

The Great Gamboni
D Ray Van
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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

GAMBONI (SAM ALBERTSON) - Master of deception; bilks grieving widows of their fortunes by faking séances.

ABIGAIL WINNAFORD - Stern widow who confronts Gamboni and calls him a fraud.

EMMA WINNAFORD - Abigail's sister(?)

MAID - Winnaford's maid.

ALFRED - Gamboni's business partner.

FADE IN

INT. 1900-STYLE SITTING ROOM

Shades are drawn. The room is darkened. A single candle on a table casts an eerie light on two figures opposite each other. Mrs. Winslow (81), a recent widow, heavy makeup, is wearing a black, high-neck dress embellished with expensive jewelry. Mr. Gamboni (48), tall, dark, and handsome, is holding a crystal orb before the widow's eyes with the fingers of one hand, and with the other, he is holding her hand.

INT. CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI AND WINSLOW

Gamboni twirls the orb. Winslow focuses on the sparkling lights of the orb. They change colors as the orb spins. His voice has a soothing baritone timbre.

GAMBONI

Relax Mrs. Winslow.

The orb spins counter-clockwise, and then clockwise. Candle light passes through the crystal, changing colors, twinkling, and dancing.

GAMBONI

Concentrate on the lights. See how they sparkle. See how they change colors. Think of nothing but the lights. Let them carry you away.

INT. CLOSE UP ON WINSLOW'S EYES

We see the reflection of the orb spinning in her eyes, and the reflection of the candle's flame dancing. She blinks.

GAMBONI (OS)

Your eyelids are growing heavy. But you can't take your eyes off the crystal and the lights. Do you see how they glimmer?

INT. CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI AND WINSLOW

Winslow's body slouches and yields to the plush chair's embrace. Her eyes remain focused on the orb. Her eyelids flutter.

WINSLOW

Yes. Yes, I do.

GAMBONI

Clear your mind and think only of the flickering colors. The colors... The colors...

EXT. CLOSE UP OF WINSLOW'S HAND IN GAMBONI'S HAND

Her hand goes limp in his. He releases his grip, and her hand drops to her lap. Her fingers and thumb curl toward her palm, relaxed.

GAMBONI (OS)

You can close your eyes and sleep now, but you will still hear and respond to my voice. Do you understand?

WINSLOW (OS)

Yes, Mr. Gamboni, I understand.

EXT. CLOSE UP VIEW OF GAMBONI AND WINSLOW

Gamboni slides his chair next to Winslow and whispers in her ear.

GAMBONI

Did you love Mr. Winslow?

Winslow nods slowly.

WINSLOW

Yes. Yes, I did very much.

GAMBONI

Did he love you?

Winslow nods again.

WINSLOW

Oh, so very much, he did.

GAMBONI

Was he intimate?

EXT. CLOSE UP ON WINSLOW AND GAMBONI HEAD/SHOULDER

Winslow's eyes open in a startled look but stare into empty space.

GAMBONI

Did two lovers enjoy the intimacy of the bedroom?

Winslow's eyes close and a smile broadens across her wrinkled face.

WINSLOW

Yes. We often enjoyed the intimacy of each other.

GAMBONI

Tell me how much in love you were.

INT. WIDER VIEW OF GAMBONI AND WINSLOW

We see Winslow's lips move and hands wave as she tells Gamboni about their most intimate moments together. Gamboni smiles.

INT. PAN TO A CLOSE-UP SHOT OF THE CANDLE - TIME LAPSE

We see wax rapidly drip, showing the passage of time.

INT. WIDER VIEW TO INCLUDE GAMBONI AND WINSLOW

Gamboni returns his chair to original location. He stares off into space as if in a trance and using ventriloquism, he calls to her.

GAMBONI (VO)

Martha? Martha, is that you?

Winslow opens her eyes and sits erect, alert.

WINSLOW

Who are you?

GAMBONI (VO)

Why, don't you know your own husband?

A look of disbelief and fear is on Winslow's face as she looks around the room.

WINSLOW

Harold?

GAMBONI (VO)

Yes, my beloved, it is I. I've missed you so.

Winslow's shows hopefulness and belief. Fear is gone.

WINSLOW

Harold. Harold. My dear, Harold, is it really you?

GAMBONI (VO)

I miss gazing into your deep blue eyes and kissing your cherry-red lips. Remember how I likened your breasts to the twin peaks of Mount Elbrus, firm and proud.

Winslow turns away and brings hanky to lips.

WINSLOW

Oh, you're making me blush.

GAMBONI (VO)

And how I fantasized scaling Elbrus,
and laid with you in loving embrace
after reaching each peak.

Winslow pats her neck and forehead with hanky.

WINSLOW

Please, not in front of Mr. Gamboni.

GAMBONI (VO)

We did enjoy our times together, didn't
we? Do you remember?

Winslow lips form an O as she is sure it's Harold speaking
to her. She licks her dry lips and speaks.

WINSLOW

It is you, Harold! How could I ever
forget?

Winslow's face lights up with delight.

