERSON. Both lungs gone. I don't know how he's lived this last month.

FENELLA. Oh, he's a tough one.

[*Lowering her voice.*]

You know, they say he's sold his soul to the devil.

M'PHERSON. If he has, the bill's overdue.

FENELLA. When will he die?

M'PHERSON. One can't say exactly. Maybe an hour, maybe less. Or he might last till morning.

FENELLA. How can I tell?

M'PHERSON. You can't tell. I'll look in again in an hour. I'm off the laird's; his leddy's near her time. I'll look in as I pass.

FENELLA. All right. I'll wire for the undertaker to come down from Inverness by the afternoon boat.

M'PHERSON. But, Good God! the man isn't dead.

FENELLA. But you say he will be by morning!

M'PHERSON. Anyhow you needn't trouble. He's in the hotel now; he came down this morning for old Mrs Fraser of Stratherrick.

FENELLA. All right. I'll talk to him.

[*The doctor goes.*]

In an hour's time, then. I hope you'll have something more definite to say—why can't I get into the sunshine? I haven't been out for three days.

M'PHERSON [*at the door*]. Well, you wouldn't have a nurse.

FENELLA. No, I wouldn't. He's my master: I'll never leave him till he's dead. How do I know what she'd do?

M'PHERSON. In an hour then. Good day.

[*He goes out and closes door.*]

FENELLA [*crying after him*]. Send that undertaker up if you see him! [*Alone, walking up and down the room nervously.*] I wish I dared touch the Strad! But he's not dead yet. I could finish him if I knew how.

FENELLA. [*Goes to window, and whistles. An answering whistle. FENELLA leans out.*] It's all right, George, I hope. The doctor says it will be over in an hour, or at latest, by morning. You shall lie in my arms all night. I'll drive you mad. I'll play on the Strad at last. You shall die, dear. Do you love me? . . . Yes, I know. O! I can see it in your eyes. To-night, then. Or to-morrow and for ever! Will you take me to Paris? I should like to live on Montmartre, and set the city on fire while I played, as Nero did. What an orchestra, the roaring flames!

WASKA [*sitting up in bed*]. What the devil are you doing, Fenella? Who are you talking to?

FENELLA. I was talking to myself, master. You haven't been very good company, lately.

WASKA. Ah, you spiteful little beast! If you'd been kind to me I would never have been ill.

FENELLA. I've nursed you.

WASKA. You've stolen my life, damn you, you vampire!

FENELLA. Rubbish!

WASKA. Yes; but I've been with the devil.

FENELLA. What's that?

WASKA. He's given me back my youth and strength.

FENELLA. For what price? What have you to give?

WASKA. Ah yes! I sold my soul for my art. I am to play duets with Paganini in hell. But I've a new trick. I'm to have you for fifty years, and to find new ways to torture your soul for his pleasure.

FENELLA. You devil! But I'm Christ's; you can't touch me. I'm a virgin! I'm a virgin! He'll save me from you.

WASKA. U! Hu! Hu! you Christ's! I spit!

FENELLA. Yes; you shall roast; I can see your flesh burning and blackening, and smell the stink of it. For ever! For ever! Ha! Ha! Ha!

WASKA. Ah! I've my strength back. You shall come to my bed to-night, Fenella.

FENELLA. Faugh!

WASKA. I've the power at last. You ungrateful little wildcat! Didn't I pick you out of the gutter, and care for you like my own flesh and blood? Didn't I dress you fine, and teach you to dance and play?

FENELLA. You never let me touch the Strad.

WASKA. No; and you never shall. It's the devil's Strad; you shan't touch it. Now, dance for me!

FENELLA. I won't.

WASKA. You will. If you don't I'll put a curse on you! I'll twist your spider-legs with rheumatism!

FENELLA. All right: I'll dance.

[She dances lightly and gracefully for him. He claps his hands for the time.]

WASKA. Bravo! Bravo! But put passion into it. You've got to love me now.

FENELLA. Love you! Love a corpse! Love a wrinkled, haggard, toothless old wolf. Filth! Filth! If you had sense enough to know what your own bed was like—this last month.

WASKA. You'll sleep in it to-night. I'll get a child on you to-night! An imp! A monster! A thing with horns and hoofs!

FENELLA. You'll die to-night! Your pact's up. Die, stink, rot, you rag! And all the sulphur of hell will never fumigate your soul.

