

FREE SPIRITS
An improbable farce
after Noel Coward

by
David Jacklin

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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 "El-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 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.*

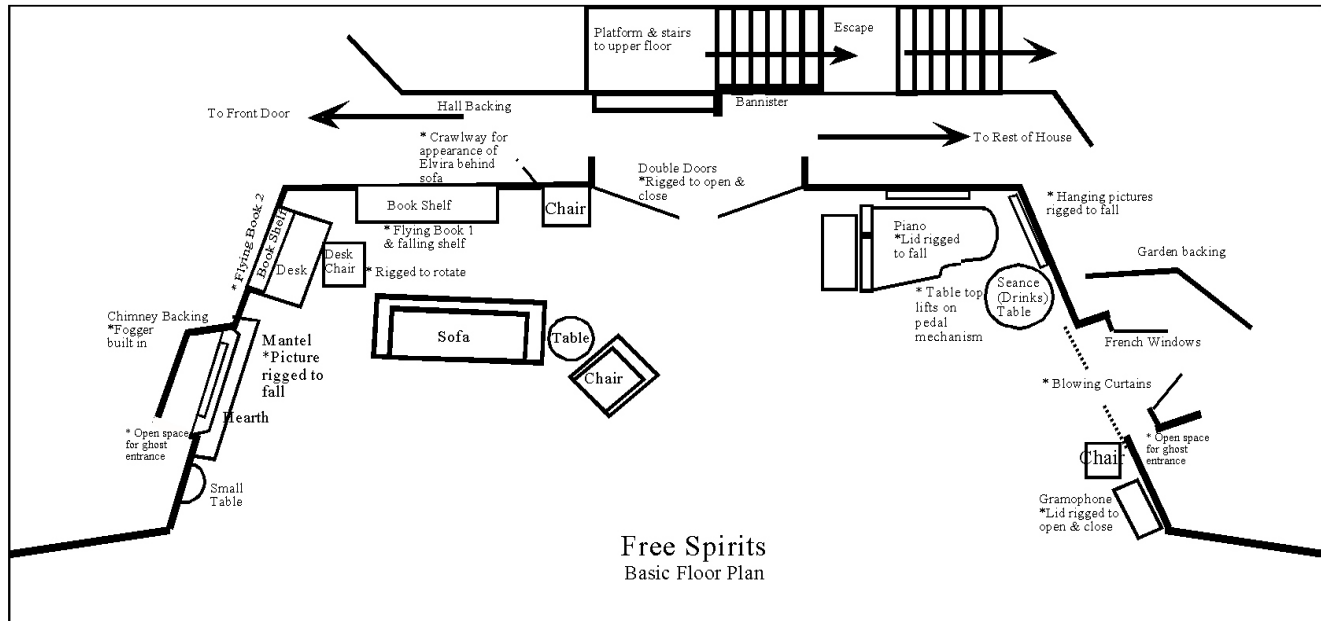
Charles Condomine, *an author, in his fifties; married now to Maude.*

Madame Arcati, *a new ghost, who was, in life, a medium.*

Daphne, *still another ghost, who is mostly heard, but later seen.*

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

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.

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!

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(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!

(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.)

Ruth.

RUTH: I haven't uttered.

(She sits down opposite ELVIRA.)

EDITH: Now, listen, dears. I think, this time, 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!* PERUSAL COPY ONLY

EDITH: With each other. PLEASE CONTACT THE AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS

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.

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.

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

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.

EDITH: Exactly. Then, there were the Stamfords . . .

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!

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.

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?

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?

RUTH: We're not children, Edith.

EDITH: Do you promise?

RUTH: Very well. I promise.

EDITH: Elvira?

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

EDITH: Very well, what?

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

RUTH: You already died.

ELVIRA: *(Same business.)* Cross my heart and hope to live, then.

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

EDITH: 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.

ELVIRA: Fine. I shall go sit in the sun.

RUTH: Yes. You're looking a little pale.

