

Cowes Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society Audition Sides for “Blithe Spirit” (2018)

A note on style: Commitment to style is vital for a production of a Coward play. Most of the characters in this play are well to do, but not noble, members of British society, and their movements and behaviors must reflect that. "Middle Class" English dialects which are clean with clear diction are the order of the day!

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Sir Noel Peirce Coward (December 16, 1899 – March 26, 1973) was an English playwright, composer, director, actor and singer, known for his flamboyance, personal style, and surgically incisive wit. His parents, Violet and Arthur, were rather poor, yet, with his mother’s encouragement, he made his professional stage debut at the age of eleven.

In the early 1900’s, England was a very class-conscious society. A boy actor coming from humble beginnings would usually have been snubbed by the upper class; however, Coward’s cleverness, charm and ambition endeared him to them and he was readily accepted.

Noel Coward achieved lasting success as a playwright, publishing more than fifty plays from his teens onward. Many of his works, such as HAY FEVER, PRIVATE LIVES, DESIGN FOR LIVING, PRESENT LAUGHTER and BLITHE SPIRIT are still regularly produced world-wide. He composed hundreds of songs, many musical theatre works, poetry, several volumes of short stories, the novel *Pomp and Circumstance*, and a three volume autobiography.

Sir Noel Coward’s stage and film acting and directing career spanned six decades. He was knighted in 1969 and also received a Tony Award for lifetime achievement. The Noel Coward Theatre in St. Martin’s Lane, London, earlier called the Albery Theatre (originally the New Theatre), was renamed in his honour in 2006.

The playwright, John Osborne said, “Mr. Coward is his own invention and contribution to this century. Anyone who cannot see that should keep well away from the theatre.”

About himself, with his usual wry wit, Noel Coward stated, “I’m an enormously talented man, and there’s no use pretending that I’m not ...”

ABOUT THE PLAY

The time was World War II, the year was 1941. Before Russia and the U.S. joined forces with the allies, Great Britain was suffering severe casualties and facing German bombing attacks at home. After his London office and apartment had been destroyed by German bombs, playwright Noel Coward felt the public would want something amusing and escapist during the dark days of the war. In between his covert operations as a member of the British Secret Service, Coward wrote BLITHE SPIRIT, a satirical comedy about ghosts. It is said that he wrote the play in less than a week.

Since its premiere in the West End of London in 1941, BLITHE SPIRIT has also played successfully on Broadway, and has been adapted for film, television and radio. For her role as Madame Arcati, the eccentric psychic, Angela Lansbury won a Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in the 2009 Broadway revival.

PLAY SYNOPSIS

Charles Condomine is a successful and apparently happily married novelist. In order to conduct research about the occult, he and his second wife, Ruth, invite an eccentric medium, Madame Arcati, to conduct a séance at their home, assuming she will be a fraud. Included in the group are the Condomine's friends, the skeptical Dr. George Bradman and his naïve wife, Violet.

Madame Arcati's ability to connect with the dead is genuine. She inadvertently summons a ghost from Charles's past: Elvira, his first wife, who has been dead for seven years. When Madame Arcati leaves after the séance, she is not aware that she has caused Elvira to appear. Charles can see and hear Elvira, but no one else can. Ruth thinks her husband has gone insane, until a floating vase, courtesy of Elvira, is handed to her out of thin air. Ruth is forced to accept the strange truth and try to come to terms with the ghostly Elvira who makes every effort to disrupt her marriage and reclaim Charles as her husband. Charles is caught in a trap. He had been married to Elvira for five years. Although they both had been unfaithful, he claims to have loved her. He still tries to convince Ruth, his living wife that she is currently the love of his life.

The competition escalates between Charles's dead and living wives. Elvira finally sabotages his car in the hopes of killing him so that he will join her in the spirit world, but it is Ruth rather than Charles who drives away and is killed. Ruth's ghost returns for revenge on Elvira. Charles cannot see her until he calls Madame Arcati back to exorcise both spirits. Something goes awry, and Ruth materializes. Both dead wives are now fully visible and they are very cranky.

