

The Séance

a ten-minute play

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Characters

RUBY: A young woman

CHRISTIAN: Her older brother

MRS. WRIGHT: A medium

England. 1920s. The dark parlor of a home. The only light comes from candles burning on a round wooden table. RUBY, wearing black, and CHRISTIAN, in a tan plaid suit, take in the environment.

RUBY

Must they keep it so dark? It's positively frightening.

CHRISTIAN

Spirits don't appear in broad daylight, Ruby. They must be coaxed out of the shadows.

RUBY

And what do you know of it?

CHRISTIAN

This is not my first séance. I've seen candles rise into the air, heard knocking echo from the walls, watched musical instruments play themselves.

RUBY

Yes, Christian, all tricks played on you by keeping you in the dark. Figuratively and literally.

MRS. WRIGHT, a medium, appears, cloaked in purple.

MRS. WRIGHT

Your sister is right. Those were merely stage shows, not true mediums, but magicians. (to RUBY) However, your brother was also correct. Bright light inhibits communication with the other planes.

RUBY

How can you be sure we are siblings?

CHRISTIAN

Mrs. Wright is a highly regarded medium. I would expect no less. In fact, my expectations are substantial.

MRS. WRIGHT

You must discard your expectations. There is no certainty when dealing with spirits. Anything can and will happen. Here, tonight, you *will* speak to the dead. But you may not get the answers you desire. Please be seated.

RUBY

Christian, I think this is a mistake.

CHRISTIAN

Sit down, Ruby.

All three sit around the table.

MRS. WRIGHT

Let's begin. How recently did your loved one pass?

CHRISTIAN

She died just two weeks ago. We are both still grieving.

MRS. WRIGHT

And what would you like to say to your mother?

CHRISTIAN

(to RUBY) You see, Ruby? She knows it was mother.

RUBY

That's an obvious assumption. A brother and sister are clearly mourning a lost parent. And you said "she."

MRS. WRIGHT

We will only be able to reach your mother if we all open ourselves up to the spirit world. Let go of your doubts and disbelief. Do you not wish to speak with your mother?

RUBY

There is nothing I want more. If only it were possible.

MRS. WRIGHT

But it is. If you open your heart and your mind. I sense that you are quite closed off.

RUBY

(standing) Maybe it would be best if I go.

MRS. WRIGHT

The séance requires at least three to summon sufficient energy.

CHRISTIAN

(standing) Ruby, please. *(ushers her into a corner to talk to her privately)* This is important to me.

RUBY

I do not trust this woman.

CHRISTIAN

Do you trust me? Remember what mother said? About us?

RUBY

(laughs, despite herself) "Hate each other if you must, but look out for one another." You owe me for this.

CHRISTIAN and RUBY return to the table.

MRS. WRIGHT

Given her recent ascension, your mother likely remains on the first plane of the afterlife. I should be able to reach her, with your cooperation.

CHRISTIAN

Please. We have urgent questions we need to ask her.

MRS. WRIGHT

Take my hands. *(RUBY and CHRISTIAN each take one of MRS. WRIGHT's hands.)* All hands must be linked.

CHRISTIAN glares at RUBY, who reluctantly takes his hand.

MRS. WRIGHT

Close your eyes. *(they all do)* Empty your mind of all other thoughts. Imagine yourself in a dark room with just one candle burning. Focus on the candle. See it flicker. Then with a soft breath, blow it out. *(all the candles blow out)* There is only darkness. Only the void. You are now drifting in the first plane of the spirit world. Picture your mother's face and I will attempt to reach out to her.

Distant, echoey piano music is heard.

MRS. WRIGHT

Did your mother play the piano?

CHRISTIAN

Yes!

MRS. WRIGHT

She is close now. Concentrate. Show me her eyes, her cheekbones, the curve of her chin. Speak her name.

CHRISTIAN AND RUBY

Nora.

MRS. WRIGHT

Once more.

CHRISTIAN AND RUBY

Nora.

MRS. WRIGHT

Again!

CHRISTIAN AND RUBY

Nora!

MRS. WRIGHT

(opening her eyes sharply) There-

CHRISTIAN

Do you see her?

MRS. WRIGHT

Yes. She stands before me. You may open your eyes.

CHRISTIAN

Ask her why she denies me.

MRS. WRIGHT

She can hear you, Christian. She just can't speak to you directly. *(pause)* She says it is you who denies her.

CHRISTIAN

Nonsense. Why don't you love me anymore, mother? How could you leave us like this?

MRS. WRIGHT

She says you ask the wrong questions. She would like to speak with your sister.

RUBY

Me?

CHRISTIAN

Why? Why won't she speak with me?

RUBY

Christian...

CHRISTIAN

I'm her son!

The sound of the piano begins to fade.

MRS. WRIGHT

She's fading back into the light...

