VOILA

Written by
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THE CHARACTERS

THE BARON MULASCA, a paranormal medium
THEODORA, his beautiful assistant
REBECCA, a member of the audience (a planted actor)
AN OLD MAN

THE SETTING

An elegant sitting room.

As the audience enters, lights illuminate the stage. We are in an elegant sitting room, which appears to be from the early 20th century. A large round table sits at center stage, covered with a lush tablecloth. A candelabra sits on top. Three simple wooden chairs line the table. Classical music from the early 1900s plays, and ushers are dressed in old-fashioned suits.

A dark-colored rug lies beneath the table, taking up much of the stage. The walls are a deep red color, decorated with eerie black-and-white photographs, paintings, a tapestry. A fireplace sits upstage, behind the table, unlit. The mantel over it is covered with vases filled with flowers and other knickknacks, including a prominent metronome. A grandfather clock hangs on the wall over the mantel, its pendulum swinging. Next to the mantel is a handsome antique cabinet, large, its doors currently closed. On the other side of the mantel is a window, curtains partially drawn, with a light
shining on it as though from the moon. At stage L, there is a dresser with a large jug of water sitting on it.

Although the time period during which the play takes place is indiscriminate, this setting is meant to take us back to a time of sophisticated horror stories, moody séances, entertainments before the age of television and the multiplex.

Gradually, the eerie whistle of wind can be heard. Lights dim, leaving only a spotlight at center stage.

THEODORA enters through a door upstage, footsteps heavy in high heels. She is beautiful: immaculately made-up, hair perfectly styled, wearing a red dress with black stockings and long black gloves. She pauses dramatically before addressing the audience.

THEODORA
Ladies and gentlemen, what you are about to experience is not for the faint of heart. You will soon be in contact with the dead, face-to-face with ghosts that no longer walk the earth. Most of these spirits are benevolent, simply looking for some contact with the souls they left behind. Others, however, bear wicked intent; their only pleasure in the afterlife derives from terrifying those who still exist on this worldly plane. Before we begin, I must take a survey — for your own safety, I assure you. By a show of hands, who in the crowd has experienced a ghostly encounter before?

Presumably some in the crowd will raise their hands. Theodora may choose to improvise a response. She may even ask a random person to explain what happened.
THEODORA
(eventually)
And who among you considers all this paranormal nonsense a
ridiculous fantasy for the simpleminded?

Others, perhaps, will raise their hands.

THEODORA
Well, for all of you non-believers, I warn you to be on your
guard. For just when you’ve become certain that it’s all
make believe, these unpredictable spirits are most likely to
strike — and at that point, a chill on your spine or a cold
breath on your neck may spell your doom.

The lights rise on the rest of the stage.

THEODORA
Now, I’d like to introduce our maestro for the evening —
that medium beyond compare, who dialogues with the dead as
though it’s small talk over afternoon tea, the one and only
Baron Mulasca.

THE BARON MULASCA enters through a
door upstage, footsteps heavy in
large boots. He wears a dashing
suit: long, black coat with tails,
a handsome vest over a white high-
collared shirt, a matching
handkerchief in his front pocket.
His black hair is slicked back,
perfectly styled. He walks
downstage, in front of the table,
and stands before the audience.

Meanwhile, Theodora steps to the
mantel, grabs a long match, ignites
it, and begins lighting the candles
on the tabletop. After she lights
the candles, she blows out the
match, moves upstage, places it on
the mantel, and stands upstage R,
hands crossed in front of her.
Thank you, good evening.

And thank you for that warm welcome, Teddy. Ladies and gentlemen, how about my beautiful assistant, Theodora?

Teddy will be helping me out tonight, here to give support in case anything goes terribly wrong — and provide a pleasant visual distraction, I might add.

I am forever in your debt.

Don’t I know it.

And I, of course, am the Baron Mulasca. Surely you know my family name; we’re revered in this part of the country for our philanthropy. Hardly content to follow in my ancestors’ footsteps, however, I chose to pursue my passion for the paranormal, studying —

I’m sure these good people don’t need to hear the Baron Mulasca’s life story.

Perhaps you’re right. You’re here tonight, ladies and gentlemen, to observe a real-life séance: an attempt to communicate with the dead. I urge silence whenever possible, for any distraction may dispel the otherworldly forces that surround us. Some of you may have chirping, buzzing, shrieking digital devices in your pockets, but I’d like you to make sure they’re silenced — tonight, we’ll go back in time to another era, when magic was still possible and the laws of the universe remained mysterious. Now, I’m sure we have some skeptics in the audience, who assume that I’m a charlatan and everything I’m saying is simply mumbo-jumbo. Good. It is my aim to prove you wrong, to convince you beyond a doubt that ghostly spirits are no mere fantasy. So...

Suddenly, the candles on the table blow out, smoke rising into the
air. Mulasca notices, casting a
glance at Theodora.

MULASCA
That’s strange. Must have been a faulty wick.

THEODORA
Not the first time I’ve heard that.

MULASCA
Well, darling, relight the candles and we’ll begin.

Theodora grabs another match from
the mantel, strikes it against the
wall, and re-lights the candles.