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.)

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(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.
- 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.

(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?

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

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?

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*(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.

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!

ELVIRA: Condomine! **PERUSAL COPY ONLY**
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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

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?

MAUDE: No.

CHARLES: *(Off.)* Smell anything?

MAUDE: Charles!

CHARLES: *(Off.)* Nothing at all?

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

CHARLES: *(Off.)* I was – once.

MAUDE: Well?

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

MAUDE: If you call me losing my patience unusual, then yes.

(There is a short pause, then CHARLES enters from the front door and stops beside her. He looks into the room, peering intently into the shadows.)

Well, do you like it?

CHARLES: I always did. I need a drink.

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

Good heavens, that's *my* Scotch.

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

CHARLES: I doubt it. The Reverend *Mrs.* Ringwoud, 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?

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.

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 Psychological 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?

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 Psychical Research – or was it the Archbishop of Canterbury? – anyway, it doesn’t matter because . . .

MAUDE: . . . Elvira had cut the brake-lines.

CHARLES: Yes!

MAUDE: And, when did Ruth move in?

CHARLES: After the funeral.

MAUDE: Whose funeral?

CHARLES: 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.

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 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.

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.)

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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

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?

CHARLES: Ravenous.

MAUDE: I'm not surprised.

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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.

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?

MAUDE: 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?

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 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 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!

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(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?

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.

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?

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

EDITH: Yes.

CHARLES: And hear them?

EDITH: Yes.

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

RUTH: Do you think he'll put it together?

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

CHARLES: No one except . . . Edith?

ELVIRA: Hurrah!

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

CHARLES/EDITH: Stop that, Elvira.

CHARLES: Are you little Edith, the parlour maid?

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

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

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

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.

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.

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. That's rather a blow, actually.

EDITH: I've really been quite alone here, since.

CHARLES: Poor Edith.

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.

(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!

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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.

(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.)*

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?

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(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 “Ooooh!” sounds.)

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!

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(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.)

**LIGHTS DOWN
END OF SCENE 3**

FREE SPIRITS
an improbable farce
ACT I
Scene 4

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: 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.

MARK: 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 thriven 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.

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?

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.)

Charles.

(She 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.

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 death 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?

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

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*(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.

(CHARLES reluctantly sits.)

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!

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!*
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?

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 yours 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.

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.)

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?

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RUTH: My word!

CHARLES: My god!

MAUDE: Who's that?

EDITH: Madame Arcati!

MADAME ARCATI: Yes?

ELVIRA: Here we go again!

**LIGHTS DOWN
END OF ACT I**

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FREE SPIRITS
an improbable farce
ACT II
Scene 1

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.)

. . . 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?

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?

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. 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.)

EDITH: Maude is standing in the lane, screaming. Why is she doing that?

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?

EDITH: Yes, he was going into town.

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.

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?

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!

MAUDE: *(Annoyed.)* Oh, Charles.

**LIGHTS DOWN
END OF SCENE 1**

FREE SPIRITS
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ACT II
Scene 2

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 disassociative 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?

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? PERUSAL COPY ONLY

EDITH: If you're bored . . . cold. You should have on a cardigan. PLEASE CONTACT THE AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS

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.)

EDITH: 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.)

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. 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?

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.)

I 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: Cowardy 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.

MARK: Pleasure.

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 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.

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.

MADAME ARCATI: I thought so! *(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!

(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.

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.)

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.)

EDITH: Now!

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?

DAPHNE: Oy s'pose.

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

DAPHNE: Orlroigh'!

EDITH: Good girl, Daphne! *(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!*

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

MADAME ARCATI: Push now!

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

EDITH: Daphne, push!

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

(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?

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

*(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!

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*(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

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.

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(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)

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.

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 us of 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 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?

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?

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?

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!*

(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?

EDITH: 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. *(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.

MARK: About what?

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.

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(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)

LIGHTS DOWN
END OF PLAY