

Marjory, Edward and George. Extract.

Scene 1. Saturday evening.

Phyllis is seated at the head of a table, with Marjory, Edward and George who are showroom dummies, dressed in fairly elegant eveningwear. They are in the middle of a séance, and it is fairly dark so we can't really tell they are dummies yet. If they are holding hands around the table, that would be good.

Wind and storm effects fill the stage at appropriate moments, and a light flashes outside the open window.

PHYLLIS. I conjure up the spirits of the deep, dark night.

Flash of light. Rumble of thunder

Spirits, it is I, Madame Zahula. Is there anybody there? Knock once for yes, twice for no.

Flash of light. Rumble of thunder.

Spirits, can you hear me? I am looking for my husband, known in this life as Gustav the Great. It is important I contact him. Do you have a message for me? Please say you have a message for me.

Flash of light. Rumble of thunder, louder.

The spirits are restless tonight, my friends. I feel them. In my bones, in my blood, in my whole being. Answer me, spirits. Is there anybody there? Can you hear me?

Loud thunderclap.

Oh, spirits, have you a message for one of us? For one of us round the table tonight? Dear Marjory, perhaps? Or sweet Edward? What about loveable old George? Or could it be, dare I hope it is a message for myself, Madame Zahula?

Lights flash wildly. Extremely loud thunder.

Yes, is it tonight, spirits? Please say it is. Please say tonight will be the night we make contact, and my years of suffering can come to an end.

Nothing.

So my years of suffering can come to an end.

Nothing.

My years of suffering can come to an end!

Elizabeth appears at the window, waving a torch.

ELIZABETH. Battery's flat.

PHYLLIS. Bugger it!

ELIZABETH. They don't last 5 minutes if they're not Duracell.

PHYLLIS. They are Duracell.

ELIZABETH. Shoddy! Hang on. I'm coming in.

Elizabeth disappears.

PHYLLIS. Seems it won't be tonight, my friends, after all.

Elizabeth enters through the main door.

ELIZABETH. Shall I put the lights on? Let the dog see the rabbit.

PHYLLIS. You may as well – everything else is ruined.

Lights on in the room reveal Phyllis dressed exotically as Madame Zahula, the three guests round the table as dummies, and Elizabeth, in coat and slippers, carrying a MP3 player and the faulty torch.

ELIZABETH. It was going so well too.

PHYLLIS. I felt it tonight, Elizabeth. Something was different. What happened to the sound?

ELIZABETH. I was so busy faffing with the torch, I missed my cue.

She presses the MP3 player. There is a thunderclap.

Your Robert was ever so good at setting it up to play like that.
He really is a computer greek.

PHYLLIS. I think you'll find it's 'geek' dear.

ELIZABETH. Is it? No wonder they look at me daft down the hairdresser's.
They probably think you've got a foreign grandson.

Phyllis starts to take off her costume.

He does always look so smart though. Usually, they just wear any old thing, but Robert really takes care of himself.

PHYLLIS. That's my influence. If you look good, you feel good. I feel lousy.

ELIZABTH. Never mind, love. You did do well. Almost as good as on Thursday. I do think 2 in a week takes it out of you, though. Always has. How was I, on wind and lights?

PHYLLIS. Ok with lights, and your wind, as always, was spot on.

ELIZABETH. I know it's not the same as the real thing. But we do our best, don't we? One day we might get a proper storm. Not had a proper storm in ages.

PHYLLIS. It's timing it, you see. It's the atmosphere we need. Lightning, thunder, all the storm effects. Really makes it come alive.

ELIZABETH. And you were doing lovely an' all. All that 'the spirits are restless' stuff, 'I can feel it in my water'. Was very convincing.

PHYLLIS. 'In my bones', not my water.

ELIZABETH. Still, it sounded good. Where do you get it all from?

PHYLLIS. Us mediums know the language.

ELIZABETH. You're about as much a medium as I'm Madonna.

PHYLLIS. I just never had the gift.

ELIZABETH. Neither of us did. It stopped with mother. Oh, look.

The torch is on.

Do you want to try again?

PHYLLIS. Bit late now. The moment has passed.

ELIZABETH. I'll ask your Robert to look at it next time he's here. Perhaps there's a loose connection.

PHYLLIS. Probably. Usually is something loose these days. Help me with Marjory, Edward and George, will you?

ELIZABETH. Come on, troops, back to the cupboard. My, Marjory's looking foxy tonight.

PHYLLIS. You think so?

ELIZABETH. Oh yes, very elegant. Is that a new dress?

PHYLLIS. No, it's one of your old ones.

ELIZABETH. Thought it was familiar. Looks better on her than it ever did on me. Wouldn't be able to get into something like that now. I swear she gets heavier.

PHYLLIS. I think I did catch her at the spag bol earlier.