After hours and hours of spells and séances, Madame Arcati finally succeeds in banishing both wives; however, she warns Charles that they may still be around, unseen. She advises him to immediately go far away. Charles leaves, and the unseen ghosts throw things around and trash the room just as soon as he is gone.

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

Charles Condomine is a wealthy, successful novelist. In order to learn about the occult, the subject of his next book, he invites an eccentric medium to conduct a séance at his quiet country home in Kent. He is sceptical but becomes a believer when the ghost of his first wife appears—and stays. From then on, poor Charles is a shuttlecock between the women battling for his affections: Ruth, his living wife, and Elvira, his dead one.

Ruth Condomine is Charles's second wife. She is charming, strong willed and obsessively curious about her husband's relationship with his deceased first wife, Elvira. She can come across as a bit stuffy and a little predictable. She is convinced that Charles has lost his mind when Elvira appears, because at first she can neither see nor hear Elvira. Throughout much of the play, Ruth acts as a concerned wife, trying to restore Charles to normalcy.

Edith is the Condomine's new maid. She is nervous and tears around at breakneck speed trying to do things right and make a good impression. Edith plays a tiny part in the bulk of the play but turns out to be a central character. Edith, not Charles, has the extrasensory powers that called Elvira back from the dead, and only Edith can make Elvira return.

Dr. George Bradman is a good friend of the Condomines. He is entirely sceptical of anything to do with the occult, but tries his utmost to go along with the proceedings for the sake of Charles's research. He is social and likes to have a good time. He also is devoted to order and normalcy.

Violet Bradman is Dr. Bradman's wife. Simple and naïve, she is quite excited about being in the presence of the medium, whom she finds fascinating. She probably doesn't get out too much and reads fluffy romance novels.

Madame Arcati is the local spiritualist and medium. Elderly but spry, Madame Arcati bicycles into the play wearing slightly outlandish clothes and talking to an eight-year-old contact on the other side. (The stage directions in the script at her first entrance describe her as "a striking woman, dressed not too extravagantly but with a decided bias towards the barbaric.") As everyone soon finds out, Madame Arcati is no fraud. She truly is in contact with the other world and inadvertently is the "medium" through which Elvira is called back to this one. The problem is that Madame Arcati cannot figure out how to return Elvira to the other side. She is eccentric, effusive and boisterous.

Elvira is Charles Condomine's deceased first wife. In life, Elvira was spirited, outgoing, wild, and carefree. In death, she is no different; she has cocktails with Genghis Khan. She does love Charles, if somewhat casually, and is jealous of Ruth. Her attempts to monopolize the attention and conversation of Charles after she reappears form the central tension of the play. Flirtatious, conniving and catty, she uses every trick in the book to disrupt Charles's current marriage and torment Ruth because she wants Charles all to herself.

AUDITION PIECES - MONOLOGUES

Charles (Discussing his late wife, Elvira, with his current wife, Ruth.)

CHARLES: 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.

Madame Arcati (Conducting a séance at the home of Ruth and Charles Condomine. One table bump means "yes"; two table bumps mean "no.")

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

Ruth (Expressing her frustration over the return of Elvira.)

RUTH: I've been making polite conversation all through dinner last night and breakfast and lunch today—and it's been a nightmare—and I'm not going to do it anymore. I don't like Elvira any more than she likes me, and what's more, I'm certain that I never could have, alive or dead. If, since her untimely arrival here the other evening, she had shown the slightest sign of good manners, the slightest sign of good breeding, I might have felt differently towards her, but all she has done is try to make mischief between us and have private jokes with you against me. I am now going up to my room and I shall have my dinner on a tray. You and she can have the house to yourselves and joke and gossip with each other to your heart's content. The first thing in the morning I'm going to London to interview the Psychical Research Society, and if they fail me I shall go straight to the Archbishop of Canterbury.....

Elvira (Describing why she returned from the afterlife to haunt Charles.)

ELVIRA: I sat there, on the other side, just longing for you day after day. I did really. All through your affair with that brassy-looking woman in the South of France. I went on loving you and thinking truly of you. Then you married Ruth and even then I forgave you and tried to understand because all the time I believed deep inside that you really loved me best...that's why I put myself down for a return visit and had to fill in all those forms and wait about in draughty passages for hours. If only you'd died before you met Ruth, everything might have been all right. She's absolutely ruined you. I hadn't been in the house a day before I realized that. Your books aren't a quarter as good as they used to be, either.

