

FREE SPIRITS

An improbable farce after Noel Coward

by

David Jacklin

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THE CHARACTERS

EDITH HEADON: an estate agent. A young woman in her mid-twenties. Although she does not yet know it, she may be the grandmother of Wendy Headon, of Hypnobirthing in Kent. Honestly, you can look the business up.

MARK BRADMAN: known locally as “Young Doctor Bradman”, who has taken over his deceased father’s practice.

ELVIRA: a ghost resident in the home.

RUTH: another ghost resident in the home.

MAUDE CONDOMINE: née Charteris, a woman in her forties; married two years to Charles, a lover from decades past.

CHARLES CONDOMINE: an author, in his fifties; married now to Maude.

MADAME ARCATI: a new ghost, who was, in life, a medium.

DAPHNE: still another ghost, who is mostly heard, but later seen.

NOTE: It’s pronounced Con-do-meen, please.

NOTES

Sitting around the kitchen table over tea and biscuits one winter afternoon, Janice my wife, fellow performer David Bird and I were reminiscing about past productions. We especially lamented that, having done two successful productions of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, we had milked that particular cash cow dry. In a spirit of ribaldry, we started planning a sequel to Coward's play. Sir Noel maintained he had written *Blithe Spirit* in four weeks; I did the first draught of *Free Spirits* in one. I did have the help of a word-processor.

At the end of *Blithe Spirit*, Charles Condomine, announcing his intention of going far away, flees the house as the ghosts of Elvira and Ruth tear the place up. Edith, at that time a parlour maid perhaps sixteen years old, is left by herself with the two spirits. What happens to her, to Charles and the others is the question that inspired *Free Spirits*.

Free Spirits is an unauthorized sequel to *Blithe Spirit*. It takes place seven years after the events of Coward's play, in the early 1950s. I point out that, as it shares no actual lines with Coward's play and as character names and place settings are not covered by copyright, it does not infringe on the rights of Coward's estate.

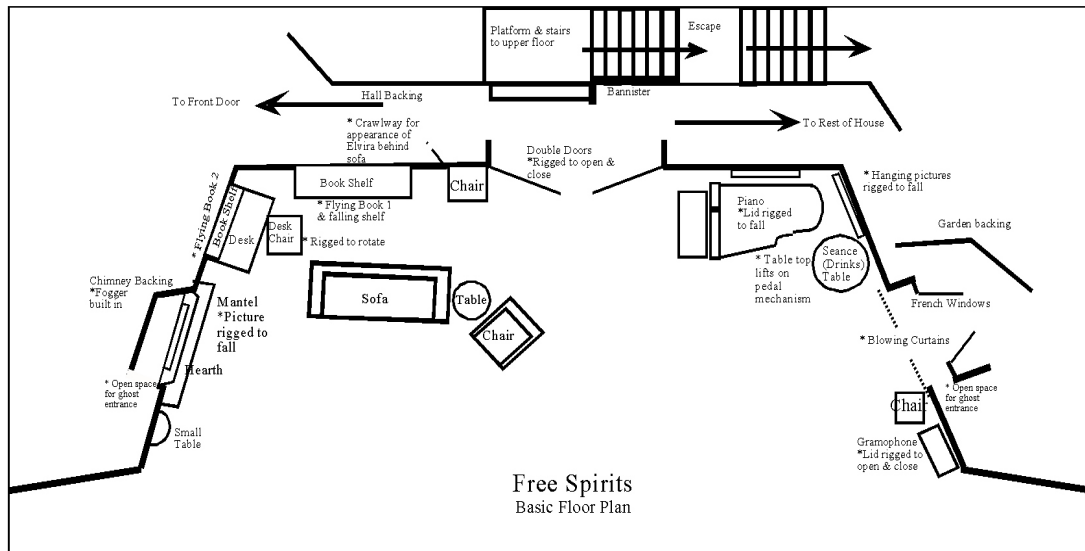
Notes on pronunciation: "Condomine" is pronounced "CON-duh-mean", "Elvira" is pronounced "EI-VEER-uh" and when Ruth and Elvira mention the Indian "fakir", please say "faker" not "fackeer". The latter is technically correct, but the joke won't work.

A NOTE ON MUSIC

In *Blithe Spirit*, Sir Noel incorporated Irving Berlin's song, *Always*. However, that was in a time of much more lax copyright enforcement. Modern productions must license (and pay for) the song separately, which will be under copyright still for some time, Mr. Berlin having lived to the age of 101. As an alternative, I have included a song, also titled "Always", for use by those groups who wish to take advantage of it. I am no Irving Berlin, but then neither was he David Jacklin. This is for use in licensed productions of *Free Spirits* only.

THE SETTING

The action of the play passes in the living room of “the old Condomine place” in Kent, England, near Hythe. The time is late summer, about 1950.



The script has been written to work with the floor plan above. There are a number of special effects, from flying books to rapidly appearing ghosts, that require careful placement within the set to work properly. The author strongly urges producing groups to use this basic floor plan as the starting point for their sets.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1. – Before dinner on a summer evening.

Scene 2. – A few hours later, the same evening.

Scene 3. – The next morning.

Scene 4. – Late the following afternoon.

ACT II

Scene 1. – Late afternoon, the next day.

Scene 2. – Early evening, a few days later.

Scene 3. – Several hours later.

NOTE ON RUN-TIMES

As written, Act One is approximately 1 hour 5 minutes; Act Two is approximately 40 minutes. The play could be performed as a three-act, breaking Act One in half. This would give act times of approximately 35, 30 and 40 minutes. Even with two 15 minute intermissions, that would still bring the curtain down at 10:15 (assuming an 8:00 p.m. start). It's my experience, however, that audiences don't like two intermissions anymore. Your mileage may vary.

Free Spirits was first produced by BarnDoor Productions (Perth) and was given its first public performance on October 21, 2011 at the Full Circle Theatre in Perth, Ontario, Canada, with the following credits:

Directed by

Joe Laxton

Set by

Joe Laxton, David Jacklin, Gary King

Costumes

Janice Jacklin

Stage Manager

Elaine Laxton

Stage Crew

Gina Tremaine, Julia Bryant, Nancy Moxon

Front of House

Nancy Moxon, Verna Harold, Marilyn Bird, Gary King

The Friends of the Full Circle Theatre

The Cast

Edith Headon Nicole Bamber

Mark Bradman Nelson McCulloch

Elvira Adrienne Ryan

Ruth Grace Main

Maude Condomine Juli Heney

Charles Condomine David Bird

Madame Arcati Janice Jacklin

Daphne Rowan McCulloch

FREE SPIRITS
an improbable farce
ACT I
Scene 1

SETTING: The scene is the living-room of “the old Condomine place” in Kent, near Hythe. The room is comfortable, airy and nicely furnished, if in a style that is a little old-fashioned. French windows open on to a garden, stage left. A large fireplace is stage right. Upstage, double doors which, when open, show a hallway and a staircase. Down the hall, off, to the left are the dining-room and kitchen; the right, the front door of the house.

(As the lights come up, it is early on a late summer evening. We hear the sound of birds. There is a short pause, then the curtains covering the french windows blow gently inward; the fire flares briefly, as if in response. Another short pause. There is the sound of two cars approaching, slowing, stopping and shutting off; two car doors open and slam shut; another pause)

(EDITH enters at the double doors; she is an attractive, competent woman in her mid-20s, who works as an estate agent. She steps to the middle of the room and looks about, as if expecting something. After a moment, MARK enters at the double doors and stops.)

MARK
You’ll never sell it.

EDITH
Oh, yes, I shall. This time, I’ll sell it.

MARK
Then, it won’t stay sold.

EDITH
This time, it’s different.

MARK
(Emphatically.)
This time, it’s going to take!

EDITH
Try not to be facetious, darling.

MARK
How can I be otherwise? This bloody house has taken up more of your time, and more of my patience, than it deserves!

(The curtains blow inward again, gently)

EDITH

... and, please don't swear here.

MARK

I'm sorry, dear. I am trying to be patient, but my limited stock of patience is wearing extremely thin in places.

EDITH

You'll have to pick some up new at Marks and Spencer's.

MARK

You may have noticed that I'm not laughing. I love you, Edith.

(EDITH puts her arms around him.)

EDITH

I know, I know, and I love you, but I have a responsibility.

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MARK

To sell this house before you marry me? What kind of responsibility is that?

EDITH

This time, I'm sure it will stay sold. You'll just have to be patient.

MARK

(Pulling her closer)

And if I can't?

EDITH

Well, there are other fish in the sea – all thoroughly wet, I'm sure.

MARK

Damn it all, Edith. I don't want any wet fish but you! Damn this house!

(The fire flares briefly.)

EDITH

Please, dear. And I'm pleased to know that, of all the wet fish in the sea, I'm the only one for you.

MARK

Well, you are. Shall I ring you later?

EDITH

As always. Now, kiss me and go. My client will be here momentarily.

(He kisses her, then seems interested in continuing; she pushes him away gently.)

Mark! Go!

MARK

(Crossing to the french doors)

Very well. Damn this bloody house!

(The french door curtains blow in toward him suddenly.)

Oh!

(He pushes the curtains away and exits through them.)

EDITH

(When he has gone.)

Elvira, stop that!

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(The fire flares and ELVIRA steps into the room from the fire-place; she is dressed in a flowing negligee and is grey from head to foot, she is, of course, a ghost.)

ELVIRA

I've been sitting quietly in the grating, minding my own business.

EDITH

Then, it was you, Ruth!

(The french door curtains blow inward and RUTH steps into the room, from the apparently closed area between the french doors and the curtains; she, too, is grey from head to foot, dressed in a nice, sensible jacket and skirt of a fashion several years old. She is, also, a ghost.)

RUTH

Mea culpa. I won't sit by and hear him run down our lovely home.

(There is the sound of a car starting and driving away.)

I don't know what you see in him, anyway.

ELVIRA

You wouldn't. I think he's quite delicious.

RUTH

(Acidly)
You would.

ELVIRA

And, what's that supposed to mean?

RUTH

Anything you please.

ELVIRA

I can't help it if I find him attractive. After all, *I* died young.

RUTH

Time is irrelevant to those who have Passed Over.

ELVIRA

If you want to think so.

RUTH

(Flaring)
What's that supposed to mean?

ELVIRA

Anything *you* please!

EDITH

Ruth! Elvira! Stop it at once!

ELVIRA

(Subdued)
Well, she started it.

EDITH

Elvira!

(ELVIRA flops sulking into a chair; RUTH looks at her triumphantly and opens her mouth to speak.)

Ruth.

RUTH

I haven't uttered.

(She sits down opposite ELVIRA.)

EDITH

Now, listen, dears. This time, I think it will work.

RUTH

We've heard it before, Edith. It's never going to work. Never!

ELVIRA

(Jumping up.)

Don't say that! It has to work!

RUTH

Wishing won't make it so, Elvira. We're stuck here.

ELVIRA

(Dropping back into the chair.)

Stuck. With you.

RUTH

With you!

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EDITH

With each other.

RUTH/ELVIRA

Yes.

EDITH

And as long as you are stuck with each other, can't you try to get along? Every time you have a flare up, windows get broken and things gets smashed and for what? You can't hurt each other by hurling the furniture.

ELVIRA

(Airily.)

We can only try.

EDITH

And I want to try, once more, to get you back to the Other Side.

(RUTH and ELVIRA groan.)

RUTH

Oh, Edith, not again. I can't stand another séance.

ELVIRA

And all that garlic. It makes me nauseous. I'll have a headache for days.

EDITH

I know we've tried many times before . . .

ELVIRA

... many, many times...

EDITH

... but this time, it's different. Let's give it one more shot!

RUTH

You're beginning to sound like Madame Arcati.

ELVIRA

Poor, dear Madame Arcati.

RUTH

Nonsense! You disliked her as much as I.

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ELVIRA

I didn't! I just couldn't stand her, that's all.

EDITH

It doesn't matter because she's dead now, anyway. Rest her soul.

ELVIRA

Wherever it is.

EDITH

Elvira!

RUTH

You say these things to shock us, Elvira, but we're not shocked, you know.

EDITH

I am.

RUTH

Edith, you're far too young to be shocked so easily.

ELVIRA

(Giggles)

She needs a man.

EDITH

I have one, if I can ever get you two settled and out of here.

RUTH

For which we will be grateful, dear. Won't we, Elvira?

ELVIRA

Eternally grateful.

RUTH

Was that a joke?

ELVIRA

Was what a joke?

EDITH

Never mind. Now, this woman who is coming. She's going to like this place and she's going to take it – and neither of you are going to do anything to make her decide not to.

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RUTH

What if *we* don't like *her*?

EDITH

You don't have to. If it works out, you'll be away and gone out of here. That's what you both want, isn't it?

RUTH

Of course.

ELVIRA

I certainly do. I've had all I can stand of *her*.

RUTH

The feeling is very much mutual, Elvira, so let's just get on with this. How is this particular woman going to help us to leave here?

EDITH

I don't want to say just yet, but I'm sure she can help.

RUTH

You've been sure before.

ELVIRA

Yes! Like when you rented the place to that Indian fakir.

RUTH

Who wasn't a real fakir, at all.

ELVIRA

No. He was a fake fakir. All he did was litter the place with snakes.

EDITH

One snake.

RUTH

One big snake. It might have been poisonous.

ELVIRA

I was afraid to sit down.

EDITH

What difference would it make? You're dead, Elvira! You're dead, Ruth!

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RUTH

Passed Over. And just because I've Passed Over doesn't mean I want my house overrun with reptiles.

ELVIRA

It's very unhygienic.

EDITH

So you chased him off by setting fire to his turban.

RUTH

Only once.

ELVIRA

Or twice.

EDITH

And, the Lowstones? What was your excuse for scaring them away? I lost a very nice commission on them.

ELVIRA

The Lowstones? Which ones were they?

RUTH

You know, very much into astrology. Used to have that woman come in and read their tea leaves.

ELVIRA

Oh, them! Goodness gracious!

EDITH

They might have helped.

RUTH

They were kooks! They believed in astrology and tea leaves and fortune-telling and...

EDITH

... ghosts?

RUTH

Well.

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EDITH

Exactly. Then, there were the Stamfords..

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ELVIRA

Were going to sell Charles's books.

EDITH

... the Langdons...

RUTH

Were going to sell *my* furniture!

EDITH

... that very nice woman who wrote poetry...

ELVIRA

Edna Braebourne.

EDITH

Yes! What was wrong with her?

RUTH

Had you read any of her poetry?

EDITH

There were the two older gentlemen from the Old Vic company...

RUTH

Well! Really!

ELVIRA

Two women in the house nattering at each other was enough.

RUTH

I couldn't stand it.

EDITH

... and heaven alone knows how many others! And finally there was Reverend and Mrs. Ringwould.

ELVIRA

Oh, them! Dreary! Dreary!

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RUTH

If we'd wanted evenings at home doing nothing, we didn't need them in the house. And she kept insisting on moving the furniture.

ELVIRA

Yes! I stumbled over things I don't know how many times.

EDITH

Elvira, you're a ghost! You can walk right through things!

ELVIRA

Yes, but it still hurts.

EDITH

They can't all have been terrible.

ELVIRA

(Mischievously.)

Well, there was Terence Waltham.

RUTH

The bachelor?

ELVIRA

Yes, he was delightful.

(Tracing the outline.)

Such... shoulders.

RUTH

And you wouldn't leave him alone – even in the bath.

ELVIRA

Well, I died young.

RUTH

So you keep saying.

ELVIRA

At least, I can say it.

RUTH

I wouldn't have died at all, if you hadn't cut the brake lines on my car!

