



by Millie R. Schacher

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This draft will be workshopped before the start of rehearsals.

Setting:

A bare stage, save a round table and five chairs.

The audience should be seated around the actors at the table with a little space in between for movement, etc. Actors should be able to access two doors, and in at least two spots, the wall covered with a curtain should be accessible to them.

Characters:

JAMES, M, Charles' brother, 34

VIRGINIA, F, Charles' sister, 36

MAUDE, F, Charles' youngest sister, 18

ELVIRA, F, Charles' wife, 27 - 31

GEORGE, M, long-time friend of the family, 42

Notes:

A "/" indicates where the next line should begin. Often, this means one character is talking over another.

A "-" indicates that the character's line is being cut off by the next line.

The actors do not "see" the audience members nor interact with them. When it comes time for a few audience members to peel off and follow ELVIRA and JAMES for their track, an assistant stage manager should nudge them to follow. It might also be wise for the ASM to find those 2 - 3 patrons before the show begins and seat them next to the door.

PRE-SHOW:

*Ten minutes before the show begins, the actors (except ELVIRA) should enter and mill about in the lobby and inside the theatre with the audience.**

JAMES and MAUDE should enter together from outside. GEORGE should enter sometime later, and VIRGINIA should already be in the building.

VIRGINIA should make the rounds, making sure everyone's okay, especially MAUDE and GEORGE. JAMES and GEORGE should go off at some point secretly and look over some papers (CHARLES' scripts). At some point, VIRGINIA should step away from the others, find her hidden flask, and take a swig. It is empty. MAUDE should at some point get a little too close to the stairs, and JAMES, GEORGE, or VIRGINIA should pull her away in alarm.

When it's time for the play to begin, VIRGINIA should tell the others that they are ready to start the seance.

**The actors should let the audience get close and see what they are doing. However, they should never at any point interact with them or notice their presence.*

ACT ONE:

PART ONE: THE LIES

All actors (save ELVIRA) enter and stand in front of a chair around the table. On the table there is a candelabra. There is some kind of continuous hum from some kind of electricity. It pervades through the scene. They look at one another tentatively. There is a pregnant pause.

JAMES: /Well, let's get on with it.

VIRGINIA: /Let's sit down.

GEORGE: Oh, we're seriously doing this?

MAUDE: Are we?

VIRGINIA: Of course, we are.

GEORGE: I don't know, I understand we're here, but I thought it – We're doing this?

MAUDE: It's so...small.

VIRGINIA: It was just going to be a reading.

GEORGE: Of his new play?

VIRGINIA: Yes.

MAUDE: What new play?

JAMES: Are we or aren't we?

Beat.

VIRGINIA: /We are.

MAUDE: Must we?

JAMES: Then let's do it. Let's not stand around and talk about it!

VIRGINIA: Why are you shouting??

JAMES: Sit–

ELVIRA rushes in, putting on lipstick as she enters.

ELVIRA: Sorry, I'm late. Did we say 7?

GEORGE: Bit early for a seance.

VIRGINIA: It's a seance, not a soiree.

ELVIRA: One should always look their best, even if it is...so this is...?

VIRGINIA: Yes. I didn't think you'd show up.

ELVIRA: Well, I did think there'd be spirits. (*titters*) I mean drinks.

GEORGE: What kind of spirits do spirits drink?

ELVIRA: Bloody Marys.

ELVIRA, GEORGE and MAUDE laugh. A bit of tension is released.

ELVIRA: Everyone looks so solemn.

VIRGINIA: Someone died.

ELVIRA: Are there drinks?

MAUDE: /I don't–

GEORGE: /'fraid not.

JAMES: No, there's no goddamn drinks!

ELVIRA: (hurt) James, are you...are you ill?

ELVIRA moves toward JAMES tentatively.

JAMES: I'm fine. Just sit down.

VIRGINIA: I suppose we should all...(she indicates they should sit down)

VIRGINIA sits down and the others that aren't already sitting, sit down.

GEORGE: I thought perhaps we should say a few words—

JAMES: Start Virginia.

VIRGINIA: There's no need to take that tone with me, James.

GEORGE: It's a difficult, horrendous thing that brought us all here tonight, but we're family. This is hard on everyone. We could all use a little grace, a little—

JAMES: Oh, shut up, George.

VIRGINIA: Don't talk to George like that.

GEORGE: He was my brother, too.

VIRGINIA: (to GEORGE) You don't need to be sorry.

JAMES: Half.

GEORGE: What?

JAMES: Half-brother.

GEORGE: That didn't matter to me.

ELVIRA: What's wrong with you James?

JAMES: What's wrong with me is that my brother is dead. Murdered. And you're bantering AND joking around like it's a goddamn cocktail party! We came to speak to Charles...your dead husband.

ELVIRA: I know he's dead!

JAMES: Then act like it for /fucks'--

VIRGINIA: Everyone, just calm down! James! Keep your head on.

ELVIRA: That's fitting.

JAMES: Let's get on with it.

MAUDE: (*stands*) I know, it's important, but must we really?

JAMES: Of course, we must! Does no one care that Charles was murdered here?! We're standing in the spot where someone spilled his blood! Where someone bashed-

VIRGINIA: Enough, /James!

MAUDE: (*upset*) I didn't mean--

JAMES: What didn't you mean?

MAUDE: I was just going to--

JAMES: You don't have to be here.

MAUDE: I want to be here. /I didn't mean anything--

JAMES: Then shut up and sit down! Have a little respect. And if you don't want to be here, then leave.

VIRGINIA goes to MAUDE.

