

A SEANCE FOR THE LIVING

A Script in Three Acts



FOREWORD FOR THE MEDIUM

This script is a piece of theatre — read it aloud as such. Lower your voice a tone below your speaking register. Slow your delivery by half. Do not rush a single line, and never rush a pause. Silence is the medium's most powerful instrument; let the room sit in it longer than is comfortable. If a guest laughs, do not laugh with them. If a guest cries, do not look at them.

You will not break character, not once, until the very last line. You will not look at this script if you can avoid it — practise twice before the night so the script is in your bones, then hold it open as a prop, not a crutch. If you lose your place, breathe slowly, look at the candle nearest you, and rejoin at the next ACT heading. The script is forgiving. The room is forgiving. You are the only one who knows the words.

RECRUIT A PARTNER



You cannot perform this script alone. Conscript a confederate — a friend in the next room with the Bluetooth speaker paired to their phone and one hand on the light switch. Walk them through the CUE markers once before guests arrive. Their job is to be invisible and on time. Yours is to never look in their direction.

PROPS CHECKLIST

☐ FIVE CANDLES, MINIMUM

Tapers or pillars. One in the centre, four at the cardinal points of the table.

☐ CRYSTAL BALL OR GLASS ORB

Centre of the table, behind the central candle, where every guest can see it.

☐ OUIJA BOARD (OPTIONAL)

If you have one, place it folded to one side. The script does not require it.

☐ BOWL OF SALT, SMALL

For the dismissal. Coarse sea salt looks best; iodised will do.

☐ TABLECLOTH, DARK

Burgundy velvet is ideal. Black wool serves. Anything heavy that drinks the light.

☐ BRASS BELL, SMALL

A handbell or service bell. It should ring clear at a touch — test before guests arrive.

☐ BLUETOOTH SPEAKER, HIDDEN

In an adjacent room or behind a curtain. Your partner controls the cues from elsewhere.

☐ A SINGLE BLACK RIBBON

Tied around the bell, or laid across the crystal ball. A small touch of mourning.

THE INVOCATION

Approximately five minutes



(The medium enters the room last, after the guests have been seated around the table. Lights are already low — one lamp, and the five candles unlit. The medium pauses in the doorway, observes the room without speaking, then crosses slowly to the empty chair at the head of the table.)

[CUE] PARTNER: confirm Bluetooth speaker is paired and audible from the next room. Wait for medium's first knuckle-tap on the table as the "ready" signal.

— PAUSE — 3 BEATS —

Good evening. Thank you all for coming. Before we begin — and we will begin in a moment — I must ask three things of you. Three small things. They are not optional.

— PAUSE — 2 BEATS —

First. Once we join hands, you will not let go. Not for any reason. Not to scratch, not to reach for your glass, not because a thing in the room startles you. The circle is what protects us tonight. A broken circle is not a circle.

Second. You will not speak unless I speak to you, or unless I ask you a question by name. Anything you wish to say to the room, you may say after the candles are out.

Third. You will not stand from your chair until I tell you the seance is closed. Even if you are afraid. Especially if you are afraid. Do you understand me?

(Wait for nods around the table. Do not continue until you have nods from every seat. If a guest looks reluctant, hold their eyes until they assent.)

— PAUSE — 2 BEATS —

Then join hands, and breathe with me. Three slow breaths together. In —

— PAUSE — 2 BEATS —

— and out. Again. In —

— PAUSE — 2 BEATS —

— and out. One more. In —

— PAUSE — 2 BEATS —

— and out. Good. Keep breathing in your own time. Slow.

(Strike a match. Light the candles one by one — slowly, ceremonially, naming each quality as the wick catches. Pause for two full breaths between candles. The single

ACT THE II

THE CONTACT — PART THE FIRST

Approximately four minutes



(Hold the silence after the invocation for at least five beats. Let the room settle into it. The first contact must arrive into a quiet so complete that the guests have begun to wonder if anything will happen at all.)

THE FIRST KNOCK

Is there a presence among us tonight?

— PAUSE — 5 BEATS —

[CUE] PARTNER: a single, hard tap on a hard object — audible through the wall. One knock only. Wait three seconds, then nothing.

(Do not react to the knock yourself. Let the guests' heads turn first. Let them look at each other. Then, only then, raise your eyes — slowly — to the empty chair, or to a corner of the room above their heads. Address that empty space.)

You are welcome at this table. Thank you for coming. We do not know yet who you were. We would like to know. We are going to ask you simple questions, and you are going to answer us in a way we can hear.

Knock once for no. Knock twice for yes. Do you understand me?

— PAUSE — 4 BEATS —

[CUE] PARTNER: two clean knocks, evenly spaced. Then silence.

(Allow the room to react. Do not smile. Note any guest who flinches — you may use that flinch later if the moment offers. Lean a quarter-inch forward in your chair.)