ELVIRA

It wasn't supposed to be your car; it was supposed to be Charles's car. I had it all planned. You never give any consideration to other people's plans.

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RUTH

That is the most unmitigated nonsense I've heard since I died.

EDITH

All right! Can we get back to the subject?

ELVIRA

What was the subject?

EDITH

The woman who is going to buy this house.

ELVIRA

Oh, yes. Her.

EDITH

I want you both to stay out of the way when she gets here. Don't even be in the same room with us.

RUTH

Why? She can't see us.

ELVIRA

You're the only one who can see us and what a terrible bore it is, too.

EDITH

You're welcome to leave, anytime.

ELVIRA

I can't leave! You know perfectly well I can't leave – nor Ruth, either!

EDITH

Exactly. But this woman will be able to help with that.

RUTH

Is she a medium?

EDITH

No.

ELVIRA

Has she experience with ectoplasmic manifestation?

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EDITH

I rather doubt it.

RUTH

Is she psychic at all?

EDITH

Not that she's mentioned.

ELVIRA

Then why are we wasting time talking about her!

EDITH

It's not because of who she is, but rather who she knows.

RUTH/ELVIRA

Who does she know?

EDITH

I'd rather not say. Just promise to stay away from her. Do you promise?

We're not children, Edith.

RUTH

Do you promise?

EDITH

Very well. I promise.

RUTH

Elvira?

EDITH

Very well.
(Looks coy and sucks momentarily at a fingertip)

ELVIRA

Very well, what?

EDITH

I promise.
(Makes a quick X over her heart and holds up her hand.)
Cross my heart and hope to die.

ELVIRA

You already died.

RUTH

Cross my heart and hope to live, then.

ELVIRA

(The sound of a car pulling up and stopping is heard; a car door slams)

That's her, now. Out of sight, both of you, and no nonsense. Just leave us alone and I truly believe, within a few days, you'll be back on the Other Side.

EDITH

Fine. I shall go sit in the sun.

ELVIRA

Yes. You're looking a little pale.

RUTH

ELVIRA

I shan't say how you look, Ruth.

(She exits through the French windows.)

RUTH

Do you see what I have to put up with?

EDITH

Ruth, please!

RUTH

(With a martyred air.)

Oh! I shall be on the roof, if anyone wants me.

(She exits after ELVIRA.)

EDITH

(Sighing)

Oh, dear. Please, let this work!

(A knock at the door. EDITH braces herself and goes out through the double doors; a brief pause. Off.)

How do you do? Do come in, please.

MAUDE

(Off.)

I've left the top down on my car. Will it be all right, do you think?

EDITH

(Off.)

Oh, I'm sure it will. It's a lovely day.

(MAUDE enters at the double doors; she is a somewhat attractive woman in her forties, fashionably dressed, but rather nervous. EDITH follows her.)

MAUDE

Yes, it is. The drive up from Hythe was quite delightful. The sea air is very bracing. There's a beautiful little bridge at the foot of the hill and I stopped there for a few moments just to drink in the tranquillity. You'd believe nothing unpleasant had ever happened there.

EDITH

You'd be surprised.

MAUDE

I would?

EDITH

At how tranquil it all is here – usually.

MAUDE

It certainly seems so. And, what a charming house this is.

EDITH

Isn't it? Late Victorian. Redone with modern wiring and plumbing. And telephone, of course.

MAUDE

Of course. The last people who owned it?

EDITH

Quite a succession of owners, really – in recent years.

MAUDE

Why is that, do you think?

EDITH

Who can say? People take odd notions into their heads.

MAUDE

(Joking.)

It's not haunted, is it?

EDITH

(Looking quickly about for RUTH or ELVIRA.)

Why do you say that?

(Realizes that MAUDE was joking.)

Oh! Ha, ha, ha! Haunted! Ha, ha, ha! Do you see any ghosts?

MAUDE

Hmm.

(Looks about.)

No.

(She smiles at EDITH, who relaxes a little.)

EDITH

Lovely fireplace in this room; large dining room. Three bedrooms upstairs and bath; servants quarters off the kitchen in back. Fully furnished, of course...

MAUDE

Yes.

(She looks at the furniture with mild distaste.)

None of it very new, is it?

EDITH

It sort of... goes with the house.

MAUDE

Very pre-war, I'm afraid. Well, it can be replaced easily enough.

EDITH

You can try. Beautiful location; lovely view. And situated just off Seabrook Road between Hythe and Folkestone, so convenient to either town.

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MAUDE

I should tell you that I'm fully prepared to take the property right now, at the listed price.

EDITH

Well, that certainly makes my job easier.

MAUDE

I think it's absolutely perfect for what Charles and I want.

EDITH

Well, it does have its drawbacks.

MAUDE

Oh, of course. These older houses all have their quirks: little squeaks and thumps in the night; strange bangings in the pipes; sudden draughts of cold wind...

EDITH

Ectoplasmic manifestations.

MAUDE

Pardon?

EDITH

Sorry? You were saying?

MAUDE

I'll tell you what sold me. My husband rang me up. He is in America, on the last leg of a book signing tour. He said, "Maude, when I come back, I don't even want to go to London again. I want you to find us a nice little place in a quiet part of the country, with no worries to keep me awake."

EDITH

He obviously trusts your judgement.

MAUDE

Well, we've known each other for a long time.

EDITH

How nice.

MAUDE

We met just after his first wife died – a flighty slip of a girl who was nowhere near good enough for him, if you ask me – at Westgate-on-Sea, do you know it? Lovely little spot. Then he married, again, this time to a very sour woman who did her best to stifle his talent and then she died in a car accident – seven years ago, that was. The next year, we met again quite by chance on the beach at Margate – or perhaps it was Ramsgate – and one thing led to another and that led to marriage. Soul mates, my dear. Soul mates.

EDITH

Wonderful. But how did that sell you on this place?

MAUDE

Oh, well, because of the listing in the Times. I have it here.

(She digs in her purse and produces a newspaper clipping.)

Here it is: "Quiet country residence; elegant retirement living; very reasonable price; ask about "the old Condomine place, Hythe". Well, that caught my eye at once. I said, "I must go into Kent and look into it." Because that's our name, of course: Condomine. What sort of coincidence is that, I ask you? There aren't many Condomines around.

EDITH

There are more Condomines around here than you'd think. Is your husband back in the country, yet?

MAUDE

Oh, yes. His ship docked earlier today and I cabled him with all the instructions on how to get here. I'm meeting him at the train later this evening. He'll be so surprised at this place. I can't wait to see his face when he walks in.

EDITH

I'm sure it'll be a picture. Well, if you are quite decided, I suppose that I can draw up the papers.

MAUDE

I'll tell you what, dear. I'll give you a cheque for the deposit, you draw up the papers and we can sign them tomorrow. In the meantime, is there any objection to our staying the night?

EDITH

Oh! Well, it's empty at the moment. No reason you couldn't spend the night, I suppose. The beds haven't been aired, of course, but...

MAUDE

Never mind, dear. I'll take care of it. I'm going to pop upstairs and turn over the beds. You draw up whatever I need to sign and I'll be back down. Then I'll run in to Hythe for some things for a "Welcome Home" supper.

(She heads for the stairway outside the double doors)

A lovely honeymoon – just the two of us.

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(As soon as she disappears, RUTH comes in)

RUTH

What did she mean – honeymoon?

EDITH

You were eavesdropping.

RUTH

I just heard that last. She's not going to honeymoon here, is she? At her age? It's disgusting.

EDITH

Just about your age when you died, I think, Ruth.

RUTH

That's neither here nor there. I wasn't honeymooning when I died. Are they newlyweds? Because I'm not going to put up with any of that.

EDITH

They're not newlyweds; her husband has just been abroad for several months. It's a second honeymoon.

RUTH

Bad enough.

(Upstairs, the sound of doors banging is heard)

What's she doing?

(ELVIRA enters down the stairs)

ELVIRA

She's going through the linen cupboard! Why is that?

RUTH

Yes, why is that?

EDITH

She's turning over the beds. She's going to be staying here tonight.

RUTH/ELVIRA

Oh, is she?

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EDITH

Yes, she is. And you two are going to leave her alone.

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RUTH/ELVIRA

Oh, are we?

EDITH

You are going to leave her alone, because her husband is coming tonight.

RUTH

And should we care about that?

EDITH

Yes, you should.

RUTH

Why?

(MAUDE comes down the stairs and enters the room, going between RUTH and ELVIRA without seeing them)

MAUDE

Miss Headon, would you know if there are any towels? I can't seem to find any.

EDITH

Oh, yes, the hall closet at the back. I'll help you find them.

MAUDE

Never mind, I'll manage. This is exhilarating. I feel quite twenty again for some reason.

(ELVIRA blows into her ear; MAUDE shivers)

I shall lay a fire upstairs. It's getting rather chilly. Like I said, draughty old house.

(She goes back up the stairs; RUTH watches her go.)

EDITH

Elvira, stop being childish.

ELVIRA

For someone who's feeling quite twenty, she looks quite forty-five. Draughty old house, indeed!

EDITH

Now, you're to leave her alone.

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RUTH

Wait a moment. I know her!

EDITH

Do you? You're to leave her alone.

RUTH

That's... that's... Maude Charteris!

ELVIRA

Who is Maude Charteris?

RUTH

Oh, she was after your time. She was a wet, whining young woman that Charles spent seven soggy weeks with after you died – she cried the whole time, according to Charles. We met once or twice afterward. She appears to have dried out since then. I wonder if she's still as fragile as she used to be?

ELVIRA

Charles had an affair with her? After I died! How ungrateful of him! I'm going straight upstairs to sort her out.

EDITH
Elvira, don't you dare!

ELVIRA
She had an affair with my husband!

RUTH
My husband!

ELVIRA
Mine, when she had the affair.

EDITH
You were dead!

RUTH
Passed Over!

ELVIRA
And I don't see what that has to do with it. I wasn't going around having affairs.

EDITH
You were dead!

RUTH
Passed Over!

ELVIRA
And not having affairs.

RUTH
No, you had yours while you were still alive – and married to Charles.

ELVIRA
Only a few.

RUTH
How few?

ELVIRA
Never mind. Just because I'd had a half dozen or so trivial affairs and had died was no reason for him to spend seven weeks with this... what was her name?

RUTH

Maude Charteris.

ELVIRA

Maude Charteris. I hope he had a terrible time. She looks like he had a terrible time.

RUTH

Maude Charteris! Well, well. I wonder what kind of husband she eventually snagged.

EDITH

Not Charteris, now, of course.

RUTH

Of course. What's her name, now?

EDITH

Condomine. Mrs. Charles Condomine.

RUTH

Charles!

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ELVIRA

Condomine!

RUTH/ELVIRA

My husband!

EDITH

Exactly.

(RUTH and ELVIRA begin to wail in a ghostly fashion. Lights down.)

END OF SCENE 1

FREE SPIRITS
an improbable farce
ACT I
Scene 2

SETTING: The Scene is as before. It is now dark. The fire has burned down and moonlight comes through the french windows.

(There is a brief pause, then we hear the sound of the front door opening.)

CHARLES

(Off.)

Damn it all, Maude. I'm not setting foot in that house!

MAUDE

(Off.)

Charles, I think you're being terribly silly.

CHARLES

(Off.)

I'm not setting foot in there and neither are you!

MAUDE

(Off.)

I certainly shall, if I wish.

CHARLES

(Off.)

Maude, I forbid you to enter that house!

MAUDE

(Off.)

Forbid fiddlesticks!

CHARLES

(Off.)

That's not even English, dear.

MAUDE

(Off.)

Charles, I will not stand on the threshold of our new home and argue. There is a lovely supper waiting for us and – I've turned the bed down.

CHARLES

(Off.)

Have you? Have you! Do you honestly believe that I could make love to you in that house?

MAUDE

(Off.)

I'm beginning to question whether you'll ever do it again anywhere. I'm going in.

CHARLES

(Off. Shouting.)

Maude! Stop! Stop at once!

MAUDE

(Off.)

Be quiet, Charles, they'll hear you in Folkestone.

CHARLES

(Off.)

I don't care if they hear me in John O'Groats! Don't go in there!

(A slight pause.)

Maude! Stop! Your life is in danger!

MAUDE

(Off.)

Nonsense.

(She enters from the front door and stops at the double doors, turning on the lights.)

It's a perfectly lovely house with a perfectly lovely view. Stop being foolish.

(She stands at the double doors and looks toward the front door, waiting for him.)

Well? Are you coming in?

CHARLES

(Off. After a short pause.)

Do you see anything... unusual?

MAUDE

No.

CHARLES

(Off.)

Hear anything?

No. MAUDE

Smell anything? (Off.) CHARLES

Charles! MAUDE

Nothing at all? (Off.) CHARLES

It's a lovely, quiet, peaceful little house, Charles. I thought you'd be delighted with it. MAUDE

I was – once. (Off.) CHARLES

Well? MAUDE

There's nothing unusual in there? (Off.) CHARLES

Well, do you like it? MAUDE

I always did. I need a drink. (He heads directly to the drinks cabinet and pours himself a drink, downing it in one gulp.) CHARLES

Good heavens, that's my Scotch. MAUDE

The Reverend Mr. Ringwould and you must have had similar tastes. MAUDE

CHARLES

I doubt it. The Reverend Mrs. Ringwould, for starters.

(He pours another drink.)

MAUDE

Charles, that's two.

CHARLES

Then I'll drink it slowly.

(He downs this drink in two gulps.)

MAUDE

(After he drinks.)

If you're going to drink like that, I'll throw the supper out.

CHARLES

Maude, I have just returned from a horrible tour of (he affects an American accent) "the States", (he drops the accent) during which I visited every provincial little town from Hobunk, New Jersey to Kiokuk... North Dakota! I have slept in more musty hotel beds than I can count, and not slept in even more than that. I have suffered through more than two hundred interviews with journalists and radio broadcasters who have never read my books, nor heard of me, and endured not one, but two dreadful sea voyages, for which the best that can be said is that they did not share the same fate as the Titanic! I arrive home, thinking that I can enjoy a peaceful sojourn in the country at some quiet, rustic cottage and I find that my dear wife, whom I love wholeheartedly, has dropped me into the middle of a nightmare! I deserve a drink!

(He pours another and downs it in one gulp.)

MAUDE

(After he drinks; on the verge of tears)

I'll throw the supper out.

(She starts for the dining room.)

CHARLES

Maude, wait!

(She stops and waits. He looks cautiously about him.)

Darling, bear with me, please. Do sit down, dear. I have to tell you something.

MAUDE

Do you?

CHARLES

Yes. Sit down, please.

(She sits; he paces a moment.)

I'm not sure where to begin this.

MAUDE

You've been unfaithful.

CHARLES

What? Nonsense. When would I have had time for that?

MAUDE

Oh, I understand, Charles. Those American women – fast cars, fast ways. I can't compete with that.

CHARLES

What are you talking about?

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MAUDE

All those hundreds of rich, glamorous, idle American women, all looking for a fast thrill.

CHARLES

What extraordinary ideas you have of America.

MAUDE

Did any of them mean anything to you?

CHARLES

Did any of whom mean anything to me?

MAUDE

I'm not sure which would hurt worse: an affair that means nothing, or an affair that means something.

CHARLES

What affair are we talking about?

MAUDE

The one you had in America!

CHARLES

I didn't have an affair in America!

MAUDE

Charles, there's no point in denying it, now.

CHARLES

My experience of America consisted of the outside of radio stations, the inside of aging bus terminals and a wearisome succession of very bad restaurant meals that nearly ruined my digestion. Even if I had inclination for an affair, I hadn't the constitution for it. I was too preoccupied searching for antacid.

