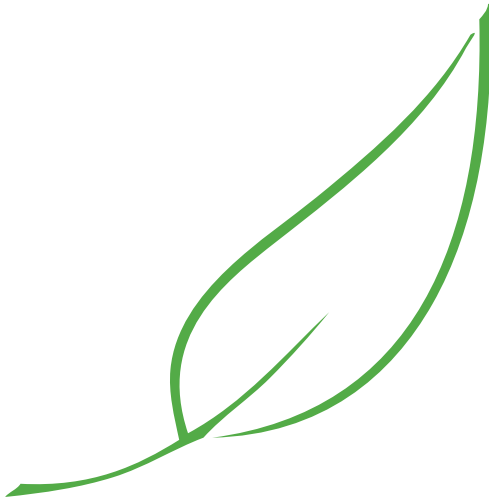


Off With His Head

By Frank V. Priore



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SYNOPSIS: Charlatan Madame Bali runs a string of franchised sorcery schools with her daughter Tabby, a true believer in the ancient art. Tabby continually warns her mother that one day the powers that be would exact their revenge for her mercenary pursuits. When Madame Bali organizes a seance for Carol Preston and four of her friends, Carol's husband, Harry, comes home to find three queens and a pair of kings on his hands. Madame Bali conjured up the spirits of Queen Victoria, Marie Antoinette, Cleopatra, Henry VIII, and King Solomon and the royal wraiths refuse to leave their hosts. While Madame Bali is searching for a metaphysical explanation for the highly successful seance, the truth behind the supernatural event is revealed in a supermundane finish.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 females, 5 males, 2 either)

CAROL PRESTON (f)	(139 LINES)
HARRY PRESTON (m)	(317 LINES)
MADAME BALI (f)	(205 LINES)
TABBY (f)	(225 LINES)
BRIAN McFELD (m)	(61 LINES)
BILL MULLIN (m)	(108 LINES)
BARBARA MULLIN (f)	(39 LINES)
SALLY GARRETT (f)	(42 LINES)
TONY GARRETT (m)	(35 LINES)
MARTHA (f)	(29 LINES)
MR. JASON (m)	(19 LINES)
MRS. JASON (f)	(28 LINES)
MADAME CASANDRA (f)	(34 LINES)
FIRST DOCTOR (m/f)	(4 LINES)
SECOND DOCTOR (m/f)	(3 LINES)

TIME: The present.

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PLACE: The living and dining room area of Harry and Carol Preston's home in suburban New York City.

PROPERTIES

ON STAGE:

Couch	Desk
Small end table	Dining table chairs (8)
Coffee table	Desk Chair
Armchairs (2)	Telephone
Bookcase	Small bag of potting soil
Books	Posters (several)
LP records	Bowl of water (on coffee table)
House plants (2)	Bill from Madame Bali (on desk)
Dining table	Carol's knitting bag (behind couch)

PERSONAL:

HARRY: Attache case, drinks on tray, wallet with sweepstakes ticket inside it, wristwatch, grocery bags (one has a fish in it)

MADAME BALI: Aerosol can, wristwatch, wad of bills, small notebook

TABBY: Shoulder bag, tray with sandwiches, fruits and other foods, bottle of Worcestershire sauce

BRIAN: Floral arrangement, Bridal bouquet, quarter, wristwatch

CAROL: Tray with chips and dip

TONY: Wristwatch

BILL: Chicken drumstick, sandwich, butcher knife.

MR. JASON: Scrap of paper with address of Preston house on it.

MRS. JASON: Lorgnette, gaudy rings.

MADAME CASANDRA: Shopping bag with five flashlights, pentagram cloth and two books in it.

MARTHA: Suitcase, shopping bag.

PRODUCTION HINTS

Use a shade and heavy drapes to cover the entire surface of the window. Since the action of the play moves from late afternoon through an evening and into the following morning and afternoon, it would be necessary to use a backdrop behind the window and vary the lighting on it if possible to see out the window. (Note: It is not necessary to vary the lighting on the backdrop behind the front door as all entrances and exits through the front door take place in daylight.)

Don't dim the stage lighting too much during the séance scene. Dim the lights only enough to indicate that the room has been darkened. It is important that the audience see all the action that occurs during the séance. Also, when the actors and actresses using chairs number 3, 4, 6 & 7 (refer to set design diagram) sit, they should pull their chairs away from the table, so as not to cover those sitting in seats 2 and 8. Seats 6 and 4 should be further away from the table than seats 3 and 7, so that a staggered effect is achieved.

Use an old encyclopedia for the set of magic books on the bookshelf. Their matched binding will help convey the impression that they are a set.

The use of a phone with a long cord attached to the receiver will allow the actors and actresses using the phone to move beyond the edge of the dining table when they are using the phone.

COSTUMING: Costuming for **OFF WITH HIS HEAD** is contemporary. Madame Bali's outfit is a bit more flamboyant than would ordinarily be seen on the street, and the sorcery caftans worn by Carol and Tony should be covered in brightly colored cabalistic symbols. (Note: One church production found that cabalistic symbols cut out of brightly colored felt and sewn onto black choir robes worked very well.) Carol and Tabby should be close enough in size for them to wear the same clothes, as Tabby borrows a gown from Carol's wardrobe during the play.

ACT ONE

SETTING:

The living and dining room area of HARRY and CAROL PRESTON's home in suburban New York City. The right side of the room is the living room area. There is a couch just above RIGHT CENTER with a coffee table in front of it. Downstage, along the right wall, are two armchairs with a small circular end table between them. A large oval rug covers most of the DOWN RIGHT area, and extends into the dining area on the left side of the room.

There is a long waist-high bookcase along the backstage wall extending from the extreme UP RIGHT corner to UP CENTER. Two potted houseplants are sitting on top of the right side of the bookcase. The bookcase is filled with books except for one shelf, which has several LP record albums on it. Behind the bookcase, there is a window with heavy draperies on it. The window has a fashionable shade on it, which is pulled completely down. Along the right wall, four or five feet from the backstage wall, there is an open archway. This leads to the upstairs bedrooms (offstage). There is a door along the backstage wall slightly left of center. This is the front door to the Preston's home. A backdrop several feet beyond the backstage wall reveals a suburban street in the background when this door is open.

The left side of the room is the dining area. A large rectangular dining table and its eight chairs DOWN LEFT dominate this side of the room. NOTE: For ease of blocking, the dining table chairs have been assigned numbers on the set diagram.

In the UP LEFT corner, there is a small desk with a chair. There is a telephone at the desk. Along the left wall there is a door which opens into the kitchen (offstage). The walls of the room are hung with various astrological and occult posters.

AT RISE:

It is late one Friday afternoon in August. CAROL PRESTON is seated on the couch. She is a young woman in her early thirties, and is wearing an ornamental robe covered with brightly colored cabalistic signs. She is sitting perfectly still. Her hands are held straight out with thumb of each hand touching the forefinger. She is staring into a small bowl of water on the coffee table. Every few seconds she chants: "Ummm." After she does this two or three times, the front door opens, and HARRY PRESTON, her husband, ENTERS. HARRY is approximately the same age as his wife, and is dressed in a business suit and tie. His jacket is draped over his shoulder, and he is carrying a small attaché case.

HARRY: *(As he enters.) Carol, I'm home. (He puts the attaché case down on the desk chair, drapes the jacket over the chair, and loosens his tie. CAROL suddenly "Ummm's.") Carol? (He finishes removing his tie, and puts that over the back of the desk chair. There is another "ummm" from CAROL. HARRY turns and spots her on the couch.) Hi, I'm home.*

CAROL: *(Without looking at him; she is still staring into the bowl of water.) That's nice. Now, please keep quiet, I'm trying to concentrate. Ummmm.*

HARRY: On what?

CAROL: This bowl of water.

HARRY: Oh, *(He starts to walk away, then stops and turns.)* Just out of curiosity, Carol, why are you concentrating on a bowl of water? You have something swimming around in there?

CAROL: No Harry, it's just a plain bowl of water. I'm using it to communicate with the metaphysical world.

HARRY: You're communicating with a bowl of water?

CAROL: Not with it, Harry, through it. Madame Bali says a bowl of water can be just as effective as a crystal ball if your concentration is strong enough.

HARRY: Ah ha, Madame Bali again. I might have known that fast talking fortune teller put you up to this.

CAROL: *(Finally looking up from the bowl of water.)* She's not a fortune teller! Madame Bali happens to be a licensed parapsychology instructor, and I might add, a dear sweet old lady.

HARRY: A dear sweet old fraud, you mean.

CAROL: You're just jealous of her abilities. She happens to be one of the few people on Earth with the true power to separate reality from illusion.

HARRY: She also has the power to separate people from their money. Look at all the junk she's sold you already, magic amulets, sacred talismans, secret potions. Even that fancy bathrobe you're wearing must have cost a fortune.

CAROL: It was a steal at \$189.98. And it's not a bathrobe, it's my official enchantment caftan. No self-respecting sorceress would be without one.

HARRY: Carol, there's no such thing as sorcery or enchantment. Tell me honestly, have you ever seen anything magical—I mean really magical—happen? I know I've never seen anything that came close to being magical in my entire life.

CAROL: That's because you won't let yourself see. As Madame Bali would say, "You're not of the right mind."

HARRY: I'm not of the right mind? You're the one who talks to bowls of water!

CAROL: (*Pouting.*) You're making fun of me again, and you said you wouldn't.