MULASCA
These candles, by the way, are essential to our séance.
Certain herbs are well-known to conjure forces from beyond
the pale. If you detect a bitter scent tonight, it may well
be the balmony and mandrake burning before you.

Theodora has finished lighting the
candles; she blows out the match
and places it on the mantel.

MULASCA
(looking back at
her)
Thank you sweetheart.

Their glance lingers a moment too
long; she’s still playing her
assistant role, but there’s a trace
of disdain at this “sweetheart”
business.

MULASCA
Now, allow me to explain how I practice my art. You’ll
notice we have no “spirit boards” here, or Ouija boards as
you may know them. We have no use for these slumber party
diversions. Spirit boards are base and untrustworthy as
scientific implements, though some occultists may try to
convince you otherwise. Those spooky messages spelled out to
sorority girls from Satan himself are merely the result of
the “ideomotor response” of the people participating.
MULASCA (cont'd)  
(to Theodora)  
And as you know, Teddy, scientific legitimacy is my utmost concern.  

THEODORA  
But of course, sweetheart.  

MULASCA  
Instead, we communicate through a series of noises, thumps, raps on the walls and furniture. I ask as many yes-or-no questions as possible. This method of conversation is harder to fake, and has the added benefit of dramatic flair.  

(turning toward Theodora)  
In fact, I’ve told Theodora many times that if she hears a vigorous thumping in my dressing room before or after shows, not to worry — I’m simply conversing with gregarious spirits. Isn’t that right, Teddy?  

THEODORA  
Yes, but thankfully it’s never happened.  

MULASCA  
(moving upstage of the table, towards Theodora)  
I will also call upon my lovely Theodora to transcribe messages that I receive when I enter a trancelike state.  

(sleazily placing his hand against the small of her back)  
I trust my eager student has her chalkboard ready?  

Theodora grabs a small chalkboard from the mantel and shows it to the audience, forcing a smile; it’s currently blank, aside from some dusty eraser trails.  

MULASCA  
(to the audience)  
The words I say when I’m in such a state are not my own, and I usually have no memory of the messages that are given to me. Now, I must warn you this can be a dangerous occurrence, as the spirits of the dead can use my body to inflict physical harm, exploiting my natural strength and dominant physique.
MULASCA (cont'd)
(This elicits a mocking laugh from Theodora. Mulasca glances at her, then moves on dramatically, turning to the audience.)

If you fear for your safety, you must protect yourself and leave at once.

(after a pause, he moves to the large cabinet upstage)

Finally, this armoire is not just for decoration.

(to Teddy)
You’ve heard of “materialization,” haven’t you, Teddy?

THEODORA
Of course. The sudden, paranormal —

MULASCA
— paranormal appearance of matter from unknown sources, defying —

THEODORA
— defying explanation. The most notable example, perhaps, being a séance held by Frau Anna Rotwang in Berlin in 1902, during which a swarm of bees materialized out of nowhere and stung everyone in attendance.

MULASCA
(impressed)
Well done. Not just a pretty face after all.

(he opens the armoire door)

In this case, you can see there is nothing in the cabinet.

(raps on the sides, pulls out the drawers)

There are no wires, hidden panels, or trapdoors. And yet, spirits have been known to leave objects behind as a sort of peace offering — or something more sinister. I urge you to keep an eye on this cabinet throughout the séance, and if you see it begin to shake with a mighty tremor...well, let’s hope the ghosts have left us with a peaceful offering.

He closes the armoire with a flourish and steps to center stage, addressing the audience.
MULASCA

Now, on with our experiment. First, I need a volunteer from the audience. Will someone join me onstage?

Presumably some people in the crowd will raise their hand; if not, Mulasca will simply select an audience member. This should be an actual random person from the crowd. Theodora helps the person onto the stage and she guides him/her onto the seat at stage R.

MULASCA
(as he takes the seat across from the volunteer)

Thank you, sir/madam. May I ask your name?

VOLUNTEER
(gives name)

MULASCA

Name, you’re a very brave soul coming up here tonight. How do you feel about conversing with the paranormal?

The volunteer gives an answer.
Mulasca improvises a response.

MULASCA
(eventually)

What I’m going to do is reach out to someone from your past — someone you’ve lost. But I want you to tell me nothing about them. Any kind of preconceived image may cloud my ability to communicate with the unseen spirits in the room at this very moment. I just want you to think about them; focus on a vivid memory you shared. Try to remember their scent, the touch of their hand, a particular cadence to their voice. A broad picture of them in your mind won’t do; I want you to think of a small, intimate detail, a scar or birthmark or your favorite freckle. Are you comfortable doing that?

The volunteer answers. Hopefully he or she is comfortable playing along, especially given the campy nature of the play so far. If not, Mulasca will either thank them and
send them back to their seat, or console the volunteer and improvise something about how communicating with a deceased love one can bring them closer together, set their mind at ease, provide closure, etc. This will require some sensitivity and judgment on the actor’s part.

If the volunteer agrees, or if/when a new volunteer takes their place, Mulasca resumes.

MULASCA
Now. On with the show. Teddy, will you start the metronome?