CHRISTIAN

Mother, talk to me! Tell me where it is!

The music is gone.

MRS. WRIGHT

I've lost her.

Whoosh! The candles mysteriously relight.

RUBY

Tell you where what is?

CHRISTIAN

Forget it.

RUBY

Tell you where what is?

CHRISTIAN

It's over! We lost her.

RUBY

No, you lost her. She didn't even want to talk to you. What did you do to her? What did you say to her that last night?

CHRISTIAN

I only asked her how we could go on without her.

RUBY

No, I see now. This is about the will.

CHRISTIAN

Of course, it's about the will! We deserve what's rightfully ours!

RUBY

You mean yours.

CHRISTIAN

Ours. I brought you here, didn't I?

RUBY

You needed a third person!

CHRISTIAN

This was pointless. (to MRS. WRIGHT) What do I owe you?

MRS. WRIGHT

There may be another way.

CHRISTIAN

Excuse me?

MRS. WRIGHT

I was unable to convince your mother to answer your questions in the spirit world, but if we could bring her down into the world of the living, we could trap her in a human body.

RUBY

You mean our mother is going to inhabit your body?

MRS. WRIGHT

No, Ruby. It must be somebody she knew while alive, a body she previously touched. It will have to be you.

RUBY

But-

MRS. WRIGHT

It's the only way your brother will be able to speak to your mother. And your mother will be able to tell him everything she feels.

RUBY

Everything?

MRS. WRIGHT

That's right. *(with a knowing look)* Do you understand what I'm asking of you, Ruby?

RUBY

I... think I do.

MRS. WRIGHT

And will you take on this challenge?

RUBY

(to CHRISTIAN) If this is what you want...

CHRISTIAN

It is.

RUBY

(to MRS. WRIGHT) What must I do?

MRS. WRIGHT

Please take hands again. Close your eyes, and return to the void. Now picture your mother. Good. Now Christian, picture your mother's face merging with your sister's.

RUBY

AHHHH!

CHRISTIAN

(opening his eyes) What? What's happening?

RUBY

I don't know! I don't- Where am I?

MRS. WRIGHT

Open your eyes, Nora. You're back.

CHRISTIAN

Mother!

RUBY

Christian, I... (*MRS. WRIGHT gives her a look*) I cannot believe that I can see you here before me.

CHRISTIAN

Is it really you, mother?

RUBY

Yes, my little boy.

CHRISTIAN

And Ruby... is she there, too?

RUBY

It's only me. But Chris, I told you I did not want to speak with you.

CHRISTIAN

I know... that we did not leave things in a good place.

RUBY

No. We did not.

CHRISTIAN

But I have changed my mind, mother. You were right to split the money evenly between Ruby and myself. I was not thinking clearly at the time.

RUBY

No, you were not.

CHRISTIAN

But without the will, Jeremiah will get everything. That man is not my father. It's not fair, mother!

RUBY

I'm dead, Christian! Is that fair? Did you treat your sister fairly?

CHRISTIAN

Ruby doesn't need money. She can just marry some rich fool. I was the first-born son! That money was my birthright! You owe it to me!

RUBY

(rising out of her chair, her voice low and echoey, bathed in a green pulsing glow) Enough! You will get NOTHING! You selfish brat, you will NEVER find the will! And I will be there with you, every night of your life, haunting your dreams, reminding you that you wasted our last conversation to grovel for money. NOW LEAVE THIS PLACE!

CHRISTIAN stumbles out of his chair.

CHRISTIAN

Mother, I'm sorry! Please!

RUBY

(echoing) GET OUT!

CHRISTIAN exits, terrified. The lights return to normal. RUBY sits with a sigh. MRS. WRIGHT laughs.

MRS. WRIGHT

You could become a fabulous medium.

RUBY

Just like you?

MRS. WRIGHT

No, not like me. Like the Fox sisters, smoke and mirrors, but no real spirits.

RUBY

You still insist that you are authentic? After that sound and light show?

MRS. WRIGHT

Whether or not you believe it, a glorious higher plane awaits us all, and if you are fortunate you will find your mother there.

RUBY

It is a pleasant thought. Well, I may not have been able to speak with my mother, but I must say the séance was, in fact, enlightening. What were the terms of payment you agreed on with Christian?

MRS. WRIGHT

Forget those. But... I would like ten percent.

RUBY

Ten percent of what?

MRS. WRIGHT

Your inheritance. Oh, yes, the will. You will find it under the drawer of Nora's vanity. There's a hidden compartment.

RUBY

But-

MRS. WRIGHT

And Ruby, your mother implores you to forgive Christian. No, that's not quite what she said. She actually said, "Hate each other if you must-"

RUBY

"-but look out for one another."

*RUBY exits, giving one last look at MRS. WRIGHT.
MRS. WRIGHT blows out the candles. End of play.*