WASKA. I'll beat you for this. Bring me the whip!

FENELLA. Your dog-whip days are done. *[She finds the whip.]* Take that! *[She lashes him across the face. No blood follows the blow.]* See! you've no strength.

[She gives him a little push. He falls back on the pillow, gasping.]

WASKA. Now hear me curse you!

[A knock at the door.]

FENELLA *[excitedly]*. Come in!

[The undertaker, hat in hand, comes cringing in.]

UNDERTAKER. Good evening, miss. I heard you were wanting to see me.

FENELLA. Yes, measure this corpse.

UNDERTAKER. Why, miss, the man's not dead.

FENELLA. He will be to-night.

UNDERTAKER. I'll come again, miss, when I hear from the doctor.

[He turns to go.]

WASKA *[rising]*. Yes! it's true, you! But mark me, you can make no boards tough enough nor clamps of steel to hold me! There's no grave deep enough to bury me, no earth that will lie on me. I'm the devil's fiddler, Mr Undertaker! Now am I afraid, or are you?

UNDERTAKER. I see he's not in his right mind, miss. Consumptives is often like that at the last.

[He goes out.]

WASKA. It's true, Fenella, I'm dying. I lied to you.

Now come here! D'ye see, I'm tired of my bargain. I'm afraid of hell. Look you, here's my plan. You'll bury the Strad with me, and maybe, when the trumpet sounds, if I play the "Messiah," Christ'll hear me,

and take me up to heaven. There's not many fiddlers like me either in heaven or on earth. Paganini's in hell; you can hear it in his music; he's writhing and roasting in hell, I say. Shouldn't that be enough for Master Satan?

FENELLA. I don't care where you are, so long as you're out of here. The Strad's mine, you promised it to me. You swore it on the holy cross!

WASKA. Only if you slept with me. I'm not to be cheated. I'm not the one to give something for nothing, damn you for a greedy, heartless wench.

FENELLA. Damn you! Before you're cold I'll play your dirge on it; and it shall sound like a wedding march.

WASKA. Oh no! you won't! Come closer! [*She obeys.*] Here, you've never seen this. [*He takes a little wooden cross from under the pillow.*] It's the wood of the True Cross! Now swear, or I'll curse you! Take it in your hand! Say it after me.

[*She takes the cross and repeats the oath after him.*

I, Fenella Lovell, the gipsy, swear by my soul's salvation and by the blessed wood of the holy rood, to bury my master's violin with him—don't falter, damn you!—and if I don't, may Christ spit me out, and may I fall into hell and be roasted for ever by devils with pitchforks, Amen! And on earth may my hair fall out, and my eyes rot in my head, and the lupus eat my nose, and the cancer eat my tongue, and my throat be twisted, and my lungs wither away, and my heart be torn out, and my liver be eaten by worms, and my bowels be thrown to the dogs. May my skin be white with the leprosy, and my blood corrupted with the plague, and my bones rotted with the pox; so hear me, blessed Christ, Amen!

[FENELLA falls fainting.

She won't dare now!

[*A knock at the door. M'PHERSON follows it.*

Now, doctor, I'm your man!

[*He falls back on the pillows. The doctor rushes forward, and makes his examination.*]

M'PHERSON. Dead this time, and no error! Come, Miss Lovell, bear up!

[*He lifts FENELLA.*

FENELLA. Dead, did you say?

M'PHERSON. I'm sorry to say so.

FENELLA. O, if it had only come ten minutes earlier! . . . Go! Leave me! Send the people to do what must be done!

M'PHERSON. I'm thinking you'd be the better for a dose of physic yourself.

FENELLA. Do you think the priest can take off dead men's curses?

M'PHERSON. I'm afraid that's hardly in my line. But I'll send for a priest from Fort Augustus. I suppose he was a Catholic?

FENELLA. He was a devil from hell. Oh go! Go! Leave me to horror and to fear. I could kiss death: it's life I shrink from. Go! Please go!

M'PHERSON. It's the kindest thing I can do. But I'll look in later.

FENELLA. Bury it with him! Oh, if I dared once touch it, I'd dare steal it. But I can't! It's too horrible. They say there are folk who don't fear curses. If I could sell my soul as he did—but how shall I get the devil to hear me? There's a way. But I don't know it. Bury it with him? And—oh! blessed god! thou hast saved me—I see! I see!

[*She runs to the window.*

George! George! He's dead—come up! I've something to tell you. Quick!