She activates a metronome placed on the center of the mantel. Its rhythmic clicking begins.

MULASCA
(speaking to the volunteer)
It’s time for us to join hands. This link must not be broken during the séance.

He places both arms on the table, palms up. The volunteer places their hands on Mulasca’s.

MULASCA
Now I must ask for complete silence. I’ll begin with a Latin invocation, used by witches in medieval times to conjure spirits.

All is quiet, except for the ticking of the metronome.

MULASCA
Sie spiritus ego tibi ostendere et venerunt usque! Spirits of the dead, be not afraid. We only want to speak to you and form a union with us, the living. Follow my voice and lift aside the veil of death to join our earthly plane once more.
A long pause. Silence. The metronome ticks.

MULASCA
Yes...I definitely feel a presence here. A benevolent presence. Tell me...is there someone joining us? Rap once for yes.

A long pause.

MULASCA
Is there a spirit joining us? Rap once for yes.

A long pause — then a loud, definite rap on the wall by the fireplace. Theodora gives no reaction.

MULASCA
Welcome. This is a friendly place, a doorway between two worlds. We only want to speak with you. Do you wish to speak with us?

A long pause.

MULASCA
Will you speak with us? Rap once for yes, twice for no.

At last, another rap on the wall.

MULASCA
Excellent. Spirit, I want you to look around this place. Feel my energy, and that of the soul across from me. The name of this person is Name. Can you feel our presence? Rap once for yes, twice for no.

After another pause, there is a light rap on a different part of the wall.
MULASCA
Good. Spirit, I want you to come close. Take a good look at Name. Do you recognize this person from another life?

Even before he finishes speaking, there is a very loud rap at another part of the wall.

MULASCA
(clears his throat; to the volunteer, gently)
Are you alright? Do you feel anything out of the ordinary?

The volunteer responds, presumably that they don’t feel any kind of presence. Mulasca improvises a response. Throughout this exchange, a scent becomes apparent – the scent of perfume.

MULASCA
(eventually)
Spirit, I want you to communicate through me. If there’s anything you want to say, enter me now and use my body to speak. I am an open vessel.

No sound but the metronome and a low wind. Theodora holds the chalkboard, ready to write his words.

MULASCA
Enter me now. Speak through me.
(after a pause)
Yes, a spirit has made contact. They know you well. Their name, I sense...starts with an ‘N’...could that be?

The volunteer responds. Perhaps (likely) they will say no. Or that it could be true; they might say a name. If they don’t say a name, Mulasca will throw out a few names: “Natalie? Natasha? Nancy?”
Eventually, Mulasca will move on regardless.
MULASCA  
(eventually) 
They do have a message for you, Name of Volunteer. They’re telling you not to be frightened. They want you to know that you are not alone and they continue to watch over you. 

After a pause, Mulasca’s hands begin to tremble, still holding the volunteer’s hands. He speaks somewhat oddly this time, unevenly, laboriously. 

MULASCA  
Yes...I can feel them speaking through me. They want to tell you... 

His body begins to shake. His voice is even more unnatural and frightening. Theodora writes the words on the slate behind him. 

MULASCA  
‘Remember the waves on the shore in winter.’ ‘Remember the waves on the shore in winter.’ ‘Remember the waves on the shore in winter.’ 

Suddenly, Mulasca removes his hands from the volunteer’s and flings backward, as though thrown by an invisible force. His chair clatters to the stage. He looks around, dazed. Theodora goes to him, helping him up and brushing him off. All of this is done with great flair and showmanship. 

MULASCA  
(gathering his senses)  
Well...I believe we made contact. Theodora, was there a message? 

THEODORA  
Yes, Baron.
THEODORA (cont'd)
(she shows the chalkboard to him and to the audience)
'Remember the waves on the shore in winter.'

MULASCA
Hmm...remember the waves...
(to the volunteer, walking towards them)
Does that mean anything to you?

The volunteer presumably says no. Mulasca improvises a response.

MULASCA
Perhaps the spirit was confused. It can be difficult, sometimes, for ghosts to know which human presence they’re contacting.

(helping the volunteer up, if they’re still seated, and shaking their hand)
Thank you for joining us in any case. You were a brave soul and I hope you felt some kind of connection here tonight. Please take a seat.

The volunteer sits. Theodora stops the metronome. Mulasca turns to Theodora and again touches the small of her back; she moves away slightly.

MULASCA
Well that’s a start, Teddy. At least we know we’re not alone. What’s more, I don’t think this...Nancy or Natasha was the only spirit among us. I believe there are others who want to make contact. Could you feel it, Teddy?

THEODORA
I could, Baron. In fact, I...I’m hesitant to say this, but I felt a presence that made me uncomfortable. Frightened. I don’t think there are only good spirits joining us tonight.

There is a long pause. Mulasca seems taken aback, as though this
response was not planned. But he regains his composure.

MULASCA
Come now, sweetheart, I remind you you’re in the hands of a professional. Rest assured, we will proceed with the utmost caution. If you’ll clear the slate, we’ll bring another volunteer onstage and continue with the experiment.