VIRGINIA: (*bugs her*) It's okay, darling. James didn't mean it. (*looking at him*) He's just upset.

JAMES: Fine! Have it your own way, but we all agreed that this was best, that this was what we were going to do, for Charles.

VIRGINIA: And we will.

MAUDE: I don't quite understand how it is we're going to do the seance. How does it even work? Does it–

GEORGE: Ginny will do it.

MAUDE: You know how?

ELVIRA: Yes, don't you know about loony Aunt Gerdy?

MAUDE: What? Who's that?

JAMES: Aunt Gerdy was a psychic.

GEORGE: Father detested her.

VIRGINIA: She, she told me I had the gift.

MAUDE: To talk to ghosts?

VIRGINIA: It's nothing. I'm not even sure what that means really....and if it's a gift it's a strange one. Why call it a gift? Talking to the dead it's–

ELVIRA: (*to MAUDE*) You'll probably get the gift too.

MAUDE: Oh no, I'm not...I'm not a real Byrne.

ELVIRA: I thought you were–

VIRGINIA: Maude was adopted by my parents when she was a toddler—

JAMES: After her mother died.

ELVIRA: What happened?

MAUDE: She fell down some stairs.

JAMES: She broke her neck.

ELVIRA: That's terrible.

GEORGE: You're a Byrne.

MAUDE: Not a real one.

VIRGINIA: Of course, you are. As real as any of us.

ELVIRA: You know he was writing about us.

MAUDE: Who was?

ELVIRA: Charles. This new play.

VIRGINIA: Did you read it?

MAUDE: /What?

GEORGE: /As if we need any more of those.

GEORGE/VIRGINIA: Sorry.

GEORGE: You go.

VIRGINIA: (*to ELVIRA*) Did you read it?

ELVIRA: No. You know I hate to read.

Beat.

GEORGE: It's rather funny, isn't it?

VIRGINIA: What?

GEORGE: Well, not funny, strange...maybe serendipitous, no, that's not the right word. That a man who writes these great tragedies becomes one himself?

JAMES: You think he brought it upon himself?

GEORGE: No! No, only that—

ELVIRA: Only when you're a nasty piece of work, writing other people's secrets you do bring trouble upon yourself.

JAMES: No need to keep anything back now. Clobber him, emasculate him. He's gone. We're only standing on his bones.

ELVIRA: Don't act all high and mighty. I'm not the only one who hated him. He was heinous. A pig.

VIRGINIA: You don't need to talk like that.

ELVIRA: Oh, so now are we to act like we all adored him?

VIRGINIA: You must have liked him a little; you were married to him.

ELVIRA: And that means I have to like him?

VIRGINIA: One would assume.

ELVIRA: Seeing as you've never been married yourself...You wouldn't know.

VIRGINIA: I find that sad.

ELVIRA: How dare you! Don't condescend to me, Virginia. Like I'm pathetic and sad, to be pitied or whatever. What about you? Why is it that you never married, Guinevera?

VIRGINIA: It's none of your business.

ELVIRA: Was no one ever good enough? Or did no one ever really care for you?

VIRGINIA: Shut up, Elvira.

ELVIRA: Oh, I'd say it had more to do with....(*looking at GEORGE*) Daddy issues.

VIRGINIA: (*with real anger born of embarrassment*) Shut up!

MAUDE: Why are you being so mean?

ELVIRA: Oh, am I? I just thought that's how we were talking to one another.

GEORGE: Ellie, c'mon now—

ELVIRA: Don't call me that, Georgie Porgie Pudding and —

GEORGE: Don't!

ELVIRA: You hated him, didn't you?

GEORGE: No, of course not.

ELVIRA: He bullied you!

GEORGE: He didn't bully me. He didn't like me when I first showed up, but that's hardly surprising. A bastard is never well-liked.

VIRGINIA: Don't talk like that, George.

GEORGE: Why not? It's true. It's okay.

MAUDE: Why didn't he like you?

GEORGE: Oh, I don't know....jealous that there was an older son, less love to spread around, or some bullshit. Eldest siblings can be quite protective.

MAUDE: I like you.

GEORGE: I like you too.

ELVIRA: He did hate you. He used to talk about you to me. Terrible, shitty little things. I never understood why he detested you so much. Nice old George. Who could hate him?

GEORGE shrugs.

VIRGINIA: Did you hate him, George?

GEORGE: Didn't you?

VIRGINIA: We're family.

ELVIRA: I hardly see why that matters. Who could you hate more than family?

JAMES: Elvira—

ELVIRA: What about you little Maudey? Did you like your big brother?

MAUDE: Of course I did

ELVIRA: Liar!

VIRGINIA: That's enough, Elvira.

ELVIRA: We all know Charles took a special liking to tearing down little Maudey whenever he could. Why did he despise her so? Why did he seem to hate so many of us? Why did he spend his life hell-bent on making ours miserable? Ooh! Let's ask him.

VIRGINIA: Stop it, Elvira! You're being wicked. Charles had his faults. We all do! Who is without sin should cast the first stone, but he wasn't all bad, and, and he loved Maude.

ELVIRA: Oh Ginny, you're so full of shit, it's muddled your brain.

VIRGINIA: *(to MAUDE)* You know he loved you. He wasn't always good at showing it. He could be so hard, and he had his own demons, and I know he shouldn't have treated you badly. I'm sorry. And you too, George.

GEORGE: It's alright. I've got a thick skin.

VIRGINIA: He didn't have it easy.

ELVIRA: That should make up for it.

VIRGINIA: He certainly didn't deserve to be murdered.

GEORGE: Is that what the police are saying?

VIRGINIA: Yes, they found him here last Thursday.

