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Samuel French Acting Edition

Blithe Spirit

An Improbable Farce in Three Acts

by Noël Coward

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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BLITHE SPIRIT was produced by John C. Wilson at the **Morosco Theatre** in New York. The play was directed by Mr. Wilson, the setting was designed by Stewart Chaney and the cast was as follows:

EDITH	<i>Jacqueline Clark</i>
RUTH	<i>Peggy Wood</i>
CHARLES	<i>Clifton Webb</i>
DR. BRADMAN	<i>Philip Tonge</i>
MRS. BRADMAN	<i>Phyllis Joyce</i>
MADAME ARCATI	<i>Mildred Natwick</i>
ELVIRA	<i>Leonora Corbett</i>

The action of the play passes in the living-room of Charles Condoline's house in Kent.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

SCENE 1.—Before dinner on a summer evening.

SCENE 2.—After dinner.

ACT II

SCENE 1.—The next morning.

SCENE 2.—Late the following afternoon.

SCENE 3.—Early evening. A few days later.

ACT III

SCENE 1.—After dinner. A few days later.

SCENE 2.—Several hours later.

BLITHE SPIRIT

ACT I

SCENE I

The SCENE is the living-room of the Condomines' house in Kent. The room is light, attractive and comfortably furnished. On the L there are french windows opening on to the garden. On the R there is an open fireplace. At the back there are double doors leading to the hall, the dining-room, the stairs, and the servants' quarters.

Light Cue No. 1, Act I, Scene 1.

When the CURTAIN rises it is about eight o'clock on a summer evening. There is a wood fire burning because it is an English summer evening. The doors are open, the windows are closed. The curtains are partially closed.

EDITH comes in from the hall carrying, rather uneasily, a large tray of cocktail things. She comes to the C table with the tray of drinks. She sees there is no room, so puts it on the drinks table up stage R with a sigh of relief.

RUTH enters C briskly. She is a smart-looking woman in the middle thirties. She is dressed for dinner, but not elaborately.

RUTH. That's right, Edith.

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. Now you'd better fetch the ice-bucket.

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH (*arranging the ornaments on the piano*) Did you manage to get the ice out of those little tin trays?

EDITH. Yes'm—I 'ad a bit of a struggle though—but it's all right.

RUTH. And you filled the little trays up again with water?

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH (*moving to the window and arranging the curtains*) Very good, Edith—you're making giant strides.

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. Madame Arcati, Mrs Bradman and I will have our coffee in here after dinner, and Mr Condomine and Doctor Bradman will have theirs in the dining-room—is that quite clear?

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. And when you're serving dinner, Edith, try to remember to do it calmly and methodically.

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. As you are not in the Navy, it is unnecessary to do everything at the double.

EDITH. Very good, 'm.

RUTH. Now go and get the ice.

EDITH (*straining at the leash*) Yes'm. (*She starts off at full speed*)

RUTH. *Not at a run, Edith.*

EDITH (*slowing down*) Yes'm.

(EDITH goes)

RUTH *crosses to the fireplace and then gives a comprehensive glance round the room.*

CHARLES *comes in C and moves to the back of the sofa. He is a nice-looking man of about forty, wearing a loose-fitting velvet smoking-jacket*)

CHARLES. No sign of the advancing hordes?

RUTH. Not yet.

CHARLES (*moving to the drinks table; going to the cocktail tray*) No ice.

RUTH. It's coming. I've been trying to discourage Edith from being quite so fleet of foot. You mustn't mind if everything is a little slow motion to-night.

CHARLES (*coming to L of Ruth, above the sofa*) I shall welcome it. The last few days have been extremely agitating. What do you suppose induced Agnes to leave us and go and get married?

RUTH. The reason was becoming increasingly obvious, dear.

CHARLES. Yes, but in these days nobody thinks anything of that sort of thing. She could have popped into the cottage hospital, had it, and popped out again.

RUTH. Her social life would have been seriously undermined.

CHARLES (*moving to the drinks table again*) We must keep Edith in the house more.

(EDITH *comes in slowly with the ice-bucket*)

RUTH. That's right, Edith. Put it down on the table.

EDITH (*putting the ice-bucket on the drinks table—up stage R*) Yes'm.

CHARLES. I left my cigarette-case on my dressing-table, Edith. Would you get it for me?

EDITH. Yes, sir.

(EDITH *runs out of the room*)

CHARLES. There now!

RUTH. You took her by surprise.

CHARLES (*at the cocktail table*) A dry Martini, I think, don't you?

(RUTH *takes a cigarette from the box on the mantelpiece and lights it, then she crosses and sits in the armchair. CHARLES is mixing cocktails*)

RUTH. Yes, darling. I expect Madame Arcati will want something sweeter.

CHARLES. We'll have this one for ourselves, anyhow.

RUTH. Oh dear!

CHARLES. What's the matter?

RUTH. I have a feeling that this evening's going to be awful.

CHARLES. It'll probably be funny, but not awful.

RUTH. You must promise not to catch my eye. If I giggle—and I'm very likely to—it will ruin everything.

CHARLES. You mustn't. You must be dead serious and if possible a little intense. We can't hurt the old girl's feelings, however funny she is.

RUTH. But why the Bradmans, darling? He's as sceptical as we are. He'll probably say the most dreadful things.

CHARLES. I've warned him. There must be more than three people and we couldn't have the Vicar and his wife because (a) they're dreary, and (b) they probably wouldn't have approved at all. It had to be the Bradmans.

(EDITH rushes into the room with Charles's cigarette-case)

(Taking it) Thank you, Edith. Steady does it.

EDITH (breathlessly) Yes, sir.

(EDITH, with an obvious effort, goes out slowly)

CHARLES. We might make her walk about with a book on her head like they do in deportment lessons.

(CHARLES comes to R of Ruth and gives her a cocktail. Then he moves to the fireplace)

Here, try this.

RUTH (sipping it) Lovely—dry as a bone.

CHARLES (raising his glass to her) To 'The Unseen'!

RUTH. I must say that's a wonderful title.

CHARLES. If this evening's a success, I shall start on the first draft tomorrow.

RUTH. How extraordinary it is.

CHARLES. What?

RUTH. Oh, I don't know—being right at the beginning of something. It gives one an odd feeling.

CHARLES (at the fireplace, facing Ruth) Do you remember how I got the idea for *The Light Goes Out*?

RUTH. Suddenly seeing that haggard, raddled woman in the hotel at Biarritz. Of course I remember. We sat up half the night talking about it.

CHARLES. She certainly came in very handy. I wonder who she was.

RUTH. And if she ever knew, I mean ever recognized, that description of herself. Poor thing . . . here's to her, anyhow. (She finishes her drink)

CHARLES (going to her, taking her glass and moving up to the drinks table) Have another.

RUTH. Darling—it's most awfully strong.

CHARLES (*pouring it*) Never mind.

RUTH. Used Elvira to be a help to you—when you were thinking something out, I mean?

CHARLES (*pouring out another cocktail for himself*) Every now and then—when she concentrated—but she didn't concentrate very often.

RUTH. I do wish I'd known her.

CHARLES. I wonder if you'd have liked her.

RUTH. I'm sure I should. As you talk of her she sounds enchanting. Yes, I'm sure I should have liked her because you know I have never for an instant felt in the least jealous of her. That's a good sign.

CHARLES. Poor Elvira. (*He comes to the L of Ruth and gives her a cocktail*)

RUTH. Does it still hurt? When you think of her?

CHARLES. No, not really. Sometimes I almost wish it did. I feel rather guilty . . .

RUTH. I wonder if I died before you'd grown tired of me if you'd forget me so soon?

CHARLES. What a horrible thing to say.

RUTH. No, I think it's interesting.

CHARLES (*crossing below Ruth and sitting on the left end of the sofa*) Well, to begin with, I haven't forgotten Elvira. I remember her very distinctly indeed. I remember how fascinating she was, and how maddening. I remember how badly she played all games and how cross she got when she didn't win. I remember her gay charm when she had achieved her own way over something and her extreme acidity when she didn't. I remember her physical attractiveness, which was tremendous, and her spiritual integrity, which was nil.

RUTH. You can't remember something that was nil.

CHARLES. I remember how morally untidy she was.

RUTH. Was she more physically attractive than I am?

CHARLES. That was a very tiresome question, dear, and fully deserves the wrong answer.

RUTH. You really are very sweet.

CHARLES. Thank you.

RUTH. And a little naïve, too.

CHARLES. Why?

RUTH. Because you imagine that I mind about Elvira being more physically attractive than I am.

CHARLES. I should have thought any woman would mind—if it were true. Or perhaps I'm old-fashioned in my view of female psychology.

RUTH. Not exactly old-fashioned, darling, just a bit didactic.

CHARLES. How do you mean?

RUTH. It's didactic to attribute to one type the defects of

another type. For instance, because you know perfectly well that Elvira would mind terribly if you found another woman more attractive physically than she was, it doesn't necessarily follow that I should. Elvira was a more physical person than I. I'm certain of that. It's all a question of degree.