Theodora moves upstage to the mantel, where she grabs a rag and clears the slate. Meanwhile, Mulasca moves downstage center.

MULASCA
So then. Who else has a desire to commune with the other side?

Presumably some other volunteers in the audience will raise their hand. However, Mulasca selects an actor planted in the crowd — a character named REBECCA in her mid-to-late 20s. As Theodora clears the slate, Mulasca helps Rebecca onstage, where they stand downstage center.

MULASCA
Thank you. So many brave souls in attendance tonight. May I ask your name?

REBECCA
Rebecca.

MULASCA
Ah, Rebecca! (taking on a grave voice) ‘Last night I dreamt of Manderley again…’

What?

MULASCA
Nothing. Before your time. Are you nervous about contacting spirits from beyond?
REBECCA
Well...it’s a good nervous, yeah.

MULASCA
How so?

REBECCA
We just don’t know what’s going to happen, right? I’m not scared, though. I’m excited.

MULASCA
Great. Well, Rebecca, this will go much like our previous experiment, although I’d like to try something different this time. You see this cabinet at the end of the mantel here?

REBECCA
Yes.

MULASCA
Perhaps you remember from earlier, we use this cabinet for —

REBECCA
Materialization.

MULASCA
That’s right! Someone’s been paying attention. Materialization or “apports” — the paranormal transference of a physical article from one place to another.

(he opens the cabinet door)

Rebecca, please take a good look inside. Feel around. Give it a good whack, you don’t mind, do you?

(she does all these things as he tells her)

Do you feel any secret panels or trapdoors?

REBECCA
No.

MULASCA
Perfect. This is no ordinary piece of furniture, Rebecca. Blessed by holy men, anointed with magical herbs and oils known to have mystical properties, this is a magnet for otherworldly forces — a lighthouse beckoning through the fog of the afterlife. Now, I’m going to lock this door.

(he does so, closing and locking it with a padlock, as he continues)

And we’re not going to just communicate with someone you’ve lost. We’re going to ask them for an offering. Something
from their past that the spirit will transport inside of this locked cabinet, using the inexplicable gifts that we, the living, cannot comprehend. Do you want to give it a try?

REBECCA
Um...sure, I guess.

MULASCA
Excellent. Again, I will reach out to someone from your past — someone you’ve lost and hope to reconnect with. Think about them very carefully, and try to remember a beloved item familiar to you and them. Something that you hope to see materialize in this cabinet. Do you have someone in mind?

REBECCA
Yes, actually. I’m sad to say my —

MULASCA
(holding up his hand to stop her)
Please, tell me no more. Expecting a visit from a particular spirit may preclude others from joining us.

REBECCA
I really do need to tell you. It’s important for my safety.

MULASCA
I’m sorry, miss, but that’s not how it’s done. I do have years of experience, and interfering with a professional séance —

THEODORA
Oh come now, Baron, I’m sure a medium such as yourself can operate under any number of conditions.

REBECCA
I really wouldn’t insist if it wasn’t important to me.

MULASCA
(flustered)
Hm. I suppose I can’t say no to that, can I?

REBECCA
Thank you.

MULASCA
Yes, alright.

REBECCA
It’s a pretty tragic story. My father, he...he was an awful man. I was scared of him, growing up. My mother was, too. He would hurt her a lot, physically and...in other ways. He
forced her to do things she didn’t want to do. I remember, I would hide in the closet, shut off the lights, cover my ears so hard they hurt, but still I could hear them. Hear my mother screaming.

MULASCA
Rebecca, this is very private information. You don’t —

REBECCA
Please, I need to. She never left him during all those years. She said she still loved him, remembered the man he was when they first met...but I don’t believe her. I think she was scared of what would happen. He said he would kill me if she tried to leave. If she took me out of the house he would track us down and things would get worse then, he told us. He never really did anything to me — at least, he didn’t leave any physical scars — but he tried. I would lock myself in my room all night, moving my dresser in front of the door, or leave home for days at a time, staying with friends. I remember, when I was eight years old, there was a doll that I wanted for Christmas, more than anything in the world. One of those Raggedy Ann dolls, with the red hair and the little apron, you remember? My mom saved up for months and bought it for me, and on Christmas morning, when I opened that present, I was the happiest girl in the world. It was one of the only times in my life that I was really, completely happy. But then my dad would use it to try to trick me. He would steal it from my room and say I could only get it back if I...did things for him. My mom would try to force him to give it back, and then he just took out his anger on her. I had to learn to give her up, my new doll, and forget that I ever had her. That’s what he was like, my father — a lesson in pain and loss. Finally, just a few months ago...my mom had enough. I wasn’t living there at the time, I moved out as soon as I turned 18. But one night, she told me later, he was even drunker than usual. He tried to force himself on her, which was nothing new. He tried to tie her to the bed. But she was ready this time — she was hiding a knife under her dress. She stabbed him 27 times, in the chest and stomach. Then she called the cops and told them, very calmly, what she had done. She was still covered in blood when they found her. She’s in a home now, a...mental institution. But I still think, after all this time, she finally triumphed over him.