JAMES: His head caved in. Somebody took a—well, they don't know. Something heavy and —*(he mimes holding a bat and hitting someone over the head, hard.)*

ELVIRA: The murder weapon wasn't found?

VIRGINIA: No. That's odd, isn't it?

JAMES: You don't leave it behind so the police can find your prints.

GEORGE: Do they know who did it?

JAMES: No, that's why we're here. We're going to find out for ourselves.

GEORGE: Wouldn't it be better to let the police—

JAMES: No, it wouldn't.

MAUDE is under the table. She is pointing to a dark stain on the ground.

MAUDE: Look, it's here.

GEORGE: What are you doing, Maude?

MAUDE: I found it. Right under our table.

They all peer under the table.

VIRGINIA: Come back up here, sweetheart. Everyone, sit down. Put your hands on the table. Palms down. Pinkies touching your neighbors.

They do so.

GEORGE: We're doing it.

VIRGINIA. Yes. Ready?

JAMES, GEORGE, and MAUDE nod.

MAUDE: I've got the chills.

Everyone is quiet. VIRGINIA lights the candles in the middle of the table. She completes the circle.

VIRGINIA: Close your eyes.

Everyone except ELVIRA does.

ELVIRA: Why?

VIRGINIA: Or don't. It doesn't matter.

ELVIRA: Then why say it at—

JAMES: Elvira!

VIRGINIA: Think of Charles. Think of him standing here. And say this:” Ut eras, eris”.

MAUDE: What does that mean?

VIRGINIA: As you were, shall you be.

VIRGINIA: (*quietly*) Ut eras, eris.

ALL: Ut eras, eris. Ut eras, eris. Ut eras, eris.

In a flash, the noise is sucked out of the room, and the electric humming stops. It is so quiet. Suddenly, ELVIRA breaks into giggles. JAMES flops over onto the table, MAUDE claps her hands over her ears, GEORGE flings his arms back behind him, and VIRGINIA gasps for air. It happens like this in a circle. And from somewhere, a little voice cries for its mommy. Twice. Then there is a knock on the table. MAUDE stifles a scream. They all look up from the table.

VIRGINIA: Someone’s here.

The table moves of its own accord.

ELVIRA: My God.

GEORGE: It’s happening.

VIRGINIA: (*to the others*) Be quiet. (*to the air*) Spirit. Please talk to us.

The same disembodied, slurred “Mommy” is heard.

ELVIRA: It’s a child.

VIRGINIA: One knock for no, two knocks for yes. Did you die here?

Two knocks.

MAUDE: Oh my God.

VIRGINIA: Were you murdered?

Two knocks. MAUDE gasps. They sit for a moment in silence.

GEORGE: That's terrible.

ELVIRA: Getting a name out of them is going to take 3 hours.

VIRGINIA: *(to the spirit)* Were you murdered by a friend?

One knock.

VIRGINIA: A lover?

ELVIRA: A lover?! It's a child.

VIRGINIA: We don't know that! Spirit, were you killed by someone you loved?

Two knocks.

GEORGE: It's always that way. Love and hate, fine line.

ELVIRA: How insightful, George.

GEORGE shrugs.

VIRGINIA: I'm so sorry, spirit. Did you die recently?

One knock.

VIRGINIA: One year ago?

One knock.

ELVIRA: Can ghosts tell time?

VIRGINIA: Five years?

One knock.

VIRGINIA: Ten?

One knock.

VIRGINIA: Twenty?

Two knocks.

MAUDE/GEORGE: It isn't Charles.

JAMES: No.

VIRGINIA: Do you know Charles Byrne, Spirit?

VIRGINIA is knocked back from her chair and falls over. The door opens, and we hear the rush of wind, the sound of someone falling down the stairs, a gurgle, a moan, and then the door slams shut.

GEORGE: Ginny!

VIRGINIA rights herself. GEORGE rushes over to help her up.

VIRGINIA: I'm alright. I'm okay.

MAUDE: That was so scary.

ELVIRA: I thought you said we were going to speak to Charles! That was NOT Charles!

MAUDE: They knocked you out of your chair.

VIRGINIA: We can. I don't—I don't understand what happened.

MAUDE: I think we should stop.

JAMES: (*ignoring MAUDE, to VIRGINIA*) Who was that?

GEORGE: Someone who was murdered here 20 years ago.

VIRGINIA: That's never happened before. That wasn't supposed to happen.

MAUDE: We shouldn't be here. We shouldn't be doing this.

ELVIRA: I thought you said this wasn't a soiree?

JAMES: 20 years ago? I was 14. Charles was...what? 18?

GEORGE: Have you been here before?

VIRGINIA: Yes, we did some shows here in high school.

JAMES: That wasn't Charles.

ELVIRA: No. Charles is all pomp and circumstance.

GEORGE: Certainly was a bit of pomp. Pumped Ginny right out of her chair.

VIRGINIA pulls a lock of hair out of her pocket.

ELVIRA: Is that—

GEORGE: What is that?

ELVIRA: Charles' hair?? What did you do? Lop it right off of him before the coroner dragged him away?

VIRGINIA: Would you have preferred I brought a finger or a bit of his nose?

ELVIRA: No. I just find it all a bit...morbid.

GEORGE: And here we are conducting a seance.

JAMES: Why did you come, Elvira?

ELVIRA: They canceled the orgy and I didn't have any other plans.

VIRGINIA: You don't have to stay.

ELVIRA: *(to GEORGE)* Why are you staying? You don't have a horse in this fight.

GEORGE: You're wrong there. I do have a race in this horse.