ELIZABETH. Come on, you, you know your place.

She opens the cupboard door and manoeuvres Marjory into it. Phyllis, now in trousers and top, picks up Edward.

PHYLLIS. I've always had a soft spot for Edward.

ELIZABETH. Oh, I know. I've seen the saucy looks you give him. You're wasting your time, of course.

PHYLLIS. I know he's a dummy, Elizabeth. I'm not a complete fruitcake.

ELIZABETH. I know that. It's just, well, I always think of Edward as not being one of the marrying kind.

PHYLLIS. Like you, you mean?

ELIZABETH. No, not like me. I just never found the right man.

PHYLLIS. Then, what do you mean?

ELIZABETH. You know. Something of the Elton John about him. And who's that other one who didn't used to be? George Michael. Edward's always so dapper and immaculate, really looks after himself. And there's that cheeky grin.

PHYLLIS. Elizabeth Wilson, you're quite dotty.

ELIZABETH. Better dotty than dead.

PHYLLIS. Oh, any day of the week.

ELIZABETH. No, I like Edward's smile. You never see George smiling. Miserable old thing. I'm sure Edwards's got a button missing.

PHYLLIS. What, he's not all there?

ELIZABETH. No, an actual button missing. A couple, in fact. On his pants, of all places.

PHYLLIS. Oh yes. Remind me tomorrow, I'll sew them back on.

ELIZABETH. I noticed Robert had a couple of buttons missing on his coat.

PHYLLIS. That boy needs someone to look after him, since he's moved into his flat. A never-ending diet of tuna, sweetcorn and rice can't help either.

ELIZABETH. Stop being a grandma, Phyllis. He's fine. Come on now, George. Your turn.

Phyllis puts Edward in the cupboard, as Elizabeth goes to George. As if George has goosed her.

Naughty! Now, George is a man's man. Got a real eye for the ladies, and loves to flirt. Even if he never does smile. Now, you. Watch where you're putting your hands.

PHYLLIS. Put him down. Elizabeth. I'm sure people have been arrested for less.

ELIZABETH. It's a victimless crime, Phyllis. George enjoys it, and I certainly do. Besides it's the only time I can get a man to touch me these days, unless you count Walter's wandering hands at the day centre, and that's only because he keeps asking me for a dance.

The three dummies are in the cupboard.

PHYLLIS. Poor Walter. You should dance him with once.

ELIZABETH. I would if it were a waltz, but he insists on a tango. I can't tango. I've got angina and a dodgy bladder for goodness sake.

PHYLLIS. There you go, all tucked up for the night, nice and safe and quiet.

There is a sudden loud clap of thunder.

ELIZABETH. Oops, sorry.

PHYLLIS. Give me that.

She grabs MP3 player off Elizabeth and puts it on side.

ELIZABETH. Cup of tea?

PHYLLIS. No, I'm all right, thanks. I'll wait for my supper.

ELIZABETH. At least we've got a repeat of Morse tonight, followed by a documentary on the making of Last of the Summer Wine, and a full 2 hours of classic Corrie.

PHYLLIS. Oh, Elizabeth, when did we get so old?

ELIZABETH. Speak for yourself. I love it. You should take an interest in something. Get out more. Take up a hobby. Read a good book. Or a newspaper.

PHYLLIS. You know I don't like newspapers. Full of silly stories and bad news.

ELIZABETH. Sometimes you find out something interesting.

PHYLLIS. Not often though.

ELIZABETH. No, suppose not.

The doorbell rings.

PHYLLIS. Who's that this time on a Saturday night?

ELIZABETH. I'll give you 3 guesses.

PHYLLIS. Quick, lock up the brandy. I'll go.

Phyllis exits, Elizabeth does actually put away the brandy.

Phyllis re-enters with Connie, another mature lady, a little on the large side.

It's Connie.

ELIZABETH. Hello, Connie.

CONNIE. Hello, Elizabeth. I can't stop.

ELIZABETH. Cup of tea?

CONNIE. Just a brandy if you've got one.

PHYLLIS. We're all out.

CONNIE. Whisky then. A large one. I need it.

Elizabeth pours a small whisky.

PHYLLIS. Why? Whatever's the matter?

CONNIE. (referring to whisky) You on rations or something? I just had to come and tell you about Mavis.

ELIZABETH. Who's Mavis?

CONNIE. Big Mavis. You know Mavis.

PHYLLIS. Mavis Bickercord?

CONNIE. Who's Mavis Bickercord?

PHYLLIS. She's the only big Mavis I know. Used to sing off key in the church choir.

CONNIE. That could be any of 'em. No, this isn't Mavis Bickercord. She was tiny compared to this Mavis. It's the Mavis with the little Yorkie who had pups during the royal wedding.