MAUDE

I see. Then it was on shipboard?

CHARLES

Maude! Since I saw you last, I have been as faithful to you as I have ever been! Can we get back to the subject?

MAUDE

You've not had an affair?

CHARLES

I am trying to talk to you about a matter of life and death. Can we not bother with something as comparatively trivial as with whom I may or may not have slept?

MAUDE

You think that's trivial?

CHARLES

No! But other things are more urgent. Maude, your life is in danger.

MAUDE

Darling, we're in Kent. No one's life is in danger.

CHARLES

Listen to me! Your life is in danger and, more urgently, I think, my life is in danger!

MAUDE

I like that!

CHARLES

Because they'll probably try to kill me first.

MAUDE

Darling, is this another of your book ideas? I wish you'd give me some warning first.

CHARLES

This has nothing to do with one of my books. Or rather it has everything to do with one of my books, but not one I've written. It's all because of a book I never wrote.

MAUDE

Now, you're not making sense, dear.

CHARLES

Just listen! Please!

MAUDE

Very well. I'm listening.

CHARLES

Where to begin? Do you want a drink?

MAUDE

Charles, you've had three, already.

CHARLES

I wasn't counting.

MAUDE

What did you wish to tell me?

CHARLES

Very well.

(He thinks for a moment.)

You know I've been married before?

MAUDE

Of course.

CHARLES

Twice.

MAUDE

(Slightly acid.)

Yes.

CHARLES

First, there was Elvira...

MAUDE

... who died of pneumonia.

CHARLES

... who died of being a silly little goose who couldn't keep her knickers up.

MAUDE

What a terrible thing to say!

CHARLES

Well, it's true. And then there was Ruth...

MAUDE

... who died in a car accident.

CHARLES

It was no accident. Elvira killed her.

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MAUDE

What? Elvira killed her?

CHARLES

Elvira cut the brake lines on the car.

MAUDE

But, Elvira died!

CHARLES

Yes, and then she cut the brake lines on the car, so that I would hit the little bridge at the bottom of the hill, in the rain, when I took her in to Folkestone to see a friend she hadn't seen since she died, but Ruth took the car first, to go see the Archbishop of Canterbury – or was it Mr. Emsworth of the Society for Psychical Research? – it doesn't matter, I suppose, because it was Ruth who hit the little bridge at the bottom of the hill and, of course, it killed her. Well, she never forgave Elvira for that and I suppose I can't blame her, but the two of them have been bickering ever since...

MAUDE

Charles! Stop!

CHARLES

What, dear?

MAUDE

Stop! You're frightening me.

CHARLES

I'm sorry, dear. I was just trying to explain.

MAUDE

Sit down for a moment, Charles. Please. Sit down.

CHARLES

Very well.

(He sits. She looks closely at him.)

MAUDE

Are you at all feverish?

CHARLES

I don't think so.

MAUDE

Let me check your pulse.

(She takes his wrist.)

Put out your tongue.

CHARLES

I am not going to put out my tongue! I feel perfectly fine.

MAUDE

You don't sound perfectly fine. What did you mean when you said that Ruth and Elvira have been bickering ever since Ruth died?

CHARLES

Just that. They didn't get along even when Ruth was still alive, and afterward, well, it was just constant. Natter, natter, natter. I could hardly sleep.

MAUDE

This *is* one of your book ideas! You're testing it on me.

CHARLES

I'm not, Maude, I swear it. Darling, I did not want to enter this house when I arrived because, to the best of my knowledge –

(he stops and takes a deep breath before continuing)

– the ghosts of my two former wives have inhabited this house since I left here seven years ago.

MAUDE

(Disbelieving.)

Charles.

CHARLES

Left here, I might add, before they had a chance to carry out any *further* attempts on my life.

MAUDE

Do you expect me to believe that?

CHARLES

No. In fact, I expect you to sit there in stolid disbelief while you attempt to find some way to bring this back around to whether or not I had an affair with a Hollywood starlet while in America!

MAUDE

Did you?

CHARLES

(Pointing at her.)

Ah-ha!

MAUDE

Charles, there are no such things as ghosts.

CHARLES

So I used to believe.

MAUDE

And what changed your mind?

CHARLES

(He stares at her for a moment in disbelief.)

Having my two dead wives come to stay with me contributed greatly to it!

MAUDE

There are no ghosts, either here or anywhere. Ghosts are simply things created for children's stories, like fairies and pixies.

CHARLES

Children's stories, yes! Like Madame Arcati's books. Pixies and fairies and moss beetles...

MAUDE

Moss beetles!

CHARLES

Madame Arcati writes children's books about moss beetles, but she also writes biographies of dead minor nobility. She has an inside view there, because she can speak to them directly.

MAUDE

You're beginning to talk crazy again, Charles.

CHARLES

Madame Arcati is a medium...

MAUDE

Someone who talks to dead people?

CHARLES

Yes.

MAUDE

I've never heard anything so out of this world.

CHARLES

Precisely.

MAUDE

I thought you said she was an authoress.

CHARLES

She is both. Ruth and I invited her here...

MAUDE

Wait a moment. "Invited her here"? Here?

CHARLES

This was my home seven years ago, Maude. That's why my dead wives inhabit it. That's why they call it –

MAUDE

The old Condomine place. I thought it was merely coincidence.

CHARLES

You are the only thing coincidental in the whole affair. So, Ruth and I invited her here to conduct a séance...

MAUDE

Oh, dear. Really, Charles.

CHARLES

... to get some background for a book idea I had – rather a good one, too, but I never did write it. "The Unseen"! I wonder if I still have my notes on it?

MAUDE

And, did she conduct this séance?

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CHARLES

Of course.

MAUDE

And?

CHARLES

That was when Elvira moved in.

MAUDE

(Disbelieving.)

Oh, Charles.

CHARLES

Ruth wouldn't believe me, either, but eventually she had to – Elvira kept re-arranging the flowers. So, that was when she decided to go see Mr. Emsworth of the Society for Psychological Research – or was it the Archbishop of Canterbury? – anyway, it doesn't matter because...

MAUDE

... Elvira had cut the brake-lines.

Yes!

CHARLES

And, when did Ruth move in?

MAUDE

After the funeral.

CHARLES

Whose funeral?

MAUDE

Ruth's. I asked Madame Arcati back for another séance...

MAUDE

Good heavens, why?

CHARLES

To get rid of Elvira before she killed me, too!

MAUDE

And, did you have this séance?

CHARLES

Of course.

MAUDE

And?

CHARLES

That was when Ruth moved in.

MAUDE

This Madame... ?

CHARLES

Arcati.

MAUDE

... Arcati doesn't seem to be very good at what she does.

CHARLES

To the contrary, she's one of the leading lights of her profession. Have you ever heard of the Sudbury case?

MAUDE

No.

CHARLES

Neither had I, but apparently, it was a great triumph for her. She did... something remarkable at age twelve. Unfortunately, she's never had another case like it.

MAUDE

She sounds to be a fraud.

CHARLES

In Elvira's words, "She's a meddling old bitch." So, there I was, stuck with the ghosts of *two* perpetually nagging wives, who, I was sure, would try to kill me as soon as I closed my eyes. We tried everything to get rid of them, but, like the cat, they kept coming back. In the end, I decided discretion to be, not only the better part of valour, but the only sensible course and I got as far away as I could. The rest, you know.

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MAUDE

How many drinks did you have on the boat train, Charles?

CHARLES

Not many. Two or three. I was very worried about you being here alone, dear.

MAUDE

And on the boat before you debarked?

CHARLES

I don't know. One or two.

MAUDE

And three here.

CHARLES

I am stone cold sober. What do you think of what I just told you?

MAUDE

It's a remarkable story, Charles.

CHARLES

Yes, it is.

MAUDE

And I don't believe a word of it. Ghosts! Fiddlesticks! Séances? Poppycock! I don't know why you are behaving like this, Charles, but I wasn't born yesterday. I may not have led as... varied... a life as you *or* your two *deceased* wives, but I have been around enough to know what's what. And what isn't! I'm going to bed now, Charles, and I don't think you need come in to say goodnight. I had wonderful plans for your homecoming, wonderful plans, but you've spoiled them. Spoiled them and spoiled the supper, too, but I'm going to leave it right where it is until morning. I've nothing further to say except... (Fighting back tears)... goodnight!

(She storms out of the room and up the stairs. CHARLES stares after her.)

CHARLES

Maude! Oh, for heaven's sake.

(He stands for a moment, then goes to the cabinet and pours another drink.)

And, I *am* stone cold sober – but I don't intend to stay so for long.

(He knocks off the drink, then pours another; he crosses to the sofa and sits.)

So much for a restful sojourn in the country.

(He sips his drink, then leans his head back and closes his eyes for moment. Suddenly, he opens them and sits up.)

Ruth? Elvira? Are you there?

(He looks around and listens intently.)

Elvira? Ruth? I know perfectly well you are.

(He looks around again and listens.)

If Madame Arcati couldn't get you out, I don't think anyone could, so I'm sure you're still here. And, if that's the case – (He suddenly looks behind him.) – if that's the case, then I'll tell you right now that I don't intend to close an eye while I'm here – which will only be until morning. And, I am going to keep a very close watch on my wife – my current wife – my *living* wife, and see that she stays that way. So, don't try anything on. If you harm Maude, I'll quite literally move heaven and earth to see that you are punished, somehow.

(He rises and moves around the room, peering into the shadows.)

I must tell you that the past seven years without you, my darlings, have been the happiest seven years of my life. My heart has been high, my spirits free and my writing has improved immensely, away from your acid criticism, Ruth, and your mindless chatter, Elvira.

(He pauses and waits for some effect from his words. Nothing.)

I've even had an international best-seller, Ruth, something which you never believed I

CHARLES Cont.

could do. Elvira, I know you always hoped I would have success like that, but only for what it would do for you. But, I've done it without either of you. And with only passive encouragement from Maude, as well.

(He pauses and waits for some effect from his words. Nothing.)

Oh, I know Maude was never very likeable, Ruth, but you hated her from the first, didn't you? You were jealous, I suppose, because she was more attractive than you.

(He pauses.)

Or younger than you.

(A book flies off a shelf and hits him in the back.)

Ah-ha! I knew you were there! How have you been keeping, darling? Still dead?

(Another book flies at him, which he catches and replaces.)

And, you, Elvira, where are you hiding? You never knew Maude, did you? That's right, we met after you died. These two years I've been married to Maude have been a revelation for me. I didn't know marriage could be as fulfilling as it has been. And, all those years ago when Maude and I first met, even then she was a far better lover than you, Elvira. And she has improved immensely.

(A knick-knack flies off the mantel toward him but misses.)

You never had a very good throwing arm, Elvira. It's lovely to not-see you again, dear.

(As he crosses, a chair suddenly jerks into his path and he nearly trips over it.)

You can do better than that, Elvira. Right now, my dears, I am going upstairs and I am going to try to apologize to my wife, if she'll let me. My living wife, that is. Poor Maude, this has all been very upsetting for her; you know all about that, Ruth, don't you? And, if she will let me apologize, I won't be coming down again until morning. So, don't either of you go up. Like I said, I don't intend to close an eye all night.

(He smiles lasciviously.)

Poor Maude.

(The fire suddenly blazes to life.)

Thank you, Ruth. It was getting rather chilly in here. Goodnight, darlings. I shall not-see you in the morning.

(He exits quickly up the stairs. The fire slowly subsides.)

RUTH

(Enters from the fireplace.)

Well, I like that! Going up to be with that woman with his wife down here!

ELVIRA

(Rises from behind the sofa.)

I'm supposed to believe that she's a better lover than I am? Hardly likely.

RUTH

She does have the advantage of being alive, Elvira.

ELVIRA

I can fix that.

RUTH

Not yet, dear. You heard what he said about moving heaven and earth.

ELVIRA

Whistling in the dark.

RUTH

Perhaps. He nearly sent us back seven years ago. What might he have learned since?

ELVIRA

Is there anything he could have learned?

RUTH

I don't know. But I wonder...

ELVIRA

Did you see his eyes? He looks very tired. Poor Charles.

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RUTH

He's been on a long journey. America. He never took me to America.

ELVIRA

He never took me, either.

(She smiles and chuckles.)

And he didn't take Maude. Poor Maude. I don't think she's at all good for him. He's gained weight and he's going grey.

RUTH

He's seven years older, Elvira. That's what it is.

ELVIRA

It's Maude, that's what it is.

RUTH

I never did like her. Not then – and not now, either.

ELVIRA

Poor Charles.

RUTH

Never mind poor Charles. What about poor us?

ELVIRA

What do you mean?

RUTH

Now that we've got him here again, I don't want to leave any more. Do you?

ELVIRA

Of course not. I only came back in the first place to be with Charles. But, why would he send us back? He said he was leaving in the morning.

RUTH

What if she persuades him to stay, but to get rid of us first?

ELVIRA

Could she do that?

RUTH

Charles said she was a better lover than you, Elvira. Could *you* have gotten him to do what you wanted?

ELVIRA

(A beat while ELVIRA considers.)

I don't like her one little bit.

(They both look up toward the ceiling.)

ELVIRA Cont.

Poor Maude.

RUTH

Poor Maude.

(They look at each other with wicked grins.)

RUTH/ELVIRA

To hell with Maude.

LIGHTS DOWN
END OF SCENE 2

FREE SPIRITS
an improbable farce
ACT I
Scene 3

SETTING: It is the next morning. Bright sunlight comes through the french windows; the table DL is set with a light breakfast.

(MAUDE sits L of the table, her back to the window, reading 'The Times'. CHARLES comes briskly in from the garden.)

CHARLES

Good morning, darling.

(He kisses her.)

MAUDE

(Around his kiss.)

Mmm. Good morning. Hungry?

Ravenous.

MAUDE

I'm not surprised.

(She serves him coffee and toast.)

CHARLES

What's in The Times this morning?

MAUDE

The advertisement for "the old Condomine place" is gone. Miss Headon is very efficient.

CHARLES

Miss Headon?

MAUDE

Our estate agent, dear. The young woman who sold us this house.

CHARLES

Young woman? Good heavens, what next? Female lumberjacks?

MAUDE

I think it's wonderful, Charles.

CHARLES

Liberté, égalité, sororité, my dear.

MAUDE

It's far too early in the morning to be flippant, Charles.

CHARLES

I wasn't aware there was a tee-off time for flippancy.

MAUDE

Never before 10:15 a.m., dear.

CHARLES

Now, who's being flippant?

MAUDE

Not flippant, just happy.

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CHARLES

Why?

MAUDE

You know very well why.

CHARLES

Ah, that. Well, it was a long and hazardous voyage. Sailor returned safely from the sea, and all.

MAUDE

It was a wonderful way to start off a second honeymoon.

CHARLES

Is this a second honeymoon?

MAUD

I certainly hope so.

CHARLES

Of course, it would be a third for you...

MAUDE

The first one hardly counts. I was only married for six months and I was nineteen at the time. I barely remember it.

CHARLES

... and a fourth for me.

MAUDE

Well, let's not dwell on our mutual sordid pasts, dear. The present is all that counts.

CHARLES

We shall have to dwell on my sordid pasts, my love. They are very much with us in the present.

MAUDE

Whatever do you mean?

CHARLES

I explained this last night, Maude. Elvira and Ruth and the Archbishop of Canterbury?

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MAUDE
Good heavens, you're not still on that?

CHARLES

Of course I am. It's foremost in my mind.

MAUDE

I had thought that, come morning, it would all have sorted itself out in your mind.

CHARLES

My mind is perfectly well sorted, thank you.