CHARLES (*smiling*) I love you, my love.

RUTH. I know you do; but not the wildest stretch of imagination could describe it as the first fine careless rapture.

CHARLES. Would you like it to be?

RUTH. Good God, no!

CHARLES. Wasn't that a shade too vehement?

RUTH. We're neither of us adolescent, Charles; we've neither of us led exactly prim lives, have we? And we've both been married before. Careless rapture at this stage would be incongruous and embarrassing.

CHARLES. I hope I haven't been in any way a disappointment, dear.

RUTH. Don't be so idiotic.

CHARLES. After all, your first husband was a great deal older than you, wasn't he? I shouldn't like you to think that you'd missed out all along the line.

RUTH. There are moments, Charles, when you go too far.

CHARLES. Sorry, darling.

RUTH. As far as waspish female psychology goes, there's a rather strong vein of it in you.

CHARLES. I've heard that said about Julius Cæsar.

RUTH. Julius Cæsar is neither here nor there.

CHARLES. He may be for all we know. We'll ask Madame Arcati.

RUTH (*rising and crossing to L*) You're awfully irritating when you're determined to be witty at all costs, almost supercilious.

CHARLES. That's exactly what Elvira used to say.

RUTH. I'm not at all surprised. I never imagined, physically triumphant as she was, that she was entirely lacking in perception.

(CHARLES *rises and goes to the R of Ruth*)

CHARLES. Darling Ruth!

RUTH. There you go again!

CHARLES (*kissing her lightly*) As I think I mentioned before, I love you, my love.

RUTH. Poor Elvira!

CHARLES. Didn't that light, comradely kiss mollify you at all?

RUTH. You're very annoying, you know you are. When I said 'Poor Elvira' it came from the heart. You must have bewildered her so horribly.

CHARLES. Don't I ever bewilder you at all?

RUTH. Never for an instant. I know every trick.

CHARLES. Well, all I can say is that we'd better get a divorce immediately.

RUTH. Put my glass down, there's a darling.

CHARLES (*taking it*) She certainly had a great talent for living. It was a pity that she died so young.

RUTH. Poor Elvira!

CHARLES (*crossing to and putting the glasses on the drinks table*) That remark is getting monotonous.

RUTH (*moving up stage a pace*) Poor Charles, then.

CHARLES. That's better.

RUTH. And later on, poor Ruth, I expect.

CHARLES (*coming to above the c table*) You have no faith, Ruth. I really do think you should try to have a little faith.

RUTH (*moving to the L arm of the armchair*) I shall strain every nerve.

CHARLES. Life without faith is an arid business.

RUTH. How beautifully you put things, dear.

CHARLES. I aim to please.

RUTH. If I died, I wonder how long it would be before you married again?

CHARLES. You won't die. You're not the dying sort.

RUTH. Neither was Elvira.

CHARLES. Oh yes, she was, now that I look back on it. She had a certain ethereal, not-quite-of-this-world quality. Nobody could call you, even remotely, ethereal.

(RUTH crosses below the sofa to the fire. CHARLES moves to the armchair)

RUTH. Nonsense! She was of the earth, earthy.

CHARLES. Well, she is now, anyhow.

RUTH. You know that's the kind of observation that shocks people.

CHARLES. It's discouraging to think how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit.

RUTH. Write that down; you might forget it.

CHARLES. You underrate me.

RUTH. Anyhow, it was a question of bad taste more than honesty.

CHARLES (*moving to below the sofa*) I was devoted to Elvira. We were married for five years. She died. I missed her very much. (*He comes to Ruth, pats her cheek, and then goes back to the armchair*) That was seven years ago. I have now—with your help, my love—risen above the whole thing.

RUTH. Admirable. But if tragedy should darken our lives, I still say—with prophetic foreboding—poor Ruth!

(A bell is heard)

CHARLES. That's probably the Bradmans.

RUTH. It might be Madame Arcati.

CHARLES. No, she'll come on her bicycle. She always goes everywhere on her bicycle.

RUTH. It really is very spirited of the old girl.

CHARLES. Shall I go, or shall we let Edith have her fling? (*He moves L to below the piano*)

RUTH. Wait a minute and see what happens.

(*There is a slight pause*)

CHARLES. Perhaps she didn't hear.

RUTH. She's probably on one knee in a pre-sprinting position, waiting for cook to open the kitchen door.

(*There is the sound of a door banging and EDITH is seen scampering across the hall*)

CHARLES. Steady, Edith.

EDITH (*dropping to a walk*) Yes, sir.

(*After a moment, DR and MRS BRADMAN come into the room.*

CHARLES goes forward to meet them. Dr Bradman is a pleasant-looking middle-aged man. Mrs Bradman is fair and rather faded. MRS BRADMAN comes to RUTH, who meets her above the sofa and shakes hands. DR BRADMAN shakes hands with CHARLES)

Doctor and Mrs Bradman.

(EDITH goes)

DR BRADMAN. We're not late, are we? I only got back from the hospital about half an hour ago.

CHARLES. Of course not. Madame Arcati isn't here yet.

MRS BRADMAN. That must have been her we passed coming down the hill. I said I thought it was.

RUTH. Then she won't be long. I'm so glad you were able to come.

(RUTH comes down on the R of the sofa and sits on the pouffe. MRS BRADMAN sits on the R end of the sofa)

MRS BRADMAN. We've been looking forward to it. I feel really quite excited.

DR BRADMAN (*moving to above the sofa and standing behind Mrs Bradman*) I guarantee that Violet will be good. I made her promise.

MRS BRADMAN. There wasn't any need. I'm absolutely thrilled. I've only seen Madame Arcati two or three times in the village. I mean I've never seen her do anything at all peculiar, if you know what I mean?

CHARLES. Dry Martini?

DR BRADMAN. By all means.

(CHARLES goes up to the drinks table and starts mixing fresh cocktails. DR BRADMAN goes up and stands by Charles)

CHARLES (*mixing*) She certainly is a strange woman. It was only a chance remark of the Vicar's about seeing her up on the Knoll on Midsummer Eve dressed in sort of Indian robes that made me realize that she was psychic at all. Then I began to make enquiries. Apparently she's been a professional in London for years.

MRS BRADMAN. It is funny, isn't it? I mean anybody doing it as a profession.

DR BRADMAN (*sitting on the back of the sofa*) I believe it's very lucrative.

MRS BRADMAN. Do you believe in it, Mrs Condomine? Do you think there's anything really genuine about it at all?

RUTH. I'm afraid not; but I do think it's interesting how easily people allow themselves to be deceived.

MRS BRADMAN. But she must believe it herself, mustn't she? Or is the whole business a fake?

CHARLES. I suspect the worst. A real professional charlatan. That's what I am hoping for, anyhow. The character I am planning for my book must be a complete impostor. That's one of the most important factors of the whole story.

DR BRADMAN. What exactly are you hoping to get from her?

CHARLES. Jargon, principally; a few of the tricks of the trade. I haven't been to a séance for years. I want to refresh my memory.

DR BRADMAN (*rising*) Then it's not entirely new to you?

CHARLES (*handing drinks to Dr and Mrs Bradman; above the sofa*) Oh, no. When I was a little boy an aunt of mine used to come and stay with us. She imagined that she was a medium and used to go off into the most elaborate trances after dinner. My mother was fascinated by it.

MRS BRADMAN. Was she convinced?

CHARLES. Good heavens, no. She just naturally disliked my aunt and loved making a fool of her. (*He gets a cocktail for himself and then comes to above the c table*)

DR BRADMAN (*laughing*) I gather that there were never any tangible results?

CHARLES. Oh, sometimes she didn't do so badly. On one occasion when we were all sitting round in the pitch dark with my mother groping her way through Chaminade at the piano, my aunt suddenly gave a shrill scream and said that she saw a small black dog by my chair. Then someone switched on the lights and sure enough there it was.

MRS BRADMAN. But how extraordinary.

CHARLES. It was obviously a stray that had come in from the street. But I must say I took off my hat to Auntie for producing it, or rather for utilizing it. Even Mother was a bit shaken.

MRS BRADMAN. What happened to it?

CHARLES. It lived with us for years.

RUTH. I sincerely hope Madame Arcati won't produce any livestock. We have so very little room in this house.

MRS BRADMAN. Do you think she tells fortunes? I love having my fortune told.

CHARLES. I expect so.

RUTH. I was told once on the pier at Southsea that I was surrounded by lilies and a golden seven. It worried me for days.

(They all laugh)

CHARLES. We really must all be serious, you know, and pretend that we believe implicitly. Otherwise she won't play.

RUTH. Also, she might really mind. It would be cruel to upset her.

DR BRADMAN. I shall be as good as gold.

RUTH. Have you ever attended her, Doctor—professionally, I mean.