VIRGINIA: Very funny. Everyone, sit back down.* *(If everyone is already sitting down, remove line.)*

ELVIRA: Why aren't your parents here?

JAMES, GEORGE, MAUDE, and VIRGINIA look at one another.

JAMES: They didn't want to come.

ELVIRA: They didn't want to come...? Or they didn't approve...

Beat.

ELVIRA: Do they even know?

GEORGE: ...Virginia, James? Do they not know?

Beat.

GEORGE: Did you even ask them?

JAMES: Dad wouldn't have approved, but then he never really liked old Charles, did he?

GEORGE: Well, now, there's a bit more to it than that.

VIRGINIA: What?

JAMES: Dad didn't like the theatre. When we stopped after the – after we graduated and Charles kept on–

GEORGE: No–

JAMES: And Charles was a wild card.

GEORGE: He didn't approve of some of his actions, but—

JAMES: Yes, so we won't worry them. It's only us, and it says between us.

MAUDE: You won't tell them?

JAMES: Not if we don't need to.

VIRGINIA: We need more of him. I think in addition to the hair we'll need to imbue our -

ELVIRA: Telephone call down to hell.

JAMES: "More of him". What do you mean?

ELVIRA: How about this? (*in a deep kind of radio jockey voice, mimicking Charles*) Hello pet, how's it hanging? Are your balls to the level of your toes yet?

GEORGE laughs.

MAUDE: (*titters*) Oh, I've got chills.

GEORGE: What about that song he was always singing–

ELVIRA: /Oh no!

GEORGE: (*singing*) “Chantilly lace and a pretty face and a ponytail and a hanging down and a–”

JAMES: That was Dad’s favorite.

MAUDE: (*sings softly*) “Let me call you sweetheart. I’m in love with you.”

MAUDE/VIRGINIA: (*singing*) “Let me hear you whisper. That you love me too.”

GEORGE: /Yes! That’s it!

ELVIRA: Oh dear Jesus.

JAMES/GEORGE/MAUDE/VIRGINIA: (*singing*) “Keep the love light glowing. In your eyes so true. Let me call you sweetheart. I’m in love with you.”

Abruptly, everyone at the table falls forward onto their face. The candles are blown out. They are motionless for some time. A twitch passes through each one of them like an electric current. GEORGE bolts upright and takes a huge breath. “Let Me Call You Sweetheart,” sung by Joni James, starts to play from somewhere.

GEORGE: Ginny, you brat.

As GEORGE goes over to ELVIRA to pick her up, the others start to wake up. ELVIRA, still groggy, is brought to her feet by GEORGE, and they start to waltz. After a few minutes, ELVIRA shakes off GEORGE.

ELVIRA: What are you doing, George? Let go of me.

MAUDE: Where’s that music coming from?

JAMES: What happened to us? George?

ELVIRA: (*moving over to JAMES*) Oh, you’ve hit your head. You’ve got a–

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): (*to ELVIRA*) Hello, my dearest pet.

ELVIRA slowly turns around.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): I missed ya, baby.

GEORGE goes over to ELVIRA and grabs her around the waist and bends down to kiss her. ELVIRA pushes him away.

ELVIRA: What are you doing!?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Can't I kiss my wife?

Beat. Everyone freezes and looks at GEORGE.

VIRGINIA: Charles?

ELVIRA: What do you mean?

JAMES: Charles in George?

VIRGINIA: Possessing him.

JAMES: If this is Charles, which leg did I break down by the lake when I was six?

GEORGE: Neither. You broke your left arm, and it was on the monkey bars, not by the lake. What lake?

JAMES: No. No, it's really Charles.

VIRGINIA: /Oh my God.

GEORGE: I heard you. "Let me call you sweetheart. I'm in love with you. Let me hear you whisper."

GEORGE (as CHARLES) goes over to ELVIRA and serenades her. He tries to kiss her again, but she moves away.

ELVIRA: Stop it, Charles, you pig. I'm not your wife anymore. And you're upsetting Virginia.

VIRGINIA: What are you talking about?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): I didn't mean anything by it. You understand, don't you Gin?

VIRGINIA: Of-Of course.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): (*to ELVIRA*) I'm back! I'm back, baby! In the flesh.

ELVIRA: You're not back, Charles. You're still dead! You've taken up residence in someone else! Poor George. (*turning on VIRGINIA*) Virginia, what is this?! I thought we were going to talk to him not – be molested by him?!

VIRGINIA: I don't know! I didn't-this has never–

MAUDE: (*quietly*) It was the song.

JAMES: Charles, I can't believe–

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*) *turns around.*

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Miss me?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*) *goes up to him, looks like he's going to hug him, then decks him. MAUDE and ELVIRA cry out.*

ELVIRA: Oh my God! James! James, are you alright? Charles! You scoundrel!

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): (*shaking out his hand*) Yowch! Wow, this old guy still has it.

VIRGINIA: That was uncalled for, Charles! Why did you do that?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): He slept with my wife.

VIRGINIA: (*to JAMES*) /You did?

ELVIRA: (*getting close to him, yelling*) I'm not your wife! I'm not your goddamn wife anymore!

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Baby, I love you. I love you so much, I came back for you. It's me. Charles. In the flesh!

ELVIRA: It's not your flesh.

ELVIRA pushes him. He barely moves. JAMES starts to get up, and ELVIRA and MAUDE help him.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Sorry, but you did deserve it.

VIRGINIA: Did you really sleep with his wife—with Elvira?

JAMES/ELVIRA: Yes.

ELVIRA: What Charles fails to mention...oh that's so you Charles! Is that we were separated! Apart!

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): We weren't divorced.