Thank you. Thank you. Were you living, once, in this house?

— PAUSE — 4 BEATS —

[CUE] PARTNER: two knocks. (Yes.)

Did you die in this house?

— PAUSE — 4 BEATS —

[CUE] PARTNER: one knock. (No.)

But you have returned to it. There is something still here for you. Something unfinished.

— PAUSE — 4 BEATS —

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[CUE] PARTNER: two knocks. (Yes.)

THE CONTACT — PART THE SECOND

Approximately five minutes



THE BELL

(Reach slowly to the centre of the table. Take up the brass bell — the one tied with the black ribbon — and set it down at the table's edge, equidistant from yourself and the guest opposite you. Do not let it ring as you place it. Steady it with your fingertip if it threatens to.)

I am going to ask you a thing that is harder. I am going to ask you to touch something in our world. This is small. Even a child could do it. Even a tired soul could do it.

On this table, between us, is a bell. A small bell. If you have the strength, I would have you ring it. Just once. Even faintly. We are listening for you.

— PAUSE — 5 BEATS —

[CUE] PARTNER: speaker plays a single faint bell tone — soft, brief, coming from the wrong direction (not the table). Cut audio cleanly after one ring.

(Do not look at the bell on the table. Look upward and slightly behind the guest seated opposite you — as though the ring came from above their shoulder. Hold that look for two beats before you speak again.)

Thank you. Thank you. That cost you something, and I felt it.

— PAUSE — 3 BEATS —

You are stronger now. Stronger than when you first came in. The longer you stay with us, the more of yourself you remember. Stay a moment longer. There is one more thing I would ask.

THE NAME

(Produce the folded slip of paper from your sleeve or pocket. Do not open it. Lay it face down on the table, beside the bell. Tap it once with your fingertip.)

Before this evening began, I asked the house for a name. The house gave me one. I have written it on this paper, and I have not looked at it since. I do not know yet whose name it is.

I would ask you to tell us the name. In any way you can. Whisper it to me, if a whisper is what you have. Speak it through the air. Speak it through the candle. We are

— PAUSE — 5 BEATS —

[CUE] PARTNER: speaker plays the same recorded whisper clip as

ACT THE III

THE DISMISSAL

Approximately five minutes



(Release the breath you have been holding. Let your shoulders drop visibly. The guests will mirror you without noticing. The room's tension begins to release here — but you are still in character; you do not break the spell until the very last line.)

Whoever you were — Eleanor, or another who answered to her name — we have heard you tonight, and we have honoured you. The questions we asked were not for our amusement. They were for the comfort of knowing you are not alone, wherever it is you wait.

— PAUSE — 3 BEATS —

Now, with the same gentleness with which we called you, we ask you to go. Not from this house — this house is yours as much as ours. But from this circle. From this table. From the small bright space we have made for you tonight. Go and rest. Go and be at peace. The asking is done.

[CUE] PARTNER: raise the room lamp back to its full setting — slowly, over a count of ten. Do not jolt it. The light should rise like dawn, not like a switch.

THE SEALING

(Take up the match-bowl, or strike a fresh match. Light a sixth candle if one has been set aside; otherwise relight the central candle even though it is already lit, as a deliberate act of sealing. Speak the closing slowly.)

This candle is for the door we leave open behind us. So that no spirit who came in tonight is locked out of the rest from which we called them. Pass through, Eleanor. Pass through, any others who came beside her. The way is clear, and the night is kind.

— PAUSE — 4 BEATS —

By the truth that brought us here. By the memory that summoned them. By the mercy we have asked for. By the patience we have shown. By the silence we have kept. The circle is closed. The veil is sealed again.

— PAUSE — 3 BEATS —

THE SALT

(Lift the small bowl of salt from the side of the table. Hold it briefly above the central

Take a pinch of this. For protection on the way home. The old houses kept salt by the door for the same reason. The salt remembers what the year forgets. Pass it on.

AFTER THE VEIL HAS CLOSED

A NOTE FOR THE MEDIUM



The performance you have just given is older than the script you held. People have been sitting together in dark rooms, holding hands and asking questions of the air, for as long as there has been a dark room and an air to ask. Your guests, when they leave tonight, will not be able to say exactly what they heard. Some of them will believe you. Some will know the whole thing was theatre and love you for it anyway. Both reactions are right.

Do not explain the cues. Do not show the speaker. Do not tell the guest who flinched at the bell that there was a paid confederate in the kitchen with a Bluetooth phone. The trick belongs to all of you now. Let it stay where you put it.

Blow out no candles tonight. Let them burn down on their own. In the morning, sweep the salt off the table into the bowl, and pour the bowl into the soil of a houseplant. The old houses did it that way, and so do we.



Yours in shadow.