MAUDE

Have you been drinking already this morning?

CHARLES

Certainly not.

MAUDE

Then what are you going on about?

CHARLES

I thought we got past this last night. Maude, I tell you the spirits or ghosts or whatever

CHARLES Cont.

they are of my two former wives are here in this house. Perhaps even here at this table with us.

MAUDE

(Looking nervously around the table.)

Don't say things like that.

CHARLES

Well, it's true.

MAUDE

What makes you think they're here?

CHARLES

I spoke with them after you went up to bed, last night.

MAUDE

When you were three drinks drunk.

CHARLES

I was not drunk!

MAUDE

I saw you down three Scotches, neat, in as many minutes.

CHARLES

We talked right here in this room.

MAUDE

Who talked?

CHARLES

Ruth, Elvira and I.

MAUDE

You saw them?

CHARLES

Well, no, I didn't see them.

MAUDE

You heard them, then?

CHARLES

No.

MAUDE

How did you have a conversation with them if you could neither see or hear them?

CHARLES

Well, I talked and they sort of...

MAUDE

Sort of what?

CHARLES

... threw things at me.

MAUDE

(Stares at him for a long moment.)

That's the sort of conversation we may have soon. They threw things at you?

CHARLES

Yes! Whenever I would say something particularly insulting, they would get angry and throw something. You see? Here! (He points to the first book RUTH threw, still on the floor.) Here's a book that Ruth threw at me when I said that you weren't very likeable.

MAUDE

Indeed?

CHARLES

(Pointing to the one he replaced on the shelf.)

And here's the second book she threw when I taunted her for being dead.

MAUDE

She threw that book at you?

CHARLES

Yes!

MAUDE

It's sitting on the shelf in its place.

CHARLES

Well, I put it back. And, see? Here's the knick-knack that Elvira threw at me, but she missed, and here's the chair that she shoved in front of me and I tripped over. (The chair

CHARLES Cont.

is still lying on its side.) You see? What more proof do you need?

MAUDE

I see a partially consumed glass of Scotch on the mantelpiece, a piece of bric-a-brac knocked to the floor, a book fallen off the shelf and a chair lying where a drunk tripped over it – and that is supposed to make me believe in the supernatural?

CHARLES

If that doesn't, what will?

MAUDE

Charles, you are either roaring drunk or raving mad. I hope, for the sake of our marriage, that it's the latter! I don't wish to discuss this any further.

CHARLES

Don't you?

MAUDE

No! Charles, if you continue this way, our second honeymoon is going to go the way of last night's supper.

CHARLES

Maude, if you continue this way, you could end up dead!

MAUDE

What, and join your two former wives in some sort of astral ménage-a-trois?

CHARLES

Ménage-a-quatre, dear. I'm part of the equation.

MAUDE

Oh, stop it, Charles!

CHARLES

Ruth! Elvira! Do something! Show her that you're here. Throw something or smash something or... something! Help me!

(A pause; MAUDE smirks sarcastically.)

Ruth! Elvira!

(A shorter pause.)

Oh, god.

MAUDE

I am going into the garden, now. When you're prepared to behave sensibly, Charles, I'll be ready to go into Hythe. Until then, don't talk to me!

(She exits to the front door; a moment later, it slams.)

CHARLES

Thank you very much, you two. Thank you very much, indeed! When I get my hands on you!

(EDITH enters through the french doors and stands quietly;
CHARLES, in agitation, moves backward toward her.)

Elvira! Ruth! Show yourselves! Where are you?

(He turns around and sees EDITH standing right behind him.)

Good god!

(He stumbles backward a few steps, then recovers a bit, moves forward, looks at EDITH closely, then pinches her arm.)

What do you want?

EDITH

I'm sorry to startle you, Mr. Condomine. I've brought the final papers over for your signatures.

CHARLES

Final papers?

EDITH

For the purchase of the house.

CHARLES

(Moving away.)

Oh, well, you can forget that!

EDITH

Forget it!

CHARLES

I am not moving back in here. You're her, aren't you? The... female lumberjack.

EDITH

Lumberjack!

CHARLES

No, no. Of course you're not a lumberjack. The... estate agent – Miss...

EDITH

Headon.

CHARLES

Headon, of course. Well, I'll tell you, Miss "Heed On", my "head's on" the block as long as I'm here. I intend to remove it as quickly as I can. (A beat.) My head from the block, I mean.

EDITH

But, you have to move back in, Mr. Condomine!

CHARLES

I have to do nothing of the sort. You move in, if you like it here so much.

EDITH

It won't do any good for me to move in here. It must be you.

CHARLES

Well, it won't be me, so don't make any plans. Tell me, when you sold my wife on this place, did you happen to mention that it was haunted?

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EDITH

Certainly not.

CHARLES

Well, it is, you know.

EDITH

Yes, I do.

CHARLES

You know! Then why, in heaven's name, didn't you see fit to mention it to Maude – to Mrs. Condomine?

(ELVIRA suddenly breezes in through the french doors, literally, with the curtains blowing around her.)

Good god, they're back. Get down!

(He ducks behind the sofa.)

EDITH

Sometimes a breeze is just a breeze, Mr. Condomine.

CHARLES

And, sometimes it's an avenging spirit from the Other Side.

ELVIRA

I like that. After all I did for him.

EDITH

(To ELVIRA.)

Be quiet.

CHARLES

(Still behind the sofa.)

I will not.

EDITH

Would she have believed me?

CHARLES

(Still behind the sofa.)

Would who have believed you?

EDITH:

Your wife, Mr. Condomine. Would she have believed me if I'd told her the house was haunted?

CHARLES

(Rising from behind the sofa.)

Of course not, but that's no reason for not telling her.

EDITH

Did you tell her?

CHARLES

About... ?

ELVIRA

I'll say he did!

EDITH

(To ELVIRA.)

Elvira.

CHARLES

Of course I told her about Elvira – and about Ruth.

ELVIRA

And what a row they had! Great fun!

EDITH

(To ELVIRA.)

Great fun?

CHARLES

Certainly not. It was most distressing. You're a very rude girl, aren't you? What passes between a husband and wife is private.

ELVIRA

Of course, they made it up in style.

EDITH

(To ELVIRA.)

No one is interested in that.

CHARLES

I should hope not.

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EDITH

So, your wife doesn't believe in ghosts?

CHARLES

Most emphatically not.

ELVIRA

Or moss beetles.

EDITH

(To ELVIRA.)

Or moss beetles?

CHARLES

Oh, I'm sure she believes in moss beetles.

EDITH

But you believe in them?

CHARLES

Ghosts?

ELVIRA

Or moss beetles?

EDITH

Moss beetles. I mean, ghosts.

CHARLES

See here, why are you asking about all this? How do you come to know the place is haunted?

(The double doors swing open and RUTH enters; the doors close behind her.)

Another breeze, Miss Headon? Or an avenging spirit from the Other Side?

RUTH

There's a difference between vengeance and justice, Charles.

EDITH

There's a difference between vengeance and justice, Mr. Condomine.

CHARLES

That sounds like something Ruth might have said.

(He suddenly looks at EDITH closely and begins to gaze around the room.)

RUTH

(Sitting in a chair.)

That sounds like something Ruth did say.

CHARLES

Tell me, Miss Headon. Are they both in the room at this moment?

RUTH

Oh, make him suffer a little longer, Edith.

EDITH

Ruth is sitting in that chair and Elvira is standing behind you just now...

(ELVIRA blows in CHARLES's ear.)

... blowing in your ear.

CHARLES

Good god! (CHARLES digs at his ear.) I mean, good god, you can see them!

Yes. EDITH

And hear them? CHARLES

Yes. EDITH

But, no one has been able to do either – not since that last séance. CHARLES

Do you think he'll put it together? RUTH

Oh, I have faith in him. Come on, Charles! ELVIRA

No one except... Edith? CHARLES

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Hurrah! ELVIRA

(She throws up her hands and spins around CHARLES, pausing to blow in his ear again.)

Stop that, Elvira. CHARLES/EDITH

Are you little Edith, the parlour maid? CHARLES

Well, I've grown up a bit, Mr. Condomine. Matured, at least. EDITH

Yes! Well – yes! Seven years. Good god. CHARLES

Mr. Condomine, it's important that you move back in here. EDITH

CHARLES

Edith, you've been here all this time?

EDITH

Not the whole time, Mr. Condomine. I went away for a while, but I came to realize that someone had to stay. Someone had to look after them. And, it was my fault, you see, the whole thing. Oh, I couldn't help it at the time. When a girl is young, if she has the Gift, it can be... uncontrollable.

CHARLES

The Gift?

EDITH

The Sight, Mr. Condomine. The power to contact the Other Side.

CHARLES

I see.

EDITH

So do I. I always have. I didn't mean to call them back, but to be fair, there was a tremendous amount of psychic energy pulling at me.

ELVIRA

And, I thought it was the power of Charles's love tugging at me.

RUTH

The power of Charles's love couldn't tug a stopper out of a drain.

EDITH

Then, after you left, the poor dears were here all alone...

RUTH

Oh, we had each other, didn't we, Elvira?

ELVIRA

For what that was worth.

EDITH

... and, after a while, I realized that I had to try to help them back to the Other Side. It was my responsibility. I tried to find people who might help. An Indian mystic...

ELVIRA

The fake fakir.

EDITH

... people who believed in the supernatural...

RUTH

The kooks.

EDITH

... spiritual people...

ELVIRA

The Reverend and Mrs. Dreary.

EDITH

Darlings, let me tell it in my own way. Stop interrupting.

CHARLES

Have they been interrupting?

RUTH

Constantly.

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EDITH

Constantly.

CHARLES

Well, stop it, Elvira.

ELVIRA

I've hardly opened my mouth.

CHARLES

And, Ruth, try to be more civil.

RUTH

Oh, I'm trying, darling.

(She throws a cushion at him.)

CHARLES

So, that's why you became an estate agent, so you could look after the house?

EDITH

That and, well, a girl has to make a living.

ELVIRA

(Giggling.)
One way or another!

CHARLES

Shut up, Elvira.

ELVIRA

You heard me!

CHARLES

(To EDITH.)
I'm sure she said something rude.
(RUTH laughs.)
And, you haven't married?

EDITH

I can't, Mr. Condomine.

CHARLES

Why ever not? Marriage can be very pleasant—so I've heard.

RUTH/ELVIRA

Oh!

EDITH

There is a belief that only a girl, or a woman, who is... in a certain condition can have the power to contact the Other Side, which is probably why the power seems to be strongest in girls who are of a certain age... if you follow me.

RUTH

Oh, Edith, you'll have to be far less subtle for Charles.

ELVIRA

A chalkboard might be in order.

CHARLES

I'm afraid I don't quite follow.

RUTH

Told you.

EDITH

Mr. Condomine, when a woman marries, certain changes take place...

ELVIRA

(Giggling.)

Her address, for one thing.

CHARLES

(After a moment's thought.)

Oh, I see! You mean you're... still?...

EDITH

As a matter of fact, I am.

CHARLES

I didn't think they still existed.

RUTH

There's one in Kent.

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EDITH

It's probably just an old wives' tale...

ELVIRA

... spread by old wives!

EDITH

... but I don't want to risk it. After all, look at Madame Arcati. The Sudbury case, her only genuine accomplishment, happened at age twelve. After that, nothing.

CHARLES

And what about Madame Arcati? Have you consulted her in all this?

EDITH

Oh, Mr. Condomine. Madame Arcati Passed Over four years ago.

CHARLES

She died!

RUTH/ELVIRA

Passed Over!

RUTH

After all, we're right here in the room.

ELVIRA

Really!

(She moves continually about the room.)

CHARLES

(Genuinely moved.)

Oh, I'm most dreadfully sorry.

(He sits.)

That's rather a blow, actually.

EDITH

I've really been quite alone here, since.

CHARLES

Poor Edith.

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EDITH

Which is one reason I was so heartened when your wife – your current wife – telephoned me. And why it's so important that you should move back here. I thought together we can finally help the poor dears back to the Other Side.

CHARLES

Shove them back to the Other Side.

ELVIRA

(At CHARLES'S ear.)

Love you, too, darling.

CHARLES

But, I don't see how I can help. I'm most definitely un-psychic. And, of course, there is the little matter of them trying to kill me.

ELVIRA

Only once.

RUTH

Or twice.

EDITH

They have promised to behave – and to not kill you. Haven't you, girls?

RUTH/ELVIRA

(Sulking.)

Yes.

EDITH

Yes, what?

RUTH/ELVIRA

We promise not to kill Charles while he's here in the house.

EDITH

Or Mrs. Condomine.

CHARLES

You'll have to be more specific.

EDITH

Or Maude.

RUTH/ELVIRA

Or Maude.

EDITH

They've promised. I want to try again – to re-create that last séance.

CHARLES

Well – as long as they're not going to kill me. I just don't see what good it will do. The last time we tried, there was only Madame Arcati and myself and the girls are still here, aren't they? And, we no longer have Madame Arcati.

EDITH

But you do have me. And, Madame Arcati and I differ in one respect, at least.

CHARLES

You're... of course.

ELVIRA

Charles does have a point, Edith. Two won't be enough.

RUTH

We need Maude.

EDITH

We need Maude – Mrs. Condomine.

CHARLES

She'll take a great deal of convincing, I'm afraid.

EDITH

We can but try. Where is she?

CHARLES

In the garden, I believe. Soaking up the sunshine.

(He crosses to the french doors and calls out.)

Maude!

(A moment.)

Maude! Would you *please* come in here? There's something we need to discuss.

(A moment.)

She's coming. I tried everything I could last night to convince her but...

EDITH

I'm sure we can.

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(MAUDE enters through the french doors.)

MAUDE

Are you ready to talk sensibly, Charles, because otherwise I have no intention... oh, Miss Headon, you're here.

EDITH

Yes, I...

MAUDE

I suppose you've brought the papers.

CHARLES

Yes, dear, but that's not what...

MAUDE

We can go over them more comfortably at the dining room table, I think.

CHARLES

That's not why we asked you...

MAUDE

Would you care for tea, Miss Hea...

CHARLES

(Shouting.)

Maude! Sit down!

MAUDE

Charles!

CHARLES

(Commanding.)

Sit!

(MAUDE begins to sit in the chair occupied by RUTH)

Not there!

(She hastily sits on the sofa.)

ELVIRA

That's the Charles I knew and loved.

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(She sits on the sofa close to MAUDE and blows on her neck.)

MAUDE

(Shivering.)

Charles, I resent being treated this way, especially in front of Miss Headon.

CHARLES

Miss Headon, as it turns out, is an old friend of the family and we have something very important to discuss with you.

MAUDE

Really? You've not begun very well.

CHARLES

Last night, Maude, I tried to convince you of certain things, but failed. This morning, I tried again and only succeeded in raising your ire.

MAUDE

Which you've done again, Charles. Forgive me, Miss Headon.

CHARLES

Miss Headon is now going to convince you.

MAUDE

She is?

(ELVIRA continues to blow on her neck and tickle her.)

EDITH

She is?

CHARLES

Yes. You have the floor, Edith.

EDITH

Mrs. Condomine, when I showed you the house, you asked me if it was haunted.

MAUDE

As a joke, dear.

(She brushes at ELVIRA's hand, thinking it a fly.)

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EDITH

Well, I lied to you, then, Mrs. Condomine. This house most definitely is haunted, by the spirits of your husband's two deceased wives.

MAUDE

What is this? Charles, what have you put her up to?

(She continues to shiver and brush at imaginary insects as ELVIRA torments her; her agitation increases throughout.)

Close the windows, Charles.

CHARLES

They are closed.

