

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 right of the sofa and sits on the pouffe. MRS. BRADMAN sits on the right 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 center 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 upstage to the right side of the door. CHARLES to the left 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.)

Stop