ELVIRA: You just hadn't signed the papers. That's all.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): You hadn't signed them either.

JAMES: (*to ELVIRA*) Is that true?

ELVIRA: How is he even here like this? Ginny, what the hell?

VIRGINIA: I don't know. I did not "do" this, Elvira. This was not me. I didn't want this.

ELVIRA: You wanted to do a bloody seance!

VIRGINIA: I'm as shocked as you are! James came to me, and I said yes, we all said yes.

ELVIRA: I didn't!

VIRGINIA: Yes, well, nothing I can do about that now!

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): (*goes and grabs ELVIRA*) Baby, we were always meant to be together. Things just got in the way.

ELVIRA: Yes, like your death and your narcissism and your lies and your secrets.

JAMES: What secrets?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Oh, come now! Everyone has secrets! Everybody lies.

GEORGE (as CHARLES) sits down at the table.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): It was going to be spectacular. Probably my best play yet.

ELVIRA: Yes, we heard about your little play.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): You did? What did you think?

ELVIRA: I didn't read it.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Not you, dear. I know you detest reading my plays.

ELVIRA: Such a lot of boring words.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): What did you think of it, James? George? How about you, Gin? I sent you all a script.

VIRGINIA: I must have missed it.

JAMES: I didn't like it, and I didn't find it very funny.

VIRGINIA: (*to JAMES*) You read it?

JAMES: Yes, both George and I did.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): It wasn't supposed to be funny.

VIRGINIA: /George, too?

ELVIRA: I take it that it stank, flaming shit on paper.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Elvira, shut up.

ELVIRA: Did I hurt your little writer's feelings?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): I only have one, and you can't hurt it anymore.

ELVIRA: Did it die with your body?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): (*back to JAMES and VIRGINIA, ignoring ELVIRA*) Each script was very special, with a different ending, made just for you (*points at JAMES*) and you (*then VIRGINIA*) and George, here (*points at himself*). I dropped them off myself.

JAMES: Why Charles? What are you getting out of this?

ELVIRA: Other than the rancour of your family, you mean?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): I'd love to hear your feedback.

ELVIRA: There's no need for feedback. Your terrible little play isn't going to see the light of day. It's finished.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Don't be so sure.

JAMES: Who murdered you, Charles?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Ah, well, that's what's so damn interesting.

MAUDE: What do you mean?

GEORGE (as CHARLES) turns around abruptly to look at MAUDE behind him.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Maude. Why are you here?

MAUDE: I–

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): You don't belong here. You should leave.

VIRGINIA: /Charles–

MAUDE: I'm part of the family.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): James, why would you bring her? She's a goddamn child!

JAMES: /She wanted to come.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Was it George who brought her?

VIRGINIA: No–

MAUDE: I wanted to come.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): To what?? Dance on my grave? Play in the ceremonial dirt, chase my demons? This isn't your playground, kid! It's my resting place.

VIRGINIA: You're being ridiculous!

ELVIRA: For once, I agree with Charles.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): /You do?

JAMES: You do?

VIRGINIA: Why?

ELVIRA: She's too young. This was and is a terrible idea. Charles, you were better off dead. I would have preferred that you rotted away in a nursing home and been forgotten, but now you'll be remembered. Damn you! You'll become one of the theatre ghosts. They may even like your crummy little plays. Maude shouldn't be here. Charles is dead and this...this is grotesque.

GEORGE: I want her out!!

VIRGINIA: Charles! She's 18. /She's an adult now.

GEORGE: 18! She's still a child. I was. She doesn't have any business being here. Get her out! Out!

JAMES: Now hold on, Charles—

MAUDE: It's okay. It's okay, Ginny. I'll be outside.

MAUDE leaves the room. Audience members will be able to follow MAUDE's track. Track to be written/devised.

VIRGINIA: Charles, you've always been wicked. Cruel to that child. I would have thought in death, at least, you could show a little kindness towards her. After all—

GEORGE: I am being kind.

ELVIRA: I'm glad to see that death changes nothing. Are there martinis in hell?

GEORGE: Boatloads, babe. Wanna come?

ELVIRA moves away, disgusted.

JAMES: Charles, who killed you? /What's so interesting?

GEORGE: I couldn't tell you. That's what's so strange. I don't remember, and I don't know.

VIRGINIA: You don't know?

JAMES: Forgotten?

GEORGE: Well, no, I don't know.

JAMES: I don't understand.

ELVIRA: He was bashed in the head. (*to GEORGE as CHARLES*) You were bashed in the head until your head caved in, and your brain was just melted jello! /That lucky son of a bitch.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): (*fascinated*) Was I?

ELVIRA: You didn't feel it?

GEORGE: No.

ELVIRA: Damn.

VIRGINIA: What do you remember?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): (*settles in, enjoying this*) I was here in the theatre after a fantastic rehearsal of my new play.

ELVIRA: I thought it was just a reading.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Yes, it was. I had a great little actress in here playing your part.

ELVIRA: Another one for the books.

JAMES: Then what happened?

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): I was making a few cuts to the script after rehearsal. Everyone had left. I was alone, and I heard a rustling, which was odd because there are no windows that open in here, so no wind. The door was locked. I didn't want someone just walking in on me. I wanted the peace and quiet. I turned around to tell the fucker off, and there was no one there!

JAMES: What?

VIRGINIA: Maybe you imagined it.

GEORGE (*as CHARLES*): Well, obviously not because the next thing I knew, it was all black and I was dead.

From outside the room they hear again someone crying "Mommy, mommy". Then there is a desperate pounding on the door.

JAMES: Someone is trying to get in.