ELIZABETH. That was Joan Hetherington who had pups during the wedding. She's still got 2 of them, gave the others away to a raffle.

CONNIE. No, Joan Hetherington had the 4 x 4 and the terrible itch. Used to offer us a lift when it was snowing, but nobody wanted to get in with her, in case they caught something.

PHYLLIS. That wasn't Joan Hetherington, it was Irene Carlisle.

ELIZABETH. You're mistaken. Irene Carlisle was married to Reg with the big nose.

PHYLLIS. Reg didn't have a big nose.

ELIZABETH. He did when he blew it. He was forever snorting into a paper hankie.

CONNIE. Anyway, anyway, never mind them. It's Mavis whatever she's called I'm on about. It's happened again.

ELIZABETH. No!

CONNIE. True. She's his latest victim.

PHYLLIS. The flasher?

CONNIE. Ay. He got her while she was coming out of Asda's car park Thursday night.

ELIZABETH. What did she do?

CONNIE. Apparently, she looked straight at him, and said, if that's the best he could do, she knew where there's a counter full at Whitely's Butcher's.

ELIZABETH. She never.

CONNIE. She said so. This is good stuff. Better than I get in at home. I'll have a top-up.

Elizabeth refills the whisky

You two not drinking?

PHYLLIS. Might have one before bed.

CONNIE. Oh yes, big Saturday night. Repeat of Morse and documentary on Last of the Summer Wine. Lovely.

PHYLLIS. Yes, anyway... Mavis.

CONNIE. Mavis who?

PHYLLIS. The one who was flashed at.

CONNIE. Oh right.

PHYLLIS. Did she get a good look?

CONNIE. She got a complete eye full.

PHYLLIS. Of his face.

CONNIE. Oh. Said she thought he was wearing some sort of mask.

ELIZABETH. A mask? Oh dear. What sort of mask?

CONNIE. She didn't say. Some sort.

ELIZABETH. I watched that film once, Scream 2. He wore a horrible mask in that.

PHYLLIS. When did you watch Scream 2?

ELIZABETH. You'd gone to bed. I thought it was a comedy. Shook me right up, I can tell you. I didn't watch Scream 3 or 4 after that.

CONNIE. Anyway, Mavis, apart from the mask, did say he was smartly dressed.

PHYLLIS. A better class of flasher, obviously.

CONNIE. Probably some poor guy getting his kicks frightening defenceless old ladies.

ELIZABETH. Defenceless old ladies be buggered. There's a lot of hussies out there, only too eager to be reminded of what they're missing.

PHYLLIS. Don't tar everyone with the same brush, Elizabeth. We're not all like you.

ELIZABETH. I know what I'm missing all right. What time's Asda shut?

CONNIE. It's 24 hours.

ELIZABETH. I might nip out later for some milk.

CONNIE. Get some brandy. I like this, but it's not as nice.

PHYLLIS. You don't want anymore then?

CONNIE. Ay, go on, just a small one.

Phyllis pours

Not as small as that.

Phyllis pours more

ELIZABETH. I don't really like Asda, to be honest. They had all that stuff taken recently.

CONNIE. Oh yes, Cynthia was telling me about that.

ELIZABETH. Who's Cynthia?

CONNIE. The small woman with the chickens.

PHYLLIS. She's got chickens?

CONNIE. They're always in our garden, bloody things. I'm forever chasing them off with my ewbank.

ELIZABETH. Why have you got a ewbank in the garden?

CONNIE. I do the rugs out there. I wouldn't mind if they laid a few eggs now and again. Anyway. She was saying there'd been a shortage of rice on the shelves because someone nicked them all.

PHYLLIS. Rice?

CONNIE. I know! Who'd nick a load of rice? I hope the police are checking all the takeaways. Still, people will take anything these days. Beryl Taylor was always getting caught with a packet of Tena Lady down her top. And they're not the easiest things to smuggle out, I can tell you. It's so embarrassing being old sometimes, trying to hide one's little indiscretions, and then all that keeping up with modern technology, I don't know how some people do it.

A mobile phone rings. All 3 ladies take out their phones to check.

PHYLLIS. Not me.

ELIZABETH. Not me.

CONNIE. Must be me. I've no idea how you answer it. I'll just let it ring. It won't be anyone important anyway. Just Kathleen asking if I'm going to church in the morning. Where were we?

ELIZABETH. Getting old.

CONNIE. Oh yes, it's not much fun, is it?

PHYLLIS. Speak for yourself – I still have fun.

CONNIE. Oh yes, doing your séancey things. How are they? Have you done one lately?

PHYLLIS. One or two.

CONNIE. Any joy?

PHYLLIS. Some.

ELIZABETH. Not really, no.

CONNIE. Eee, you never give up though, do you? Remember that time you roped me in?

PHYLLIS. I'll never forget.