WINSLOW

Oh Harold, I'm tingling all over. Tell
me more.

INT. WIDER VIEW OF PARLOR

Gamboni is sitting in his chair, staring into space,
trance-like, talking without moving his lips. Winslow is on
the edge of her chair, talking and gesturing in response to
Gamboni (faking the voice of Harold). No audible dialogue.

INT. PAN TO A CLOSE-UP SHOT OF CANDLE - TIME LAPSE

We see the wax rapidly drip, showing the passage of time.

INT. CLOSE-UP ON GAMBONI

Faking exhaustion, Gamboni closes his eyes and slumps in his chair. He cracks his left eyelid enough to observe Winslow.

INT. CLOSE-UP ON WINSLOW

Winslow is on the edge of her chair, hanging on every word. She clasps her hands on her knees.

GAMBONI (OS)

Dear, Martha, I have to depart, now.

WINSLOW

Oh, Harold, I can almost feel your presence. Don't leave me again.

GAMBONI (OS)

I must go. Farewell, my darling.

INT. MOTOR CAR

Gamboni is sitting in the back seat, and Alfred (52) is driving.

ALFRED

How did you make out with the old widow?

GAMBONI

Excellent haul, Alfred. The old darling was convinced her dear Harold had returned from the hereafter. They spent the afternoon reminiscing their most intimate escapades. It was quite disgusting, actually, but it earned us a sizable bonus and considerable word-of-mouth business.

ALFRED

I don't know how you do it. How you can bilk those sweet old widows out of their fortunes just for a last chance to talk to their dead husbands.

GAMBONI

Don't turn all rightness on me, Alfred. If your conscience is overwhelming your sensibilities, you can return to the penny-ante vaudeville stage shows where I found you.

ALFRED

Let's not get hasty, Sam. I didn't mean anything by it.

GAMBONI

I didn't think you did. And if I remember by the last accounting, you've a pretty sum squirreled away for yourself. As long as the gullible old gals want me to entertain them--and that's all it is: entertainment--I'm ready to accommodate them for the right price.

ALFRED

Aren't you playing with fire?

GAMBONI

What do you mean?

ALFRED

Well, what if there is an afterlife and you're making the spirits angry. They may decide to get even with you. Every time you fake a séance, the god of the afterlife may reach a breaking point and finally say, "Enough!"

GAMBONI

Hogwash, Alfred. I don't believe any of that malarkey. This is an act, and I am pretty good at it, in fact, I'm one of the best, if not the best. Have you checked our backlog of bookings recently?

ALFRED

Yes. You have solid bookings for the next six weeks.

GAMBONI

That should be proof enough. I want you to crosscheck them. Decline any widow who isn't rich and schedule one who is. We might as well capitalize on our popularity as long as we can.

ALFRED

Okay, Sam. You're the boss.

GAMBONI

By the way, Alfred, it's Mr. Gamboni. Samuel Albertson is just a memory.

ALFRED

Yes, Mr. Gamboni.

INT. GAMBONI'S OPULENT BEDROOM

Gamboni is dressing for his next appointment. As he moves around the room, we can see dark clouds through the tall windows, gathering and swirling.

GAMBONI

Alfred, hurry, you know how I hate to be late for an appointment. I like to arrive a few minutes early if possible.

ALFRED

I'm coming.

GAMBONI

I'll be late if you don't get a move on. Bring the car around. The weather looks ominous.

ALFRED

I'll meet you at the front door. Don't forget a topcoat and umbrella.

EXT. WIDE SHOT OF STREET LEADING PAST MANSION - DARKENING SKIES, THUNDER RUMBLING IN DISTANCE

Alfred drives the car up the long cobblestone circle. Manicured bushes flank the driveway, as does statuettes of Roman gods. Wrought iron post and chain fencing line the entrance to the portico supported by marble columns.

ALFRED

Here's the address, Mr. Gamboni. It's quite the place. Should I wait?

GAMBONI

No. I'll want to play this one as long as I can. My bonus should astronomical.

EXT. WIDE SHOT OF PORTICO, 1924 LANCIA LAMBDA TOURING CAR, AND FRONT OF MANSION. STORM CLOUDS GATHER.

Alfred stops the car under the portico, gets out, and opens the passenger door for Gamboni. Gamboni walks to the front door and knocks as Alfred drives away. The front door opens.

INT. WELL LIGHTED HALLWAY - DARKENING OUTSIDE

Maid opens front door, Gamboni removes his hat.

GAMBONI

Mr. Gamboni at your service... I have an appointment to see Mrs. Winnaford.

MAID

Good afternoon, Mr. Gamboni, my mistress is expecting you. Please come in.

GAMBONI

Thank you.

MAID

Your hat and coat, sir.

GAMBONI

Why, thank you.

MAID

Madam will meet with you in the library. Please step this way.

INT. DARK CHERRYWOOD PANELED LIBRARY - DIM LIGHTING

Gamboni follows maid from bright hallway to dimly lit library. Disorientated, he bumps against a table, jostling a vase of fresh-cut lilacs. Their heady-sweet fragrance causes him to cough.