VIRGINIA: (*sudden realization*) Maude! Oh my God! Maude.

VIRGINIA and JAMES run for the door. They throw it open, but MAUDE isn't there.

VIRGINIA: Maude! Maude!

JAMES: Maude! Where are you?

ELVIRA: (*to GEORGE*) What did you do?

GEORGE hasn't answered. GEORGE has collapsed in his chair.

ELVIRA: Oh my God.

ELVIRA shakes GEORGE.

ELVIRA: George. George!

VIRGINIA runs over. She feels his neck for a pulse.

VIRGINIA: He's okay. Just passed out. (*to JAMES*) Do you see Maude?

JAMES: No! I don't see her. It's not a big building. I'm going this way to see if I can find her.

VIRGINIA: /Hold on.

ELVIRA: James! James! Wait.

ELVIRA rushes out the door. At this point, the script deviates into two tracks. ELVIRA & JAMES and VIRGINIA & GEORGE. It will be up to the discretion of the director to decide how many audience members will follow ELVIRA & JAMES onto their track. I would advise a small number, around 2 or 3.

VIRGINIA & GEORGE:

VIRGINIA: Hold on, Elvira! Don't go! (*She's gone already.*) Damn it.

VIRGINIA looks down at GEORGE and lovingly strokes his face. He wakes up.

GEORGE: Hello, darling.

VIRGINIA: Hello, George. It is George, isn't it?

GEORGE: (*he sits up cautiously, holding his head*) I think so.

VIRGINIA: Are you okay?

GEORGE: My head is pounding. It's like he blew up my brain, rattled around in my skull. How did he do that?

VIRGINIA: I'm so sorry. I don't know. That's never happened before. I'm so sorry. Are you alright?

They look at each other for a long moment. It is tender. GEORGE winces in pain.

VIRGINIA: Let me see if I can find you something.

VIRGINIA looks through her bag but is defeated easily. She didn't bring anything. She spots ELVIRA's bag.

VIRGINIA: I bet...

VIRGINIA goes and looks inside and comes out with a small bottle of gin.

GEORGE: Bravo!

VIRGINIA: I know Elvira.

VIRGINIA hands GEORGE the bottle, which he opens and takes a solid swig. He hands it back to VIRGINIA. She takes a very large swig.

GEORGE: I thought you'd stopped.

VIRGINIA: I did.

Beat.

VIRGINIA: This has all gotten so out of hand.

GEORGE: Yes, it has, but I suppose that's what comes from playing with demons.

VIRGINIA: They've always been my friends. (*chanting*) One of us. One of us.

Beat.

VIRGINIA: Do you think I'm bad?

GEORGE: I'm no angel.

VIRGINIA: You are to me. (*she crawls over to him and sits like a child at his knees*) George, you are—

GEORGE: (*puts his hands on either side of her face*) A demon.

VIRGINIA: My perfect little demon.

GEORGE: Ginny?

VIRGINIA: Yes?

GEORGE: Why didn't you tell Dad and your Mom?

VIRGINIA: (*alarmed*) What do you mean?

GEORGE: About the seance.

VIRGINIA: Oh! You know them. They wouldn't understand. They don't believe in the occult. They would have called it witchcraft. It's not their thing.

Beat.

VIRGINIA: What did it feel like? To have Charles in your head?

GEORGE: Like I was watching my life through a TV in my brain, but the reception was a bit off.

VIRGINIA: You kissed Elvira.

GEORGE: I didn't kiss Elvira.

VIRGINIA: Was it nice?

GEORGE: Not as nice as this.

GEORGE leans down and kisses VIRGINIA. From behind the curtain, arms press out, trying to grab VIRGINIA. VIRGINIA and GEORGE do not notice.

VIRGINIA: I love you, George. I've always loved you.

GEORGE: Since the very first moment?

VIRGINIA: Yes, always. I was always so afraid.

GEORGE: I know.

VIRGINIA: I can't help the way I feel. Why do you have to be so wonderful?

GEORGE: I'm not really.

VIRGINIA: Do you think we could ever be together?

GEORGE: Only if we went far, far away. What would your parents say?

VIRGINIA: I don't care. I don't care about any of them. I only care about you. George, let's go. This has all gotten so out of hand. It's dangerous—

The door crashes open, and MAUDE walks in the doorway. She is not herself. She is bolder. She struts. She holds herself differently. VIRGINIA gets up quickly and runs to MAUDE and hugs her.

VIRGINIA: Oh, Maude, we were so worried. Where did you go? Are you okay? I'm so sorry. Do you want to go home?

VIRGINIA steps back. MAUDE had not reciprocated the hug but stood frozen.

GEORGE: Maude, what is it?

Beat.

GEORGE: Don't worry. He's gone. Charles isn't in me anymore. God, that sounds...strange. It's just me. George.

MAUDE looks at VIRGINIA and then starts choking her.

MAUDE: You nasty, selfish bitch!

GEORGE: *(jumps up and grabs MAUDE)* Maude! Maude, stop!

GEORGE pulls MAUDE off of VIRGINIA.

MAUDE: You are evil! Evil! *(to GEORGE)* You are stupid, George. Do you have anything floating in that great big hollow head?

GEORGE: What a thing to say? What's wrong with you?

VIRGINIA: Maude, what happened? Why are you being like this?

MAUDE: *(hugs herself)* My dearest little Maudey. *(to VIRGINIA)* You took her away from me! My baby!

The same disembodied “Mommy! Mommy!” is heard again.

VIRGINIA: (*realization and terror*) No. ...No. You cannot be here right now. (*looks at GEORGE and then MAUDE*)

GEORGE: What is going on—

VIRGINIA grabs MAUDE and starts dragging her to the door as MAUDE laughs.