AUDITION PIECES - SCENES

Madame Arcati and Ruth (Discussing the unexpected return of Charles's first wife, Elvira.)

RUTH: It's all very fine for you to talk like this, Madame Arcati. You don't seem to have the faintest realization of my position.

MADAME ARCATI: Try to look on the bright side.

RUTH: Bright side indeed! If your husband's first wife suddenly appeared from the grave and came to live in the house with you, do you suppose you'd be able to look on the bright side?

MADAME ARCATI: I resent your tone, Mrs. Condomine; I really do.

RUTH: You most decidedly have no right to. You are entirely to blame for the whole horrible situation.

MADAME ARCATI: Kindly remember that I came here on the other night on your own invitation.

RUTH: On my husband's invitation.

MADAME ARCATI: I did was requested to do, which was to give a séance and establish contact with the Other Side. I had no idea that there was any ulterior motive mixed up with it.

RUTH: Ulterior motive?

MADAME ARCATI: Your husband was obviously eager to get in touch with his former wife. If I had been aware of that at the time I should naturally have consulted you beforehand. After all, 'Noblesse oblige'!

RUTH: He had no intention of trying to get in touch with anyone. The whole thing was planned in order to get material for a mystery story he is writing about a homicidal medium.

MADAME ARCATI: (drawing herself up) Am I to understand that I was only invited in a spirit of mockery.

RUTH: Not at all. He merely wanted to make notes of some of the tricks of the trade.

MADAME ARCATI: (incensed) Tricks of the trade! Insufferable! I've never been so insulted in my life. I feel we have nothing more to say to one another, Mrs. Condomine. Goodbye! (She turns away up stage C to the door)

RUTH: Please don't go—please—

MADAME ARCATI: (turning and facing Ruth upstage C by the door) Your attitude from the outset has been most unpleasant, Mrs. Condomine. Some of your remarks have been discourteous in the extreme and I should like to say, without umbrage, that it you and your husband were foolish enough to tamper with the unseen for paltry motives and in a spirit of ribaldry, whatever has happened to you is your own fault, and, to coin a phrase, as far as I'm concerned you can stew in your own juice!

Charles and Ruth (Arguing over their ghostly visitor.)

RUTH: I am making every effort not to lose my temper with you, Charles; but I must say you're making it increasingly difficult for me.

CHARLES: All this talk of battles and duels...

RUTH: She came here with one purpose and one purpose only—and if you can't see it you're a bigger fool than I thought you.

CHARLES: What purpose could she have beyond a natural desire to see me again? After all, you must remember that she was extremely attached to me, poor child.

RUTH: Her purpose is perfectly obvious. It is to get you to herself forever.

CHARLES: That's absurd. How could she?

RUTH: By killing you off, of course.

CHARLES: Killing me off? You're mad.

RUTH: Why do you suppose Edith fell down the stairs and nearly cracked her skull?

CHARLES: What's Edith got to do with it?

RUTH: Because the whole of the front stair was covered in axle grease. Cook discovered it afterwards.

CHARLES: You're making this up, Ruth.

RUTH: I'm not. I swear I'm not. Why do you suppose when you were lopping that dead branch off the pear tree that the ladder broke? Because it had been practically sawn through on both sides!

CHARLES: But why should she want to kill me? I could understand her wanting to kill you, but why me?

RUTH: If you were dead it would be her final triumph over me. She'd have you with her for ever on her damned astral plane, and I'd be left high and dry. She is probably planning a sort of spiritual re-marriage. I wouldn't put anything past her.

CHARLES: (really shocked) Ruth!

RUTH: Don't you see me now?

CHARLES: She couldn't be so sly, so wicked! She couldn't!

RUTH: Couldn't she just?

CHARLES: I grant you that as a character she was always rather light and irresponsible, but I would never have believed her capable of low cunning.

RUTH: Perhaps the spirit world has deteriorated her.

CHARLES: Oh, Ruth!