DR BRADMAN. Yes. She had influenza in January. She's only been here just over a year, you know. I must say she was singularly unpsychic then. I always understood that she was an authoress.

CHARLES. Oh yes. We originally met as colleagues at one of Mrs Wilmot's Sunday evenings in Sandgate.

MRS BRADMAN. What sort of books does she write?

CHARLES. Two sorts. Rather whimsical children's stories about enchanted woods filled with highly conventional flora and fauna; and enthusiastic biographies of minor royalties, very sentimental, reverent and extremely funny.

(There is the sound of the front-door bell)

RUTH. Here she is.

DR BRADMAN. She knows, doesn't she, about tonight? You're not going to spring it on her.

CHARLES. Of course. It was all arranged last week. I told her how profoundly interested I was in anything to do with the occult, and she blossomed like a rose.

RUTH. I really feel quite nervous; as though I were going to make a speech.

(EDITH is seen sedately going towards the door)

CHARLES. You go and meet her, darling.

(RUTH crosses up stage to the R side of the door. CHARLES to the L side of the door by the piano. DR BRADMAN moves to above the sofa. Meanwhile EDITH has opened the door, and MADAME ARCATI's voice, very high and clear, is heard)

MADAME ARCATI *(off)* I've leant my bike up against that little bush; it will be *perfectly* all right if no one touches it.

EDITH *(appearing)* Madame Arcati.

RUTH. How nice of you to have come all this way.

(MADAME ARCATI enters. She is a striking woman, dressed not too extravagantly but with a decided bias towards the barbaric. She might

be any age between forty-five and sixty-five. RUTH ushers her in. RUTH and CHARLES greet her simultaneously)

CHARLES. My dear Madame Arcati!

MADAME ARCATI. I'm afraid I'm rather late; but I had a sudden presentiment that I was going to have a puncture so I went back to fetch my pump.

(MADAME ARCATI takes off her cloak and hands it to RUTH, who puts it on the chair R of the door)

And then, of course, I didn't have a puncture at all.

CHARLES. Perhaps you will on the way home.

MADAME ARCATI *(moving below Ruth to R to shake hands with DR BRADMAN. Greeting him)* Doctor Bradman—the man with the gentle hands!

DR BRADMAN. I'm delighted to see you looking so well. This is my wife.

(MADAME ARCATI shakes hands with MRS BRADMAN over the back of the sofa. DR BRADMAN moves to the fireplace)

MADAME ARCATI. We are old friends—we meet coming out of shops.

CHARLES. Would you like a cocktail?

MADAME ARCATI *(peeling off some rather strange-looking gloves)* If it's a dry Martini, yes—if it's a concoction, no. Experience has taught me to be very wary of concoctions.

CHARLES *(up to the drinks table)* It is a dry Martini.

(MADAME ARCATI moves to Ruth, C)

MADAME ARCATI. How delicious. It was wonderful cycling through the woods this evening. I was deafened with bird song.

RUTH. It's been lovely all day.

MADAME ARCATI. But the evening's the time—mark my words. *(She takes the cocktail CHARLES gives her, he having come down on her R)* Thank you. Cheers! Cheers!

(RUTH leads MADAME ARCATI down stage to the L end of the sofa, where she sits. RUTH sits on the right arm of the armchair. DR BRADMAN is at the fireplace. CHARLES is above the C table)

RUTH. Don't you find it very tiring bicycling everywhere?

MADAME ARCATI. On the contrary, it stimulates me. I was getting far too sedentary in London. That horrid little flat with dim lights! They had to be dim, you know; the clients expect it.

MRS BRADMAN. I must say I find bicycling very exhausting.

MADAME ARCATI. Steady rhythm, that's what counts. Once you get the knack of it you need never look back. On you get and away you go.

MRS BRADMAN. But the hills, Madame Arcati; pushing up those awful hills.

MADAME ARCATI. Just knock again. Down with your head, up with your heart, and you're over the top like a flash and skimming down the other side like a dragon-fly. This is the best dry Martini I've had for years.

CHARLES. Will you have another?

MADAME ARCATI (*holding out her glass*) Certainly.

(CHARLES takes her glass and refills it at the drinks table)

You're a very clever man. Anybody can write books, but it takes an artist to make a dry Martini that's dry enough.

RUTH. Are you writing anything nowadays, Madame Arcati?

MADAME ARCATI. Every morning regular as clockwork, seven till one.

CHARLES (*giving MADAME ARCATI a cocktail*) Is it a novel or a memoir?

MADAME ARCATI. It's a children's book. I have to finish it by the end of October to catch the Christmas sales. It's mostly about very small animals; the hero is a moss beetle.

(MRS BRADMAN *laughs nervously*)

I had to give up my memoir of Princess Palliatani because she died in April. I talked to her about it the other day and she implored me to go on with it. But I really hadn't the heart.

MRS BRADMAN (*incredulously*) You *talked* to her about it the other day?

MADAME ARCATI. Yes, through my control, of course. She sounded very irritable.

MRS BRADMAN. It's funny to think of people in the spirit world being irritable, isn't it? I mean, one can hardly imagine it, can one?

CHARLES (*coming down on the left of Ruth*) We have no reliable guarantee that the after life will be any less exasperating than this one, have we?

MRS BRADMAN (*laughing*) Oh, Mr Condomine, how *can* you?

RUTH. I expect it's dreadfully ignorant of me not to know—but who was Princess Palliatani?

MADAME ARCATI. She was originally a Jewess from Odessa of quite remarkable beauty. It was an accepted fact that people used to stand on the seats of railway stations to watch her whizz by.

CHARLES. She was a keen traveller?

MADAME ARCATI. In her younger days, yes. Later on she married a Mr Clarke in the Consular Service and settled down for a while.

RUTH. How did she become Princess Palliatani?

MADAME ARCATI. That was years later. Mr Clarke passed over and left her penniless with two strapping girls.

RUTH. How unpleasant.

MADAME ARCATI. And so there was nothing for it but to obey

the beckoning finger of adventure and take to the road again. So off she went, bag and baggage, to Vladivostock.

CHARLES. What an extraordinary place to go!

MADAME ARCATI. She had cousins there. Some years later she met old Palliatani, who was returning from a secret mission in Japan. He was immediately staggered by her beauty and very shortly afterwards married her. From then on her life became really interesting.

DR BRADMAN. I should hardly have described it as dull before.

RUTH. What happened to the girls?

MADAME ARCATI. She neither saw them nor spoke to them for twenty-three years.

MRS BRADMAN. How extraordinary.

MADAME ARCATI. Not at all. She was always very erratic emotionally.

(The door of the dining-room opens and EDITH comes in)

EDITH *(nervously)* Dinner is served, mum.

RUTH. Thank you, Edith. Shall we—?

(EDITH retires backwards into the dining-room. They all rise)

MADAME ARCATI. No red meat, I hope?

RUTH. There's meat, but I don't think it will be very red. Would you rather have an egg or something?

MADAME ARCATI. No, thank you. It's just that I make it a rule never to eat red meat before I work. It sometimes has an odd effect . . .

CHARLES. What sort of effect?

MADAME ARCATI. Oh, nothing of the least importance. If it isn't very red, it won't matter much. Anyhow, we'll risk it.

(MADAME ARCATI goes out first with RUTH, followed by MRS BRADMAN, DR BRADMAN and CHARLES)

RUTH. Come along, then. Mrs Bradman—Madame Arcati—you're on Charles's right. . . .

(They all move into the dining-room as the lights fade on the scene)

(Light Cue No. 2. Act I, Scene 1)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

(Light Cue No. 1. Act I, Scene 2)

When the LIGHTS go up, dinner is over, and RUTH, MRS BRADMAN and MADAME ARCATI are sitting having their coffee; MRS BRADMAN on the pouffe down stage R. MADAME ARCATI on the R end of the sofa,

RUTH *on the L end of the sofa. All have coffee-cups. The doors are open, the windows are closed and the curtains are half closed.*

MADAME ARCATI. . . . on her mother's side she went right back to the Borgias, which I think accounted for a lot one way or another. Even as a child she was given to the most violent destructive tempers. Very inbred, you know.

MRS BRADMAN. Yes; she must have been.

MADAME ARCATI. My control was quite scared the other day when we were talking. I could hear it in her voice. After all, she's only a child.

RUTH. Do you always have a child as a control?

MADAME ARCATI. Yes, they're generally the best. Some mediums prefer Indians, of course, but personally I've always found them unreliable.

RUTH. In what way unreliable?

MADAME ARCATI. Well, for one thing, they're frightfully lazy, and also, when faced with any sort of difficulty, they're rather apt to go off into their own tribal language, which is naturally unintelligible. That generally spoils everything and wastes a great deal of time. No, children are undoubtedly more satisfactory, particularly when they get to know you and understand your ways. Daphne has worked with me for years.

MRS BRADMAN. And she still goes on being a child? I mean, she doesn't show signs of growing any older?