VIRGINIA: Maude, we have to go home now.

MAUDE: Don’t you recognize me Georgie? /It’s only been 18 years!

VIRGINIA: We have to go home right now.

GEORGE: What’s going on? Wait Ginny.

The tracks reconnect on page 40, PART TWO.

ELVIRA & JAMES:

ELVIRA runs after JAMES.

ELVIRA: James, wait for me.

JAMES: Stay in there.

ELVIRA: No! I want to come with you. What's wrong with you?

JAMES: What's wrong—is that a serious question?

ELVIRA: Why are you being so mean to me?

JAMES: Mean to you?! It's not about you, Elvira.

ELVIRA: (*grabs him*) James. I was going to sign the papers. The divorce papers.

JAMES: Let go of me. (*shouting*) Maude! Maude, it's James.

ELVIRA: Where were you last Thursday? I called you at home, and you didn't answer.

JAMES is looking in the different room, knocking on doors, but most of them are locked.

JAMES: I wasn't home. Maude! Please, Maude! Where is she?

ELVIRA: (*very serious and unlike her*) Where were you, James?

JAMES: (*stopped by the tone of her voice*) Why? Why does it matter?

ELVIRA: Where were you?

JAMES: I went out. Met someone.

ELVIRA: Who?

JAMES: It wasn't like that.

ELVIRA: James, you're scaring me.

JAMES looks at her questioningly.

JAMES: You think I...

ELVIRA: I don't know. You keep refusing to answer me.

JAMES: I didn't kill my brother. Why would I?

ELVIRA: I don't know! ...You wouldn't. Of course you wouldn't. ...But I wouldn't blame you if you did.

JAMES: I didn't. Maude!

ELVIRA: Then who did you meet?

JAMES: I met up with George. At the pub.

ELVIRA: Why?

JAMES: Charles sent us his script.

ELVIRA: So what?

JAMES: So the play accused us of murdering Ruth.

ELVIRA: Who's Ruth?

A door a little ways down the hall opens and they hear whispers. ELVIRA and JAMES approach cautiously.

JAMES: Maude?

JAMES looks at the door of the office, which is being remodeled. There is a piece of plastic sheeting hanging over the entrance. The shadow of a figure can be seen standing behind it.

JAMES: Maude?

Suddenly, the plastic flies forward and JAMES is knocked into the room on the other side of the hall. The door slams shut before ELVIRA can get inside. She bangs on the door.

ELVIRA: James! James. Come out. James!

From one side of the hall, MAUDE (as RUTH) steps out, standing in the middle.

MAUDE (as RUTH): Who are you?

ELVIRA: *(surprised, she screams, then)* Maude! What are you—what?

MAUDE (as RUTH): Who are you?

ELVIRA: I'm Elvira? Are you okay? Did something happen? Did you hit your head or something?

MAUDE (as RUTH): Who's Elvira? Charles?

ELVIRA: *(tries to open the door, bangs on it)* James! James, please come out! Something's wrong with Maude.

JAMES (as CHARLES) opens the door.

JAMES (as CHARLES): *(to MAUDE)*: This is my wife, Elvira. Elvira, this is Ruth.

ELVIRA: James?

JAMES (as CHARLES) shakes his head.

ELVIRA: *(glowering)* Charles...

JAMES (as CHARLES): You like me a bit better like this, don't you?

ELVIRA grabs JAMES and shakes him.

ELVIRA: Charles, you get out of him right now! Out!

JAMES (as CHARLES): That doesn't do anything to me. You're just hurting James.

MAUDE (as RUTH): You don't know about me?

ELVIRA: No, I don't know about you. Are you Ruth from the fucking bible?

MAUDE (as RUTH): *(to JAMES)* Why are they here?

JAMES (as CHARLES): They're conducting a seance.

MAUDE (as RUTH): A seance? Is that why...Hold on. Who is conducting a seance?

JAMES (as CHARLES): Just all your old friends.

MAUDE (as RUTH): *(she gets very close to him)* Who!

JAMES (as CHARLES): Well, James, Elvira, George, Virginia—

MAUDE (as RUTH): Where are they?

JAMES (as CHARLES): Over in the theatre—

MAUDE (as RUTH) turns to run, JAMES (as CHARLES) catches her.

JAMES (as CHARLES): What are you going to do?

MAUDE (as RUTH): Make her account for her sins.

JAMES (as RUTH): She pushed you. It wasn't an accident?

MAUDE (as RUTH): She took me away from my baby.

MAUDE (as RUTH) runs from JAMES and ELVIRA and to the theatre. MAUDE enters VIRGINIA & GEORGE's track at the top of page 33. Audience members can follow MAUDE or stay with ELVIRA and JAMES.

ELVIRA: What the hell was that about?

JAMES (as CHARLES): That was Ruth.

ELVIRA: Why do I get the feeling that in life, she was a violent redhead?

JAMES (as CHARLES): Always had a fondness for dramatic women. Especially redheads.

ELVIRA: What happened?

They laugh.

JAMES (as CHARLES): I did love you. Quite a lot.

ELVIRA: Oh, you weren't half bad—

JAMES (as CHARLES): Wasn't half good either.

Beat.

ELVIRA: She's Maude's mother, isn't she? The one who fell down the stairs. Over there (*points in the direction of the stairs*)

JAMES (as CHARLES) nods.

ELVIRA: That makes you her Daddy.

JAMES (as CHARLES) nods. The disembodied "Mommy, Mommy" is heard. JAMES turns and runs towards the theatre, ELVIRA runs after him. Tracks reconnect in PART TWO.