RUTH: For heaven's sake stop looking like a wounded spaniel and concentrate. This is serious.

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 *[takes her glass and goes to 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.

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: Well to begin with I *haven't* forgotten Elvira—I remember her very distinctly indeed—I remember how fascinating she was, and how maddening—*[sits]* 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 views 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 sort 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 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 strong vein of it in you.

CHARLES: I've heard that said about Julius Caesar.

RUTH: Julius Caesar is neither here nor there.

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

RUTH: 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 tri-

DR. & MRS. BRADMAN
CHARLES & RUTH

ACT ONE SCENE I

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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: I was devoted to Elvira. We were married for five years. She died. I missed her very much. 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!

[Bell.]

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?

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.

[MRS. BRADMAN comes to RUTH—shakes hands. DR. BRADMAN shakes hands with CHARLES. DR. BRADMAN is a pleasant-looking middle-aged man. MRS. BRADMAN is fair and rather faded.]

EDITH: Dr. and Mrs. Bradman.

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.

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

DR. BRADMAN [*shaking hands with RUTH*]: 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: 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 inquiries—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: 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 in 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 you get from her?

CHARLES [*handing DR. and MRS. BRADMAN cocktails*]: Jargon, principally—a few of the tricks of the trade—it's many years since I went to a séance. I want to refresh my memory.

DR. BRADMAN: Then it's not entirely new to you?

CHARLES: 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 [*gets cocktail for himself*]: Good heavens, no—she just naturally disliked my aunt and loved making a fool of her.

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 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—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.

[*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 conversational 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.

-  ELVIRA: Poor Ruth.
- CHARLES [*staring at her*]: This is obviously an hallucination, isn't it?
- ELVIRA: I'm afraid I don't know the technical term for it.
- CHARLES [*rising and walking about the room*]: What am I to do?
- ELVIRA: What Ruth suggested—relax.
- CHARLES: Where have you come from?
- ELVIRA: Do you know, it's very peculiar, but I've sort of forgotten.
- CHARLES: Are you here to stay indefinitely?
- ELVIRA: I don't know that either.
- CHARLES: Oh, my God!
- ELVIRA: Why, would you hate it so much if I did?
- CHARLES: Well, you must admit it would be embarrassing.
- ELVIRA: I don't see why, really—it's all a question of adjusting yourself—anyhow I think it's horrid of you to be so unwelcoming and disagreeable.
- CHARLES: Now look here, Elvira . . .
- ELVIRA [*near tears*]: I do—I think you're mean.
- CHARLES: Try to see my point, dear—I've been married to Ruth for five years, and you've been dead for seven . . .
- ELVIRA: Not dead, Charles—"passed over." It's considered vulgar to say "dead" where I come from.
- CHARLES: Passed over, then.
- ELVIRA: At any rate, now that I'm here, the least you can do is to make a pretense of being amiable about it . . .
- CHARLES: Of course, my dear, I'm delighted in one way . . .
- ELVIRA: I don't believe you love me any more.
- CHARLES: I shall always love the memory of you.
- ELVIRA [*rising and walking about*]: You mustn't think me unreasonable, but I really am a little hurt. You called me back—and at great inconvenience I came—and you've been thoroughly churlish ever since I arrived.
- CHARLES [*gently*]: Believe me, Elvira, I most emphatically did not send for you—there's been some mistake.
- ELVIRA [*irritably*]: Well, somebody did—and that child said it was you—I remember I was playing backgammon with a very sweet old Oriental gentleman—I think his name was Genghis Khan—and I'd just thrown double sixes, and then that child paged me and the next thing I knew I was in this room . . . perhaps it was your subconscious.

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

ELVIRA: I don't see how I can.

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

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

CHARLES: You must know somebody else besides Genghis Khan.

ELVIRA: Oh, Charles . . .

CHARLES: What is it?

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

CHARLES: What do you want to cry for?

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

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

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

CHARLES: Is it cold—being a ghost?

ELVIRA: No—I don't think so.

CHARLES: What happens if I touch you?

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

CHARLES: Oh, Elvira . . .

[*He buries his face in his hands.*]

ELVIRA: What is it, darling?

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

ELVIRA: That's better.