HARRY: You're right, I'm sorry. Look, honey, believe whatever you want, okay? Just try to spend a little less money believing it. The way you're shelling out money to Madam Bali, I ought to list her as a dependant. You...haven't bought anything since yesterday, have you?

CAROL: The bill's on the desk. (*HARRY moves to the desk, and picks up the bill. As he does, CAROL braces herself.*)

HARRY: \$252! Are you out of your mind? That's more than I take home every week. What could you possibly buy from her that costs that much? (*He moves to the couch.*)

CAROL: Let's see...there was \$12.50 for a plastic coated deck of tarot cards, a one hundred dollar down payment on a Nostradamus autograph model crystal ball, \$64.50 for various herbs and potions, and \$75.00 for the latest edition of the Ancient Egyptian Book of Incantations.

HARRY: You paid \$75.00 for a book! Couldn't you wait until it came out in paperback?

CAROL: Don't worry about the money, Harry. Just consider it an investment.

HARRY: In what—the Madame Bali retirement fund?

CAROL: In my spiritual enrichment—the metaphysical nourishment of my soul.

HARRY: Ridiculous, Carol. And I don't mind saying so. However, since you brought up the subject of nourishment, what are we having for dinner?

CAROL: I've eaten already. Your supper is on the top shelf of the refrigerator.

HARRY: The refrigerator? What kind of supper can possible be kept on the top shelf of a refrigerator?

CAROL: Yogurt and carrot straws.

HARRY: Yogurt!

CAROL: And carrot straws. Does wonders for your powers of concentration.

HARRY: I don't care about my powers of concentration! I'm a meat and potatoes man. Carol, you know that.

CAROL: A change of menu wouldn't do you any harm.

HARRY: Dear, meat and potatoes men love, yogurt and carrot straws, men hate.

CAROL: Madame Bali highly recommends it in her transcendental diet book.

HARRY: Then let her eat it! I'm going out for a hamburger. *(He turns and heads for the front door.)*

CAROL: Suit yourself. But don't stay out too long, we're having company tonight.

HARRY: *(Stops dead in his tracks, turns apprehensively.)* Who?

CAROL: The Mullins and the Garretts. Madame Bali will be here, too. We're going to have a séance—my first one.

HARRY: *(Crosses to the armchair DOWN RIGHT, and plops into it.)* Oh no! You invited the Mullins here for a séance? Carol, how could you? Bill and Barbara have been our friends for years. You're going to make a fool of yourself in front of them. You didn't tell them why you invited them here, did you?

CAROL: I didn't have to. Barbara's in my class at Madame Bali's school.

HARRY: You're kidding! I thought she'd have more sense. Say, what about Sally Garrett? She's not in your class, too, is she?

CAROL: No.

HARRY: Well, that's a relief.

CAROL: Her husband Tony is, though.

HARRY: I don't believe this. Barbara Mullin and Tony Garrett—two people I've always considered basically stable—they talk to bowls of water, too! Has the entire world gone mad?

CAROL: Dearest, the entire world has become enlightened.

HARRY: I give up! *(He rises and moves toward the kitchen door.)*
I'll be in the kitchen if you want me.

CAROL: I thought you were going out.

HARRY: I changed my mind. There's a bowl of jello in the refrigerator. I think I'll go have a chat with it.

CAROL: Fine, and take your sarcasm with you AND stay there a while. I would like a few minutes of concentration with the bowl before our guests arrive. It's impossible to conduct any meaningful communication with the metaphysical world with your negative charma in the room. *(HARRY opens the kitchen door, and exits. CAROL has started chanting "Ummm" again while staring into her bowl of water. After a few seconds, the doorbell rings.)*

CAROL: *(Without moving her eyes from the bowl.)* Will you get that, Harry? I don't want to break my concentration. I'm on the brink of attaining the Third Level. *(HARRY enters from the kitchen.)*

HARRY: I think you've already gone over the brink.

HARRY moves to the front door and opens it. As soon as he does, MADAME BALI rushes past him into the room. She is a middle-aged woman dressed in a gaudy print dress tied with a brightly colored sash. Her hair is held in place by a polka dot bandanna. She is holding an aerosol can high in the air. The can has a garish label festooned with stars and astrological symbols. TABBY follows MADAME BALI through the door. TABBY, a young girl in her early twenties, is dressed more conventionally, and carries a large over-the-shoulder handbag. TABBY remains near the door, as HARRY closes it behind her. MADAME BALI, however, flits around the room,

spraying from the aerosol can wherever she goes. Finally, she ends up by the armchair DOWN RIGHT, and plops into it.

MADAME BALI: Whew! Thank heaven I got here in time.

CAROL: Madame Bali, what's wrong?

MADAME BALI: Asmodeus.

HARRY: Gesundheit. (*MADAME BALI glares at him momentarily.*)

CAROL: Harry, please! (*To MADAME BALI.*) Asmodeus—the demon?

MADAME BALI: One and the same. He's on the loose again. Some fool amateur down in Argentina raised him up without creating a proper pentagram to contain him.

CAROL: Goodness! And you think we might be in danger?

MADAME BALI: Not any more. (*She pats the can in her hand, then passes it over to CAROL.*)

CAROL: (*Rises, moves to MADAME BALI, takes the can from her.*) (*Reading from the can's label.*) "Madame Bali's Instant Demon Repellent—Guaranteed to forestall imminent invasion by the forces of darkness." Sounds very impressive. Is it effective? (*She puts the can down on the small table between the armchairs.*)

MADAME BALI: I'll say it is. Why, only last month, I took on a roomful of demons with just one can of this marvelous potion. It was the large economy size, of course.

CAROL: Wow! Perhaps I should lay in a supply for myself.

MADAME BALI: It's all taken care of, dear. I'm having a case sent over from my warehouse. It'll arrive COD tomorrow.

HARRY: (*Moves downstage to left side of the coffee table.*) How much COD?

MADAME BALI: I beg your pardon?

HARRY: I'd like to know just how much I have to shell out for this case of hotsy-totsy bugaboo chaser.

MADAME BALI: (*Horried.*) Asmodeus is loosed upon the world, and you're worried about money?

HARRY: (*Insistent.*) How much?

MADAME BALI: (*To CAROL.*) Really, my dear, I'm afraid your husband's preoccupation with mundane matters is a serious impediment to his spiritual development.

HARRY: How much?

MADAME BALI: (*With pursed lips.*) \$42.50—and that's wholesale!

HARRY: Wholesale robbery, you mean. I'll have to take out a second mortgage on the house soon if you keep selling this junk to my wife.

MADAME BALI: Well, if you do, come to me first. I'll be glad to hold the mortgage for you. In fact, I've established the Madame Bali Credit Acceptance Corporation to help out in just such cases. And I'll give you an attractive percentage rate you can't get anywhere else.

CAROL: (*To HARRY.*) There, now isn't that nice of her. Aren't you ashamed of the way you're acting?

HARRY: I don't believe this!

CAROL: That's your trouble, Harry. You've always been a non-believer.

HARRY: Oh, I believe, all right, I believe I'm going to be sick. I can't take any more of this. If you want me, I'll BE UPSTAIRS—filing for bankruptcy. Have a nice evening, dear. Enjoy your séance. And a good evening to you, Madame Bali. I'm sure this séance will prove to be a profitable experience for you. (*He turns to TABBY.*) And finally, good evening to you, Miss, whoever you are. (*He heads for the archway.*)

TABBY: Meow. (*HARRY stops in his tracks, and turns again toward TABBY.*)

HARRY: What did you say?

MADAME BALI: Are you deaf? She very distinctly said, "meow."

HARRY: That's what I thought she said. Would you care to venture an opinion on why she said, "meow"?

MADAME BALI: Certainly. Tabby said "Meow" because she's really a cat.

HARRY: A cat?

MADAME BALI: Yes. Tabby's my familiar. Faithful little thing. She's been with me for years. I worked an ancient Egyptian transmigration spell on her. (*To CAROL.*) You'll find it on page 79 of your textbook, dear. It's really a dandy little spell. Turned out rather well, wouldn't you say? It certainly makes it a lot easier for her to help me out. You can imagine how difficult it would be for a cat to pick up some odds and ends at the supermarket.

CAROL: How charming.

HARRY: (*Moves to CAROL.*) Don't tell me you believe her?

CAROL: If Madame Bali says she's a cat, then she's a cat.

HARRY: Ah, come on, Carol—a cat? That is a person standing there, not a cat. An honest-to-goodness, flesh and blood person. I don't care what Madame Bali-hoo says.

CAROL: Did you say you were leaving?

HARRY: Oh no, not now. (*He plops down on the couch.*) I've got to stick around and see the rest of this show. We already have two clowns and a cat. Who knows, before it's over, we may see a few trained seals.

CAROL: Well, if you insist on hanging around, will you at least make yourself useful? Get our guests something to drink.

MADAME BALI: A capital idea!

HARRY: Lady, you put the capital in capitalist. (*BALI smirks.*)

MADAME BALI: I'll have a little ginger ale, if you please. (*To CAROL.*) And you should, too, dear. Never touch anything stronger than ginger ale before a séance.

HARRY: That's right—never mix spirits with your spirits.

CAROL: You're hilarious, Harry. Now just get our drinks like a good little boy.

HARRY: (*Rise.*) Certainly. What about our feline friend? A little milk, perhaps?