[*She dances to the door and impatiently flings it open. GEORGE FOSTER comes running up the stairs.*

He is a sturdy youth with a fat face, long blonde hair, and dull eyes. She throws her arms round him and covers him with kisses and bites.]

GEORGE. Don't Fenella darling! You hurt!

FENELLA. The old devil's done for. I'm yours! And the Strad's mine, if you're brave! Oh! kiss me! kiss me! kiss me!

GEORGE. Ought we to make love when he's lying dead?

FENELLA. Oh, your oughts! Did your nurse never tell you that ought stands for nothing?

GEORGE. Anyhow, I don't like it

FENELLA. He's dead! Can a dead man see and hear? Look! I spit in the filthy face—does he whip me

as he used, and curse me? Ah, but he cursed me! And that's where you must help.

GEORGE. I'll help you in anything.

FENELLA. It's a dreadful thing! But you can win me!

GEORGE. I won you long ago.

FENELLA. Not that much! [*She flicks her fingers.*] But if you'll get the Strad for me, I'm yours for ever!

GEORGE. Then we'll take it.

FENELLA. O! but I've sworn to bury it with him.

GEORGE. Get the priest to absolve you. I suppose he forced you to swear.

FENELLA. Oh no! I swore it on the wood of the True Cross. But I didn't swear not to get it afterwards!

GEORGE. Get it afterwards?

FENELLA. Yes; dig him up and take it!

GEORGE. O! I couldn't. It's too horrible. You mustn't ask me to do a thing like that.

FENELLA. Well, then, I'll get someone else.

GEORGE. No! I'll do it.

FENELLA. Swear to me!

GEORGE. By the body of Christ, I'll do it.

FENELLA. Then kiss me! Come, where he can see us!

GEORGE. He can't see us. He's dead.

FENELLA. His soul can see.

GEORGE. Those filthy eyes of his glare like a devil's still.

FENELLA. Kiss me! Then we'll put pennies on them. [*She does so.*] That horrible dropped jaw looks as if he were laughing. He used always to laugh hollow, like curses ringing and echoing in the dome of hell.

GEORGE. Let's tie it up with a handkerchief!

[*A knock.*]

FENELLA. Come in!

[*Enter the UNDERTAKER as before.*]

UNDERTAKER. Pardon, miss, the doctor told me as how the angel'ad passed.

FENELLA. Yes: he's dead. Measure him. That violin has to be buried with him. He was always afraid of being buried alive; make a very thin shell, so that it can be opened easily.

UNDERTAKER. Right, miss. I'll finish it with short nails. If he was to struggle, it'd come open easy.

FENELLA. Just what I want.

UNDERTAKER. Pardon, miss, but I hope he died easy.

FENELLA. It's never very difficult, is it? I think there are only three people in history who failed at it.

UNDERTAKER. O, miss, I meant right with his Maker.

FENELLA. He was a good Catholic, and believed in the resurrection of the body. So do I. Now we'll leave you to your work.

[*She takes GEORGE'S arm, and runs off with him down stairs.*]

UNDERTAKER. A precious old 'un, and by the looks of him a precious bad 'un.

CURTAIN.

SCENE II: *The Burying-ground at Boleskine. It is very ancient; the walls are lined with tombs whose tablets have been scarred by bullets. At the back, in mid-stage, is a little tower with a window, intended for a watcher in the days when body-snatching was common. There are many tombs and stones; bones lie here and there, for the digging of every fresh grave disinters several dead. It is entered by a wooden grate between square stone pillars on the left, near front of stage. It being the height of summer in the northern Highlands, it is fairly light, although cloudy and moonless. Near the centre is the fresh tomb of Stanislas Waska, loose earth piled into a mound. The foot of the mound faces the footlights. The gate is opened by FENELLA, fearfully advancing, followed by GEORGE with a spade.*

They tip-toe in silence to the new grave, then stop and listen.

FENELLA. All right. Get along. Every second increases the danger.

GEORGE. I'll work; you listen.

[He sets to work to shovel away the loose earth.]

FENELLA. I can hear half way to Foyers on the road.

GEORGE. Yes; you have perfect ears.

FENELLA. No nonsense now. Don't strike the spade in like that; you'll wake the country.

[The howl of a bull-dog, exactly like the crying of a child, is heard far off.]

GEORGE. All right. It's only that damned dog of M'Alister's. He does it every night.