MADAME ARCATI (*patiently*). Time values on the Other Side are utterly different from ours.

MRS BRADMAN. Do you feel funny when you go off into a trance?

MADAME ARCATI. In what way funny?

RUTH (*hastily*). Mrs Bradman doesn't mean funny in its comic implication; I think she meant odd or strange.

MADAME ARCATI. The word was an unfortunate choice.

MRS BRADMAN. I'm sure I'm very sorry.

MADAME ARCATI. It doesn't matter in the least. Please don't apologize.

RUTH. When did you first discover that you had these extraordinary powers?

MADAME ARCATI. When I was quite tiny. My mother was a medium before me, you know, and so I had every opportunity of starting on the ground floor, as you might say. I had my first trance when I was four years old and my first ectoplasmic manifestation when I was five and a half. What an exciting day that was! I shall never forget it. Of course the manifestation itself was quite small and of very short duration, but, for a child of my tender years, it was most gratifying.

MRS BRADMAN. Your mother must have been so pleased.

MADAME ARCATI (*modestly*). She was.

MRS BRADMAN. Can you foretell the future?

MADAME ARCATI. Certainly not. I disapprove of fortune tellers most strongly.

MRS BRADMAN (*disappointed*) Oh, really? Why?

MADAME ARCATI. Too much guesswork and fake mixed up with it, even when the gift is genuine. And it only very occasionally is. You can't count on it.

RUTH. Why not?

MADAME ARCATI. Time again. Time is the reef upon which all our frail mystic ships are wrecked.

RUTH. You mean because it has never yet been proved that the past and the present and the future are not one and the same thing.

MADAME ARCATI. I long ago came to the conclusion that nothing has ever been definitely proved about anything.

RUTH. How very wise.

(MADAME ARCATI *hands her cup to RUTH. MRS BRADMAN puts her cup behind her on the small table down stage R. EDITH comes in with a tray of drinks. She puts the tray down on the C table by Ruth. RUTH moves a coffee-cup and a vase to make room for it. She takes the cigarette-box and the ash tray from the table and gives them to EDITH, who puts them on the drinks table*)

I want you to leave the dining-room just as it is for tonight, Edith. You can clear the table in the morning.

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. And we don't want to be disturbed for the next hour or so for any reason whatsoever. Is that clear?

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. And if anyone should telephone, just say we are out and take a message.

MRS BRADMAN. Unless it's an urgent call for George.

RUTH. Unless it's an urgent call for Doctor Bradman.

EDITH. Yes'm.

(EDITH *goes out swiftly*)

RUTH. There's not likely to be one, is there?

MRS BRADMAN. No, I don't think so.

MADAME ARCATI. Once I am off it won't matter, but an interruption during the preliminary stages might be disastrous.

MRS BRADMAN. I wish the men would hurry up. I'm terribly excited.

MADAME ARCATI. Please don't be. It makes everything much, much more difficult.

(CHARLES and DR BRADMAN *come out of the dining-room. They are smoking cigars. DR BRADMAN comes to the fireplace and CHARLES to the L arm of the armchair*)

CHARLES (*cheerfully*) Well, Madame Arcati—the time is drawing near.

MADAME ARCATI. Who knows? It may be receding!

CHARLES. How very true.

DR BRADMAN. I hope you feel in the mood, Madame Arcati.

MADAME ARCATI. It isn't a question of mood. It's a question of concentration.

RUTH. You must forgive us being impatient. We can perfectly easily wait though, if you're not quite ready to start.

MADAME ARCATI. Nonsense, my dear, I'm absolutely ready. (*She rises*) Heigho, heigho, to work we go!

CHARLES. Is there anything you'd like us to do?

MADAME ARCATI. Do?

CHARLES. Yes—hold hands or anything?

MADAME ARCATI. All that will come later. (*She goes to the window*)

(*The others all rise*)

First a few deep, deep breaths of fresh air— (*Over her shoulder*) You may talk if you wish, it will not disturb me in the least. (*She flings the windows wide open and inhales deeply and a trifle noisily*)

RUTH (*with a quizzical glance at Charles*) Oh dear!

CHARLES (*putting his finger to his lips warningly*) An excellent dinner, darling. I congratulate you.

RUTH. The mousse wasn't quite right.

CHARLES. It looked a bit hysterical, but it tasted delicious.

MADAME ARCATI. That cuckoo is very angry.

CHARLES. I beg your pardon?

MADAME ARCATI. I said that cuckoo is very angry. Listen.

(*They all listen obediently*)

CHARLES. How can you tell?

MADAME ARCATI. Timbre. No moon; that's as well, I think. There's mist rising from the marshes. (*A thought strikes her*) There's no need for me to light my bicycle lamp, is there? I mean, nobody is likely to fall over it?

RUTH. No, we're not expecting anybody else.

MADAME ARCATI. Good night, you foolish bird. (*She closes the windows*) You have a table?

CHARLES. Yes. We thought that one would do.

MADAME ARCATI (*putting her hands on the small table below the piano and then pointing to the C table*) I think the one that has the drinks on it would be better.

(*DR BRADMAN comes to the C table and takes the tray from it and puts it up stage R on the drinks table, closes the doors and brings the chair from R of the door to down stage L. CHARLES brings the C table over to L between the armchair and the gramophone*)

DR BRADMAN. Change over.

CHARLES (*to Ruth*) You told Edith we didn't want to be disturbed?

RUTH. Yes, darling.

MADAME ARCATI (*crossing below the séance table, over to the mantel-piece. Then she walks about the room—twisting and untwisting her hands*) This is a moment I always hate.

RUTH. Are you nervous?

MADAME ARCATI. Yes. When I was a girl I always used to be sick.

DR BRADMAN. How fortunate that you grew out of it.

(*RUTH gets the desk-chair from up stage R and brings it to LC above the table*)

RUTH (*hurriedly*) Children are always much more prone to be sick than grown-ups, though, aren't they? I know I could never travel in a train with any degree of safety until I was fourteen.

(*MADAME ARCATI is now walking RC above the sofa. MRS BRADMAN brings the pouffe over to R of the séance table*)

MADAME ARCATI (*still walking*) 'Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper. What shall he have but brown bread and butter?' I despise that because it doesn't rhyme at all; but Daphne loves it.

(*MADAME ARCATI has now arrived below the sofa. The others are grouped round the séance table, DR BRADMAN down L, RUTH on his R, then CHARLES and MRS BRADMAN by the pouffe*)

DR BRADMAN. Who's Daphne?

RUTH. Daphne is Madame Arcati's control. She's a little girl.

DR BRADMAN. Oh, I see—yes, of course.

CHARLES. How old is she?

MADAME ARCATI. Rising seven when she died.

MRS BRADMAN. And when was that?

MADAME ARCATI. February the sixth, eighteen eighty-four.

MRS BRADMAN. Poor little thing.

(*DR BRADMAN brings the chair above the gramophone to the table*)

DR BRADMAN. She must be a bit long in the tooth by now, I should think.

MADAME ARCATI (*at the fireplace. She stops walking and addresses Dr Bradman across the stage*) You should think, Doctor Bradman, but I fear you don't; at least, not profoundly enough.

MRS BRADMAN. Do be quiet, George. You'll put Madame Arcati off.

MADAME ARCATI. Don't worry, my dear, I am quite used to sceptics. They generally turn out to be the most vulnerable and receptive in the long run.

RUTH. You'd better take that warning to heart, Doctor Bradman.

DR BRADMAN. Please forgive me, Madame Arcati. I can assure you I am most deeply interested.

MADAME ARCATI. It is of no consequence. Will you all sit round the table, please, and place your hands downwards on it?

RUTH. Come, Mrs Bradman—

CHARLES. What about the lights?

MADAME ARCATI. All in good time, Mr Condomine. Sit down, please.

(The four of them sit down at each side of the séance table. RUTH is up stage facing MRS BRADMAN. CHARLES on Ruth's R. DR BRADMAN on Ruth's L. MADAME ARCATI comes to above the table between Ruth and Dr Bradman and surveys them critically, her head on one side. She is whistling a little tune. Then she sings)

The fingers should be touching . . . that's right. I presume that that is the gramophone, Mr Condomine?

CHARLES *(half rising)* Yes. Would you like me to start it? It's an electric one.

MADAME ARCATI. Please stay where you are. I can manage. *(She moves to the gramophone L and picks up the record album from the rack below it)* Now let me see—what have we here? Brahms—oh dear me, no; Rachmaninoff—too florid. Where is the dance music?

RUTH. They're the loose ones on the left.

MADAME ARCATI. I see. *(She stoops down and produces a pile of dance records)*

CHARLES. I'm afraid they're none of them very new.

MADAME ARCATI. Daphne is really more attached to Irving Berlin than anybody else. She likes a tune she can hum. Ah, here's one—'Always'.

CHARLES *(half jumping up again)* 'Always'!

RUTH. Do sit down, Charles. What is the matter?