CONNIE. You had us all sitting round that table holding hands. I remember I had Walter Pine on one side and he didn't half have a tight grip. Sweaty too. Think he was a bit too excited. Anyway, there we were, all sat round holding hands, lights out, getting into the atmosphere, waiting for someone to come through from the other side, and then somebody got the giggles and started telling Knock Knock jokes.

PHYLLIS. That wasn't somebody, Connie, that was you.

CONNIE. Ay, so it was. Good laugh though. Do you still ask people to take part in them?

PHYLLIS. Not so much now.

CONNIE. What? You do them on your own?

ELIZABETH. She uses dummies.

PHYLLIS. Elizabeth...

CONNIE. Well, yes, they'd have to be a bit dumb, I suppose. I mean, no offence, but you've been doing them for years, and no contact with the other side, as far as I know.

PHYLLIS. No, but I enjoy it.

CONNIE. Ay, that's the main thing. And you're not harming anyone, so good luck with it. Right. (**downing her drink**) That's me off. Thought I'd let you know about Carla.

ELIZABETH. Who's Carla?

CONNIE. The one who was flashed at.

ELIZABETH. I thought it was Mavis.

CONNIE. Mavis who?

PHYLLIS. Oh, don't start that again. Just go before it gets dark.

Connie makes sure she's finished off her glass, and then makes to go.

CONNIE. Night, ladies. Batten down the hatches; they say we're in for a stormy one tonight.

PHYLLIS. Who says?

CONNIE. Don't you watch the weather? It's coming in from the West apparently. Or the East. Somewhere anyway.

ELIZABETH. We were just saying earlier, we've not had a good storm for ages.

CONNIE. Ay, well, don't want one either. Scares my Millie half to death.

PHYLLIS. You really should take that budgie to a therapist.

CONNIE. Nothing wrong with her.

PHYLLIS. She's about 30.

CONNIE. Sturdy birdy, I call her. She'll outlive us all. I'll turn the TV up, then she won't hear anything. Right, goodnight, lock up behind me, won't you? And hey, watch out for flashers!

She does a quick flash of her coat and goes. Phyllis follows. Elizabeth checks the whisky.

Phyllis returns.

ELIZABETH. She always brings such good news.

PHYLLIS. It's the only reason she comes. To cheer us up. How much of that whisky's left?

ELIZABETH. There's still some, don't worry.

PHYLLIS. I wouldn't mind if she only ever had one, I don't begrudge anyone a drink, but it's never just the one, it's always 3 or 4, and large ones at that.

ELIZABETH. Perhaps she's got a problem.

PHYLLIS. It's us with the problem. We're too soft.

ELIZABETH. Right, it's nearly half past, I'm going to put my 'jamas on, and then settle down with Morse.

PHYLLIS. You'll have seen it before.

ELIZABETH. I know, but they're so good, and I can never remember who did it. Except that one with the deaf people – I always remember that one for some reason.

Elizabeth goes.

Phyllis makes sure the window is closed and draws the curtains. She puts Connie's whisky glass on the side ready to take into the kitchen, and looks for the remote for the telly.

PHYLLIS. Now, where's she put it?

She searches a bit more, then goes to the door, and calls out.

Elizabeth? Where's the remote? Elizabeth!

There's no answer. She looks under the sofa or chair.

She must have had it last. She never lets me near the bloody thing.

She goes to the sideboard. She opens a drawer, searches, but nothing. She opens another, nothing. She opens another, gasps and stops.

What the - ?

She looks in the drawer

What on earth? Elizabeth?

She hears a noise and closes the drawer, as -

Elizabeth enters in a dressing gown.

ELIZABETH. Did you shout?

PHYLLIS. Yes, I was looking for the remote.

ELIZABETH. It's where it always is. In the Radio Times.

PHYLLIS. 'In' the Radio Times?

ELIZABETH. Marking the day.

PHYLLIS. Of course. And where's the Radio Times?

ELIZABETH. Haven't a clue. Oh yes, I remember, I was reading it in bed last night. I'll go and get it.

PHYLLIS. Elizabeth? Will you want any supper?

ELIZABETH. Oh yes please. Tea seems like ages ago, and then with all the excitement of the séance and Connie...

PHYLLIS. What would you like?

ELIZABETH. Oh, you know me, I'll eat anything. But, maybe, with what Connie was saying, you know, if there's going to be a storm, something comforting. Maybe a pizza. No, I know. One of those microwave curries we got in.

PHYLLIS. Anything with it?

ELIZABETH. With a curry? Well, rice, of course. I really fancy curry and rice, don't you? Yum. Won't be long.

She goes

PHYLLIS. Curry and... rice... Well, there's certainly plenty of that.

And Phyllis opens the drawer and brings out lots of packets of rice.

Blackout.