MADAME BALI: (*Answering for TABBY.*) Milk would be fine for her, thank you.

HARRY: Should I bring it in a glass or a saucer?

CAROL: Harry!

HARRY: (*Smiling, as he moves to the kitchen door.*) It was a reasonable question, dear. (*He exits through kitchen door.*)

CAROL: (*Sits on the couch.*) You must forgive my husband. He's been a diehard skeptic all his life.

MADAME BALI: Born under the sign of Scorpio rising, no doubt.

CAROL: You're right, he was! I charted his horoscope last week.

MADAME BALI: Of course.

CAROL: Oh, you're so gifted, Madame Bali! (*She turns her head briefly towards TABBY, then turns back. To MADAME BALI.*) Would Tabby like to come join us?

MADAME BALI: I'm sure she would. (*She gestures to TABBY.*

TABBY moves downstage, heading for the armchair right center.)

CAROL: Make yourself comfortable. Have a seat. That is, er...unless you'd prefer to curl up on the rug.

TABBY: Mmm, the chair will be fine, thanks. (*TABBY's voice is distinctly feline. When she speaks, it almost seems as if she is going to meow. She sits on the armchair.*)

CAROL: You speak!

MADAME BALI: Certainly. Tabby's not your garden variety cat, you know. She'd never cut the mustard as a familiar if she was. It takes talent, believe me.

HARRY: (*Offstage.*) Carol, where did you hide the glasses?

CAROL: (*Shouts back to him.*) They're not hidden, they're drying in the dishwasher. (*To TABBY.*) So, you're Madame Bali's familiar, are you?

TABBY: Uh-hmm.

MADAME BALI: In a sense, they are. Tabby is what you would call a spiritually enlightened cat.

HARRY: (*Offstage.*) There's no more ginger ale in the refrigerator, Carol.

CAROL: There's a few bottles in the pantry, dear.

HARRY: (*Offstage.*) Fine, where's the pantry?

CAROL: (*Rises.*) Excuse me, I'll be back in a moment. My husband is absolutely helpless when it comes to finding things. (*Exiting to the kitchen.*)

MADAME BALI: I sensed that about him.

CAROL: Of course you did.

MADAME BALI: (*After CAROL has exited.*) Your cat voice is excellent tonight, dear. Have you been practicing?

TABBY: (*Now speaking normally.*) To tell you the truth, Mother, I really wish we could drop this cat routine altogether.

MADAME BALI: But why? It's working so well. In fact, it's one of the best ideas I've had in years. It really keeps the customers coming back for more—especially the women. They see you, and wheels start turning in their heads. They start looking at their house cats as potential live-in maids.

TABBY: Oh, don't be silly, Mother.

MADAME BALI: I'm not. I know what goes on in those greedy little minds. They keep thinking about how nice it would be to have someone to cook and clean all day for a can of Nine Lives and an occasional snort of catnip. That's when I get them to sign up for the advanced class.

TABBY: But it's all a big fraud, and you know it.

MADAME BALI: Shh! Talk like that could put me out of business. Besides, there's nothing fraudulent about it. I never actually tell them. They'll be able to turn cats into people. I just sort of hint at it.

TABBY: Still, I'd be a lot happier if you started introducing me as your daughter instead of your cat.

MADAME BALI: Out of the question. Business is bad enough, already. Sales are off fifteen percent this year. Do you want me to go broke?

TABBY: (*Rises, moves to center.*) But I'm tired of pretending to be a cat! Do you have any idea what it's doing to my ego—not to mention my social life. When boys take me out, they keep looking at my fingernails to see if they retract.

MADAME BALI: Complain, complain, complain! Really, Tabitha, you surprise me. When you were a little girl, you used to love my work. You'd sit at my feet while I read palms. You were fascinated by my crystal ball. You used to play old maid with my tarot cards. Now, when you're finally old enough to be part of the act—bingo, you want out!

TABBY: Part of the act? But that's the trouble. Mother, don't you understand? It's nothing but a big act. I'm tired of scamming innocent people. It's...it's...it's not nice.

MADAME BALI: Not nice? And you think it's nice for your mother to starve while everyone else around her lives off the fat of the land? I'm just earning a living, Tabitha, what's wrong with that? My sorcery school is perfectly legal. I even pay social security.

TABBY: It may be a legitimate business, but that's as far as it goes. You don't know the first thing about sorcery. You couldn't work a spell to save your life.

MADAME BALI: (*Rises.*) Bite your tongue! I won't listen to that kind of talk from my own daughter. Are you aware that you're descended from a long line of professional soothsayers and

magicians? Why, your great-grandmother toured with P.T. Barnum's circus. She had an act that would've knocked your socks off.

TABBY: I'm sure she did. And Mr. Barnum had something to say about your customers, too, didn't he? Something about one being born every minute.

MADAME BALI: You have no respect, that's your problem. Why, if I talked that way to my mother, she would have marched me over to the caldron and washed my mouth out with a newt's tail.

TABBY: I'm sorry, Mother. I just can't take it any more.

MADAME BALI: You mean that, don't you?

TABBY: (*Practically in tears.*) Yes, I do.

MADAME BALI: All right. I'll tell you what I'll do. Just play this gig with me, then you can split. Okay?

TABBY: And what about you?

MADAME BALI: Oh, I'll get along fine. I'll just have to hire another cat.

TABBY: Why don't you give it all up?

MADAME BALI: And do what—get a job as a secretary? Honey, I'd never make it, my typing is lousy, believe me. (*Sits in the armchair, becomes very serious.*) Besides, there's more involved here than just earning a living.

TABBY: Oh?

MADAME BALI: There's a reason for our family's long history of involvement with sorcery and fortune telling, and it's not what you might think. Long ago—and I mean long, long ago, back in the Middle Ages—your ancestors really had the power. They didn't have to rely upon fakery...er, that is, artificial embellishments of their manifestations. They could foretell the future and work spells and do all sorts of wonderful things. Then sometime in the fifteenth century it just vanished. Lucinda Abigail Bali, who died in 1456, was the last member of our family to have the power. There's a family legend that she was cursed by one of her rivals, an old wizard who was afraid of the potential of her power. Since then, none of her descendants have been born with the power. But we've kept the tradition alive, hoping that maybe the next generation would be the one to be blessed with it once again. So, that's why your mother does what she does. (*She coughs.*) Of

course, I, er...didn't see anything wrong with making a few bucks while I kept the fires burning.

TABBY: Did you ever consider that someday you might be called to task for all this?

MADAME BALI: All what?

TABBY: All this blatant profiteering from something our ancestors considered important enough to preserve through the ages.

MADAME BALI: (*Purses her lips.*) All my life, I hoped that my child would be the Bali who was born with the power. Instead, I get one born with a conscience!

TABBY: Mother, what would Lucinda Abigail Bali say if she were here today and saw what you were up to?

MADAME BALI: I think she would be very pleased that I was carrying on the family tradition.

TABBY: (*Moves to small table, picks up the aerosol can.*) And what would she have to say about "Madame Bali's Instant Demon Repellent?"

MADAME BALI: (*Snatches the can from TABBY.*) I...I wouldn't show it to her.

TABBY: Suppose she's watching right now? (*MADAME BALI quickly puts the can underneath her, then looks around her expecting to see LUCINDA BALI popping up from somewhere. TABBY is smiling.*)

MADAME BALI: Oh, posh. (*The doorbell rings.*) I'll get it. (*She rises and attempts to move to the front door. TABBY stops her.*)

TABBY: Why don't you stay put. Keep your demon repellent warm, I'll answer the door. (*MADAME BALI sits. TABBY moves to the door and opens it. BRIAN is standing in the doorway. He is the delivery man for the local florist. BRIAN is a young man in his early twenties. He is dressed in a delivery man's uniform. He is carrying a small floral arrangement.*)

BRIAN: Flowers for Mrs. Carol Preston.

TABBY: I'll take them, thank you. (*She moves to the dining table and places the flowers in the middle of the table. She takes the card from the flowers and reads it.*) "To my brilliant student, Carol Preston. Good luck on your first séance. Madame Bali." Oh, Mother, that's sweet.

MADAME BALI: It's all part of the service, dear. I run my sorcery school with class.

BRIAN: *(Who has been left standing in the doorway.)* A-hem.

TABBY: Yes?

BRIAN: The flowers are COD.

TABBY: *(Glares at MADAME BALI.)* COD—that's class?

MADAME BALI: Well, I never said it was **first** class.

TABBY: Mother, sending flowers COD is like billing a child for his Christmas presents.

MADAME BALI: It's the thought that counts.

TABBY: Especially when you're thinking about money.

BRIAN: Will somebody please think about paying me. I have two more orders to deliver, and I'm running late as it is.

TABBY: Of course, my dear fellow. *(To MADAME BALI.)* Mother, this gentleman has just delivered your flowers COD. Pay him.

MADAME BALI: Pay him? Me?

TABBY: You ordered the flowers.

BRIAN: The bill comes to \$25.75.

MADAME BALI: *(Rises, moves to BRIAN, who has entered the room. TABBY closes the door behind him. MADAME BALI reaches into a pocket in her dress. She takes out a mammoth roll of bills, and peels a few off the top.)* This is coming out of your salary, Tabitha.

TABBY: So what? I just quit, remember?