EDITH

Mrs. Condomine, those spirits are, at this moment, in the room with us.

MAUDE

Ridiculous!

EDITH

The shade of your husband's second wife is in the chair you first tried to sit in.

RUTH

(Twinkling her fingers at MAUDE.)

Hello, Maude. It's been a long time.

EDITH

The shade of your husband's first wife is beside you, tickling your neck.

MAUDE

(Starting and flapping at ELVIRA's hands.)

Ah!

(She looks at the space on her left, sees nothing.)

Ridiculous! Absolute nonsense!

EDITH

Ruth! Show her that you're here.

(RUTH knocks an ash tray off the side table.)

MAUDE

AH! Nonsense! Utter nonsense!

(RUTH picks up the ash tray and "floats" it mysteriously past MAUDE's nose, making ghostly "Oooh!" sounds.)

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AH! I don't believe it! I don't believe it!

ELVIRA

Said Mr. Scrooge!

CHARLES

Elvira! Quick, the flowers! Like you did with Ruth!

(ELVIRA picks up a vase of flowers from the mantel piece. She "floats" it past MAUDE, also "Oooh"-ing, then suddenly pulls the flowers out of the vase and pours the water over MAUDE.)

CHARLES/EDITH

Elvira!

MAUDE

(Leaping up.)

Charles! You brute! Why are you doing this? How are you doing this?

EDITH

Ruth! Elvira! Something else!

(RUTH and ELVIRA, flanking MAUDE, suddenly pick her up in their arms and swing her back and forth)

MAUDE

AHHH! Charles! Stop them! Ruth! Elvira! Put me down!

EDITH

Do you believe us now, Maude?

MAUDE

I do! I do! I must! Put me down!

(RUTH and ELVIRA laugh and drop MAUDE onto the sofa.)

AAAHH!

(RUTH and ELVIRA laugh; CHARLES and EDITH look aghast at the scene.)

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LIGHTS DOWN
END OF SCENE 3

FREE SPIRITS
an improbable farce
ACT I
Scene 4

SETTING: The time is late on the following afternoon. The doors are shut. The windows are shut. The curtains are open.

(There is a pause; the doors slowly swing open; another pause.)

EDITH

(From OFF.)

Darling, you just have to trust me for a while.

MARK

(From OFF.)

Of course I trust you. I just want to know what you're doing.

EDITH

(Appearing at the doors.)

That doesn't sound like trust.

MARK

(Appearing at the doors.)

I rang a half-dozen times last evening. Your landlady says you never came home last night.

EDITH

What business is it of hers?

MARK

That's not the point, is it?

EDITH

(Coming into the room.)

I stayed here last night, if you must know.

MARK

(Following her.)

I do know. That's why I came here to find you.

EDITH

Well, you found me.

MARK

I was very worried about you.

EDITH

(Softening.)

Ohh... were you?

MARK

I pictured you in a car crash at the foot of the hill, here, lying in a pool of blood...

EDITH

Stop it!

(She looks around to see if RUTH or ELVIRA overheard.)

MARK

Sorry but, when you're not around, I go a little mad.

EDITH

That's nice.

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Not really.

EDITH

A few more days, dear. I promise. One way or another, it'll just be a few more days.

MARK

I've heard that before.

EDITH

(With her arms around his neck.)

Aren't I worth waiting for a few more days?

MARK

Well, when you put it that way...

(They kiss; CHARLES enters at the double doors.)

CHARLES

Oh, I'm terribly sorry.

(He starts to back out then stops.)

See here, I don't mean to interrupt, but...

EDITH

I'm sorry. Mr. Condomine, this is Dr. Bradman. Dr. Mark Bradman.

CHARLES

(Shaking hands.)

Good heavens! It's old home week.

MARK

I beg your pardon?

CHARLES

We knew your parents, Ruth and I. My previous wife.

MARK

I see.

CHARLES

I was so sorry to hear of your father's... passing... over.

MARK

Thank you.

CHARLES

How is your mother?

MARK

She seems to be thriving in Shropshire.

CHARLES

Extraordinary. I've never known anyone who has thrived in Shropshire.

MARK

There's a first time for everything.

CHARLES

As we have learned around here.

EDITH

(Who doesn't want MARK to know the situation.)

So, is your wife feeling better, Mr. Condomine?

CHARLES

Eh? Yes, of course. A bit shaken up, that's all. It was quite a shock to the system.

MARK

Should I have a look at her? What's seems to be the problem?

EDITH

Nothing you can help with, dear.

MARK

Are you sure?

EDITH

Absolutely.

CHARLES

I don't know, Edith. He could make up the numbers.

MARK

Numbers for what?

EDITH

Just a silly party game we'll be playing later.

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MARK

What? You, Mr. Condomine and his wife?

EDITH

Exactly. And, it's a three-person game, so there's no room for you. Off you go.

MARK

Are you trying to get rid of me?

EDITH

Yes! Take a hint, can't you?

MARK

Very well. What am I supposed to do?

EDITH

Wait for me. We agreed that I was worth waiting for, didn't we? So, go home and wait!

(She pushes him out the door and returns.)

Mr. Condomine – Charles – when Mark and I marry – and we are going to marry – I intend to live a life of utter, complete, profound and boring normality. I would rather that Mark did not know anything about this... escapade here. The less he knows about my... Sight, the better.

CHARLES

Of course. I understand completely.

EDITH

Thank you. Where is your wife?

CHARLES

Lying down. She had a headache all night, naturally enough.

EDITH

Oh, dear. That might make it more difficult.

CHARLES

A headache?

EDITH

Additional psychic strain.

CHARLES

I see. Well, she took a headache powder, perhaps she'll be over it soon. Where are they?

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EDITH

Ruth is weeding the garden. I haven't seen Elvira.

CHARLES

Oh, oh.

EDITH

They've promised to behave.

CHARLES

I've survived their promises before.

(MAUDE comes down the stairs; she holds a cloth to her head.)

How are you feeling, dear?

MAUDE

What kind of question is that? How do I look like I'm feeling?

CHARLES

Well, I was hoping you looked worse than you felt. I don't mean that. I mean, felt better than you look. I don't mean that, either.

MAUDE

Shut up, Charles.

CHARLES

Very well.

EDITH

I'm sorry, Mrs. Condomine, but I couldn't think of any other way to convince you.

MAUDE

I am now convinced. What do we do about it?

EDITH

It is my earnest hope to get them out of the house.

MAUDE

What, send them to Brighton for the weekend?

EDITH

Get them back to the Other Side.

MAUDE

I wholeheartedly endorse the idea. How will you do it?

CHARLES

Well, you see, dear –

MAUDE

Shut up, Charles.

CHARLES

Very well.

EDITH

I had hoped, with Charles's help, to send them back through a séance.

MAUDE

A séance! In my house!

CHARLES

Actually, dear, we haven't signed the papers, yet.

MAUDE
Shut up, Charles.

CHARLES
Very well.

(He crosses to the drinks cabinet.)

MAUDE
And stay away from the liquor.

CHARLES
I was not drunk!

MAUDE
What do you need for this séance?

EDITH
Well, not much, really. A table...

MAUDE
Which we have.

EDITH
Some chairs...

CHARLES
Ditto.

EDITH
Some salt...

MAUDE
Yes.

EDITH
A bit of dried garlic, if you have it.

MAUDE
There's a rope of it in the pantry.

EDITH
Music.

(MAUDE waves her hand toward the gramophone.)

EDITH Cont.

Charles.

(MAUDE waves her hand toward CHARLES.)

And you.

MAUDE

Me!

EDITH

We really need at least two people at the table, Mrs. Condomine. I'll be moving about the room, conducting the séance, so we need one more person at the table.

MAUDE

And, no one else is available.

EDITH

I'm afraid not.

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MAUDE
Very well. But, Charles, don't think I'll forget this.

CHARLES

I never dreamed you would, dear. We need Ruth and Elvira.

EDITH

I'll get them. You bring the table out, please – and three chairs.

CHARLES

Just the same as seven years ago?

EDITH

Just the same, please.

(She exits through the french doors. MAUDE crosses up to the double doors and pauses.)

MAUDE

Charles, which of us do you love most?

CHARLES

(Moving the table to DR.)

I don't understand, dear.

MAUDE

It seems to be a perfectly simple question. Which of your three wives do you love most?

(She exits to the kitchen.)

CHARLES

(Raising his voice to reach her.)

I have only one wife, Maude. You, my darling.

MAUDE

(Off.)

You have three wives at present, Charles – all of them very much present.

CHARLES

Until death do us part, dear. Death has very clearly parted me from two of my wives.

MAUDE

(Off.)

Has it? I wonder.

CHARLES

Maude, I said to Elvira and Ruth yesterday that I have never been happier. My marriage to you has opened my eyes to what marriage should be. I have been deliriously happy with you and had looked forward to many more years of the same. Instead, we came here. After the deaths of my first two wives, I made strenuous efforts to remove their memory from my mind and myself from their vicinity, efforts equal to those I am currently making to remove those two former wives, who are here through no fault of mine, from a house which, I hesitate to point out –

(MAUDE returns from the kitchen with garlic and salt.)

– you bought! Surely that should satisfy you.

MAUDE

(Placing the garlic and salt on the table.)

And, yet it doesn't answer my question. Which of your wives do you love the most?

CHARLES

At the present moment, Maude, the answer is "my fourth wife"!

(The curtains blow and ELVIRA enters through the french doors.)

ELVIRA
Bickering again!

MAUDE
Is one of them here, Charles?

CHARLES
How the devil should I know?

MAUDE
Make her do something so we know she's here.

CHARLES
Even when they were alive, I couldn't make them do anything. If Elvira is here, please move a chair. If Ruth is here, please... play a note on the piano.

(ELVIRA picks up a book, carries it across the room, with "Ooh" sounds and smacks CHARLES on the head with it.)

MAUDE
Well, who's that, then?

CHARLES
Who knows? Pope Clement the bloody Seventh, the way things are going.

(RUTH enters through the french doors, followed by EDITH.)

EDITH
There she is! We've been looking all over for you, Elvira.

CHARLES
Elvira – I should have known. Is Ruth here?

EDITH
Yes, she is.

ELVIRA
What are we doing?

RUTH
We're having another séance.

ELVIRA

Now? I don't think I want to.

EDITH

Elvira, we have the chance right now to free both of you from this place.

ELVIRA

But...

RUTH

Shut up, Elvira.

CHARLES

Is she being difficult?

EDITH

No. Now, listen please. I'm going to ask Charles and Maude to sit at the table.

CHARLES

Now?

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EDITH

Very well. Now. Ruth and Elvira, please stand by the french doors.

(RUTH and ELVIRA move to the french doors, while CHARLES and MAUDE seat themselves. There is confusion while EDITH tries to speak.)

CHARLES

Sit here, Maude. I'll take that chair.

(MAUDE sits in the chair he did NOT indicate.)

EDITH

I need to be free to move about. I may stand at the table; I may stand by Ruth and Elvira.

RUTH

Elvira, must you stand so close?

EDITH

I shall play some music on the gramophone, then turn off the lights.

CHARLES

(Jumping up.)
Not the piece we played last time!

EDITH

It's best to have the same circumstances, Charles.

CHARLES

I hate that piece, now.

ELVIRA

(Pouting.)
It used to be *our* song.

RUTH

I was never very fond of it myself.

MAUDE

Sit down, Charles.

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EDITH

When I feel the moment is right, I'll sit beside you, Charles. Would the two of you place your hands on the table with fingers touching?

(CHARLES and MAUDE sit on opposite sides of the table, L and R, hands on top, fingertips touching. EDITH crosses to the gramophone, hunts through the records, selects one and places it on the turntable, ready to go.)

Is everyone ready?

MAUDE

Ready.

CHARLES

I'm ready.

RUTH

I certainly am.

ELVIRA

I suppose, but it seems a waste.

EDITH

What does?

ELVIRA

Let's get on with it.

EDITH

Alright. Quiet, everyone. Concentrate on connecting with the Other Side.

(She starts the record: Always, by Irving Berlin.)

Concentrate, everyone! Not a sound, now! Eyes closed! Lights!

(She switches off the lights. Only a faint glow comes through the french doors. The music continues. She comes to the table and picks up the salt.)

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

(She throws a pinch of salt at each of CHARLES and MAUDE.)

CHARLES

Steady on!

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EDITH

Quiet!

(She sings. From here the dialogue overlaps with no waits.)

Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper.

What shall he have but brown bread and butter?

MAUDE

What is she doing?

CHARLES

Daphne loves that song.

MAUDE

Daphne?

CHARLES

Madame Arcati's control – her spirit guide. I assume Edith uses her as well.

(EDITH picks up the garlic and waves it around. She becomes more intense with each repetition of the doggerel below.)

EDITH

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

EDIT Cont.

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!
Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

ELVIRA

(Overlapping EDITH's lines.)
She's really getting very good at this.

RUTH

(Overlapping.)
Quiet! I can feel it. Something's happening.

EDITH

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

(The music has stopped. She pauses, arms uplifted and from the silence,
a child's ghostly voice is heard.)

DAPHNE

(Singing Off.)
Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper.
What shall he have but brown bread and butter?

MAUDE

(Whispering.)
Who's that?

CHARLES/ELVIRA/RUTH

(Whispering.)
Daphne.

EDITH

Ssh!
(She sits at the table between CHARLES and MAUDE, touching their
fingers with hers.)
Daphne! Daphne, is that you?

DAPHNE

(Off.)
Yeth.

EDITH

Daphne, we need your help.

DAPHNE

Don't want to. Want to go home.

MAUDE

Why, she's just a child!

EDITH

Ssh! I'm sorry, dear, but you can't go home. Do you remember when you came here first?

DAPHNE

No.

EDITH

Do you remember Madame Arcati and how kind she was?

DAPHNE

Madame Arcati?

EDITH

You liked Madame Arcati, didn't you?

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DAPHNE

Yeth.

EDITH

We want to get everything back the way it was when Madame Arcati was here.

DAPHNE

Madame Arcati there?

EDITH

No, Daphne. Madame Arcati is over there. But we want to get all the people on the proper side. Can you help us?

DAPHNE

Don't know.

EDITH

If we all try very hard, can you sort of pull and get all the people back where they should be?

DAPHNE

Try.

EDITH

Good girl, Daphne!

(She crosses to the gramophone and re-starts the record. She heads back to the table.)

Elvira, Ruth, join us. Put your hands in the circle here.

(EDITH, RUTH and ELVIRA join CHARLES and MAUDE at the table, hands in contact with them.)

Alright, everyone! Repeat with me: Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

THE GROUP

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

EDITH

Everyone, concentrate! Push with your minds!

THE GROUP

(Continuing under.)

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

EDITH

Now, Daphne, pull! Pull!

THE GROUP

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

(The music winds higher in pitch; DAPHNE's voice is heard over top)

DAPHNE

(Singing.)

Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper.

What shall he have but brown bread and butter?

THE GROUP

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

(The table they are sitting around suddenly jumps under their fingers.)

DAPHNE

(Singing.)

Madame Arcati. Madame Arcati. Madame Arcati.

MAUDE

Aaah!

(The table jumps up and down several times.)

Charles! It's getting away!

CHARLES

Hold on, Maude!

EDITH

Oh-oh-oh!

(Suddenly, EDITH falls to the floor, the table topples over, MAUDE falls off her chair; the music winds to a shriek and stops. There is a silence.)

CHARLES

Maude, are you all right? Edith? Is anyone there?

RUTH

Well, I'm still here.

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ELVIRA

So am I.

CHARLES

Of course you are. I couldn't be that lucky.

(Realizing what's happened.)