THEODORA
(after a long pause)
Rebecca, that’s...no one can understand what you went through. I’m so sorry that happened to you.

REBECCA
It happens all the time. That’s the sad thing.
Think of all the other women out there, trapped by some monster who does whatever it takes to make himself feel powerful.

MULASCA
Are you sure you’re comfortable going on? Really, we can call everything off if you’re —

REBECCA
No, no, I have to. You see...the story’s not over. For the last three months, I’ve still been scared, every moment, every day. I get this feeling that I’m not alone. Someone or something is watching me. I wake up sometimes and things are moved around in my apartment, my mirror is shattered or the teakettle’s boiling. I hear voices sometimes. I don’t think I’ve really slept in weeks. I’ve started wandering outside all night until I can’t walk anymore, and then it’s morning and I finally collapse from exhaustion. Even now, I think my father is haunting me. He couldn’t finish the job in life, so he’s trying to do it in death. I need your help, Baron. I need you to find out what’s happening to me.

MULASCA
(after another long pause)
I want to help, of course. Perhaps under different circumstances, though. Without an audience present...I don’t want to endanger them.

THEODORA
Baron, if there was ever an important time for you to practice your art, it’s right now.

MULASCA
(clearing his throat uncomfortably)
But there really should be more than one medium here. Malevolent spirits can be hard to control, sometimes, and even harder to exorcize...

THEODORA
Are you really going to make this poor woman leave here tonight without doing your best to help her?

MULASCA
I suppose you’re right. That’s my Theodora, always holding me to a high standard. (to Rebecca)
Rebecca, if you’re sure you want to proceed, I will try to work my magic.
REBECCA
Thank you. I knew you would.

MULASCA
Okay. Start the metronome, Teddy.
(She does, then stands L of the mantel. Mulasca’s voice seems shaky, unsteady.)

Rebecca, I need you to concentrate very hard on someone from...well, I guess you already are. Okay then.
(he places his palms face-up on the table)

Again, it’s very important that we do not break contact during the séance. Place your hands over mine.
(Rebecca does)
I ask for total silence from the audience. I will now begin the incantation, inviting any lingering spirits to join us.
(clears his throat)

Sie spiritus ego tibi ostendere et venerunt usque! Sie spiritus ego tibi ostendere et venerunt usque! Spirits of the dead, be not afraid. We only want to speak with you. Follow my voice and lift aside the veil of death.

A long pause. Silence. The metronome ticks.

MULASCA
Hm...I don’t feel anything at the moment. Perhaps he’s shy.

THEODORA
Or clever.

MULASCA
(clears throat)
I’ll try another invocation. See if that brings him out of the woodwork. ‘I conjure thee, spirit, to come and show thyself, without deformity or guile from Casmiel’s title. Lift aside the veil of death and make yourself known.’

Another long pause.

MULASCA
Well, some spirits are more difficult than others. I’m afraid there’s nothing in our —
The metronome stops. Suddenly. All three of them look at it. A crash of thunder and lightning erupts.

THEODORA
You were saying?

MULASCA
Is there a presence joining us? If there is a spirit here in our midst, rap once for ye —

Before he even finishes, there is a loud, single rap by the mantel. The walls shudder. All three onstage jump. Theodora moves away, slightly, towards Rebecca.

MULASCA
Right then. Uh, welcome. Tell me, spirit, do you know this person sitting across from me? Her name is Rebecca.

There is another single rap — more like a long scratching sound that seems to come from the walls.

MULASCA
(swallowing hard)
Okay. That’s...good. Tell me, spirit, do you want to speak with us?

Another loud rap.

MULASCA
Alright. Uhh...please, spirit, we need to know...are you a benevolent presence?

A long pause. Then, softer but more menacing, two definite knocks on the wall near the fireplace.
MULASCA
(more quietly, to
Theodora and
Rebecca)
I really should insist, for your own safety, that we have
more mediums here, law enforcement perhaps. This isn’t the
kind of thing you want to trifle —

Before he finishes the sentence,
the large jug of water on the
dresser at stage L flies off,
crashing onto the floor, water and
glass going everywhere. Mulasca
leaps to his feet, looking at it in
amazement. Theodora, almost as
shocked, stumbles backward. Rebecca
remains seated.

REBECCA
Baron, I thought we weren’t supposed to break the
connection...

MULASCA
(ignoring her; to
himself)
This isn’t how it’s supposed to go!
(to the walls,
ceiling, nothing in
particular)
Look here...I mean, listen, spirit, we only want to talk to
you. Learn who you are and what prevents you from going to
the other side. Do you want to tell us?

A loud rap.

MULASCA
Well. Let’s keep it civilized then, shall we?

THEODORA
Just like the Baron - scolding a ghost for having bad
manners.

MULASCA
(stammering, to
Rebecca and
Theodora)
So, ladies, I, um...well, I want to caution you, now...
having a conversation with this guest of ours will be no
easy task. I fear we’re at the spirit’s mercy. We’ll only learn whatever it wants to tell us.

THEODORA
Perhaps it can speak through you?

MULASCA
I’m sorry?