MADAME BALI: Harumph! *(To BRIAN.)* Here. *(She hands him the bills. He takes the money and gives her a quarter change. She puts the quarter in her mouth and bites it with her eye tooth, then looks at it and pockets it along with her roll of bills. She turns away from BRIAN, then suddenly turns back to face him.)* Say, you look familiar. Have we met in some previous incarnation?

BRIAN: *(Smiling.)* I doubt it. But I **have** sat in on a few of your sorcery classes.

MADAME BALI: Of course. That's why I remember your face. I have total recall, you know. I never forget a face or a name. Yours is... *(She closes her eyes for a second to think, then opens them.)* ...McGillicuddy.

BRIAN: McFeld, ma'am. Brian McFeld.

MADAME BALI: Well, maybe I forget a name once in a while, but never a face—especially yours. Your face has the distinct characteristics of a true believer written all over it—one of the world's classic unforgettable faces.

BRIAN: Thank you, Madame Bali. I'm very flattered.

MADAME BALI: (*Takes BRIAN's arm and leads him downstage.*)

So, tell me, Brian with the unforgettable face, what did you think of my sorcery classes?

BRIAN: Not much, I'm afraid.

MADAME BALI: (*Suddenly dropping his arm.*) What!

BRIAN: No offense, ma'am, but they seemed a bit foolish.

MADAME BALI: I was wrong. You do have a forgettable face—a very forgettable face. In fact, I've forgotten it already. (*To TABBY.*) Why don't you see what's-his-face to the door, Tabitha. I'm going in there. (*Indicating the door to the kitchen.*) I hear an inner voice calling me into the kitchen. (*She exits through the kitchen door.*)

TABBY: Inner voice, my foot. That's her stomach growling.

BRIAN: Gee, I didn't think your mother would get so upset over a little honest criticism. I certainly didn't mean to insult her, I was just, er...

TABBY: Calling 'em like you saw 'em?

BRIAN: Something like that.

TABBY: (*Moving to armchair down right on the line.*) Don't feel bad. You're quite right, you know. Her classes are foolish—very foolish. In fact, foolish is too mild a word to use. Downright fraudulent would be closer to the truth.

BRIAN: (*Moves to the couch and sits. His voice becomes quiet and serious.*) And how do feel you about the situation.

TABBY: Terrible. How would you feel if your mother made her living cheating and deceiving people every day?

BRIAN: (*Smiling.*) I guess it's not easy being Madame Bali's daughter.

TABBY: It's even harder being her cat.

BRIAN: I'm afraid I don't understand.

TABBY: Oh, it's some silly gimmick my mother thought up to improve business. She tells people I'm really a cat that she transformed into a person. My name is Tabitha, so naturally, my

nickname, Tabby, fits right in. It might do wonders for her business, but let me tell you, it's driving me crazy.

BRIAN: Why do you do it, then?

TABBY: I'm not doing it anymore—not after tonight, that is. I can't go on like that. You might think I'm being silly for saying this, but I take the ancient arts very seriously.

BRIAN: Silly? On the contrary. I, myself, have a strong belief in the powers of old. You see, my family has been practicing the ancient arts since the old days.

TABBY: So has mine. That's why I'm so upset by the way mother is debasing it all by her antics. I wish there was some way I could show her the error of her ways.

BRIAN: Have you tried?

TABBY: Every day! It's useless. I'd have more luck trying to convince a fish to swear off water.

BRIAN: Well, keep at it. I'm sure you'll succeed sooner or later. In fact, I know you will. I can sense that you have the power to do it.

TABBY: *(Startled.)* What?

BRIAN: *(Smiling.)* The power of persuasion.

TABBY: Oh, I thought...well, forget what I thought. Say, would you like to stick around for a while? Mother is conducting one of her phony séances. It should be good for a few laughs.

BRIAN: I'd love to, but I do have two more orders of flowers to deliver today. *(He rises)*

TABBY: Couldn't you deliver them tomorrow?

BRIAN: Not really. One's for a wedding and the other's for a funeral.

TABBY: *(Rises, and starts walking toward the front door with BRIAN.)* All right, but why don't you stop over after your deliveries. I think you'll get a kick out of seeing mother in action. And, er...I'd like to talk with you some more...*(Quickly.)* about the old days, that is.

BRIAN: *(Smiles.)* I'd like that, Tabby. *(Their eyes meet momentarily, then TABBY suddenly moves away from BRIAN and opens the door for him.)*

TABBY: *(Smiles.)* Hurry back. *(HARRY enters from the kitchen. He is carrying a tray with the drinks on it. MADAME BALI enters, following him in.)*

BRIAN: Don't worry. I'll be back right after the funeral. (*Hearing this, HARRY stops dead in his tracks. BRIAN exits, closing the door behind him.*)

HARRY: So that's how you get spirits for your séance. You sign them up in advance.

TABBY: (*Again in her "cat" voice.*) Mmm, of course. We give them a recruitment bonus and a five year no-trade contract. (*She takes her glass of milk from the tray, moves to the couch and sits.*)

MADAME BALI: (*Takes her glass of ginger ale from the tray.*) Pay no attention to her. She's been acting strange all day. I must have put a little too much catnip in her din-din. (*She moves to the armchair Down Right and sits. She gives TABBY a dirty look. TABBY hisses back at her, and makes a clawing motion in the air. CAROL enters from the kitchen carrying a lazy susan filled with chips and dip.*)

CAROL: Here we go, everybody—potato chips and some nice dips.

HARRY: Just put out the chips, Carol. We have more dips than we need here already. (*CAROL puts the tray down on the dining table. The doorbell rings.*) Ah ha! The trained seals. (*Puts down the tray of drinks on the coffee table and moves to the door to answer it. He opens the door to reveal BARBARA MULLIN and BILL MULLIN standing in the doorway. BARBARA immediately moves downstage to CAROL and gives her a big hug.*) Hi, Bill. Come on in.

BARBARA: Honey! Your first séance! Congratulations! You must be so nervous.

CAROL: I am, I am, I've been shaking like a leaf all afternoon. The thing that's been able to calm me down has been Madame Bali's concentration exercises.

BARBARA: They'll do the trick every time. So, tell me, did you see anything interesting in your bowl of water?

CAROL: No. Unfortunately, before I could make contact with the metaphysical world, my husband came home and managed to muddy the waters.

BARBARA: (*Wags a finger at HARRY in jest.*) Naughty, naughty. (*To CAROL.*) Don't feel bad, dear, I know what you're up against. The great stone face here (*Indicating BILL.*) is just as bad. He refuses to believe anything he doesn't see on TV.

BILL: (*Moves downstage to BARBARA. HARRY closes the door behind him.*) Here, now, that's uncalled for, Barbara. I'm a very reasonable person, and I pride myself on my ability to be as objective as the next man.

BARBARA: Come on, Bill. This is me, your wife. Save the snow jobs for your friends.

BILL: Have I or have I not been willing to take your word that you can see something other than glass in that crystal ball of yours? And didn't I give you the benefit of the doubt about contact with the spirit world?

BARBARA: Well, that's true, but...

BILL: But nothing! I'm sorry, but I absolutely refuse to believe that anyone—even your famous Madame Bali—can conjure up demons, turn lead into gold, or turn their next door neighbor into a horned toad.

BARBARA: That's all you know! People are only turned into animals in fairy tales, Bill. For your information, Madame Bali's teachings are above such nonsense.

HARRY: (*Never one to miss an opportunity, he moves downstage to BILL, BARBARA and CAROL.*) By the way, have either of you met Tabby yet? This lovely young lady (*Gesturing towards TABBY.*) is actually Madame Bali's pet cat.

MADAME BALI: (*Jumps up.*) She is not a pet, she's my familiar.

HARRY: Pardon me! (*To BARBARA and BILL.*) May I present Madame Bali's **familiar**—Tabby the cat.

BARBARA: (*Moves to TABBY.*) I'm pleased to meet you, my dear. Any cat of Madame Bali's is, er...a cat of mine.

TABBY: Mmm, likewise, I'm sure.

BILL: (*To HARRY.*) They're kidding, aren't they?

HARRY: What do you think? (*BILL looks at BARBARA's face, then at MADAME BALI's. Both are sober. When he looks at TABBY, she winks and meows for him.*)

BILL: They're serious! (*He staggers to the other side of the couch and sits next to TABBY. To HARRY.*) Does your wife...(*He gesture with his hands.*)

HARRY: She talks to bowls of water.

BILL: And you?

HARRY: If I don't see it on the six o'clock news, I don't believe it.

BILL: Phew, then there's still some hope for the world.

BARBARA: *(Ignoring BILL's remarks, she turns and spots the flowers on the dining table.)* Oh, look at the lovely flowers. *(To MADAME BALI.)* You never forget, do you, Madame Bali?

MADAME BALI: How could I forget one of my students?

CAROL: *(Picks up the card from the flowers and reads it.)* Dear, dear Madame Bali. How thoughtful of you.

HARRY: *(To MADAME BALI.)* Those are from you?

MADAME BALI: *(Indignantly.)* Yes, they are, what about it?

HARRY: Nothing, except I'm surprised they didn't come COD. *(The doorbell rings.)*

CAROL: That must be the Garretts.

HARRY: Or possibly the acrobats and jugglers. *(He moves to the front door and opens it. SALLY GARRETT and TONY GARRETT are standing in the doorway. TONY is dressed in the same type of cabalistically adorned robe as CAROL is wearing. They step into the room, and HARRY closes the door behind them. To TONY.)* Ah, I see you came in uniform.