CHARLES *(subsiding)* Nothing—nothing at all.

MADAME ARCATI. The light switch is by the door?

RUTH. Yes, all except the small one on the desk, and the gramophone.

MADAME ARCATI *(moving above them to C on R of Ruth)* Very well, I understand.

RUTH. Charles, do keep still.

MRS BRADMAN. Fingers touching, George. Remember what Madame Arcati said.

MADAME ARCATI. Now there are one or two things that I should like to explain; so will you all listen attentively?

RUTH. Of course.

MADAME ARCATI. Presently, when the music begins, I am going to switch out the lights. I may then either walk about the

room for a little or lie down flat. In due course I shall draw up this dear little stool and join you at the table. I shall place myself between you and your wife, Mr Condomine, and rest my hands lightly upon yours. I must ask you not to address me or move or do anything in the least distracting. Is that quite, quite clear?

CHARLES. Perfectly.

MADAME ARCATI. Of course, I cannot guarantee that anything will happen at all. Daphne may be unavailable. She had a head cold very recently, and was rather under the weather, poor child. On the other hand, a great many things might occur. One of you might have an emanation, for instance; or we might contact a poltergeist, which would be extremely destructive and noisy.

RUTH (*anxiously*). In what way destructive?

MADAME ARCATI. They throw things, you know.

RUTH. No, I didn't know.

MADAME ARCATI. But we must cross that bridge when we come to it, mustn't we?

CHARLES. Certainly—by all means.

MADAME ARCATI. Fortunately an Elemental at this time of the year is most unlikely.

RUTH. What do Elementals do?

MADAME ARCATI. Oh, my dear, one can never tell. They're dreadfully unpredictable. Usually they take the form of a very cold wind.

MRS BRADMAN. I don't think I shall like that.

MADAME ARCATI. Occasionally reaching almost hurricane velocity.

RUTH. You don't think it would be a good idea to take the more breakable ornaments off the mantelpiece before we start?

MADAME ARCATI (*indulgently*). That really is not necessary, Mrs Condomine. I assure you I have my own methods of dealing with Elementals.

RUTH. I'm so glad.

MADAME ARCATI. Now, then; are you ready to empty your minds?

DR BRADMAN. Do you mean we're to try to think of nothing?

MADAME ARCATI. Absolutely nothing, Doctor Bradman. Concentrate on a space or a nondescript colour. That's really the best way.

DR BRADMAN. I'll do my damndest.

MADAME ARCATI. Good work!—I will now start the music.

(She goes to the gramophone, puts on the record of 'Always', and begins to walk about the room; occasionally she moves into an abortive little dance step. Then with sudden speed, she runs across the room and switches off the lights)

Lights!

(Light Cue No. 2. Act I, Scene 2)

MRS BRADMAN. Oh dear!

MADAME ARCATI. Quiet—please!

(In the gloom MADAME ARCATI, after wandering about a little, brings the stool from under the piano to between Ruth and Charles and sits at the table. The gramophone record comes to an end. There is dead silence)

Is there anyone there? . . . *(A long pause)* . . . Is there anyone there? . . . *(Another long pause)* . . . One rap for yes . . . two raps for no. Now then . . . is there anyone there?

(After a shorter pause, the table gives a little bump)

MRS BRADMAN *(involuntarily)* Oh!

MADAME ARCATI. Sshhh! . . . Is that you, Daphne? *(The table gives a louder bump)* Is your cold better, dear? *(The table gives two loud bumps, very quickly)* Oh, I'm so sorry. Are you doing anything for it? *(The table bumps several times)* I'm afraid she's rather fretful . . . *(There is a silence)* Is there anyone there who wishes to speak to anyone here? *(After a pause the table gives one bump)* Ah! Now we're getting somewhere . . . No, Daphne, don't do that, dear, you're hurting me . . . Daphne, dear, please . . . Oh, oh, oh! . . . be good, there's a dear child . . . You say there is someone there who wishes to speak to someone here? *(One bump)* Is it me? *(Two sharp bumps)* Is it Doctor Bradman? *(Two bumps)* Is it Mrs Bradman? *(Two bumps)* Is it Mrs Condomine? *(Several very loud bumps, which continue until MADAME ARCATI shouts it down)* Stop it! Behave yourself! Is it Mr Condomine? *(There is dead silence for a moment, and then a very loud single bump)* There's someone who wishes to speak to you, Mr Condomine.

CHARLES. Tell them to leave a message.

(The table bangs about loudly)

MADAME ARCATI. I really must ask you not to be flippant, Mr Condomine.

RUTH. Charles, how can you be so idiotic? You'll spoil everything.

CHARLES. I'm sorry; it slipped out.

MADAME ARCATI. Do you know anybody who has passed over recently?

CHARLES. Not recently, except my cousin in the Civil Service, and he wouldn't be likely to want to communicate with me. We haven't spoken for years.

MADAME ARCATI *(hysterically)* Are you Mr Condomine's cousin in the Civil Service? *(The table bumps violently several times)* I'm afraid we've drawn a blank. Can't you think of anyone else? Rack your brains.

RUTH *(helpfully)* It might be old Mrs Plummett, you know. She died on Whit-Monday.

CHARLES. I can't imagine why old Mrs Plummett should wish to talk to me. We had very little in common.

RUTH. It's worth trying, anyhow.

MADAME ARCATI. Are you old Mrs Plummett?

(The table remains still)

RUTH. She was very deaf. Perhaps you'd better shout.

MADAME ARCATI *(shouting)* Are you old Mrs Plummett? *(Nothing happens)* There's nobody there at all.

MRS BRADMAN. How disappointing; just as we were getting on so nicely.

DR BRADMAN. Violet, be quiet.

MADAME ARCATI *(rising)* Well, I'm afraid there's nothing for it but for me to go into a trance. I had hoped to avoid it because it's so exhausting—however, what must be must be. Excuse me a moment while I start the gramophone again. *(She comes to the gramophone)*

CHARLES *(in a strained voice)* Not 'Always'. Don't play 'Always'—

RUTH. Why ever not, Charles? Don't be absurd.

MADAME ARCATI *(gently)* I'm afraid I must. It would be imprudent to change horses in midstream, if you know what I mean. *(She restarts the gramophone)*

CHARLES. Have it your own way.

(MADAME ARCATI starts to moan and comes back slowly to the stool and sits. Then in the darkness a child's voice is heard reciting rather breathlessly: 'Little Tommy Tucker')

DR BRADMAN. That would be Daphne. She ought to have had her adenoids out.

MRS BRADMAN. George—please.

(MADAME ARCATI suddenly gives a loud scream and falls off the stool on to the floor)

CHARLES. Good God!

RUTH. Keep still, Charles . . .

(CHARLES subsides. Everyone sits in silence for a moment, then the table starts bouncing about)

MRS BRADMAN. It's trying to get away. I can't hold it.

RUTH. Press down hard.

(The table falls over with a crash)

There now!

MRS BRADMAN. Ought we to pick it up or leave it where it is?

DR BRADMAN. How the hell do I know?

MRS BRADMAN. There's no need to snap at me.

ELVIRA (*behind the fireplace opening, on the other side, a perfectly strange and very charming voice*) Leave it where it is.

CHARLES. Who said that?

RUTH. Who said what?

CHARLES. Somebody said 'Leave it where it is.'

RUTH. Nonsense, dear.

CHARLES. I heard it distinctly.

RUTH. Well, nobody else did—did they?

MRS BRADMAN. I never heard a sound.

CHARLES. It was you, Ruth. You're playing tricks.

RUTH. I'm not doing anything of the sort. I haven't uttered.

(*There is another pause, and then the voice says:*)

ELVIRA (*behind the doorway c*) Good evening, Charles.

CHARLES (*very agitated*) Ventriloquism—that's what it is—ventriloquism.

RUTH (*irritably*) What is the matter with you?

CHARLES. You must have heard that. One of you must have heard that!

RUTH. Heard *what*?

CHARLES. You mean to sit there solemnly and tell me that you none of you heard anything at all?

DR BRADMAN. I certainly didn't.

MRS BRADMAN. Neither did I. I wish I had. I should love to hear something.

RUTH. It's you who are playing the tricks, Charles. You're acting to try to frighten us.

CHARLES (*breathlessly*) I'm not. I swear I'm not.

ELVIRA (*behind the windows*) It's difficult to think of what to say after seven years, but I suppose good evening is as good as anything else.

CHARLES (*intensely*) Who are you?

ELVIRA (*as before*) Elvira, of course—don't be so silly.

CHARLES. I can't bear this for another minute . . . (*He rises violently*) Get up, everybody—the entertainment's over.

(*Light Cue No. 3. Act I, Scene 2*)

(*He rushes across the room and switches on the lights. Then he moves to the fireplace. All the others rise. MADAME ARCATI is on the floor, her head towards the audience and her feet on the stool*)

RUTH. Oh, Charles, how tiresome of you. Just as we were beginning to enjoy ourselves.