CHARLES [*looking up*]: What's better?

ELVIRA: Your voice was kinder.

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

ELVIRA: Often . . .

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

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

CHARLES: Only very, very gently . . .

ELVIRA: I loved you very much.

CHARLES: I loved you too . . . [*He puts out his hand to her and then draws it away*] No, I can't touch you—isn't that horrible?

ELVIRA: Perhaps it's as well if I'm going to stay for any length of time . . .

MADAME ARCATI
&
RUTH

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BLITHE SPIRIT

MADAME ARCATI [*briskly*]: Kind? Nonsense! Nothing kind about it—I look upon it as an outing.

RUTH: I'm so glad—will you have some tea?

MADAME ARCATI: China or Indian?

RUTH: China.

MADAME ARCATI: Good. I never touch Indian, it upsets my vibrations.

 RUTH: Do sit down.

MADAME ARCATI [*turning her head and sniffing*]: I find this room very interesting—very interesting indeed. I noticed it the other night.

RUTH: I'm not entirely surprised.

[*She proceeds to pour out tea.*]

MADAME ARCATI [*sitting down and pulling off her gloves*]: Have you ever been to Cowden Manor?

RUTH: No, I'm afraid I haven't.

MADAME ARCATI: That's very interesting too—strikes you like a blow between the eyes the moment you walk into the drawing room. Two lumps of sugar, please, and no milk at all.

RUTH: I am profoundly disturbed, Madame Arcati, and I want your help.

MADAME ARCATI: Aha! I thought as much. What's in these sandwiches?

RUTH: Cucumber.

MADAME ARCATI: Couldn't be better. [*She takes one.*] Fire away.

RUTH: It's most awfully difficult to explain.

MADAME ARCATI: Facts first—explanations afterwards.

RUTH: It's the facts that are difficult to explain—they're so fantastic.

MADAME ARCATI: Facts very often are. Take creative talent for instance, how do you account for that? Look at Shakespeare and Michael Angelol Try to explain Mozart snatching sounds out of the air and putting them down on paper when he was practically a baby—facts—plain facts. I know it's the fashion nowadays to ascribe it all to glands but my reply to that is fiddlededee.

RUTH: Yes, I'm sure you're quite right.

MADAME ARCATI: There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Mrs. Condomine.

RUTH: There certainly are.

MADAME ARCATI: Come now—take the plunge—out with it.

You've heard strange noises in the night no doubt—boards creaking—doors slamming—subdued moaning in the passages—is that it?

RUTH: No—I'm afraid it isn't.

MADAME ARCATI: No sudden gusts of cold wind, I hope?

RUTH: No, it's worse than that.

MADAME ARCATI: I'm all attention.

RUTH [*with an effort*]: I know it sounds idiotic but the other night—during the séance—something happened—

MADAME ARCATI: I knew it! Probably a poltergeist, they're enormously cunning, you know, they sometimes lie doggo for days—

RUTH: You know that my husband was married before?

MADAME ARCATI: Yes—I have heard it mentioned.

RUTH: His first wife, Elvira, died comparatively young—

MADAME ARCATI [*sharply*]: Where?

RUTH: Here—in this house—in this very room.

MADAME ARCATI [*whistling*]: Whew! I'm beginning to see daylight!

RUTH: She was convalescing after pneumonia and one evening she started to laugh helplessly at one of the B.B.C. musical programmes and died of a heart attack.

MADAME ARCATI: And she materialized the other evening—after I had gone?

RUTH: Not to me, but to my husband.

MADAME ARCATI [*rising impulsively*]: Capital—capital! Oh, but that's splendid!

RUTH [*coldly*]: From your own professional standpoint I can see that it might be regarded as a major achievement!

MADAME ARCATI [*delighted*]: A triumph, my dear! Nothing more or less than a triumph!

RUTH: But from my own personal point of view you must see that, to say the least of it, it's embarrassing.

MADAME ARCATI [*walking about the room*]: At last—at last—a genuine materialization!

RUTH: Please sit down again, Madame Arcati.

MADAME ARCATI: How could anyone sit down at a moment like this? It's tremendous! I haven't had such a success since the Sudbury case.