CAROL: Tony, why are you dressed in the ceremonial robes? I thought that I...

MADAME BALI: Of course you're running the séance, dear. Tony's merely your backup medium. Seances are tricky, you know. You can never tell exactly who or what you're going to pull in from the spirit world. In case you can't handle the traffic, Tony will step in and pinch hit for you. He's the best trance medium in my class. I remember once he brought in the High Priest Caiaphas, Julius Caesar and Abraham Lincoln at the same séance.

TONY: Now, now, Madame Bali. We weren't sure the last one actually was Lincoln.

MADAME BALI: He kept asking how the play ended, didn't he?

BARBARA: Well, now that everyone's here, shall we get started?

CAROL: Not yet, I want to show all of you my collections of Egyptian scarabs.

BARBARA: Oh, that sounds interesting. Are they all genuine?

CAROL: Certainly, Madame Bali sells only authentic merchandise.

MADAME BALI: Every one was imported directly from Egypt.

HARRY: Is that why they all say "Made in Japan" on the back?

MADAME BALI: *(To CAROL.)* Really, my dear, you must do something about that husband of yours. He's sure to prove detrimental to your existential development.

HARRY: He also brings home a nice fat pay check once a week.

MADAME BALI: Then again, he does have his good points. Shall we go see your scarabs?

CAROL: Follow me, everybody. They're upstairs in the recreation room. *(She starts for the archway Up Right.)*

HARRY: Right next to the caldron. *(CAROL exits through the archway, followed by TONY, BARBARA and MADAME BALI. TABBY rises, and also exits, following the parade through the archway.)*

HARRY: *(To SALLY and BILL who have remained behind.)* Aren't the two of you going along to have a look at my wife's "famous" scarab collection?

BILL: No, thank you! I have to put up with enough of that nonsense at home. Our house is filled with those little clay beetles. Barbara's exhibiting a batch of them in a display case that used to hold my bowling trophies. I'd like to stuff a bean-bag ashtray with the whole lot of them. *(HARRY and SALLY move downstage.)*

SALLY: I know what you mean. If I never see another scarab, it'll be too soon.

HARRY: Amen! Did you know that Bali gets \$25 a shot for those scarabs?

SALLY: They're \$27.50 now. She jacked up her prices last week. It's her semi-annual cost of living increase.

BILL: Good grief! If Barbara doesn't get off this sorcery kick soon, she's going to put me in the poorhouse.

HARRY: You'll have to stand in line behind me to get in. Carol buys so much mumbo-jumbo paraphernalia. I'm thinking of having my checks pre-printed, Pay to the order of Madame Bali.

BILL: Your wife couldn't possible spend as much on that garbage as my wife does.

HARRY: You think so, eh? Last week Carol spent the grocery money on a new magic wand. We had to have cornflakes for supper every night.

BILL: With or without milk? Barbara paid a tuition bill from Madame Bali's school instead of paying the milkman. We've been cut off since last Wednesday.

SALLY: I have both of you beat. Tony sold our bedroom furniture to buy a rare book on Hindu magic.

HARRY: No bedroom furniture? How do you manage?

SALLY: We now sleep on a queen size bed of nails.

BILL: Let's face it, it's not easy being married to the Sorcerer's Apprentice.

HARRY: You can say that again.

SALLY: I think it's these stupid séances that really get to me. If it wasn't for them, I could almost...almost chalk up all this sorcery business as just another one of Tony's ridiculous hobbies. It won't last forever, Tony's hobbies never do. I know that sooner or later he'll chuck the crystal balls and magic wands into the trash can and go back to his stamp collection. Without the séances, I could just shrug my shoulders and open up another can of beans for supper until he does.

HARRY: What's so bad about the séances?

SALLY: What's bad is, he drags me to every one of them. He says several people have to be present or it won't work right. I guess the spirits refuse to play to an empty house.

HARRY: Interesting. And what about you, Bill? Have you ever been to one of Bali's séances.

BILL: One? In our house, it's a weekly event, Barbara has people over for séances the way other women have them over for bridge.

HARRY: *(Sits in the armchair Down Right.)* Tell me something, what's her routine during these séances?

BILL: Well, usually she fakes going into a trance, and then pretends that some famous person from the past like King Arthur or Julius Caesar, is speaking through her.

HARRY: Do you think she'll do that tonight?

SALLY: Sure she will. She's got a good act, so she sticks with it.

HARRY: Hmm, that gives me an idea. Maybe we could beat Madame Bali at her own game and have a little fun in the process. I think we can use this séance to show her up for the fraud she is. In fact, if we play our cards right, we might even get our spouses to swear off sorcery for good.

BILL: What do we do—go out and find someone who can out-hocus pocus Madame Bali?

HARRY: No, we'll let her do that herself—or at least make her think she'd doing it herself. What we do is play her little game along with her. When the séance starts and Bali goes into her act, claiming to be someone from the past, we'll chime in and pretend that we're other people from the same era.

SALLY: You mean, like, if she does King Arthur, we do Merlin and Guinevere?

HARRY: That's the trick. And if she does Julius Caesar, we do Cassius and Brutus.

BILL: And if she does Groucho, we do Harpo and Chico!

HARRY: Bill, be serious.

BILL: I am, I'd rather do Chico then Brutus any day.

HARRY: Bill!

BILL: *(With a sheepish smile.)* Sorry.

SALLY: There's something I don't understand, Harry. How is our little act going to expose Madame Bali as a fake?

HARRY: Simple. First we have to make sure our performance is good enough to convince Bali that these people from the past really are speaking through us. Once we do that, it's a cinch she'll step in and take credit for making it all happen. Then while Carol, Barbara and Tony are in the middle of praising her "marvelous powers," we all bust out laughing and tell them the truth.

BILL: *(Jumps up, excited.)* Madame Bali will be left with egg all over her face! She'll look absolutely foolish!

HARRY: As will each of her three prize students.

SALLY: Sounds great. Do you think it'll work?

HARRY: Certainly. All we have to do is make sure we put on an all-star performance for them.

BILL: You can count on me. If it'll bring Barbara back from the Twilight Zone, I'll put on a show that'll put *Hamlet* to shame.

SALLY: You've got my vote, too. I'd do anything to have a nice soft mattress to sleep on again. In fact, I'd even settle for a nice hard mattress, as long as there weren't any nails sticking up through it. *(The doorbell rings.)*

BILL: If it's Julius Caesar, tell him, "no thanks, we already gave at the forum." (*HARRY answers the door. BRIAN is standing in the doorway. He is still in his delivery uniform.*)

HARRY: Well, well, back from your funeral already? What did they do, buy you in uniform?

BRIAN: I'm looking for Tabby. Is she here?

HARRY: Our little feline friend? She's upstairs right now, purring over some funny looking beetles. I'll get her for you. (*He starts for the archway.*)

BRIAN: No, don't bother. I can't stay. I would appreciate it, though, if you'd give her a message for me.

HARRY: Don't tell me, let me guess: You're really a tomcat, and you want her to meet you in the alley so the two of you can go rummaging through garbage cans for fish heads.

BRIAN: Er, no, sir. Just tell her that I have to work overtime tonight, so I can't make the séance. Also would you let her know that I've been thinking about her problem, and I believe I've come up with a solution that will work.

HARRY: A problem? What's wrong—does she have fleas or something?

BRIAN: Why do I have the feeling we're carrying on two separate conversations?

HARRY: Look, kid. I'll give our resident pussy cat your message, okay? You'd better get back to your funeral before somebody misses you.

BRIAN: Er...right. I have to run now. (*He turns to leave, then turns back.*) Oh, would you tell her one more thing, please? Even though I won't be here for the séance, it will be on my mind tonight. It's important that she know that. (*MADAME BALI's harsh laugh is heard offstage.*)

HARRY: Why don't you tell her yourself? She's coming downstairs now with the rest of the basket cases.

BRIAN: (*Looks at his wristwatch.*) No, I have to leave right now, I'm late already. Don't forget to tell Tabby that the séance will be on my mind tonight. Bye. (*BRIAN exits through the front door.*)

HARRY: (*Closes the front door.*) What a world. When I was his age, I had girls on my mind. Nowadays, they have séances on their

mind! *(Once again, MADAME BALI's voice is heard laughing offstage.)*

HARRY: Well, if we're going to put on our little show, we'd better take our places. It sounds like Act One is about to begin.

HARRY moves to the armchair Down Right, and sits. SALLY moves to the armchair Center Right, and sits. BILL sits on the couch. They strike a casual pose. With MADAME BALI in the lead, CAROL, TONY and BARBARA come sweeping into the room through the archway Up Right. TABBY enters last. She remains at the archway, leaning against the upstage side of it.

TONY: *(To CAROL.)* I must say, that was one of the loveliest scarab collections I've ever seen. *(To HARRY.)* And tell me, old boy, do you have a beetle collection also?

HARRY: Certainly. I have every record they ever made. *(Before TONY can respond, MADAME BALI looks at her watch, and announces.)*

MADAME BALI: My, my, my—just look at the time. We'd better get started with our séance. I have a phrenology class to teach in an hour, and Tabby has another engagement.

HARRY: What is she going to do—round up a few of the gang, and go howl on a back fence? *(CAROL, who has moved next to the armchair HARRY is sitting in, stomps on HARRY's foot.)* Ow! Why did you stomp on my foot?

CAROL: Just to remind you to keep it out of your mouth, dear. *(To all.)* All right everyone, let's sit at the table.

