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Blithe Spirit

AN IMPROBABLE FARCE IN THREE ACTS

by Noël Coward

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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

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

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

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

SCENE 1.—Before dinner on a summer evening.

SCENE 2.—After dinner.

ACT II

SCENE 1.—The next morning.

SCENE 2.—Late the following afternoon.

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

ACT III

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

SCENE 2.—Several hours later.

BLITHE SPIRIT

Produced at the Opera House, Manchester, on June 16th, 1941, and then played at the Piccadilly Theatre, London, on July 2nd, 1941, with the following cast of characters :

EDITH (a Maid)	.	.	.	.	.	.	Ruth Reeves.
RUTH	.	.	.	.	.	.	Fay Compton.
CHARLES	.	.	.	.	.	.	Cecil Parker.
DOCTOR BRADMAN	.	.	.	.	.	.	Martin Lewis.
MRS. BRADMAN	.	.	.	.	.	.	Moya Nugent.
MADAME ARCATI	.	.	.	.	.	.	Margaret Rutherford.
ELVIRA	.	.	.	.	.	.	Kay Hammond.

BLITHE SPIRIT

ACT I

SCENE I

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

A Ground Plan will be found on page 93.

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

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

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

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

RUTH. That's right, Edith.

EDITH. Yes'm.

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

EDITH. Yes'm.

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

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

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

EDITH. Yes'm.

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

EDITH. Yes'm.

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

EDITH. Yes'm.

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

EDITH. Yes'm.

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

EDITH. Very good, 'm.

RUTH. Now go and get the ice.

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

RUTH. Not at a run, Edith.

EDITH (*slowing down*) Yes'm.

(EDITH goes)

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

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

CHARLES. No sign of the advancing hordes?

RUTH. Not yet.

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

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

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

RUTH. The reason was becoming increasingly obvious, dear.

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

RUTH. Her social life would have been seriously undermined.

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

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

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

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

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

EDITH. Yes, sir.

(EDITH *runs out of the room*)

CHARLES. There now!

RUTH. You took her by surprise.

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

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

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

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

RUTH. Oh dear!

CHARLES. What's the matter?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EDITH (breathlessly) Yes, sir.

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

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

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

Here, try this.

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

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

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

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

RUTH. How extraordinary it is.

CHARLES. What?

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

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

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

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

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

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

RUTH. Darling—it's most awfully strong.

CHARLES (*pouring it*) Never mind.

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

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

RUTH. I do wish I'd known her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHARLES. What a horrible thing to say.

RUTH. No, I think it's interesting.

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

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

CHARLES. I remember how morally untidy she was.

RUTH. Was she more physically attractive than I am?

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

RUTH. You really are very sweet.

CHARLES. Thank you.

RUTH. And a little naïve, too.

CHARLES. Why?

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

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

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

CHARLES. How do you mean?

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

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

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

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

CHARLES. Would you like it to be?

RUTH. Good God, no!

CHARLES. Wasn't that a shade too vehement?

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

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

RUTH. Don't be so idiotic.

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

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

CHARLES. Sorry, darling.

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

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

RUTH. Julius Cæsar is neither here nor there.

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

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

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

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

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

CHARLES. Darling Ruth!

RUTH. There you go again!

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

RUTH. Poor Elvira!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RUTH. Poor Elvira!

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

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

CHARLES. That's better.

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

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

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

CHARLES. Life without faith is an arid business.

RUTH. How beautifully you put things, dear.

CHARLES. I aim to please.

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

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

RUTH. Neither was Elvira.

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

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

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

CHARLES. Well, she is now, anyhow.

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

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

RUTH. Write that down; you might forget it.

CHARLES. You underrate me.

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

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

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

(A bell is heard)

CHARLES. That's probably the Bradmans.

RUTH. It might be Madame Arcati.

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

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

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

RUTH. Wait a minute and see what happens.

(*There is a slight pause*)

CHARLES. Perhaps she didn't hear.

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

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

CHARLES. Steady, Edith.

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

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

CHARLES goes forward to meet them. Dr Bradman is a pleasant-looking middle-aged man. Mrs Bradman is fair and rather faded.

MRS BRADMAN comes to RUTH, who meets her above the sofa and shakes hands. DR BRADMAN shakes hands with CHARLES)

Doctor and Mrs Bradman.

(EDITH goes)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHARLES. Dry Martini?

DR BRADMAN. By all means.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MRS BRADMAN. Was she convinced?

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

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

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

MRS BRADMAN. But how extraordinary.

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

MRS BRADMAN. What happened to it?

CHARLES. It lived with us for years.

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

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

CHARLES. I expect so.

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

(They all laugh)

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

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

DR BRADMAN. I shall be as good as gold.

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

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

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

MRS BRADMAN. What sort of books does she write?

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

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

RUTH. Here she is.

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

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

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

(EDITH is seen sedately going towards the door)

CHARLES. You go and meet her, darling.

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

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

EDITH *(appearing)* Madame Arcati.

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

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

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

CHARLES. My dear Madame Arcati!

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

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

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

CHARLES. Perhaps you will on the way home.

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

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

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

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

CHARLES. Would you like a cocktail?

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

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

(MADAME ARCATI moves to Ruth, C)

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

RUTH. It's been lovely all day.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHARLES. Will you have another?

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

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

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

RUTH. Are you writing anything nowadays, Madame Arcati?

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

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

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

(MRS BRADMAN *laughs nervously*)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHARLES. She was a keen traveller?

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

RUTH. How did she become Princess Palliatani?

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

RUTH. How unpleasant.

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

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

CHARLES. What an extraordinary place to go!

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

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

RUTH. What happened to the girls?

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

MRS BRADMAN. How extraordinary.

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

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

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

RUTH. Thank you, Edith. Shall we—?

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

MADAME ARCATI. No red meat, I hope?

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

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

CHARLES. What sort of effect?

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

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

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

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

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

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

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

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

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

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

MRS BRADMAN. Yes; she must have been.

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

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

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

RUTH. In what way unreliable?

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

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

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

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

MADAME ARCATI. In what way funny?

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

MADAME ARCATI. The word was an unfortunate choice.

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

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

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

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

MRS BRADMAN. Your mother must have been so pleased.

MADAME ARCATI (*modestly*). She was.

MRS BRADMAN. Can you foretell the future?

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

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

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

RUTH. Why not?

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

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

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

RUTH. How very wise.

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

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

EDITH. Yes'm.

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

EDITH. Yes'm.

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

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

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

EDITH. Yes'm.

(EDITH *goes out swiftly*)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MADAME ARCATI. Who knows? It may be receding!

CHARLES. How very true.

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

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

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

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

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

MADAME ARCATI. Do?

CHARLES. Yes—hold hands or anything?

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

(*The others all rise*)

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

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

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

RUTH. The mousse wasn't quite right.

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

MADAME ARCATI. That cuckoo is very angry.

CHARLES. I beg your pardon?

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

(*They all listen obediently*)

CHARLES. How can you tell?

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

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

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

CHARLES. Yes. We thought that one would do.

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

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

DR BRADMAN. Change over.

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

RUTH. Yes, darling.

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

RUTH. Are you nervous?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DR BRADMAN. Who's Daphne?

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

DR BRADMAN. Oh, I see—yes, of course.

CHARLES. How old is she?

MADAME ARCATI. Rising seven when she died.

MRS BRADMAN. And when was that?

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

MRS BRADMAN. Poor little thing.

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

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

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

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

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

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