RUTH [*sharply*]: Nevertheless I must insist upon you sitting down and controlling your natural exuberance. I appreciate

EDITH,
MADAME ARCATI,
& CHARLES

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BLITHE SPIRIT

MADAME ARCATI: Come here, child.

EDITH: Oh!

[*She looks anxiously at CHARLES.*]

CHARLES: Go on—go to Madame Arcati—it's quite all right.

MADAME ARCATI: Who do you see in this room, child?

EDITH: Oh, dear . . .

MADAME ARCATI: Answer please.

EDITH [*falteringly*]: You; madame—

[*She stops.*]

MADAME ARCATI: Go on.

EDITH: The Master.

MADAME ARCATI: Anyone else?

EDITH: Oh no, madame . . .

MADAME ARCATI [*inflexibly*]: Look again.

EDITH [*imploringly, to CHARLES*]: I don't understand, sir—I—

MADAME ARCATI: Come, child—don't beat about the bush—look again.

[*ELVIRA begins to move about the room almost as though she were being pulled. EDITH follows with her eyes.*]

RUTH: Do concentrate, Elvira, and keep still.

ELVIRA: I can't . . .

MADAME ARCATI: Do you see anyone else now?

EDITH [*slyly*]: Oh, no, madame.

MADAME ARCATI: She's lying.

EDITH: Oh, madame!

MADAME ARCATI: They always do.

CHARLES: They?

MADAME ARCATI [*sharply*]: Where are they now?

EDITH: By the fireplace. Oh!

CHARLES: She can see them—do you mean she can see them?

MADAME ARCATI: Probably not very clearly—but enough—

EDITH [*bursting into tears*]: Let me go—I haven't done nothing
not seen nobody—let me go back to bed.

MADAME ARCATI: Give her a sandwich.

EDITH [*drawing away*]: I don't want a sandwich. I want to go
back to bed . . .

CHARLES [*handing EDITH the plate*]: Here, Edith.

MADAME ARCATI: Nonsense—a big healthy girl like you saying no
to a delicious sandwich—I never heard of such a thing—sit
down.

EDITH [*to CHARLES*]: Please, sir, I . . .

CHARLES: Please do as Madame Arcati says, Edith.

EDITH [*sitting down and sniffing*]: I haven't done nothing wrong.

CHARLES: It's all right—nobody said you had.

RUTH: If she's been the cause of all this unpleasantness I'll give her a week's notice tomorrow.

ELVIRA: You may not be here tomorrow—

MADAME ARCATI: Look at me, Edith. [EDITH *obediently does so*]
Cuckoo—cuckoo—cuckoo—

EDITH [*jumping*]: Oh, dear—what's the matter with her? Is she barmy?

MADAME ARCATI: Here, Edith—this is my finger—look— [*She waggles it*] Have you ever seen such a long, long, long finger? Look now it's on the right—now it's on the left—backwards and forwards it goes—see—very quietly backwards and forwards—tic-toc—tic—toc—tic-toc.

ELVIRA: The mouse ran up the clock.

RUTH: Be quiet—you'll ruin everything.

[MADAME ARCATI *whistles a little tune close to EDITH's face—then she snaps her fingers. EDITH looks stolidly in front of her without flinching. MADAME ARCATI stands back.*]

MADAME ARCATI: Well—so far so good—she's off all right. 

CHARLES: Off?

MADAME ARCATI: She's a Natural—just the same as the Sudbury case—it really is the most amusing coincidence. Now then—would you ask your wives to stand close together please?

CHARLES: Where?

MADAME ARCATI: Over there by you.

CHARLES: Elvira—Ruth—

RUTH: I resent being ordered about like this.

ELVIRA: I don't like this at all—I don't like any of it—I feel peculiar.

CHARLES: I'm afraid I must insist.

ELVIRA: It would serve you right if we flatly refused to do anything at all.

MADAME ARCATI: Are you sorry for having been so mischievous, Edith?

EDITH [*cheerfully*]: Oh yes, madame.

MADAME ARCATI: You know what you have to do now, don't you, Edith?

EDITH: Oh yes, madame.

RUTH: I believe it's going to work whatever it is. Oh, Charles.