THEODORA
You demonstrated your prowess before, Baron. Few mediums are as capable as you at providing a vessel for spirits, friendly or not, to communicate with the living.

MULASCA
(laughing uneasily)
Well, these are somewhat different circumstances. This phantom doesn’t seem willing to play nice. It could be very dangerous to allow it to possess me.

THEODORA
Any more dangerous than allowing it to torment Rebecca after she leaves here tonight?

REBECCA
No, I understand...I don’t want to endanger anyone. Certainly not the Baron.

THEODORA
But it comes with the territory, doesn’t it, Baron? All in a day’s work.

There’s a long, tense silence. Even the spirit is quiet. Finally, the Baron, with an exaggerated sigh, sits back down at the table.

MULASCA
I’ll repeat what I said before: I’ll do what I can.

REBECCA
Thank you, Baron. I’m grateful.

He slowly, uneasily places his hands on the table, palms up. Rebecca places hers face-down over them. Theodora stands behind them.
MULASCA
Intrubus mihi spiritus. Ego ostum in abyssum irent. Spirit, I want you to communicate through me. If there’s anything you want to say, enter me now and use my body to speak. I am an open vessel.

No answer. A long silence, interrupted by a crack of thunder.

MULASCA
Enter me now. Speak through m —

He is interrupted by a long, shrill, high-pitched sound, like nails being dragged over a chalkboard. They all look around, confused. Theodora notices something on the mantel and steps back in fright.

THEODORA
Would you look at this...

MULASCA
What is it?

THEODORA
The chalk. It’s moving on its own. I think our visitor is leaving us a message.

The shrieking sound continues, mixed with the roar of thunder. At last, the sound stops. Theodora picks up the slate and shows it to Mulasca, Rebecca, and the audience. In shaky lettering, it reads: GIVE HER TO ME.

THEODORA
(reading aloud)
Give her to me...

MULASCA
This doesn’t make any sense.
Rebecca starts crying, softly.
Theodora walks to her side, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder.

THEODORA
Don’t worry, we’re not gonna let that happen.

MULASCA
(mustering a semblance of strength)
Well look, spirit, that’s not possible. Why don’t you tell us who you are, what happened to you, and we can —

Suddenly, the slate flies out of Theodora’s hand, crashing onto the floor. There’s another peal of thunder, which transitions into something like a creaking sound, then a low, gravelly, rasping moan. Almost imperceptibly, the moan becomes a voice, coming from every direction. The voice is low, distorted, eerie — an inhuman voice.

VOICE
I am the man become death. I am the one who spells your doom. I am the tide that cannot be stopped. I will control all that you are.

A tense silence. Theodora tries to break it.

THEODORA
Oh, is that all?

MULASCA
Do you recognize the voice, Rebecca?

REBECCA
Well...not exactly. It sounds like my father, but this is something else. A different kind of evil.

THEODORA
They all go back to the same thing, though, don’t they?
THEODORA (cont'd)
(to Mulasca)
Baron, isn’t there some kind of spell we can try? An invocation?

MULASCA
(clearing his throat; trying to hide his fear)
There is an exorcism spell that might work. It may not be powerful enough for a spirit like this, but...

REBECCA
Anything. Please.

MULASCA
Alright.

(he lifts his right hand, offering it to Theodora)
Teddy, darling, will you join the circle? We need it to be as strong as possible.

Theodora stands upstage of the table, holding Mulasca and Rebecca’s hands. Mulasca takes a deep breath. The candles continue to burn; there’s a roar of thunder and a crash of lightning, causing a strobe of light visible through the windows.

MULASCA
Terrae, cantata Deo, psallite Cernunnos, Regna terrae, cantata Dea psallite Aradia.

Another low, eerie, monstrous moan rings through the room.

MULASCA
Caeli Deus, Deus terrae, humiliter majestati gloriae tuae supplicamus.

Now, an evil laugh joins the moaning sound, eventually drowning it out. Mulasca continues, raising his voice, desperate.
MULASCA
Ut ab omni infernalium spirituum potestate, Laqueo, deception nequitia...

The laugh, odd and inhuman, seemingly slowed-down and played in reverse, has grown even louder than Mulasca’s words.

THEODORA
(shouting)
He’s mocking you!

MULASCA
(angrily rising from his chair and shouting to nothing)
Omnis fallaciae, libera nos, dominates.

REBECCA
Baron, you’re breaking the circle...

MULASCA
Exorcizamus omnis immundus spiritus —

VOICE
(as the laugh ends)
Stupid, impotent man. Your words mean nothing.

MULASCA
Okay, now I’m getting mad. No one upstages the Baron Mulasca.

(he grabs a candle and begins pacing the stage, agitated)
Omnis satanica potestas, omnis incursio, infernalis adversarii, omnis legio, omnis —

At this point he passes by the window stage R of the mantel. At that very moment, thunder roars and lightning strikes. A flash of light outside the window reveals AN OLD MAN — ghostly, foreboding, wearing a black coat, with a shock of bright white hair — staring inside. Mulasca screams, drops the candle, and jumps backwards, falling to the ground.
REBECCA
It’s him! Father...