HARRY, SALLY and BILL rise, and along with CAROL, MADAME BALI, BARBARA and TONY, move to the dining table and sit. CAROL sits in chair #1-(refer to set diagram)—HARRY in chair #6, BILL in #7, and MADAME BALI in #8. TABBY remains standing by the archway.

CAROL: *(To TABBY)* Aren't you going to join us, dear?

TABBY: Mmm, no, I'll stay here and watch.

CAROL: Oh, dear, I wish I had a little rubber mouse or something for you to amuse yourself with.

HARRY: That reminds me. I have a message for Puss-in-Boots there.

TABBY: For me?

HARRY: Yeah, Your boyfriend was here, or maybe it was just his spirit—I couldn't tell.

TABBY: *(With sudden interest. Her cat voice almost changes to a normal voice, but she catches herself in time.)* Br...Brian?

HARRY: Brian? Is that his name?

TABBY: Yes. Is there something wrong with the name Brian?

HARRY: Not at all, I just kind of thought it would be Tom. *(CAROL stomps on his foot again.)* Ow! Carol, that's my foot, not the accelerator of A.J. Foyts* race car. *(*Individual productions may substitute the name of any popular race car driver they wish.)*

TABBY: Excuse me, but you said Brian left a message for me.

HARRY: Right. Let's see now...*(Thinking for a moment.)* He said he couldn't be here tonight, but he was going to think about it.

TABBY: Think about it?

HARRY: Yeah. He said he had the solution to your problem, too—whatever that's supposed to mean.

MADAME BALI: *(Turns to TABBY.)* Problem?

TABBY: *(With a mischievous smile.)* Mmm, yes. I couldn't decide which collar to wear. He likes the green collar, but I prefer the red one with the little bell on it.

CAROL: How sweet. Now, would you be a good little cat and turn off the lights for us. The switch is right there behind you. *(TABBY does. The stage lights dim*. See production hint #2.)*

BILL: Why do these things always have to be done in the dark?

MADAME BALI: It's just for the atmosphere, Mr. Mullin; to help the medium concentrate. The spirits do not require darkness to manifest themselves. They are drifting through the air constantly, night and day, just like the dust.

BILL: The spirits are just like dust?

MADAME BALI: In a matter of speaking, yes.

BILL: Gee, just think—I might have swept my Uncle Mortimer under the rug without even knowing it. *(He laughs at his own joke.)*

MADAME BALI: You're not approaching this séance with the proper attitude, Mr. Mullin. There is no place for flippancy in these

matters. Contact with the spirit world requires an extraordinary amount of hard work, deep concentration.

HARRY: And cold cash. (*CAROL kicks him under the table.*) Ow! Congratulations, Carol. You've gotten my foot and my shin. What are you going to try for next—my kneecap?

CAROL: Next, I go for the knockout punch. (*To all.*) Now, everybody join hands, and I'll begin the concentration chant. (*They join hands. CAROL closes her eyes and begins chanting; Ummm. After a beat, TONY joins her with a slightly higher pitched Ummm. Finally, BARBARA chimes in with a still higher pitched Ummm.*)

HARRY: What is this, a séance or a barbershop quartet? (*CAROL again kicks him under the table.*) Ow!

BILL: (*To HARRY.*) The kneecap?

HARRY: No, the ribs.

BILL: She kicked you in the ribs? How did she manage that?

HARRY: I don't know. This sorcery school must give electives in karate.

MADAME BALI: Will you gentlemen please be quiet. The spirits will not manifest themselves in such a noisy atmosphere.

SALLY: I thought they loved noise. Don't they go around rattling chains and shouting Boo all the time?

MADAME BALI: A popular misconception, I'm afraid, Mrs. Garrett. Fictional spirits may engage in such ridiculous antics, but I assure you, genuine specters are much more sedate.

SALLY: No chains? Are you sure? Every horror flick I've ever seen has them by the bushel.

MADAME BALI: I'm sorry to disillusion you, my dear, but no self respecting wraith would be found within a country mile of a chain.

CAROL: (*Her voice is suddenly deeper and more authoritative.*) We shall slap the lot of you in chains if this infernal prattling does not cease immediately.

HARRY: Oh, come now, my dear. Kicking me in the ribs is one things, but...chains? I know you like to keep me around the house at night, but that's ridiculous.

CAROL: "My dear?" Is that how you address your sovereign?

HARRY: My sovereign? Unless I'm mistaken, *you* were the one who promised to love, honor and obey.

CAROL: Is this some attempt at humor?

HARRY: Why not? This whole thing is a joke anyway.

CAROL: We are not amused.

HARRY: We?

MADAME BALI: Quiet, you fool. Can't you see that some spiritual entity is speaking through your wife?

HARRY: Really? I thought that was your number.

MADAME BALI: I beg your pardon?

HARRY: You're usually the one who pretends to be Alexander the Great or someone like that at these séances, aren't you?

MADAME BALI: (*Indignant.*) Pretends! What are you...

CAROL: If this incessant babbling does not cease immediately, we shall clear this room!

MADAME BALI: Of course. (*In a sweet voice.*) Won't you tell us who you are, dear?

CAROL: If one more person addresses the Queen of England as "dear," heads are going to roll!

MADAME BALI: Ah, now we're getting somewhere; you're the Queen of England. Er, what particular queen might you be? No, don't tell me; let me guess...How about Bloody Mary?

CAROL: (*Furious, shouts.*) Guards!

MADAME BALI: All right, all right, so you're not Bloody Mary. Let's see, who else was there?

HARRY: Is this a private game of twenty questions, or can anyone play?

MADAME BALI: Mr. Preston, if you please! I am trying to determine the identity of the incarnate entity present among us.

HARRY: You mean you haven't guessed yet? Carol's doing Queen Victoria, aren't you dear?

CAROL: Didn't we tell you what we would do if we heard the word "dear" again?

MADAME BALI: Wait! Queen Victoria—is that who you are?

CAROL: We are pleased that you have managed to ascertain our identity.

MADAME BALI: Then you *are* Queen Victoria. This is marvelous, Carol, er...I mean your majesty. Who would have guessed!

HARRY: I would have. Don't you think I can see through this sham? You're a phoney, Bali. And you, Carol—I'm surprised at you,

playing right along with her. It's bad enough listening to her half-baked impersonations; I'm certainly not going to put up with that nonsense from my own wife.

BILL: *(He also has a suddenly more authoritative voice.)* Good show, old boy! Never take any nonsense from a wife. If they give you too much trouble, just chop off their head; that's what I always say!

HARRY: What?

BILL: Of course, these things would be much easier to manage if you were king, as I am. But, if you'd like, I could recommend an excellent headsman. Always gets the job done in a single stroke, he does.

HARRY: Do you mind telling me what you're talking about, Bill?

HARRY: You are—remember?

BILL: My dear fellow, I am Henry VIII, the King of England.

HARRY: Oh, so that's what that was all about. Look, you can drop the act, Bill. I'm changing the game plan. I thought Bali was going to do the voice from the past bit, not my wife. *(He rises.)* Right now, I'm just very annoyed with this whole business. I'm going to end this dumb séance this minute, and kick all these metaphysical fakers out on their ear. And tomorrow I'm going to get rid of all this sorcery junk. I'm throwing a big garage sale. Everyone's invited. In fact, I have a better idea—I'm going to make it a fire sale!

BILL: I don't recall granting permission for you to rise, peasant.

HARRY: Come on, Bill. Knock it off.

BILL: *(Rises, and angrily pounds his fist on the table.)* Knock it off! Knock it off! Put that impertinent head of yours on the block, and I'll show you how I'll knock it off!

SALLY: *(In a soft sweet voice.)* Louis, Louis, is that you?

BILL: I most certainly am not Louis, Madam. I am the king.

SALLY: But that is impossible, my Louis is King of France.

HARRY: Oh, no, Sally. Not you, too? Didn't you hear me tell Bill the game was over?

SALLY: Sally? The Queen of France would never have such a common name. I am Antoinette.

MADAME BALI: *(Jumps up.)* Antoinette! Marie Antoinette?

SALLY: *(With a smile.)* C'est moi.

MADAME BALI: This is utterly fantastic! (*She moves away from the table to Center.*) Totally unbelievable!

HARRY: You can say that again.

MADAME BALI: (*Moves to TABBY.*) I've done it, dear. This time it's for real; I've worked a miracle! The power has returned to the Bali family!

BARBARA: Nonsense.

MADAME BALI: Eh?

BARBARA: Sheer nonsense, woman. You could not possibly have worked a miracle. Only the High Priest of Ra can work miracles, and you hardly resemble the High Priest of Ra.

MADAME BALI: High Priest? (*She moves to Center.*) What are you talking about? (*It suddenly dawns on her. She moves to BARBARA and stares into her eyes.*) Is that you in there, Barbara, or are we in the presence of still another ghostly entity?

BARBARA: (*Rises.*) You are in the presence of Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile, you foolish creature. On your knees!

MADAME BALI: (*Hastily dropping to her knees.*) Oh yes, I'm so sorry, Your Nileskip...er, that is Your Pharaohship...or, er...

BARBARA: A simple "Your Majesty" will do.

BILL: What is the meaning of this? No one goes down on their knees except to the King of England.

CAROL: (*To BILL.*) You mean the Queen of England, presumptuous upstart. There has been no King of England for sixty years, only a queen, and I am her! I'll have you taken to the Tower of London if I hear any more of this foolishness.