CHARLES. Never again—that's all I can say. Never, never again as long as I live.

RUTH. What on earth's the matter with you?

CHARLES. Nothing's the matter with me. I'm just sick of the whole business, that's all.

DR BRADMAN. Did you hear anything that we didn't hear really?

CHARLES (*with a forced laugh*) Of course not—I was only pretending.

RUTH. I know you were.

MRS BRADMAN. Oh dear—look at Madame Arcati!

(MADAME ARCATI is still lying on the floor with her feet upon the stool from which she fell. She is obviously quite unconscious)

RUTH. What are we to do with her?

CHARLES. Bring her round—bring her round as soon as possible.

DR BRADMAN (*going over and kneeling down beside her*) I think we'd better leave her alone.

RUTH. But she might stay like that for hours.

(DR BRADMAN is kneeling L of Madame Arcati, RUTH is above her. MRS BRADMAN to the L of Dr Bradman. CHARLES goes to the R of Madame Arcati below the sofa)

DR BRADMAN (*after feeling her pulse and examining her eye*) She's out all right.

CHARLES (*almost hysterically*) Bring her round! It's dangerous to leave her like that.

RUTH. Really, Charles, you are behaving most peculiarly.

CHARLES (*kneeling R of MADAME ARCATI, shaking her violently*) Wake up, Madame Arcati! Wake up! It's time to go home!

DR BRADMAN. Here—go easy, old man!

CHARLES. Get some brandy—give her some brandy, lift her into the chair—help me, Bradman!

(RUTH goes to the drinks table L and pours out some brandy.

CHARLES and DR BRADMAN lift MADAME ARCATI and put her in the armchair. MRS BRADMAN takes the stool from her feet and puts it back under the piano)

(*Leaning over her*) Wake up, Madame Arcati! Little Tommy Tucker, Madame Arcati!

(RUTH brings the brandy to above the armchair. CHARLES takes it and gives some to MADAME ARCATI on her R. DR BRADMAN pats her hand on her L. MRS BRADMAN is above Dr Bradman)

RUTH. Here's the brandy.

(MADAME ARCATI gives a slight moan and a shiver)

CHARLES (*forcing some brandy between her lips*) Wake up!

(MADAME ARCATI gives a prolonged shiver and chokes slightly over the brandy)

MRS BRADMAN. She's coming round.

RUTH. Be careful, Charles, you're spilling it all down her dress.

MADAME ARCATI (*opening her eyes*) Well, that's that.

RUTH (*solicitously*) Are you all right?

MADAME ARCATI. Certainly I am. Never felt better in my life.

CHARLES. Would you like some more brandy?

MADAME ARCATI. So that's the funny taste in my mouth. Well, really! Fancy allowing them to give me brandy, Doctor Bradman. You ought to have known better—brandy on top of a trance might have been catastrophic. Take it away, please. I probably shan't sleep a wink tonight as it is.

CHARLES. I know I shan't.

RUTH. Why on earth not?

(CHARLES *moves away to R to the fireplace and takes a cigarette*)

CHARLES. The whole experience has unhinged me.

MADAME ARCATI. Well, what happened? Was it satisfactory?

RUTH. Nothing much happened, Madame Arcati, after you went off.

MADAME ARCATI. Something happened all right, I can feel it— (*She rises, crosses to the fireplace, above Charles, and sniffs*) No poltergeist, at any rate—that's a good thing. Any apparitions?

DR BRADMAN. Not a thing.

MADAME ARCATI. No ectoplasm?

RUTH. I'm not quite sure what it is, but I don't think so.

MADAME ARCATI. Very curious. I feel as though something tremendous has taken place.

RUTH. Charles pretended he heard a voice in order to frighten us.

CHARLES (*lighting a cigarette*) It was only a joke.

MADAME ARCATI. A very poor one, if I may say so (*She goes round above the sofa to RC*) Nevertheless, I am prepared to swear that there is someone else psychic in this room apart from myself.

RUTH. I don't see how there can be really, Madame Arcati.

MADAME ARCATI. I do hope I haven't gone and released something. However, we are bound to find out within a day or two. If any manifestation should occur or you hear any unexpected noises, you might let me know at once.

RUTH. Of course we will. We'll telephone immediately.

MADAME ARCATI. I think I really must be on my way now.

RUTH. Wouldn't you like anything before you go?

MADAME ARCATI. No, thank you. I have some Ovaltine all ready in a saucepan at home; it only needs hotting up.

DR BRADMAN. Wouldn't you like to leave your bicycle here and let us drive you?

MRS BRADMAN. I honestly do think you should, Madame Arcati. After that trance and everything you can't be feeling quite yourself.

MADAME ARCATI. Nonsense, my dear, I'm as fit as a fiddle.

Always feel capital after a trance—rejuvenates me. Good night, Mrs Condomine.

RUTH. It was awfully sweet of you to take so much trouble.

MADAME ARCATI. I'm so sorry so little occurred. It's that cold of Daphne's, I expect. You know what children are when they have anything wrong with them. We must try again some other evening.

(MADAME ARCATI crosses above Ruth to R of Mrs Bradman)

RUTH. That would be lovely.

MADAME ARCATI (*shaking hands with MRS BRADMAN*) Good night, Mrs Bradman.

MRS BRADMAN. It was thrilling, it really was. I felt the table absolutely shaking under my hands.

(MADAME ARCATI crosses to DR BRADMAN and shakes hands)

MADAME ARCATI. Good night, Doctor.

DR BRADMAN. Congratulations, Madame Arcati.

MADAME ARCATI. I am fully aware of the irony in your voice, Doctor Bradman. As a matter of fact you'd be an admirable subject for telepathic hypnosis. A great chum of mine is an expert. I should like her to look you over.

DR BRADMAN. I'm sure I should be charmed.

MADAME ARCATI. Good night, everyone. Next time we must really put our backs into it!

(*With a comprehensive smile and a wave of the hand, she goes out, followed by CHARLES.*)

RUTH sinks down into the sofa, laughing helplessly. MRS BRADMAN comes and sits L of the armchair. DR BRADMAN picks up the séance table and puts the desk-chair back up stage R, then comes back and puts the pouffe back in position down stage R. He then returns to LC)

RUTH. Oh dear! . . . oh dear!

MRS BRADMAN (*beginning to laugh too*) Be careful, Mrs Condomine; she might hear you.

RUTH. I can't help it. I really can't. I've been holding this in for ages.

MRS BRADMAN. She certainly put you in your place, George, and serve you right.

RUTH. She's raving mad, of course; mad as a hatter.

MRS BRADMAN. But do you really think she *believes*?

DR BRADMAN. Of course not. The whole thing's a put-up job. I must say, though, she shoots a more original line than they generally do.

RUTH. I should think that she's probably half convinced herself by now.

DR BRADMAN. Possibly. The trance was genuine enough; but that, of course, is easily accounted for.

RUTH. Hysteria?

DR BRADMAN. Yes—a form of hysteria, I should imagine.

MRS BRADMAN. I do hope Mr Condomine got all the atmosphere he wanted for his book.

RUTH. He might have got a great deal more if he hadn't spoiled everything by showing off . . . I'm really very cross with him.

(Light Cue No. 4. Act I, Scene 2)

(At this moment ELVIRA comes in through the french windows. She is charmingly dressed in a sort of negligée. Everything about her is grey; hair, skin, dress, hands, so we must accept the fact that she is not quite of this world. She passes between DR and MRS BRADMAN and RUTH while they are talking. None of them sees her. She moves to the fireplace, then comes round the sofa to below the piano, where she leans. She regards them with interest, a slight smile on her face)

I suddenly felt a draught—there must be a window open.

DR BRADMAN *(looking)* No—they're shut.

MRS BRADMAN *(laughing)* Perhaps it was one of those what you may call 'ems that Madame Arcati was talking about.

DR BRADMAN. Elementals.

RUTH *(also laughing again)* Oh no, it couldn't be. She distinctly said that it was the wrong time of the year for Elementals.

(CHARLES comes in and moves to the armchair c)

CHARLES. Well, the old girl's gone pedalling off down the drive at the hell of a speed. We had a bit of trouble lighting her lamp.

MRS BRADMAN. Poor thing.

CHARLES. I've got a theory about her, you know. I believe she is completely sincere.

RUTH. Charles! How could she be?

CHARLES. Wouldn't it be possible, Doctor? Some form of self-hypnotism?

DR BRADMAN. It might be. As I was explaining to your wife just now, there are certain types of hysterical subjects . . .

MRS BRADMAN. George, dear, it's getting terribly late, we really must go home. You have to get up so early in the morning.

DR BRADMAN. You see? The moment I begin to talk about anything that really interests me, my wife interrupts me.

MRS BRADMAN. You know I'm right, darling—it's past eleven.

DR BRADMAN *(moves to Charles c)* I'll do a little reading up on the whole business; just for the fun of it.