Oh, my god!

RUTH

Charles! You heard us!

(CHARLES switches the lights on; MAUDE and EDITH are lying on the floor; the table and two chairs are knocked over.)

CHARLES

I see you, too!

(He sees MAUDE.)

Maude!

(He goes to MAUDE and begins to revive her.)

You two, wake up Edith!

ELVIRA

How?

CHARLES

I don't know. Throw some salt at her.

EDITH

(Suddenly sitting up.)

Something has happened.

RUTH

Yes, you've set us back seven years! Charles can see and hear us again!

EDITH

No, not that! Something important has happened.

(MAUDE begins to come around.)

CHARLES

You haven't sent anyone back, that's certain.

(MAUDE, seeing RUTH and ELVIRA, clutches at CHARLES.)

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MAUDE
Aaah! Charles!

(Going from frightened to furious.)

They're!... they're!... they're... they're your wives.

CHARLES

You can see them, too! Maude, you remember Ruth and I don't think you ever met Elvira.

MAUDE

(Acidly.)

Not while she was alive.

ELVIRA

Better late than never.

MAUDE

That's a matter of opinion.

EDITH

Quiet! Listen!

(A bell is heard, faintly, then growing louder. It is a bicycle bell.)

There! Look!

(She points to the french doors, which fly open. MADAME ARCATI enters, and looks around. She is a ghost, grey from top to toe, in grey tweed, grey sensible shoes and a grey hat with a grey feather.)

MADAME ARCATI

I've left my bike propped against those bushes. It will be all right there, I suppose?

RUTH

My word!

CHARLES

My god!

MAUDE

Who's that?

EDITH

Madame Arcati!

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MADAME ARCATI

Yes? PLEASE CONTACT THE AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS

ELVIRA

Here we go again!

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF ACT I

FREE SPIRITS
an improbable farce
ACT II
Scene 1

SETTING: It is a day later, in the late afternoon. Dull light comes through the french door curtains. Tea and sandwiches are laid out on the table DL.

(There is the sound of distant thunder and heavy rain. MAUDE stands at the french doors, watching the rain. Another rumble of thunder, closer, and MADAME ARCATI comes down the stairs and enters the room. When MADAME ARCATI becomes agitated, her cultured accent tends to slip and betray her Cockney roots.)

MAUDE

Madame Arcati. Thank you for coming down.

MADAME ARCATI

Not at all, my dear.

MAUDE
I trust you are quite recovered from your... journey?

MADAME ARCATI

Fit as a fiddle. Bit of a shock to suddenly find myself bicycling up the path here, but I've gotten over it.

MAUDE

Marvellous. Would you care for tea or a sandwich?

MADAME ARCATI

(Crossing to the table and inspecting the food.)

Oh, dear, I wish I could. I remember being ravenously hungry just before I Passed Over.

MAUDE

How did you... Pass Over, Madame Arcati? If it's not too painful to recall.

MADAME ARCATI

Not in the least. I was attending a football match in Reachfields between Hythe Town FC and New Romney FC but the match was called because of heavy rain. I was coasting my bicycle down Lydell Close and had just raised my right arm to signal a left turn onto Dymchurch Road – thusly (She raises her right arm) – when suddenly there was a...

(A sudden loud crack of thunder.)

MADAME ARCATI Cont.

... oh! Precisely. And that, as they say, was that.

MAUDE

Struck by lightning!

MADAME ARCATI

No, an articulated lorry came roaring out of the mist and clobbered me on my blind side. Sent me quite “arse over teakettle”, if you’ll excuse my French. Never felt a thing.

MAUDE

Well, small blessings, I suppose.

MADAME ARCATI

Not really, I’m still ’ovis.

MAUDE

You’re what?

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MADAME ARCATI

’ovis bread – stone cold dead.

MAUDE

Well, I do sympathize, Madam Arcati, but that’s all in the past, now, isn’t it?

MADAME ARCATI

Time is irrelevant on the Other Side, my dear. What is past might be the present might be the future might have happened eons ago.

MAUDE

Isn’t that rather confusing?

MADAME ARCATI

Damned confusing, but there you are.

MAUDE

Be that as it may, I would like to talk over some of my problems – some of our problems, I think.

MADAME ARCATI

I know of what you speak. The house is quite overrun with spectral beings.

MAUDE

To put it mildly. Infested might be a better word.

MADAME ARCATI

I rather resent that, Mrs. Condomine.

MAUDE

I do apologize, Madame Arcati, but please consider my position. I found myself not two minutes ago offering tea to a ghost! I wake up in the morning and find that all the furniture I have moved the day before has been moved back again and if I try to set out a nice arrangement of flowers, Elvira dumps them in the wastebasket and replaces them with ethereal blossoms no one can see but her! It's truly intolerable!

MADAME ARCATI

I'm not sure what you think I can do about it, Mrs. Condomine. After all, I am only here because Daphne seized me and pushed me across.

MAUDE

Across?

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MADAME ARCATI
The Divide, my dear, the Great Divide.

MAUDE

Daphne! If she weren't a child, I could shake her.

MADAME ARCATI

A child! Nonsense. She's a woman grown.

MAUDE

But that voice, a childish little lisp.

MADAME ARCATI

I fell for it, too, when I was on This Side, but she only puts it on for the tourists, you know – to perk up the show.

MAUDE

Perk up the show!

MADAME ARCATI

It's all show business, isn't it? A little excitement; a little razzamatazz.

MAUDE

So, you admit it's all a fake, then?

MADAME ARCATI

Hardly a fake, Mrs. Condomine, or I wouldn't be here, would I?

MAUDE

I thought you were here because Daphne pushed you across the Great Divide.

MADAME ARCATI

Yes, and when I get hold of her, I'll give her that shaking you mentioned. Quite deliberate on her part, I do believe.

MAUDE

So, she knew what she was doing?

MADAME ARCATI

Oh, most certainly. She can be rather spiteful, really.

MAUDE

Can we count on her for help if we try another... séance?

MADAME ARCATI

Who can say?

MAUDE

We may need an exorcism to get rid of you all.

MADAME ARCATI

Excuse my French again, but that's a load of cobblers. Wasted time.

MAUDE

But, you were a medium. Surely you have some way of contacting the Other Side. Of bridging the Great Divide.

MADAME ARCATI

When I was alive, my dear. When I was alive! But now...

MAUDE

Now?

MADAME ARCATI

I find that I cannot say anything substantive about the Other Side, Mrs. Condomine, apart from saying, whatever I may have thought I knew about it when I was alive, it is entirely different than I believed it to be.

MAUDE

But can you get back there?

MADAME ARCATI

I can sense there is a... blockage in the psychic energy. Like a cork in a bottle.

MAUDE

And that's not good.

MADAME ARCATI

I don't know.

MAUDE

Do you have any idea of how to get rid of this blockage?

MADAME ARCATI

Not a powder.

MAUDE

Then what are we going to do?

MADAME ARCATI

Get used to it?

MAUDE

I will not get used to it! If you think that I am going to sit calmly by while my husband's dead wives ruin my marriage as thoroughly as they ruined their own, while my house is being used as a clearing station for spook central, while adenoidal seven-year olds chant ghostly ditties in the dark, and a preposterous apparition like you clutters up the walkways with spectral bicycles, then all I can say, Madame Arcati, is that (in a thick Cockney) you're completely Tommy Paine! (She crosses to the double doors then turns back.) And that's insane!

MADAME ARCATI

What are you going to do?

MAUDE

I'm going into Folkestone to speak to a priest about you and Ruth and Elvira and Daphne.

MAUDE Cont.

Then, I'm going to get every book I can on getting rid of ghosts. Then, I'm going to drive back here and read the books. Then I'm going to get drunk!

(She exits.)

MADAME ARCATI

Seems a plan.

(RUTH and ELVIRA come down the stairs.)

RUTH

Why was Maude so upset?

MADAME ARCATI

She wants to get rid of us.

ELVIRA

That's rather rude – and you've only just got here.

MADAME ARCATI
She is naturally upset at my presence but most particularly, I think, because of you two.

ELVIRA

We haven't done anything.

RUTH

We've been as well-behaved as school-girls.

MADAME ARCATI

I was a school-girl myself, once. What have you been up to?

RUTH/ELVIRA

Not a thing.

MADAME ARCATI

Something, I think. At any rate, she's going into Folkestone to do research.

RUTH

She's taking the car?

MADAME ARCATI

Of course.

ELVIRA
Their car?

MADAME ARCATI
Of course.

ELVIRA
(Beginning to wail.)
Oh!

RUTH
(Beginning to wail.)
Oh!

RUTH/ELVIRA
Oh!

(EDITH comes in from the kitchen to the double doors.)

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EDITH
Maude is standing in the lane, screaming. Why is she doing that?
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MADAME ARCATI
She's gone Tommy Paine.

EDITH
What are you two going on about? Ruth! Elvira! What have you done to her?

ELVIRA
Nothing whatsoever. Haven't seen her for hours.

RUTH
Really, Edith. You shouldn't leap at conclusions so.

EDITH
It's an easy leap. You both promised to behave.

RUTH
We did.

ELVIRA
We most certainly did.

RUTH/ELVIRA

And a promise is a promise.

EDITH

(Looking at them suspiciously.)

Yes, it is.

(We hear the front door opening.)

MAUDE

(Off.)

Blast! Blast! Blast! Blast!

(Each word is punctuated with a slam of the front door. MAUDE comes back in, drenched from the rain and fuming.)

Charles has taken the car!

RUTH/ELVIRA

What?

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EDITH

Yes, he was going into town.

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MAUDE

Blast!

(She takes off her coat and throws it at the front door.)

I'm never getting out of here!

EDITH

He found you were out of Scotch. He said he was going into Hythe for more.

MAUDE

I'd have gone with him. I need it more than he does!

RUTH

Charles took the car!

ELVIRA

Charles took the car!

RUTH

I wanted to go with him!

ELVIRA
I wanted to go with him!

EDITH
Why?

RUTH/ELVIRA
No reason.

MAUDE
Whatever you two are planning, you're not going to get Charles alone to wheedle and whine him into something foolish. You're not going to have a chance to start insinuating yourself between us. It's horribly unfair of you to come back and insert yourselves into our happiness. I wouldn't do it to you!

RUTH
Maude, we have no intention of insinuating ourselves between you and Charles.

ELVIRA
Certainly not, but we do have some rights in this situation.

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RUTH
All we want is some resolution to this whole thing.

ELVIRA
I'm sick to life of this whole unpleasantness.

MAUDE
Well, thank you. I can appreciate your position.

ELVIRA
And, if Charles takes the car out in the rain, it's not our fault, is it?

RUTH
They really ought to do something about the grade of that awful hill, oughtn't they?

ELVIRA
They really ought.

MADAME ARCATI
Oh, my word, not again.

MAUDE

Not what again?

EDITH

Oh, my god! Not the car!

MAUDE

What do you mean, not the car? Oh, my lord! Elvira, you've cut the brakes again!

ELVIRA

I did not!

EDITH

You promised you wouldn't harm Charles.

RUTH

No. We promised we wouldn't kill Charles while he was here in the house.

EDITH

Elvira, did you cut the brake-lines?

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ELVIRA

Of course not!

(She points an accusing finger at RUTH.)

Ruth did.

MAUDE

Ruth!

RUTH

(She points an accusing finger at ELVIRA.)

Elvira loosened the steering.

MAUDE

Oh, god!

(The telephone rings. They all freeze. The phone continues to ring.
MAUDE slowly walks over and answers it.)

Hello. This is she. The bottom of the hill. The little bridge. I understand. No, I can come on my own. Thank you.

(She replaces the phone. The lights dim suddenly and the french doors blow open violently. Thunder sounds and lightning flashes. The fire in the grate flares. The grandfather clock strikes several times, wildly.)

MADAME ARCATI

(Frightened.)

Oh, heavens!

EDITH

(Frightened.)

Oh, no!

RUTH

(Frightened.)

Oh, goodness!

ELVIRA

(Frightened.)

Oh, oh!

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MAUDE

(Annoyed.)

Oh, Charles.

LIGHTS DOWN
END OF SCENE 1

FREE SPIRITS
an improbable farce
ACT II
Scene 2

SETTING: It is three days later, evening.

(MARK stands at the telephone, listening; there is a pause, which extends for several seconds)

MARK

Yes, I'm still here. All right.

(He waits. After a few moments, he begins to hum the theme from the song "Always". EDITH comes down the stairs.)

Still waiting.

(EDITH glances listlessly through a newspaper, then throws it down.)

Restless?

EDITH

I need to get out, but...

(She gestures upstairs.)

MARK

So go into town for an hour. I'll stay here.

EDITH

No, that's no good. I'll just rest a bit while she sleeps.

MARK

Strange. Two attempts on her own life since the funeral. Yet, she doesn't seem suicidal.

EDITH

She's not. But, we must watch everything that goes on, all the same.

MARK

She said to me again: "I thought you were Charles. Where's Charles?" Classic dissociative behaviour. (Into the telephone.) Yes! No change, then. All right. I'll be at this number for a few hours, at least. I'll ring you if I leave. Let me know.

(He hangs up.)

EDITH

Do you need to be there?

MARK

No, nothing to be done, right now. How is she?

EDITH

As can be expected.

MARK

Such a strange coincidence. First, his wife seven years ago, then he. Same place; same cause. Almost supernatural.

EDITH

Almost.

(ELVIRA appears at the top of the stairs, sits on the bannister and slides down it, but doesn't appear to be enjoying it. Whispering.)

Elvira!

MARK

Elvira?

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EDITH

Charles's first wife. She just popped into my head... for some reason.

ELVIRA

Bored! Bored! Bored!

(She blows into MARK's ear, without enthusiasm. He shivers.)

Bored.

EDITH

(To ELVIRA.)

It's your own fault.

MARK

What is?

EDITH

If you're bored... cold. You should have on a cardigan.

MARK

I don't have a cardigan.

EDITH

I could get you one of Charles's.

MARK/ELVIRA

No!

EDITH

No cardigan. Let's all sit quietly and look at each other.

(MARK comes behind EDITH and puts his arms around her.)

Mark! She'll see.

MARK

Mrs. Condomine will be sleeping for hours.

ELVIRA

Mrs. Condomine can see more than you think.

EDITH

Mrs. Condomine can see more than you think.

(RUTH enters through the curtains.)

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RUTH
What can Mrs. Condomine see?

ELVIRA

Young love in bloom.

MARK

I'm getting very impatient with being patient.

RUTH

Ah! The darling buds of May!

EDITH

I think it very rude of you to mock.

MARK

I'm not mocking. I'm complaining.

RUTH

I was mocking.

EDITH

You were young, too, remember.

MARK

Darling, I'm not that much older than you.

EDITH

I wasn't speaking to you.

MARK

Sweetness, you need to lie down.

ELVIRA

Yes, go and have a good long lie-down.

EDITH

Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you?

MARK

Not particularly, unless I can lie down with you.

RUTH

He has designs on your virtue, Edith.

ELVIRA

He has designs on more than her virtue.

EDITH

That is utterly wicked of you! Take it back!

MARK

Very well. I don't want to lie down with you.

EDITH

Oh, darling, I'm so sorry! I just want this over with and then we can be together.

ELVIRA/MARK

Hurrah!

EDITH

But not yet.

RUTH

Oh, phooey.

MARK

Oh, bloody.

MARK

Damn this house! Damn it!

(The curtains blow violently. The fire flares. Wind moans and the house shakes. Loud banging noises are heard. The grandfather clock strikes several times.)

EDITH/RUTH

Mark!

(MADAME ARCATI comes quickly down the stairs.)