FENELLA. He sees the ghost of old Lord Lovat.

GEORGE. Old Lord Lovat?

FENELLA. Yes; they beheaded him after the '45. He rolls his head up and down the corridors.

GEORGE. Pleasant pastime!

FENELLA. What else is a man to do?

GEORGE. What's that tapping?

[He stops to listen.]

FENELLA. Go on! It's only the old woman.

GEORGE. What old woman?

FENELLA. Her son was a lunatic. They let him out cured, as they thought. His mother came up here with him to lay flowers on his father's grave; and he caught her legs and smashed her brains against the wall.

GEORGE. Oh damn it!

FENELLA. You baby! So ever since she comes from time to time to try and pick her brains off the wall.

GEORGE. I'm damned if I like this job. Here, hang the fiddle; let's get out.

FENELLA. The last you'll see of me if you do. There, you're nearly through with the first bit. Hullo! there's a cart.

GEORGE. By God, yes. It's coming this way.

FENELLA. They're bound to see us. Come along; we'll hide in the lookout.

[They go up stage and enter the narrow door of the tower. The noise of the cart increases. By and by one distinguishes two drunken voices singing "We are na fou'." They grow very loud and die away again.]

[Re-enter FENELLA and GEORGE.]

GEORGE. That's better. I don't mind carts and Scotchmen. It's your ghosts I'm afraid of.

FENELLA. Get on, then!

[He sets to work again.]

FENELLA. *[sings in a low voice]*—

The ghost is chilly in his shroud:—

Laugh aloud! Laugh aloud!

His bones are rattling in the wind;

His teeth are chattering with the cold;

For he is dead, and out of mind,
And oh! so cold!

He walks and walks and wraps his shroud
(Laugh aloud! Laugh aloud!)
Around his bones. He shivers and glares,
For hell is in his heart stone-cold—
What is the use of spells and prayers
To one so cold?

The dogs howl when they scent his shroud.
Laugh aloud! Laugh aloud!
The village lads and lasses feel
A breath of bitter wind and cold
Blow from those bones of ice and steel
So cold! So cold!

GEORGE. My God, Fenella, I think you want to drive me mad.

FENELLA. Not here, dear. Come, there's nobody about. You may kiss me, for there's the wood of the coffin.

GEORGE. O don't let us lose time!

FENELLA. No! I'll keep time.

[She dances fantastically to the rhythm of his shovelling.]

GEORGE. Don't. You've got all my nerves on edge. What's that? *[He starts violently.]*

FENELLA. A nerve, I suppose. Come now. I'll take this end.

[They lift out the coffin. She produces a chisel.]

And now to crack the nut! Good old undertaker! He's done his job beautifully.

[The lid of the coffin comes off; they set it aside.]

GEORGE. And there's the Strad for my darling!

[He gives her the violin, and kisses her.]

FENELLA. Ah! my beauty, my beauty! Mine at last. Don't kiss me, you fool! It's the Strad that I love, not you. Put the lid back quick! We'll be off!

GEORGE. So that's the thanks I get, curse you, is it? I've a jolly good mind to smash the beastly thing.

FENELLA. You dare! Don't be a fool, George! All my love when we're back safely. Take the lid!

[A whistle is heard, off.]

. . . Oh, my God! . . .

[A cry off: "Heel, Shiva, heel!"]

GEORGE. It's the M'Alister with his cursed bloodhounds! What does he want at this time o'night?

FENELLA. Oh, he's mad as a March Hare!

GEORGE. He's the heritor of the graveyard. If he comes, we're done for! Oh God! Oh God! What shall we do?

FENELLA. Do? Why, tell him the whole story. He's a good chap and an artist. He'll understand that you can't bury the third best Strad in the world! And, besides, I'll make love to him.

GEORGE. You treacherous whore!

FENELLA. Always a gentleman! I tell you what, my friend. I'm my own mistress now, and tired of being yours.

GEORGE. I wish I'd cut my hand off rather than helped you.

FENELLA. Cut your stupidity off, and your talk. Here's the laird on the road now.

[THE M'ALISTER appears leaning on the fence.]

THE M'ALISTER. Hullo! what are you doing in my graveyard, young lady?

FENELLA. Digging up a corpse. . . . Why, it's the M'Alister!

THE M'ALISTER. Yes. Isn't that Miss Lovell? Fine night, isn't it? I suppose you don't want any help?

All right.