CHARLES. You must have a drink before you go.

DR BRADMAN. No, really, thank you. Violet's quite right, I'm afraid. I have got to get up abominably early tomorrow. I have a patient being operated on in Canterbury.

(MRS BRADMAN goes to Ruth, below the sofa. RUTH rises)

MRS BRADMAN. It has been a thrilling evening. I shall never forget it. It was sweet of you to include us.

DR BRADMAN. Good night, Mrs Condomine. Thank you so much.

CHARLES. You're sure about the drink?

DR BRADMAN. Quite sure, thanks.

RUTH. We'll let you know if we find any poltergeists whirling about.

DR BRADMAN. I should never forgive you if you didn't.

MRS BRADMAN. Come along, darling.

(The BRADMANs exeunt, followed by CHARLES.)

RUTH crosses to the piano, leans over Elvira and gets a cigarette and lights it, then crosses back to the fireplace as CHARLES comes back into the room)

RUTH. Well, darling?

CHARLES *(L end of the sofa. Absently)* Well?

RUTH. Would you say the evening had been profitable?

CHARLES. Yes—I suppose so.

RUTH. I must say it was extremely funny at moments.

CHARLES. Yes—it certainly was.

RUTH. What's the matter?

CHARLES. The matter?

RUTH. Yes. You seem old, somehow. Do you feel quite well?

CHARLES. Perfectly. I think I'll have a drink. Do you want one?

RUTH. No, thank you, dear.

CHARLES *(moving to the drinks table and pouring out a whisky and soda)* It's rather chilly in this room.

RUTH. Come over by the fire.

CHARLES. I don't think I'll make any notes tonight. I'll start fresh in the morning.

(CHARLES turns, the glass in his hand. He sees Elvira and drops the glass on the floor)

My God!

RUTH. Charles!

ELVIRA. That was very clumsy, Charles dear.

CHARLES. Elvira!—then it's true—it was you!

ELVIRA. Of course it was.

RUTH *(starts to go to Charles)* Charles—darling Charles—what are you talking about?

CHARLES *(to Elvira)* Are you a ghost?

ELVIRA *(crossing below the sofa to the fire)* I suppose I must be. It's all very confusing.

RUTH *(moving to R of Charles and becoming agitated)* Charles—what do you keep looking over there for? Look at me. What's happened?

CHARLES. Don't you see?

RUTH. See what?

CHARLES. Elvira.

RUTH (*staring at him incredulously*) Elvira!!

CHARLES (*with an effort at social grace*) Yes. Elvira dear, this is Ruth. Ruth, this is Elvira.

(RUTH tries to take his arm. CHARLES retreats down stage L)

RUTH (*with forced calmness*) Come and sit down, darling.

CHARLES. Do you mean to say you can't see her?

RUTH. Listen, Charles—you just sit down quietly by the fire and I'll mix you another drink. Don't worry about the mess on the carpet, Edith can clean it up in the morning. (*She takes him by the arm*)

CHARLES (*breaking away*) But you must be able to see her—she's there—look—right in front of you—there!

RUTH. Are you mad! What's happened to you?

CHARLES. You can't see her?

RUTH. If this is a joke, dear, it's gone quite far enough. Sit down, for God's sake, and don't be idiotic.

CHARLES (*clutching his head*) What am I to do! What the hell am I to do!

ELVIRA. I think you might at least be a little more pleased to see me. After all, you conjured me up.

CHARLES. I didn't do any such thing.

ELVIRA. Nonsense; of course you did. That awful child with the cold came and told me you wanted to see me urgently.

CHARLES. It was all a mistake, a horrible mistake.

RUTH. Stop talking like that, Charles. As I told you before the joke's gone far enough.

CHARLES. I've gone mad, that's what it is, I've just gone raving mad.

RUTH (*pouring out some brandy and bringing it to Charles below the piano*) Here—drink this.

CHARLES (*mechanically—taking it*) This is appalling!

RUTH. Relax.

CHARLES. How can I relax? I shall never be able to relax again as long as I live.

RUTH. Drink some brandy.

CHARLES (*drinking it at a gulp*) There! Now are you satisfied?

RUTH. Now sit down.

CHARLES. Why are you so anxious for me to sit down? What good will that do?

RUTH. I want you to relax. You can't relax standing up.

ELVIRA. African natives can. They can stand on one leg for hours.

CHARLES. I don't happen to be an African native.

RUTH. You don't happen to be a *what*?

CHARLES (*savagely*) An African native!

RUTH. What's that got to do with it?

CHARLES. It doesn't matter, Ruth; really it doesn't matter.

(CHARLES sits in the armchair. RUTH moves above him)

We'll say no more about it. See, I've sat down.

RUTH. Would you like some more brandy?

CHARLES. Yes, please.

(RUTH goes up to the drinks table with the glass)

ELVIRA. Very unwise. You always had a weak head.

CHARLES. I could drink you under the table.

RUTH. There's no need to be aggressive, Charles. I'm doing my best to help you.

CHARLES. I'm sorry.

RUTH (*coming to Charles with the brandy*) Here, drink this; and then we'll go to bed.

ELVIRA. Get rid of her, Charles; then we can talk in peace.

CHARLES. That's a thoroughly immoral suggestion. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

RUTH. What is there immoral in that?

CHARLES. I wasn't talking to you.

RUTH. Who were you talking to, then?

CHARLES. Elvira, of course.

RUTH. To hell with Elvira!

ELVIRA. There now—she's getting cross.

CHARLES. I don't blame her.

RUTH. What don't you blame her for?

CHARLES (*rising and backing downstage L a pace*) Oh, God!

RUTH. Now, look here, Charles. I gather you've got some sort of plan behind all this. I'm not quite a fool. I suspected you when we were doing that idiotic séance.

CHARLES. Don't be so silly. What plan could I have?

RUTH. I don't know. It's probably something to do with the characters in your book—how they, or one of them, would react to a certain situation. I refuse to be used as a guinea-pig unless I'm warned beforehand what it's all about.

CHARLES (*moving a couple of paces towards Ruth*) Elvira is here, Ruth—she's standing a few yards away from you.

RUTH (*sarcastically*) Yes, dear, I can see her distinctly—under the piano with a zebra!

CHARLES. But Ruth—

RUTH. I am not going to stay here arguing any longer.

ELVIRA. Hurray!

CHARLES. Shut up!

RUTH (*incensed*) How dare you speak to me like that?

CHARLES. Listen, Ruth. Please listen—

RUTH. I will not listen to any more of this nonsense. I am going up to bed now; I'll leave you to turn out the lights. I shan't be asleep. I'm too upset. So you can come in and say good night to me if you feel like it.

ELVIRA. That's big of her, I must say.

CHARLES. Be quiet. You're behaving like a guttersnipe.

RUTH (*icily*) That is all I have to say. Good night, Charles.

(RUTH walks swiftly out of the room without looking at him again)

CHARLES (*following Ruth to the door*) Ruth——

ELVIRA. That was one of the most enjoyable half-hours I have ever spent.

CHARLES (*putting down his glass on the drinks table*) Oh, Elvira—how could you!

ELVIRA. Poor Ruth!

CHARLES (*staring at her*) This is obviously an hallucination, isn't it?

ELVIRA. I'm afraid I don't know the technical term for it.

CHARLES (*coming down c*) What am I to do?

ELVIRA. What Ruth suggested—relax.

CHARLES (*moving below the chair to the sofa*) Where have you come from?

ELVIRA. Do you know, it's very peculiar, but I've sort of forgotten.

CHARLES. Are you to be here indefinitely?

ELVIRA. I don't know that either.

CHARLES. Oh, my God!

ELVIRA. Why? Would you hate it so much if I was?

CHARLES. Well, you must admit it would be embarrassing?

ELVIRA. I don't see why, really. It's all a question of adjusting yourself. Anyhow, I think it's horrid of you to be so unwelcoming and disagreeable.

CHARLES. Now look here, Elvira——

ELVIRA (*near tears*) I do. I think you're mean.

CHARLES. Try to see my point, dear. I've been married to Ruth for five years, and you've been dead for seven . . .

ELVIRA. Not dead, Charles. 'Passed over.' It's considered vulgar to say 'dead' where I come from.

CHARLES. Passed over, then.

ELVIRA. At any rate, now that I'm here, the least you can do is to make a pretence of being amiable about it.

CHARLES. Of course, my dear, I'm delighted in one way.

ELVIRA. I don't believe you love me any more.

CHARLES. I shall always love the memory of you.

ELVIRA (*crossing slowly above the sofa by the armchair to downstage L*) You mustn't think me unreasonable, but I really am a little hurt. You called me back; and at great inconvenience I came—and you've been thoroughly churlish ever since I arrived.

CHARLES (*gently*) Believe me, Elvira, I most emphatically did not send for you. There's been some mistake.