MADAME ARCATI

Who started that?

EDITH

Who started it?

MARK

I didn't start it. You started it.

MADAME ARCATI

Who started that confusion in the energy?

EDITH

It was Mark.

MARK

No, it was Edith.

EDITH

(She claps a hand over his mouth.)

Stop it, dear! What just happened?

MADAME ARCATI

There was a sudden confusion in the psychic energy. A great whirlpool of chaos.

EDITH

Chaos! Yes! It felt like the bottom fell away from everything – just for a moment.

RUTH

I felt it, too.

MARK

(Removing her hand.)

I think you should lie down, Edith.

ELVIRA

I didn't feel a thing. What did I miss?

EDITH

Everyone! Shut up!

(She walks around the room, sniffing and sensing with her hands.)

MADAME ARCATI

It's close by, dear. I can sense it.

EDITH

It's very close.

MARK/RUTH/ELVIRA

What is?

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EDITH

Quiet.

(She stops centre and shakes her head.)

I can't find it.

MADAME ARCATI

Nook or cranny, Edith!

EDITH

Of course!

(She stands on a chair.)

In nook or cranny, where ere ye be, come to me!

In hall or closet, if ye be, come to me!

'Neath floorboard hid, or on the stair,

In attic still or cellar bare –

Awake, asleep, now come to me!

(She steps down off the chair.)

MADAME ARCATI

Well done, Edith!

RUTH

(To ELVIRA.)

She really is very good.

MARK

(Putting up his hand.)

Edith...

EDITH

(Taking his hand.)

Quiet, dear. Wait.

MARK

(Putting up his hand again.)

Edith...

EDITH

What?

MARK

It's me.

EDITH

I know it's you, my love. I've not forgotten you.

MARK

No. It's me. I'm the chaos.

(They all look slowly to him.)

Or, at least, the cause of the chaos.

EDITH

Explain.

RUTH

At least.

MARK

My sweet, how many people do you see in the room at this moment?

EDITH

How many do you see?

ELVIRA
He asked you first.

MARK
Both together?

EDITH
All right.

(They look at each other and judge the moment.)

MARK/EDITH
You and me.

RUTH
Cowardly custards.

MARK/EDITH
And the other three.

EDITH
How well can you see them?

MARK
Well, they're mist, mostly. That one –
(He points to MADAME ARCATI.)
– is very hard to see – almost transparent. Those two –
(He points to RUTH and ELVIRA.)
– I see best. They're a thicker mist.

RUTH
Is he saying we're thick?

EDITH
Do be quiet, Ruth.

MARK
Ruth? So, that's Ruth Condomine, is it?

EDITH
Yes. Ruth, this is Dr. Mark Bradman. Mark, Mrs. Ruth Condomine.

MARK

(Attempting to shake hands, but failing.)

How do you do, Mrs. Condomine?

RUTH

Reasonably well, for someone seven years dead. I must look up your father if ever I get back to the Other Side.

MARK

Did she say something?

EDITH

You can't hear her?

MARK

Only a high-pitched whine.

EDITH

That's about right. Elvira, Dr. Mark Bradman, Mark, Mrs. Elvira Condomine.

Pleasure.

MARK

ELVIRA

Always delighted to meet a young doctor.

(She circles him and blows in his ear.)

EDITH

Elvira, I shall find a way to hurt you.

ELVIRA

I was only playing.

EDITH

And finally, Madame Arcati.

MARK

A privilege, ma'am.

MADAME ARCATI

(Clapping her hands together.)

I knew it! I knew it! I said to your father that he would be an admirable subject for

MADAME ARCATI

telepathic hypnosis. I was right! Look at you, young man. A natural! Ha, ha!

(She claps her hands again and does a little spin.)

MARK

What is she doing? A dance?

EDITH

Sort of. Mark, I've always had the Sight. What about you?

MARK

I don't know about always, but I can see things that others can't. When I get agitated, sometimes things happen.

EDITH

Like just now?

MARK

That? Yes, I think so. It never amounts to much, though.

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MADAME ARCATI

Never amounts to much! I never felt anything so strong.

(MAUDE appears at the top of the stairs.)

MAUDE

What's going on down here? Has Charles come back, yet?

MARK

Mrs. Condomine!

RUTH/ELVIRA/MAUDE

Yes?

MARK

You should be lying down.

MAUDE

I've had enough of lying down. Is Charles back, yet?

EDITH

Charles isn't coming back, Maude.

MAUDE

Nonsense. Of course he is; he's just been held up, that's all.

EDITH

Yes, Maude. If you say so.

MAUDE

Don't patronize me! I'm perfectly fine.

MARK

Mrs. Condomine, I don't like to say it, but you have twice tried to kill yourself...

MAUDE

I didn't try to kill myself! They tried to kill me!

(She points at RUTH and ELVIRA.)

Sleeping pills in my warm milk and they blew out the pilot light on the gas heater.

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MADAME ARCATI

I thought so!

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(She crosses to RUTH and ELVIRA. Her Cockney slowly gets stronger as she speaks.)

Now, you listen to me, girls. Just because you're 'ovis doesn't mean there are no consequences to what you do. You just have a butcher's over dere and see what you've done to dat woman. Oi tell you if dere's any more of dis Inverness, Oi'll be on you 'arry Dash! See if Oi don't!

(She calms herself.)

Do you understand me?

RUTH

Every word.

MADAME ARCATI

Good. Elvira, you went on outings with Mr. Condomine at various times after you came back, didn't you?

ELVIRA

Only after I begged and begged, and even then, not very far. Hythe... and Folkestone, once.

MADAME ARCATI

Exactly. And how did you feel when you went?

ELVIRA

How did I feel?

MADAME ARCATI

Physically.

MAUDE

She has nothing physical to feel with.

MADAME ARCATI

What was your state of well-being?

ELVIRA

I felt perfectly fine in Hythe, but Folkestone hurt terribly.

MADAME ARCATI

Good, good, good!

ELVIRA

Well, you don't have to take such pleasure in it.

MADAME ARCATI

Never mind. Do you see what I'm getting at, Edith?

EDITH

I'm afraid not.

MADAME ARCATI

She felt fine going to Hythe, but not Folkestone Why? Because it's a mile or two further away.

EDITH

I see! None of you can leave the cottage unless someone living takes you. But even with someone living, there's a limit to how far you can go. As if you're anchored to this spot.

MADAME ARCATI

Anchored, yes! And we must hoist the anchor. This energy blockage: it must be cleared!

RUTH

That's it, Madame Arcati. All hands on deck!

MADAME ARCATI

Exactly, Ruth! Mrs. Condomine, do you feel up to another séance?

MAUDE/ELVIRA

Now?

MADAME ARCATI

No time like the present, is there? Listen, please. This admirable young man here is a wonder. I've not seen such a powerful Gift since... well, since that young woman over there.

(She indicates EDITH.)

You have me now; you have Edith; and you have this prodigy, here. If we can't do it, it can't be done.

MAUDE

That's what I'm afraid of.

MADAME ARCATI

Don't start that, now.

(To RUTH and ELVIRA.)

What do you say, girls? Are you up for another one? Really put our shoulders to the wheel, our noses to the grindstone and our backs to the wall?

RUTH

That's the most awkward position I can imagine.

ELVIRA

(Giggling.)

You have so little imagination, Ruth.

MADAME ARCATI

Never mind! Edith, get the garlic and salt.

(EDITH exits to the kitchen.)

Ruth and Elvira, get the gramophone ready.

(They cross to the gramophone.)

Dr. Bradman, pull out the table and the chairs.

(MARK stands and watches EDITH moving.)

Dr. Bradman? Dr. Bradman!

(MARK slowly turns his head to focus on MADAME ARCATI.)

Get the table!

(He continues to stare at her.)

GET – THE – TABLE!

(He continues to stare.)

Really, is the man simple?

MAUDE

(Smiling.)
He can't hear you, Madame Arcati.

MADAME ARCATI

Oh, of course! How stupid of me.

MAUDE

Dr. Bradman, let's you and I bring the table and chairs over.

MARK

Oh, good. What's happening?

MAUDE

A séance!

MARK

Really!

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(EDITH returns with the garlic and salt. MARK and MAUDE are moving the table to DR.)

EDITH

Garlic and salt.

MADAME ARCATI

On the table, dear!

(The table is in position. EDITH places the items on it.)

RUTH

(At the gramophone, with a record in her hands.)
"Always", wasn't it?

EDITH

"Always."

ELVIRA

It's always "Always."

MADAME ARCATI

Will you conduct, Edith, or shall I?

EDITH

Madame Arcati – you're a ghost.

MADAME ARCATI

What?

(She looks down at herself.)

Oh, good heavens, so I am! Well, that would never work, would it? Carry on, my dear, carry on!

EDITH

(Crossing to the table.)

Maude, in your usual place. Mark, sit opposite her, please.

MARK

What do we do?

EDITH

Simply sit with your fingertips touching.

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MADAME ARCATI

Ah, you have your father's gentle hands, Dr. Bradman. Dr. Bradman?

(He doesn't hear her.)

I feel quite a fifth wheel here.

EDITH

Very well. Now. Ruth and Elvira, I think we'll need you at the table.

ELVIRA

(As she and RUTH move to the table.)

Ruth, must you stand so close?

EDITH

Is everyone ready?

MADAME ARCATI

Primed and ready, dear. Forge ahead!

(She starts the record: Always, by Irving Berlin.)

EDITH

Concentrate, now! Everyone! Lights out!

(She switches off the lights. Only a faint glow comes through the french

doors. The music continues. She comes to the table and picks up the salt. Again, the dialogue is overlapped.)

EDITH Cont.

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

(She throws a pinch of salt at each of MARK and MAUDE.)

MARK

I'll take that with a grain of salt.

EDITH

(She sings.)

Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper.

What shall he have but brown bread and butter?

(She picks up the garlic and waves it around. She becomes more intense with each repetition of the doggerel below.)

Now!

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THE GROUP

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

(The music has stopped. She pauses, arms uplifted and we hear DAPHNE's voice.)

DAPHNE

(Singing Off.)

Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper.

What shall he have but brown bread and butter?

MAUDE

Daphne.

EDITH

Ssh!

(She sits at the table between CHARLES and MAUDE, touching their fingers with hers.)

Daphne! Daphne, are you there?

DAPHNE

Yeth.

(She sniffs.)

EDITH

Daphne, we need your help again.

DAPHNE

Won't help anymore.

EDITH

Do you remember that you pushed Madame Arcati Across?

DAPHNE

Yeth.

EDITH

Well, we have to get her back to your side, Daphne, and some other people, too.

DAPHNE

Won't help.

MADAME ARCATI

That's quite enough of that! Daphne, do you know who this is?

DAPHNE

(After a pause.)

Yeth.

MADAME ARCATI

Drop it, Daphne, you're fooling no one.

DAPHNE

(In an adult, Cockney voice.)

Yeah, orlroigh?. Wotcher wont den?

MADAME ARCATI

(To herself.)

The girl is maddening.

(To DAPHNE.)

Now listen to me. There's a large build-up of psychic energy here that's blocking everything. We're going to push from this side and you're going to pull from that side and we're going clear this log-jam once and for all. Got it?

Oy s'pose.
DAPHNE

Don't you cock this up, Daphne.
MADAME ARCATI

Orlroigh'!
DAPHNE

Good girl, Daphne!
EDITH

(She crosses to the gramophone and re-starts the record. She heads back to the table.)

Elvira, Ruth, hands in the circle.

(EDITH, RUTH and ELVIRA join MARK and MAUDE at the table, hands in contact with them.)

All right, everyone! Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!
THE GROUP

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MADAME ARCATI
Push now!

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!
THE GROUP

Daphne, push!
EDITH

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!
THE GROUP

(The music begins to wind up higher and higher)

DAPHNE
(Singing off.)
Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper.
What shall he have but brown bread and butter?

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!
THE GROUP

(The curtains blow; the table jumps; lights flicker on and off and the sounds of banging through the house are heard.)

MAUDE
Aaah!

MARK
Oh!

EDITH
Aaaah!

(EDITH falls to the floor, the table topples, MAUDE and MARK leap up; the music shrieks to a stop and CHARLES, now ghostly grey like the rest, bursts from the grandfather clock.)

CHARLES
Didn't any of you hear me? Three days, I've been in there! I could scarcely breath!

MAUDE
I told you he was held up.

LIGHTS DOWN
END OF SCENE 2

FREE SPIRITS
an improbable farce
ACT II
Scene 3

SETTING: It is several hours later. Various paraphernalia for séances is strewn about the room, teacups and drinks glasses are in various places, perhaps a plate with one or two sandwiches on it),

(MADAME ARCATI sits on the stair steps US with an old, large book; RUTH is leaning on the mantelpiece; CHARLES is sitting on the back of the sofa; ELVIRA is sitting on the piano stool; MAUDE is lying on the sofa, sleeping; MARK sits in the chair, centre, and EDITH sits on his lap, with her head on his shoulder; they, too, are asleep.)

ELVIRA

Does anyone want to take a walk?

(No one answers.)

I'd like to go to the cinema.

(No one answers.)

I haven't been to the cinema in simply ages.

(No one answers.)

I did so love the cinema.

CHARLES

Do shut up, Elvira.

(A pause. The grandfather clock strikes five, unevenly.)

RUTH

You've ruined that clock, Charles. It'll never be the same again.

CHARLES

Do shut up, Ruth.

MAUDE

(Mumbles in her sleep.)

Charles... Charles, you're back... back...

CHARLES

Do shut up, Maude.

MADAME ARCATI

Dawn coming soon, now.

ELVIRA

Another lovely day.

RUTH

Stuck here.

CHARLES

Oh god, stuck here.

MADAME ARCATI

Come on, now! Don't be glum. What do you say? "Are we downhearted...?"

CHARLES

Do shut up, Madame Arcati.

(EDITH wakes with a start. MARK wakes as well)

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EDITH

There has to be something more something we haven't done.

MARK

I don't see what.

RUTH

We're all very tired, Edith.

MADAME ARCATI

We have been through Edmunson's Witchcraft and Its Byways from front to back.

ELVIRA

And back to front.

RUTH

We have been moaned over, sprinkled on, salted, garlicked, peppered, everything short of basted, and we're still here.

CHARLES

We've had so many séances Daphne refuses to answer. And, I don't blame her.

ELVIRA

And, I won't have any more holy water shaken in my face. It stings!

CHARLES

So, Edith, we are all three of us adamant.

RUTH

No more spells; no more witchery...

ELVIRA

No more mumb-jumbo.

CHARLES/RUTH/ELVIRA

And no more garlic!

MARK

I'm going to make some tea.

(Holds out a hand to EDITH.)

Do you want to come with me?

EDITH

(Taking his hand.)

I'd love to come with you.

(They head for the kitchen; ELVIRA smirks after them.)

ELVIRA

Don't do anything I... oh, never mind, I'm too tired.

(MARK and EDITH exit to the kitchen.)

I really would like to go to the cinema. I haven't been to the cinema since you took me, Charles – just before Ruth died. What did we see, then?

CHARLES

I don't remember. I remember you misbehaving quite atrociously during the cartoon.

ELVIRA

(Giggles.)

I hadn't done that in even longer. I wish we could go further than Folkestone, though. I'd love to go into London to the theatre.

CHARLES

As I recall, you were terribly uncomfortable even in Folkestone.

ELVIRA

Uncomfortable, nothing. It hurt. I hate being dead!

CHARLES

We're none of us particularly enamoured of it, Elvira.

(MARK and EDITH return.)

EDITH

No tea left.

MADAME ARCATI

Drat! I could use a good cuppa.