BILL: (*Furious.*) How dare you speak to your king thus, you sniveling insect!

CAROL: (*Rises.*) Insect! (*She points her finger at BILL. Screaming.*) Off with his head!

BILL: Off with my head? (*He points his finger at CAROL.*) Off with your head!

SALLY: (*Rising.*) Stop this instantly!

MADAME BALI: (*Rises from her knees.*) Please, please, everyone—calm down. I'm sure we can talk this thing out. (*Everybody quiets down.*) There, that's better. Now, we'll all take turns speaking. Let's start with Marie Antoinette. I believe she had something to say.

SALLY: Thank you, dear. To begin with, I wish both of you (*Indicating BILL and CAROL.*) would stop all this talk of chopping off heads. It brings back unpleasant memories. (*She unconsciously brings her hand to her throat.*)

TONY: (*Who has up to now been sitting quietly observing the proceedings, rises.*) An excellent suggestion. Besides, you people have it all wrong, anyway. You don't cut off the head; you divide them down the middle.

ALL: (*Horried.*) What!

TONY: Of course. It's the perfect solution to any problem, and also, I might say, the wisest. Take it from me. You see, two women once came to me, each claiming that a newborn infant was theirs, so I proposed dividing the child down the middle.

MADAME BALI: You're King Solomon!

TONY: Quite correct, child.

MADAME BALI: (*She moves to the armchair Down Right, and swoons into it.*) Oh! Oh! This is too much for me.

HARRY: It's **much** too much for me. (*He moves to TABBY, at the archway, and turns the lights back on. TONY, SALLY, BARBARA and BILL are taken aback as the light comes on.*)

BILL: What manner of wizard is this that moves his finger and fills the room with light?

CAROL: It's an electric light, you dolt. You claim to be King of England, and you're not even aware of the latest scientific wonders. Hah!

HARRY: (*Moves to Center.*) An electric light—the latest scientific wonder? Are you forgetting about your hot comb, electric curlers and automatic dishwasher?

TABBY: (*Moves to HARRY. In her normal voice.*) Please, Mr. Preston, you must realize that Queen Victoria died in 1901. At that time, electric lights *were* the latest wonder.

HARRY: Fine, but that happens to be my wife, Carol, who was born in 1948, when Milton Berle's TV show was the latest wonder. She's not some queen who died at the turn of the century. And furthermore, Bill and Sally aren't Henry VIII and Marie Antoinette. They're only pretending to be. It's a little game we cooked up while you were off admiring my wife's pet beetles. Bill's no more Henry VIII than I am; isn't that right, Bill? (*There is no response*)

from BILL.) Bill? *(Still no response. HARRY walks right up to BILL.)* Come on, Bill, give me a break, will you? We're trying to make Bali look like an idiot, not me.

BILL: Curb thy tongue, knave. I've sent men to the Tower for less.

HARRY: *(Confused.)* Bill?

BILL: The name is Henry, not Bill, fool.

TABBY: *(Moves to HARRY.)* Mr. Preston, I'm afraid that the spirit of Henry VIII has actually taken possession of your friend's body. This may have started out as a game, but he doesn't look like he's playing a game now, does he?

HARRY: He has to be. There's no such thing as spirits taking possession of a live person's body.

TABBY: Oh, isn't there, though. What about your wife?

HARRY: Listen, young lady—or young kitten—whatever you are...

TABBY: It's your lady. The cat business was only an act. *(To MADAME BALI.)* wasn't it, mother?

MADAME BALI: *(Who is still in ecstasy over her accomplishment.)* Hmm? Oh, the cat thing. Yes, yes it was all an act, an act I don't need anymore. I have the power you see. I really have the power!

TABBY: *(She leads HARRY further downstage.)* So, Mr. Preston, while most of what my mother has done in the past **has** been phony, it appears that this time she really did hit the supernatural jackpot. She's managed to bring back the spirits of three queens and two kings.

HARRY: Three queens and two kings—a full house.

TABBY: *(Smiles.)* Yes. And right at this moment, your wife isn't your wife; she's Queen Victoria. *(She takes HARRY's hands in a pleading gesture.)* Please, Mr. Preston, you must believe me.

HARRY: *(Still a little skeptical, but relenting.)* Well...I must admit, you're a lot more believable as a person than you were as a cat.

TABBY: Thank you.

HARRY: *(Moving away from TABBY.)* All right, let's say for the sake of argument that we really do have a fistful of royalty on our hands. What do we do with them?

TABBY: Well, I imagine we should have a nice chat with them—it should prove extremely interesting—and then send them back.

HARRY: Can you send them back?

TABBY: Not me. My mother will have to do that. That's the first law of sorcery; spirits have to enter and exit by the same gate, as it were.

HARRY: Well, what about it, Madame Bali—can you open the gates up again so their majesties can shuffle off to oblivion?

MADAME BALI: I...I think so.

HARRY: You think so? My wife and friends are looking for heads to chop off, and you **think** you can set things straight? And you call yourself a medium? I ought to sue you for malpractice.

MADAME BALI: Mr. Preston, you have my assurance that I will do my utmost to restore things to their proper perspective.

HARRY: And what do I do if you can't—change the name of this place to Buckingham Palace?

CAROL: (*Moves to Down Center, near HARRY.*) An excellent suggestion if we do say so ourselves. Even though it is a trifle petite compared to the genuine article.

HARRY: Oh it is, is it? Well I don't recall hearing any complaints from you in the last eleven years.

CAROL: Silence, or you shall find yourself spending the next seven years in the Tower of London!

TABBY: Please, Mr. Preston. I think she means it.

HARRY: I'm not really worried, Tabby. The Tower of London is more than three thousand miles away.

CAROL: We trust that this dwelling has an attic of some sort?

HARRY: It's just a crawl space.

CAROL: That will do quite nicely.

TABBY: I told you she meant business. (*HARRY sheepishly moves to the couch and sits.*)

CAROL: Now, does anyone else have any objections?

BILL: (*Moves to CAROL.*) Hmmpf, it's not much of a palace, if you ask me.

SALLY: (*Moves downstage to Down Left.*) At Versailles, the gardeners have better lodgings.

BARBARA: And it can't hold a candle to the pyramid of Cheops.

TONY: Or my temple at Jerusalem.

BILL: (*Sighs.*) Well, I suppose it'll do. (*He clears his throat.*) I hereby declare this wretched hovel to be Buckingham Palace pro tempore.

HARRY: (*Jumps up.*) Now see here, you can't go taking over this house. I don't care who you're supposed to be. This is my home!

BILL: Hold your tongue!

TABBY: (*Moves to HARRY.*) Please, they have to have somewhere to stay until mother can send them back. And you can't expect the crowned heads of Europe and the Middle East to sleep in anything less than a palace, can you?

MADAME BALI: That's right. You can't just send the King of England to a motel for the night, you know.

HARRY: Well, Carol can stay; she belongs here. But the rest of them have to go.

CAROL: And which one of us is Carol, pray tell.

HARRY: You are.

CAROL: We are?

HARRY: Not we—you.

TABBY: She's using the imperial we, Mr. Preston.

HARRY: Well, I wish she'd stop it; it's driving me crazy.

TABBY: (*To CAROL.*) Would you please, your majesty? I know it's your prerogative, but right now, it's just adding to the confusion.

CAROL: Very well. We...that is I yield on the matter, but only because you asked so nicely.

HARRY: (*To TABBY.*) By the way, while we're on the subject of speaking, there's something else I don't understand. I can see why Queen Victoria and Henry VIII would be speaking English, but what about the other three? If they're really who they claim to be, they should be speaking French, Hebrew and Egyptian.

MADAME BALI: (*Rises.*) I can answer that. The spirit of the incarnate always adopts the language of the host body. It makes the transition that much easier. Occasionally a phrase or two will slip out in the native tongue, but for the most part, they stick to the language of the host.

HARRY: Host is the right word; these kings and queens are nothing but a bunch of parasites.

BILL: Here, what's that you say—parasites?

HARRY: That's right, parasites. And the sooner you all go back to wherever it is you came from, the happier I'll be.

BILL: My dear fellow, where I come from, we have ways to deal with unruly peasants such as yourself.

HARRY: Well, I have news for you, buster. This peasant happens to own the property you're standing on. And you are trespassing!

TABBY: *(To BILL, who is about to explode.)* Your Majesty, you must forgive him. I'm afraid he's right, technically.

BILL: Hmm, that's true, isn't it. *(To CAROL, BARBARA, SALLY and TONY.)* I believe some deliberations is in order. *(BILL, CAROL, BARBARA, SALLY and TONY move to the Down Left area, and go into a football-type huddle.)*

MADAME BALI: How nice—their first summit conference!

HARRY: Well, they can hold their next one on the front lawn. If they're not out of here in ten minutes, I'm going to call the police.

MADAME BALI: And what would you report to them—that Henry VIII refuses to leave your living room?

HARRY: I'll tell them that a pack of loonies has invaded my home.

MADAME BALI: One of those loonies is, or was, your wife. *(Before HARRY can answer, the huddle breaks up abruptly, and the kings and queens move to Center. HARRY also moves to Center to confront them.)*

BILL: We have reached a decision. We've decided to cede this property to the crown by royal proclamation. And I do so proclaim. So, you see, now it is you who are trespassing.

TABBY: Please, Your Majesty; This was his home. What's to become of him?