She breaks down into tears, burying her head in her hands. The flash of light subsides and the figure is gone. Theodora goes to Mulasca, bending down.

THEODORA
Are you okay?

MULASCA
This doesn’t make any fucking sense.

THEODORA
You’ve said it yourself, Baron. This type of thing doesn’t always follow a script.

He gets up, brushes himself off. By this point, he’s clearly scared and confused but trying to hide it.

MULASCA
Yes. I’ve really had to ply my trade tonight. Now, though, I must insist that we bring in law enforcement, as well as more paranormal investigators, to deal with this spirit. I’ve never faced anything like this before.

THEODORA
Really, the Baron Mulasca has never confronted such a presence? I don’t believe it —

MULASCA
(interrupting her)
For everyone’s safety, I don’t think we can go on.

THEODORA
Now that we know something is after Rebecca. Now that the danger is imminent and we can’t rely on this thing to be patient and wait until we have more capable reinforcements.

MULASCA
No need to be insulting, Teddy. I think it’s in everyone’s best interests.

THEODORA
There are other spells, other invocations. We’ll relight the candles and —
MULASCA
Other spells for exorcizing an evil spirit? Not that I can think of...

THEODORA
Really, you can’t remember any others from your Fisher Price Magic Spell Kit?

As their argument gets louder, more heated and intense, the cabinet upstage begins to shake—quietly, slightly at first. Mulasca and Theodora don’t notice.

MULASCA
Teddy, love, where is this animosity coming from? I’ve never...

THEODORA
You’ve never what? This animosity, Baron, has been building for the last two years I’ve worked under you. Every night, having to deal with your ineptitude. Having to deal with you groping and harassing me. Darling this, sweetheart that. Dressing me up in your little skirts and gloves and having me do your bidding.

MULASCA
Teddy...

Rebecca has noticed the cabinet shaking and tries to get their attention.

REBECCA
Uhh, I think the —

THEODORA
Do you have any idea what it’s like to work for someone so clueless, yet somehow so arrogant? When my talents, my knowledge of the occult, have always been vastly superior to yours.

REBECCA
Please, there’s —

THEODORA
You are the very image of mediocrity run amok. You would be nowhere in life if you weren’t born with an extra
chromosome. You only treat this as a sideshow, a way to make a quick buck —

MULASCA
(frantically addressing the audience)

Uhh, please pay no attention to her, she’s clearly hysterical...

THEODORA
— but I know how real and dangerous this can all be.

REBECCA
Hey! There’s something happening here.

Finally, Theodora and Mulasca notice that the cabinet is shaking — more violently now. The legs are jostling, it’s shaking the walls. Theodora and Mulasca move hesitantly towards it, Teddy in front. When they’re a step away, the cabinet suddenly stops. All is silent.

MULASCA
Step aside.

THEODORA
Are you kidding me? After everything I said, you’re still —

MULASCA
I need to unlock it.

Theodora realizes that Mulasca is holding the key to the padlock. Begrudgingly, she moves aside. Mulasca opens the door, trembling. Inside of the cabinet is a Raggedy Ann doll, blank-faced, unsettling. He reaches in, grabs it by the neck and holds it out to the audience, gazing at it in confusion.

Rebecca screams again, her traumatic past coming back to her in a rush. She scrambles beneath the table and curls up in the fetal position. Theodora walks to the
table, leans down, and comforts Rebecca.

The doll begins to bleed: bright red blood seeping out of the fabric, running down its face and body, and all over Mulasca’s hand. After he stares at it and realizes what is happening, he drops it to the ground, where it is illuminated with a red spotlight.

MULASCA
This is not. How it’s supposed. To go.
(in Theodora’s direction)
Any bright ideas, Theodora?

She rises from under the table, looking at Mulasca. Throughout her following dialogue, she calmly picks up the candle that Mulasca had dropped earlier, puts it back on the table, gets a long match from the mantel and relights it, and restarts the metronome.

THEODORA
Yes, actually. A spell you’ve likely never had a reason to cast before. Protection against the evil and treachery of men. I know it well.

She moves downstage R, closing her eyes. She is illuminated by a spotlight. Calmly, she starts chanting, hands slowly rising in front of her, palms-up. Throughout the incantation, the cabinet starts to shake again. There are loud poundings on the wall; the lights in the room start to flicker wildly, except for the spotlight on Theodora. All of this starts slowly and quickly rises in pace.

THEODORA
Ab insidiis diabolic, libera nos, dominates, ut coven tuam secura tibi libertate...
MULASCA
(interrupting)
This is highly irregular, Teddy, these things should be left to the professionals.

THEODORA
...servire facias, te rogamus, audi nos! Ut inimicos sanctae circulae...

MULASCA
Please, Teddy, you’re going to get hurt! You don’t know what you’re doing...

THEODORA
...humiliare digneris, te rogamus, audi nos! Terribilis Deus Sanctuario suo, cernunnos...

MULASCA
It’s very quaint of you to try, really, but —

THEODORA
...ipse truderit virtutem plebi Suae. Benedictus Deus, Gloria Patri, Benedictus Dea, Matri Gloria!