ELVIRA (*irritably*) Well, somebody did—and that child said it was you. I remember I was playing backgammon with a very sweet old Oriental gentleman, I think his name was Genghiz Khan, and I'd just thrown double sixes, and then the child paged me and the next thing I knew I was in this room. Perhaps it was your subconscious . . .

CHARLES. You must find out whether you are going to stay or not, and we can make arrangements accordingly.

ELVIRA. I don't see how I can.

CHARLES. Well, try to think. Isn't there anyone that you know, that you can get in touch with over there—on the other side, or whatever it's called—who could advise you?

ELVIRA. I can't think—it seems so far away—as though I'd dreamed it . . .

CHARLES. You must know somebody else besides Genghiz Khan.

ELVIRA (*moving to the armchair*) Oh, Charles . . .

CHARLES. What is it?

ELVIRA. I want to cry, but I don't think I'm able to.

CHARLES. What do you want to cry for?

ELVIRA. It's seeing you again—and you being so irascible, like you always used to be.

CHARLES. I don't mean to be irascible, Elvira.

ELVIRA. Darling—I don't mind really—I never did.

CHARLES. Is it cold—being a ghost?

ELVIRA. No—I don't think so.

CHARLES. What happens if I touch you?

ELVIRA. I doubt if you can. Do you want to?

CHARLES (*sitting at the L end of the sofa*) Oh, Elvira . . . (*He buries his face in his hands*)

ELVIRA (*moving to the L arm of the sofa*) What is it, darling?

CHARLES. I really do feel strange, seeing you again.

ELVIRA (*moving to R below the sofa and round above it again to the L arm*) That's better.

CHARLES (*looking up*) What's better?

ELVIRA. Your voice was kinder.

CHARLES. Was I ever unkind to you when you were alive?

ELVIRA. Often.

CHARLES. Oh, how can you! I'm sure that's an exaggeration.

ELVIRA. Not at all. You were an absolute pig that time we went to Cornwall and stayed in that awful hotel. You hit me with a billiard cue.

(*Light Cue No. 5. Act I, Scene 2*)

CHARLES. Only very, very gently.

ELVIRA. I loved you very much.

CHARLES. I loved you too . . . (*He puts out his hand to her and then draws it away*) No, I can't touch you. Isn't that horrible?

ELVIRA. Perhaps it's as well if I'm going to stay for any length of time. (*She sits on the L arm of the sofa*)

CHARLES. I suppose I shall wake up eventually . . . but I feel strangely peaceful now.

(Light Cue No. 6. Act I, Scene 2)

ELVIRA. That's right. Put your head back

CHARLES (*doing so*) Like that?

ELVIRA (*stroking his hair*) Can you feel anything?

CHARLES. Only a very little breeze through my hair . . .

ELVIRA. Well, that's better than nothing.

CHARLES (*drowsily*) I suppose if I'm really out of my mind they'll put me in an asylum.

ELVIRA. Don't worry about that—just relax.

CHARLES (*very drowsily indeed*) Poor Ruth.

ELVIRA (*gently and sweetly*) To hell with Ruth.

By now the blackout is complete

The CURTAIN falls

ACT II

SCENE I

(*Light Cue No. 1. Act II, Scene 1*)

It is about nine-thirty the next morning. The sun is pouring in through the open french windows; the curtains are wide open. The doors are shut.

A breakfast-table is set LG below the piano. RUTH sits L of the table, her back to the window, reading 'The Times'. CHARLES comes in and kisses her.

CHARLES. Good morning, darling.

RUTH (*with a certain stiffness*) Good morning, Charles.

CHARLES (*going to the open window and taking a deep breath*) It certainly is.

RUTH. What certainly is what?

CHARLES. A good morning. A tremendously good morning! There isn't a cloud in the sky and everything looks newly washed.

RUTH (*turning a page of 'The Times'*) Edith's keeping your breakfast hot. You'd better ring.

CHARLES (*crossing to the mantelpiece and ringing the bell up stage*) Anything interesting in *The Times*?

RUTH. Don't be silly, Charles.

CHARLES. I intend to work all day.

RUTH. Good.

CHARLES (*coming back to the breakfast-table*) It's extraordinary about daylight, isn't it?

RUTH. How do you mean?

CHARLES. The way it reduces everything to normal.

RUTH. Does it?

CHARLES (*sitting R of the table opposite Ruth. Firmly*) Yes—it does.

RUTH. I'm sure I'm very glad to hear it.

CHARLES. You're very glacial this morning.

RUTH. Are you surprised?

CHARLES. Frankly, yes. I expected more of you.

RUTH. Well, really!

CHARLES. I've always looked upon you as a woman of perception and understanding.

RUTH. Perhaps this is one of my off days.

(*EDITH comes in with some bacon and eggs and toast. She comes to above the table between Charles and Ruth*)

CHARLES (*cheerfully*) Good morning, Edith.

EDITH. Good morning, sir.

CHARLES. Feeling fit?

EDITH. Yes, sir, thank you, sir.

CHARLES. How's Cook?

EDITH. I don't know, sir, I haven't asked her.

CHARLES. You should. You should begin every day by asking everyone how they are. It oils the wheels.

EDITH. Yes, sir.

CHARLES. Greet her from me, will you?

EDITH. Yes, sir.

RUTH. That will be all for the moment, Edith.

EDITH. Yes'm.

(EDITH goes out)

RUTH. I wish you wouldn't be facetious with the servants, Charles. It confuses them and undermines their morale.

CHARLES. I consider that point of view retrogressive, if not downright feudal.

RUTH. I don't care what you consider it. I have to run the house and you don't.

CHARLES. Are you implying that I couldn't?

RUTH. You're at liberty to try.

CHARLES. I take back what I said about it being a good morning. It's a horrid morning.

RUTH. You'd better eat your breakfast while it's hot.

CHARLES. It isn't.

RUTH (*putting down 'The Times'*) Now look here, Charles, in your younger days this display of roguish flippancy might have been alluring. In a middle-aged novelist it's nauseating.

CHARLES. Would you like me to writhe at your feet in a frenzy of self-abasement?

RUTH. That would be equally nauseating, but certainly more appropriate.

CHARLES. I really don't see what I've done that's so awful.

RUTH. You behaved abominably last night. You wounded me and insulted me.

CHARLES. I was the victim of an aberration.

RUTH. Nonsense. You were drunk.

CHARLES. Drunk?

RUTH. You had four strong Dry Martinis before dinner, a great deal too much Burgundy at dinner, Heaven knows how much Port and Kummel with Doctor Bradman while I was doing my best to entertain that mad woman—and then two double brandies later. I gave them to you myself. Of course you were drunk.

CHARLES. So that's your story, is it?

RUTH. You refused to come to bed, and finally when I came down at three in the morning to see what had happened to you, I found you in an alcoholic coma on the sofa with the fire out and your hair all over your face.

CHARLES. I was not in the least drunk, Ruth. Something happened to me last night; something very peculiar happened to me.

RUTH. Nonsense.

CHARLES. It isn't nonsense. I know it looks like nonsense now in the clear remorseless light of day, but last night it was far from being nonsense. I honestly had some sort of hallucination.

RUTH. I would really rather not discuss it any further.

CHARLES. But you must discuss it. It's very disturbing.

RUTH. There I agree with you. It showed you up in a most unpleasant light. I find that extremely disturbing.

CHARLES. I swear to you that during the séance I was convinced that I heard Elvira's voice.

RUTH. Nobody else did.

CHARLES. I can't help that. I did.

RUTH. You couldn't have.

CHARLES. And later on I was equally convinced that she was in this room. I saw her distinctly and talked to her. After you'd gone up to bed we had quite a cosy little chat.

RUTH. And you seriously expect me to believe that you weren't drunk?

CHARLES. I *know* I wasn't drunk. If I'd been all that drunk I should have a dreadful hangover now, shouldn't I?

RUTH. I'm not at all sure that you haven't.

CHARLES. I haven't got a trace of a headache—my tongue's not coated—look at it. (*He puts out his tongue*)

RUTH. I've not the least desire to look at your tongue, kindly put it in again.

CHARLES (*rising, crossing to the mantelpiece and lighting a cigarette*) I know what it is. You're frightened.

RUTH. Frightened! Rubbish. What is there to be frightened of?

CHARLES. Elvira. You wouldn't have minded all that much, even if I had been drunk; it's only because it was all mixed up with Elvira.

RUTH. I seem to remember last night before dinner telling you that your views of female psychology were rather didactic. I was right. I should have added that they were puerile.

CHARLES. That was when it all began.

RUTH. When what all began?

CHARLES (*moving up to above the R end of the sofa*) We were talking too much about Elvira. It's dangerous to have somebody very strongly in your mind when you start dabbling with the occult.

RUTH. She certainly wasn't strongly in my mind.

CHARLES. She was in mine.

RUTH. Oh, she was, was she?

CHARLES (*crossing and facing Ruth at the breakfast-table*) You tried to make me say that she was more physically attractive than you, so that you could hold it over me.

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