BILL: Oh, we've decided what to do about the problem also.

HARRY: *(Sarcastically.)* And just what have the sovereign rulers of the Western World decided to do about me?

(CAROL, BILL, BARBARA, SALLY and TONY turn towards each other momentarily, and then turn back to face HARRY. They all simultaneously point their finger at Bill and shout--)

CAROL, BILL, BARBARA, SALLY and TONY: *(To HARRY.)* OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**SETTING:**

Same as Act One.

AT RISE:

It is immediately following the close of ACT ONE. CAROL, BILL, BARBARA, SALLY and TONY are still pointing their fingers at HARRY. TABBY steps between the five kings and queens and HARRY.

TABBY: Now, now, now, let's not be hasty, ladies and gentlemen.

BILL: Why not? This whole matter can be resolved with one swish of the axe.

TABBY: Things aren't done that way any more, your majesty. This is the Twentieth Century, not the Middle Ages. Heads of State do not arbitrarily order executions.

BILL: They don't? Then, how ever do they dispose of unwanted wives?

TABBY: *(To HARRY.)* Should I tell him about women's lib, or let him find out for himself?

HARRY: I think you'd better hold off for a while. Somehow, I get the feeling Henry VIII's not quite ready for the ERA.

TABBY: *(To CAROL.)* And I'm surprised at you, Victoria. Unless I've read my History wrong, people didn't have their heads chopped off during your reign either.

CAROL: *(Sighs.)* I know, I know. I've always wanted to point my finger and shout: "Off with his head."

TABBY: You did?

CAROL: Yes. Ever since I read *Alice In Wonderland*.

BILL: What's all this prattle about the Twentieth Century?

TABBY: It's not prattle, your majesty. You're in the Twentieth Century right now. You all are, as a matter of fact. There's...er, something else I have to tell all of you. I'm not sure I know how to break this to you gently. You're all dead.

BARBARA, BILL, CAROL, SALLY AND TONY (Ad-lib.): What! Preposterous! Ridiculous!

HARRY: *(To TABBY.)* I don't think you broke it gently.

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BILL: (*Moves to TABBY, puts a hand on her shoulder.*) Sit down, my dear. I'll send for the court physicians.

SALLY: Perhaps a few men from the asylum would be of more use. The girl's obviously mad.

BARBARA: Why not skip all that and make a mummy out of her?

TABBY: But you really are dead? Some of you have been dead for centuries, even millenniums.

CAROL: Poor deluded child.

TONY: She's right, I'm afraid.

BILL: What? Don't tell me, you've gone mad, too?

TONY: Not at all my good man. I know it's hard to believe that we're all deceased, but logic and, er...*wisdom* would seem to dictate otherwise. For instance, do you recognize the body you're in? I don't. My last recollection of myself is as an old man with a long white beard. It's obvious that the body I now inhabit is neither old nor bearded, ergo it is not my own.

BILL: (*Looking himself over.*) Hmm, I do appear to be a bit scrawny, now that you mention it.

CAROL: And my hands—they're all rough and red.

HARRY: It's called dishpan hands.

BARBARA: (*Touching her face.*) This face is not my own. The Queen of Egypt has much better features than these.

TABBY: And what about you, Marie Antoinette? Do you notice any change?

SALLY: (*Feeling her throat.*) Well, I do seem to...er, have everything all together.

TABBY: (*To TONY.*) Thank you, King Solomon. That was a most brilliant—and wise—observation.

TONY: Nothing at all, my dear. Wisdom is my stock in trade, you know. Say, have I ever told you about the time these two mothers brought their babies to me...

TABBY: (*Abruptly.*) Yes.

TONY: (*Disappointed.*) Oh. Well, it bears repeating, you know. (*To HARRY.*) How about you, young man?

HARRY: No thanks. I've already read the book.

TABBY: All right everybody, let me explain to you just how...

MADAME BALI: (*Rising suddenly.*) I'll take over now, dear.

TABBY: Mother, do you think you should?

MADAME BALI: Of course. I brought them here, they're my responsibility.

TABBY: But, Mother, I really...

MADAME BALI: Tut, tut, tut, daughter.

BARBARA: Did somebody say Tut?

TABBY: Relax, Cleopatra, it's just a figure of speech.

MADAME BALI: (*Addressing the kings and queens.*) Now then, children...

BILL: I am not a child, madam!

MADAME BALI: I know that, I just...

BILL: Then, kindly desist from referring to me **as** a child.

MADAME BALI: I'm sorry.

BILL: You should be.

MADAME BALI: Now, see here---you just mind your manners!

BILL: You will not raise your voice to me, madam. I am Henry VIII.

MADAME BALI: Well, I'm Bali the first, and I'll raise my voice any time I care to!

BILL: (*To TABBY.*) Are you certain about that no execution rule?

MADAME BALI: Hummmf! Talk about ingrates. Why, if it wasn't for me, you wouldn't even be here?

BILL: Impossible. Henry VIII does not depend upon a mere woman for his existence.

MADAME BALI: You...you...you male chauvinist king!

TABBY: Sit down, Mother. Another ten minutes of this and we'll be at war with England. (*Reluctantly, MADAME BALI moves to armchair Down Right and sits. The doorbell rings.*)

BILL: Ah, the dinner gong! Excellent, I'm famished.

TABBY: Sorry to disappoint you, sir, but that's not a gong, it's a bell—a doorbell. And it means that someone is on the other side of the door waiting to come in.

BILL: Do you mean to say that people no longer knock on doors to gain admittance, they ring a bell?

TABBY: Precisely.

BILL: Isn't that a bit inconvenient?

TABBY: What do you mean?

BILL: Carrying a bell around with you all the time.

TABBY: (*To HARRY.*) Why don't you explain that one to him. I'll go answer the door. (*She moves toward the front door. HARRY grabs her arm to stop her.*)

HARRY: Wait—don't open that door!

TABBY: Why not?

HARRY: Somebody might be there!

TABBY: I'll admit that **is** a distinct possibility.

HARRY: What I meant to say is I don't want to let anyone into the house with them here.

TABBY: Hmm, good point. That would pose somewhat of a problem, wouldn't it?

HARRY: Especially if Henry VIII decides to start head hunting again. (*The doorbell rings again.*)

TABBY: Coming! (*To HARRY.*) I'll tell you what—why don't you and mother escort the royal entourage upstairs while I answer the door for you.

MADAME BALI: (*Rises.*) An excellent idea. (*To the kings and queens.*) Come along, your majesties. We'll show you to your quarters. (*She moves to the archway and exits. The following dialogue occurs as BILL, BARBARA, CAROL, SALLY and TONY, followed by HARRY are exiting through the archway.*)

BARBARA: I do hope you have a room with a view of the Nile.

HARRY: I'm afraid we don't. Will you settle for the East River?

CAROL: The East River—is that like the Thames?

HARRY: More or less, they're both polluted. (*They have exited. TABBY opens the front door. BRIAN is standing in the doorway. He is still in his deliveryman uniform. He is carrying a small white bridal bouquet.*)

BRIAN: Hi—

TABBY: Oh, Brian, come in, please. (*BRIAN enters. He and TABBY move downstage toward the couch and sit.*)

BRIAN: I'm sorry I missed the séance. A big rush order came in at the last minute. I had to work late. I came right over as soon as I finished delivering it.

TABBY: I see. (*Spotting the bouquet he is holding.*) Er, you didn't forget to deliver something, did you?

BRIAN: These? Oh, they're for you. (*He hands the bouquet to her.*)

TABBY: For me? How sweet; thank you. (*Rises.*) I'll just set these down next to...(*She stares at the bouquet for a moment, then turns to BRIAN.*) Brian, this is a bridal bouquet.

BRIAN: I know. (*She stares at him.*) Oh, don't get the wrong idea. They're from a wedding I had to deliver to this afternoon. The groom didn't show. I thought you'd like to have them.

TABBY: I do...I think. (*She sets the bouquet on the table.*)

BRIAN: How did the séance go?

TABBY: (*Returning to the couch and sitting.*) It was er...interesting.

BRIAN: Interesting?

TABBY: Very. But let's not talk about it right now. I'm more interested in the message you left with Mr. Preston. He said something about a problem you had the solution to.

BRIAN: Yes. That's why I stopped over. I figured out how we can get your mother to stop playing "Strike-It-Rich-With-The-Spirit-World."

TABBY: You did? That's terrific, Brian. How are you going to do it?

BRIAN: Well, actually, it's not just me, you're involved, too. I've already set things in motion, and...

BILL: (*Offstage.*) What! The King of England spent the night in this puny room. Out of the question!

BRIAN: What was that?

TABBY: That's another problem. Maybe you could tackle that one next.

MADAME BALI: (*Offstage.*) Please, your majesty, it really is a very nice room...

BILL: (*Offstage.*) Out of my way, peasant!

TABBY: Oh dear, I hope mother is right.

BRIAN: That was your mother?

TABBY: One of them was. (*She rises.*) Look, Brian, I think you'd better leave now.

BRIAN: (*Rising.*) But, why?

TABBY: Please. (*Moving with him to the front door.*) It looks like I have to deal with **this** problem before we go to work on the other. Come back tomorrow. Things should be resolved by then—I hope. If I'm not here, Mr. Preston will tell you where to reach me.

BRIAN: (*Stops at the door, turns to face TABBY.*) Tabby, you're not in any sort of trouble—or danger—are you?



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