ACT ONE:

PART TWO: THE TRUTH

As VIRGINIA makes it to the door, it is thrown open again, and JAMES rushes in with ELVIRA right behind him.

VIRGINIA: James! I, uh, we'll meet you in the car. Maude isn't—\

JAMES (as CHARLES) catches VIRGINIA and stops her.

VIRGINIA: Let go of me, James.

JAMES (as CHARLES): Sit down, Virginia.

VIRGINIA: What are you doing? Let go of me. I'm taking Maude—

JAMES (as CHARLES): That's not Maude, and you know it.

VIRGINIA: Yes, she is.

JAMES (as CHARLES): No, she isn't.

JAMES (as CHARLES) tosses VIRGINIA back into the room.

GEORGE: What's going on? James, what are you doing?

JAMES (as CHARLES): You'll know soon enough.

VIRGINIA: This has gone too far. *(to GEORGE)* We're in danger, George. We need to go.

GEORGE: Is he possessed? Are they all possessed?

VIRGINIA: Yes, I think so. Hurry George!

VIRGINIA grabs George and heads toward the other exit, hidden behind the curtains on the other side of the room. MAUDE collapses, and a figure stretches out arms from behind the curtain and grabs hold of VIRGINIA. VIRGINIA screams.

VIRGINIA: Let go of me!

GEORGE goes to rescue VIRGINIA.

JAMES (as CHARLES): You killed her!

Everyone stops, but the arms still hold VIRGINIA tight.

GEORGE: Killed who? What are you doing, James?

JAMES (as CHARLES): Not James, big brother. Did you put her up to it? Was this your doing?

GEORGE: Charles, let her go. Who am I supposed to have helped her kill?

JAMES (as CHARLES): (*to VIRGINIA*) Do you know how I know?

VIRGINIA: George, please. He's got a hold of James, and he's going to kill me!

JAMES (as CHARLES): You read it. I know you read it. And it scared you.

VIRGINIA: Elvira, please help me.

ELVIRA: I'd like to see how this plays out.

VIRGINIA: You fucking bitch.

ELVIRA: I have never liked you more than in this moment, Guinevere.

VIRGINIA: (*to JAMES*) You don't know. You don't actually know anything. You guessed!

JAMES (as CHARLES): And I was right, wasn't I, pet?

VIRGINIA: I'm not malicious and hateful as you make me out to be. It was an accident!

MAUDE comes to groggily.

MAUDE: What happened?

VIRGINIA: Oh, Maude.

JAMES: Don't "Oh Maude" her. You killed her mother!

MAUDE: What? What's going on? (*gasps as she sees the arms holding VIRGINIA*) Ginny! (*to JAMES*) Get them off her!

VIRGINIA: I didn't mean to, Maude! I would never. I love you. I love you so much. You're like my own child.

JAMES (as CHARLES): But she isn't your child. What did Ruth do that made you so angry?

GEORGE: Hold on, Charles. What are you saying? Are you actually accusing Ginny of what? Killing Ruth? Ruth fell down the stairs. It was an accident! We all know that.

JAMES (as CHARLES): We don't all know that!

GEORGE: This...This is about...this is what your script was about? What, what were you trying to do?

JAMES (as CHARLES): What I succeeded in doing! We were the only ones in the theatre when Ruth died that night. Just a couple of punks, trying to get drunk and party, except that it wasn't so fun after all. Ruth didn't get drunk and fall down those stairs (*points towards the stairs just outside the room*). She was pushed by Virginia.

MAUDE: No, that's not true!

GEORGE: Why? Why would Ginny do that?

Again, the disembodied voice, "Mommy, mommy," is heard. The arms disappear from around VIRGINIA, and ELVIRA gasps.

ELVIRA (as RUTH): I asked you to watch her. I know that two-year-olds are difficult, can be so difficult.

GEORGE: /Ruth?

ELVIRA (as RUTH): You could have killed her! It was one fucking hour! I kept your secrets. I didn't care, if you wanted to fuck your brother (*looking quickly at GEORGE*) then I wasn't going to stop you, but I found her outside by herself.

VIRGINIA: I said I was sorry.

ELVIRA (as RUTH): She could have died! It was freezing. She was just a baby. My baby.

ELVIRA (as RUTH) goes over to MAUDE and holds her.

GEORGE: Ginny.

VIRGINIA: It was an accident.

GEORGE: What was an accident?

VIRGINIA: George. They were never going to leave us alone. She was going to tell them.

GEORGE: Who?

VIRGINIA: Everyone. Dad. I wasn't trying to hurt her. I didn't mean to. It was an accident. I pushed her. I did. I was so fucking angry, but I didn't–

GEORGE backs away.

VIRGINIA: I love you, George. Please. Please don't leave me.

Beat. VIRGINIA goes after JAMES (as CHARLES).

VIRGINIA: You fucker. You hateful, heinous pig! You were supposed to be dead!

VIRGINIA reaches for the candelabra and brings it up to smash it into JAMES' head, but GEORGE grabs her and the candelabra before she can do any harm.

GEORGE: Stop, Ginny! Charles is dead.

VIRGINIA buries her face in GEORGE's neck.

ELVIRA (as RUTH): *(goes to JAMES and strokes his face)* Oh, Charles. I'm so sorry, my love.

ELVIRA (as RUTH) takes his hand, and both ELVIRA and JAMES take one step towards the door and collapse. The curtains rustle. MAUDE looks at VIRGINIA and GEORGE and the prone figures of JAMES and ELVIRA. She steps over them and leaves the theatre. The door closes.

END OF PLAY