MULASCA
Teddy, you’re making a fool out of —

By this time, Mulasca has reached upstage center, in front of the mantel and the grandfather clock on the wall. As the walls shake violently, they force the clock to come dislodged; it falls and hits Mulasca on the head, knocking him out. He crumbles to the ground.

Theodora’s spell has ended. Everything silences itself. The furniture stops shaking, the walls stop pounding, the lights go back to normal. The patter of rain can be heard outside. There is a long moment of peace as Theodora opens her eyes and looks around. Rebecca hesitantly emerges from under the table and walks to Theodora.

THEODORA
Are you alright?
REBECCA
Yes, I think so.

THEODORA
He’s gone for now. But I don’t think it’s permanent. I’m afraid the Baron was right — this spirit was too strong for us to confront by ourselves.

REBECCA
You’ve given me hope at least that there might be an end to all this. That’s more than I’ve ever had.

She hugs Theodora, unexpectedly.
After a long embrace, they part.

THEODORA
Do you have a way of getting home? Should I call you a ride?

REBECCA
Um...yeah, that would be great, thanks. I don’t think I’m ready to take the bus right now.

THEODORA
Of course.

(she looks at the Baron, knocked out behind the table, immobile)

Look at him. That’s about as useful as he’s ever been.

REBECCA
Poor guy.

THEODORA
Yeah, poor guy. I’ll call an ambulance. Why don’t you rest up? There’s a side room over here.

(she points offstage R)

I’ll let you know when the Lyft gets here.

REBECCA
Okay. Thank you...for everything.

Rebecca exits through a door stage R. Theodora faces the audience, as though suddenly reminded that they’re there.
THEODORA
So, uh...our evening didn’t go exactly as planned. I’m sorry you had to witness that. If nothing else, it’s a reminder that the forces of the beyond are nothing to trifle with. (she looks back at the Baron)
Especially if you don’t know what the hell you’re doing. Don’t worry, he’ll be okay. Whether or not I’ll be here next time to make him look good is another question. One way or another, I hope you were entertained. And if you leave here tonight and feel a sinister presence following you on your way home - well, take a deep breath, hold your loved ones close, and say a little prayer for the dead. Thank you and good night.

She exits stage R. The lights dim onstage. Though the crowd may applaud at this point (hopefully), the sound of rain continues to fall, and no lights come onstage for the curtain call. When the applause dies down, lights come up on a small room at stage R; this part of the stage has been dark throughout the play.

As lights come up, Rebecca is lying on a small cot, her back to the audience. Theodora opens the door and knocks on it.

THEODORA
Knock knock.

Rebecca rises from the cot, collecting herself.

REBECCA
So that’s curtains?

THEODORA
Yes ma’am.

REBECCA
(clapping playfully)

Brava!

Smiling, Theodora curtsies.
THEODORA
Thanks again, Becca. I don’t think I could have done it without you.

REBECCA
How do you think it went?

THEODORA
I think it went smashingly well. I can’t tell you how gratifying it was to see that man powerless and humiliated and shaking with fear.

REBECCA
You don’t think it was too much?

THEODORA
Too much? Every day working for him has been a nightmare. The entitlement, the chauvinism. Every day, a hand on my back or a pinch on my ass. ‘Just stand there and look pretty. I’ll tell you what to do.’ No, I don’t think it was too much. Who knows? Maybe I’ll get my own show now.

REBECCA
Well, hopefully he learned a lesson or two.

THEODORA
I think he learned a lesson he’ll never forget.

REBECCA
It was one of the stranger performances I’ve given onstage, but you’re right, it was...weirdly satisfying.

THEODORA
And our stagehands did great. All those rehearsals paid off in the end. The trapdoors and hidden wires and speakers and all that. I almost fainted when the cabinet started to shake.

REBECCA
(laughing)
Me too.

THEODORA
It’s sad that it took all this to get the point across. But men like that require a little added emphasis.

Theodora’s phone beeps in her pocket. She takes it out and looks at the screen.
THEODORA
That’s your ride. Are you sure you’re okay getting home?

REBECCA
(grabbing her coat from a coatrack)
Yeah, I’ll be fine. Teddy?

THEODORA
Yeah?

REBECCA
It’s weird...I know that was all made up, brilliantly conceived and executed by you, but I still can’t help but feel that there’s something else here. Listening. Watching us. Something not quite right.

THEODORA
(laughing, but somewhat uneasily)
You’re letting things get to you. I believe in some of this stuff, Becca, but there are no malevolent spirits out there. There’s nothing going bump in the night that’s watching you from the beyond. Trust me.

REBECCA
Yeah, I know. That was maybe a little too convincing, I guess.

THEODORA
(grabbing Rebecca’s elbow affectionately)
The wonders of stagecraft at work.

A car blares its horn from outside.
Rebecca pulls her coat around her.

REBECCA
Yeah...if only everything went as smoothly in real life. Well, good night. I’ll see you soon.
(as she’s pulling open the door to leave)
Teddy, I should have asked – will you be okay?

Theodora opens her mouth to answer – but before she can, there are two loud, definite knocks from
the wall. They both turn to look in fright. Lights fall.

THE END