GEORGE. O thank you, sir. Thank you, sir.

FENELLA. Never mind my poor friend: he's not used to this sort of thing—shut up, will you, you fool! May I come up to tea to-morrow?

THE M'ALISTER. Oh, come to lunch, and we'll try for a rabbit afterwards. Good night! One o'clock. Er—this ghoul act, you know! I should hurry over the meal; there may be all sorts of asses about.

FENELLA. Thanks so much. Good night. Get on, George.

[THE M'ALISTER *goes off.*]

You idiot! You nearly spoil everything.

GEORGE. It's all right.

FENELLA. Yes, no thanks to you! Get on with the work.

[*Loud laughter, off, distant.*]

Lord, there's fools abroad! Workmen from Foyers, I should think. [*Points off, L.*] And, yes, there's folk from Inverfarigaig, too. [*Points off, R.*] I can hear them talking—religion, of all things!

GEORGE. We're caught like rats in a trap! Let's get into the tower!

FENELLA. And leave the body there? We've no time. Blessed Saints of God! I have it. What a fool you are! They're not fond of the road just here, the best of times. Ill try the first kisses of my beauty [*She reaches for the violin*].—if that doesn't frighten them, I'm a Dutchman!

GEORGE. Oh how clever you are!

FENELLA. Even if they come and see us, they'll think we're devils.

GEORGE. So you are, Fenella!

[*She has taken the violin from its case and begins to play. In a few moments two bearded men enter R. and look over the wall.*]

THE MEN. Lord, save us!

[*They flee in terror.*]

FENELLA. Saved! The only thing now is the Foyers men: they may be too drunk to be afraid!

[*She plays again, a wilder melody. Both she and GEORGE lose themselves in the beauty of the music.*]

STANISLAS WASKA *suddenly sits up in his coffin, and tears off the wrappings. A horrible grin distorts his face, and with a choking roar he leaps at GEORGE, catching him by the throat.*]

WASKA. Go on, Fenella! You were worthy of the Strad, after all.

[*She shrieks and drops the fiddle. GEORGE goes limp, strangled.*]

I've killed your lover, my fine virgin. I heard every word you said, I watched every filthy kiss till you put the pennies on my eyes. The devil told the truth after all.

[*FENELLA, breaking from her stupor, starts to flee, WASKA stumbles to his feet, roaring, and chases her among the tombs. She trips and falls. He catches her up and carries her to the tower. They disappear.*]

Stop your shrieking, harlot! You'll only drive the folk away! Ah! we'll have a fine new story of Bole-skine graveyard.

Satan! Satan! Satan! I thank thee! Thou hast kept thy word and I'll keep mine! Satan! Satan! Satan! Oh, the bliss! Fenella, mine, mine! Fenella!

[*He thrusts the corpse of FENELLA half through the window, where it hangs limp.*]

Mine she was, by God, though I'm dead this hour!

[*He comes out, staggering, falls over a mound, crawls on hands and knees to his grave.*]

Satan! what a morsel! what a *bonne bouche*! What a savoury to wind up life's feast!

Well, here's my coffin. There's no place like home. I must play my own dirge. [*He seats himself in it.*]

[*He takes the violin, and plays a dirge.*]

This time it's the real thing. No play, no pay. I've had my fun, and here's the price of it.

[*He plays again.*]

And now Good night.

[*Clasping the fiddle to his breast, he lies down in the coffin. Silence; then the death-rattle. WASKA half rises, and falls dead. A pause.*]

[*Enter THE M'ALISTER, at the gate.*]

THE M'ALISTER. Too much shrieking and fiddling from my pretty little ghoul. I wonder what's happened.

[*He enters the graveyard, and approaches the grave.*]

Nobody here! Who's that?

[Bends over the corpse of GEORGE, and examines it.]

Why, you're dead, my poor, putrid poopstick. Died of too much brains—I don't think.

[Goes up stage to tower.]

Good God! Fenella! What are you doing there?

[He takes her hand.]

Dead, too. Died of too much—temperament, I'm betting.

Well, there's nothing alive here but the fiddle.

I'll follow my usual rule and obey the Scriptural injunction to let the dead bury their dead. But I'm heritor of this graveyard, and I think I'll inherit this fiddle.

[He packs it into its case, tucks it under his arm, and goes out.]

All right, Shiva! Nothing the matter! Home, boy!

[He starts to whistle a jig.]

CURTAIN.