CHARLES

Perhaps Daphne could send some across.

MARK

I could go into town for tea... as soon as the shops open.

ELVIRA

Can I come with you, please? It's ages since I've been in the shops.

MARK

Is that Elvira? Did she say something to me?

ELVIRA

Pooh! He's no fun. I don't know what you see in him, Edith.

RUTH

You did, once.

ELVIRA

Well, *one* of us has lost *something*.

EDITH

If we are to continue in this house *without* tea and *with* you, can we please not discuss *him*?

MARK

Discuss who?

CHARLES

Discuss whom.

EDITH

Discuss no one!

(MAUDE slowly wakes and sits up, clearly tired.)

MAUDE

No change?

MARK

None. None that I can see.

EDITH

None.

MADAME ARCATI

Mrs. Condomine...

RUTH/ELVIRA/MAUDE

Yes?

MADAME ARCATI

There comes a time when one must face facts, square up to the problem, look the devil in the eye – and throw in the towel.

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MAUDE

I don't have a towel.

MADAME ARCATI

Metaphorically. We have tried all in our power. We have gone through all the permutations and variations. We have pushed, shoved, dragged and clawed our way through at least a half-dozen sessions since Mr. Condomine's return, but we are no closer to getting any of us back across the Divide than before. The build-up of psychic energy around this cottage is remarkable. It's so like the Sudbury case, but with no third party about to cause it.

MAUDE

The Sudbury case?

MADAME ARCATI

My greatest triumph, Mrs. Condomine. When I was but a slip of a girl, I dematerialized Lady...

CHARLES

Yes, Madame Arcati, we know. But as you say, unlike the Sudbury case, there is no third party present to keep the four of us here. Ancient history doesn't help us, now.

MAUDE

Edith, what is your opinion?

EDITH

I assume the energy build-up has to do with the number of spirits in the house. The more spirits, the more energy, the more difficult to send them back – but I have no idea of where to go from here.

(Taking MARK's hand.)

Apart from straight to bed.

MAUDE

Dr. Bradman?

MARK

(After a moment.)

This is all new to me. If she's stumped, then I'm baffled.

MAUDE

Charles, I do wish you'd say something useful.

CHARLES

Me? I'm a mere infant in these matters. All I know of the Other Side is the brief glimpse I got before I was pushed back here.

MADAME ARCATI

Pushed?

CHARLES

Yes. I've been dead...

RUTH/ELVIRA

Passed Over!

CHARLES:

... DEAD three days and fourteen hours – all but seven hours of which I spent enclosed in clockwork. I had a pendulum passing through my rib-cage for seventy-nine hours! All I can say is I won't stay here. Not with those two: they tried to kill me. They *did* kill me!

RUTH

Charles, are you still hanging on to that? That was three days ago!

CHARLES

Believe me, my rib-cage counted out every second.

ELVIRA

Well, I won't stay here with them! They're both of them the stuffiest people I've met in all my death.

RUTH

And you, Elvira, remain flighty, feckless, brainless, self-absorbed and entirely too wrapped up in your own beauty!

ELVIRA

Well, I died young.

CHARLES

You wouldn't have died at all, if you hadn't been making love with Captain Bracegirdle in a punt and caught pneumonia!

ELVIRA

For the last time, Charles, it was a launch!

RUTH

And you're hardly blameless, Charles. I know all about your various indiscretions while we were married.

CHARLES

I was never indiscrete, Ruth. I always had the utmost discretion about it.

RUTH

Well, so did I!

(She throws a pillow at him. He throws it back, but hits ELVIRA. ELVIRA picks up an ashtray and begins to chase him around the furniture. RUTH picks up a small chair and tries to hit them both.)

EDITH

Stop it! All of you!

(RUTH, ELVIRA and CHARLES look at EDITH in surprise.)

MADAME ARCATI

Dear, dear, dear! Children, this will never do.

(RUTH puts down the chair, ELVIRA the ashtray.)

CHARLES

(In a subdued voice.)

They started it.

MADAME ARCATI

It is obvious, Mrs. Condomine, that they cannot remain in this house. They would destroy it utterly. They must leave.

RUTH

But we can't leave!

ELVIRA

We're stuck here, on this property, forever!

CHARLES

Maude will just have to put up with us.

MAUDE

Maude will not put up with you! Charles, my bags have been packed and sitting in the car since shortly after the funeral. I'd have been 'way and gone out of here days ago, if Elvira and Ruth hadn't been pulling more of their little stunts.

CHARLES

Elvira! Ruth! You didn't!

ELVIRA

We didn't want her finding a way to get you back for herself.

CHARLES

Maude, I renounce these two. They are unfaithful, unreliable and unrepentant. I only have you left, my darling.

MAUDE

You do not. We were married, my darling, until death do us part. I will point out that you are dead and I am not.

CHARLES

I think it very insensitive of you to bring that up. It's no fault of mine.

MAUDE

Charles, I have loved you and supported you. I have put up with your irascibility, your self-interest – your ego. But, you are now, my dear, my dear departed and I am free to follow whatever path I fancy and I fancy it will be a path far from here – and the royalties from

MAUDE Cont.

your book sales will make that possible for a long time to come.

CHARLES

Maude, you can't leave me here with them. You can't! It's inhuman.

MAUDE

Edith, this house is back on the market.

MARK

I told you it wouldn't stay sold.

RUTH

Please, don't leave us here, Maude!

ELVIRA

Not alone with them!

EDITH

Can you ignore that, Maude?

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MARK

I don't know what they're saying, but I'll make my plea. Mrs. Condomine, I'm not going to be... married until they are out of here. I beg you. One last try!

MADAME ARCATI

One last try?

MAUDE

One last try and then I'm leaving for good.

MADAME ARCATI

Excellent! I've had a new thought.

EDITH

What is it?

MADAME ARCATI

I'd best not say, just now.

(She looks both ways and taps her ear with a finger.)

Little pitchers! Everyone, listen! When I say so, stop pushing at the energy and pull, all together. Got that?

EDITH

Right! Places, everyone!

(MAUDE and MARK sit at the table; RUTH and ELVIRA go to the gramophone; MADAME ARCATI stands by the french windows.)

Join them at the table, Charles. You're used to it.

(He does so.)

Ruth! Elvira! Music!

(The strains of "Always" come from the gramophone.)

Concentrate, now! Lights out!

(She switches off the lights, comes to the table and picks up the salt. Telescope the dialogue.)

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

(She throws salt at each of MARK, MAUDE and CHARLES.)

CHARLES

Went through me like a dose of salts.

EDITH

(She sings.)

Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper.

What shall he have but brown bread and butter?

Daphne! Speak to us! Daphne! Come to us!

(She picks up the garlic and waves it around.)

THE GROUP

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

Imri na, imri va! Locus questo loquima!

(We hear DAPHNE's voice over the music.)

DAPHNE

(Singing Off.)

Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper.

What shall he have but brown bread and butter?

CHARLES

Bloody Daphne.

EDITH

Ssh!

(She sits between CHARLES and MAUDE, touching their fingers with hers.)

Daphne! Daphne, is that you?

MADAME ARCATI

Getting closer.

DAPHNE

Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper...

EDITH

Daphne!

MADAME ARCATI

Closer!

DAPHNE

... what shall he have but brown bread and butter?

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MADAME ARCATI

There! Everyone, pull!

EDITH

Now, Mark! Get angry!

MARK

About what?

EDITH

The fact that our wedding night is put off permanently unless these spirits go back!

MARK

Right! Everybody, pull!

(He joins hands with EDITH and they concentrate fiercely. The gramophone winds faster and faster. The fire flares. Music from the piano, then the lid slams down. The french doors flap open and shut. The clock strikes wildly. DAPHNE bursts through the french doors, shrieking wildly. DAPHNE, too, is a ghost, in 19th century lower-class clothing.)

MAUDE

Aaah! It's a ghost!

DAPHNE

AAAAAH!

MADAME ARCATI

Got you, you nasty girl!

(MADAME ARCATI pinions DAPHNE and brings her DS.)

Ha, ha! Now let's see what we're about! Daphne, we've had just about enough of this! Stop this nonsense and talk to us.

DAPHNE

Wha' abou'?

EDITH

Daphne, you pushed Madame Arcati across, didn't you?

DAPHNE

(Sullenly.)

Yeah.

EDITH

And, I think you trapped Mr. Condomine in the clockworks, didn't you?

DAPHNE

(Giggling.)

Yeah.

MADAME ARCATI

And, you trapped Elvira and Ruth here. And, you've been blocking all our attempts to get back, haven't you?

DAPHNE

(Sullenly, again.)

Yeah.

MADAME ARCATI

The Sudbury case, all over again. Ancient history, indeed, Mr. Condomine.

DAPHNE

Wotcher wont wiv me, den?

MADAME ARCATI

Why ever did you do all that, you silly girl?

DAPHNE

You fink Oi won'a stie beck dey-ah wol oll yew toffs git ta flit beck and forf 'avin' fun? It's bleedin' borin' ovah dey-ah, innit?

ELVIRA

It's bleedin' borin' over here, too, Daphne.

MADAME ARCATI

Daphne, look what you've done! Can't you see how unhappy you've made them? None of us belong here. You're a naughty, naughty girl.

DAPHNE

(After a pause.)

Yeah.

MADAME ARCATI

Are you ready to fix this, Daphne? Ready to unblock the passage, so we can all go back?

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DAPHNE

Orlroigh'!

EDITH

Good girl, Daphne!

(She crosses to the gramophone and re-starts the record. She heads back to the table.)

Mark, Maude, hands in the circle. Charles, Elvira, Ruth, by the french doors. Madame Arcati, keep tight hold on Daphne.

(MARK and MAUDE stay at the table. CHARLES, RUTH and ELVIRA stand at the french doors; MADAME ARCATI grasps DAPHNE's hands as they stand by the fireplace.)

Alright, everyone! Listen! Backwards this time! To send them back!

Amiquol otsequ sucol! Av irmi, an irmi!

Amiquol otsequ sucol! Av irmi, an irmi!

THE GROUP

Amiquol otsequ sucol! Av irmi, an irmi!

MADAME ARCATI

Now, Daphne!

DAPHNE

(Singing.)

Lit'le Tommy Tuck-ah sings for 'is supp-ah.
Wot shall 'e 'ave bu' brown bread 'n' but-ah?

THE GROUP

Amiquol otsequ sucol! Av irmi, an irmi!

EDITH

Daphne, push! Mark, Maude, push!

THE GROUP

Amiquol otsequ sucol! Av irmi, an irmi!

(The music begins to wind up higher and higher)

THE GROUP

Amiquol otsequ sucol! Av irmi, an irmi!

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(The curtains blow; the table jumps; lights flicker on and off and the sounds of banging through the house are heard.)

MAUDE

Aaah!

(The table jumps up and down several times.)

Is it working?

MARK

Hold on, Maude!

EDITH

It's working! It's working!

ELVIRA

It's working! I can feel it! I'm going.

RUTH

I'm going. Oh, I'm going!

EDITH

Oh-oh-oh!

(The fire flares. The lid of the gramophone slams up and down. All the doors flap open and shut. The clock strikes wildly. The mantelpiece shakes and things jump off it. One or two pictures fall off the wall. Books fall off the bookshelves. Suddenly, EDITH falls to the floor; the music winds to a shriek; MAUDE screams and falls.)

ELVIRA

(Off. With reverb effect. Fading away.)

Goodbye, Maude. We'll take care of Charles.

RUTH

(Off. Etc.)

Goodbye, Edith. Mark, take care of her, or we'll haunt you.

MADAME ARCATI

(Off. Etc.)

Come, Daphne! Time to go. Now, girl! Leap!

RUTH

(Off. Etc.)

Goodbye, Maude. Elvira, take Charles's hand!

ELVIRA

(Off. Etc.)

Goodbye, Edith. I've a good hold on Charles, already, Ruth.

CHARLES

(Off. Etc.)

Elvira, you're incorrigible.

ELVIRA

(Off. Etc. Giggling.)

Thank you.

CHARLES

(Off. Etc.)

I really did love you, Maude. It took me three wives to find the right one and then it was over. I'm sorry, dear. Goodbye. I've a feeling you'll be just fine.

MADAME ARCATI

(Off. Etc.)

Oh, dear! I've left my bicycle leaning against the bushes!

(Silence. Only a faint glow comes through the curtains.)

MARK

Who's still here?

(A pause.)

Anyone? Who's still here?

(He switches on the lights; EDITH and MAUDE lie on the floor.)

Edith! Maude!

(He is unsure of who to help first. He crosses to EDITH, chafes her wrists, then starts to loosen her clothing. She wakes up.)

EDITH

Did that really work?

(She sees what he is doing.)

What on earth are you doing?

MARK

Helping?

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Later.

(He helps her up.)

What about Maude?

(MAUDE is beginning to wake. He helps her up and seats her.)

MARK

Let me check your pulse.

MAUDE

No need. I'm perfectly well.

(She looks around.)

Have they truly gone?

EDITH

I can't sense anything. Mark?

MARK

Nothing at all.

MAUDE

Doesn't mean anything, I suppose.

MAUDE Cont.

(She looks around again.)

Charles, as we're turning over a whole new leaf, I think you should know that, while you were in America, your editor was most solicitous for my welfare. A very nice man. He helped me get over your absence in many ways – came over three or four times a week. In fact, I hardly noticed you were gone.

(She waits; nothing.)

If that didn't do it, nothing will. He's gone.

(She sits suddenly and covers her mouth with her hand, breathing deeply several times.)

Gone for good.

EDITH

(Crossing and sitting beside her.)

Maude, what can we do? Will you be all right?

MAUDE

Oh, yes, dear. I shall, indeed. Charles was right.

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MARK

About what?

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MAUDE

On his way out, he said "I've a feeling you'll be just fine." And I shall. If I can live through all of this, I can live through anything! And, thanks to the royalties from Charles's books, I can do it in style!

MARK

Bravo!

MAUDE

(Rising and rubbing her hands briskly.)

Well, I'd best make a start, then.

EDITH

What? You can't leave now! The sun's just coming up.

MAUDE

My bags are already in the car. If I leave now, I can be on board ship by noon. Now, where should I go first?

MARK

Venice!

EDITH

Paris!

MAUDE

America! You never took me there, Charles, but now your money is going to!

EDITH

Next stop, California!

MAUDE

A grand adventure! That leaves the house to deal with. Where are those papers?

EDITH

Oh!

(She finds the estate papers.)

Here. I can refund your deposit tomorrow and get this property re-listed by next week.

MAUDE

No need.

(She signs the papers.)

There. And there. And there. And there.

EDITH

But, Mrs. Condomine, you've just completed the purchase! You now own this property.

(She takes keys from the manila envelope that the papers came in and hands them over to MAUDE.)

MAUDE

Right.

(She hands them back.)

You now own this property. A wedding gift.

EDITH

Mrs. Condomine!

MAUDE

Not a word! I owe you much. I'm off.

(At the double doors, she stops to look at MARK and EDITH.)

What are you two going to do?

MARK

Why, get married, of course. Tomorrow afternoon.

MAUDE

But your psychic power, Edith? What if that causes more trouble?

EDITH

Oh, by tomorrow morning, I'm sure that will all be a thing of the past.
(She looks meaningfully at MARK.)

MAUDE

Oh? Oh!

(MAUDE smiles indulgently and exits. EDITH and MARK are centre,
with their arms around each other.)

EDITH

Ruth? Elvira? Charles? Madame Arcati?
(A beat.)

Daphne?

(They look cautiously around. There is a silence; nothing happens. They
sigh deeply, smile and kiss)

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LIGHTS DOWN

END OF PLAY