MAID

Are you all right, sir?

GAMBONI

Lilacs.

MAID

Sir?

GAMBONI

Fresh-cut lilacs. Allergies. Their strong fragrance causes me to cough. It'll pass in a moment or two.

EXT. WIDE VIEW OF MANSION, DARK CLOUDS SWIRLING, LIGHTENING

We see torrents of rain falling on roof, flashes of lightening, and wind blowing trees. We hear peals of thunder.

INT. CUT TO DARKLY LIT LIBRARY - DARK OUTSIDE WINDOWS - LIGHTENING FLASHES

The sound of rain pounding on the roof reverberates through the ceiling. When lightning flashes, the whole room is fleetingly bright as if a photoflash went off. Gamboni hesitates. He extends his hand, feeling for obstacles. Windowpanes rattle, and crystals in the central chandelier clink with each peal of thunder as the main storm erupt.

Gamboni stops.

GAMBONI

Miss?

MAID

Yes, sir.

GAMBONI

Could we pause a minute or two for the worst to pass?

MAID

As you wish, sir.

INT. DIM LIBRARY - CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI AND MAID

Maid turns to face Gamboni.

GAMBONI

Sorry, miss. I've already bumped a table of lilacs, and I don't want to reveal another episode of clumsiness if I can prevent it.

MAID

I understand, completely.

Nearby, Gamboni notices a lighted cabinet filled with curios. He walks over for a closer look. The maid follows.

GAMBONI

Extensive collection of fine Asian figurines Mrs. Winnaford has. Chinese, I believe.

Gamboni bends to examine the lower shelves.

MAID

Yes, sir. Chinese. And ancient. Ming dynasty ivory, they are. The Winnafords collected them during their Far East honeymoon travels. Many decades ago, it was.

GAMBONI

Most expensive, too.

MAID

I wouldn't know, sir.

Gamboni stands and points to the top shelf.

GAMBONI

Take my word; they are very expensive, indeed, especially, that one.

MAID

I'm sure they are, sir.

INT. CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI

Gamboni walks to a nearby bookcase. A ceiling spot casts a soft light on the volumes. He examines the titles.

GAMBONI

And the books as well.

INT. WIDE VIEW OF GAMBONI AND MAID

Gamboni is pointing to a shelf of books.

MAID

Books, sir?

The maid stands next to him. Gamboni leans closer to read the titles.

GAMBONI

If I'm not mistaken, these are leather-bound first editions of *The Innocents Abroad*, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. And countless others. May I inspect one?

The maid nods her head.

MAID

I suppose so. Guests often do.

Gamboni runs his fingers along the top of the volumes and stops at a particular one. He hooks his index finger on the top binding and carefully pulls it forward an inch. Then he grasps the volume and gently removes from the case.

INT. - CLOSE UP OF GAMBONI'S HANDS OPENING THE BOOK TO THE TITLE PAGE.

We see the title, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Below the title, we see an inscription from Mark Twain, "To my friends, Johnathan and Abigail Winnaford," and signed by Mark Twain.

GAMBONI (OS)

Ah, autographed by Mark Twain, too. The handwritten note adds considerable value to the book. This collection is priceless.

MAID (OS)

If you say so, sir. They're just some dusty old books I have to dust to me...

INT. DIM LIBRARY - CLOSE UP OF GAMBONI AND MAID AT BOOKCASE

Gamboni closes book and returns it to the shelf.

MAID

Well, the storm's lettin' up. Please step this way, sir. My mistress will be joining us soon.

The maid leads the way to a sitting area and Gamboni follows.

GAMBONI (VO)

Art Nouveau... Expensive, top-quality furniture, if you like that curving style. I don't particularly care for it. Passé for the 1920s.

INT. DIM LIBRARY - WIDE VIEW OF SITTING AREA

We see a large stone fireplace with roaring fire. A larger-than-life portrait hangs above the mantle. Ceiling spots flood it with soft light. Two chairs are angled toward the fireplace. One is Art Nouveau, and the other is a large, plush, smoking chair.

Gamboni stops to admire the painting.

GAMBONI

Miss?

The maid turns to Gamboni.

MAID

Yes, sir?

INT. CLOSE UP OF PORTRAIT

GAMBONI (OS)

The woman in the portrait, is she Mrs. Winnaford's sister?

MAID (OS)

Yes, 'tis Emma, sir. She passed away while sleeping four years ago this very afternoon in her bedroom. Emma was only forty-eight, ah, so young, too young. 'Twas after a long illness she had, and heartbroken she was.

INT. CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI'S FACE

Gamboni turns to the maid with a puzzled look on his face.

GAMBONI

Who?

MAID (OS)

Mrs. Winnaford. She was by her side 'til the end. 'Tisn't a day goes by she don't come and stare at the portrait.

Gamboni turns and looks at portrait again.

MAID (OS)

Sometimes, she talks to it. Had it painted soon after...well...you know. Kinda big, though. Can't miss it when you come in the library.

INT. CLOSE UP OF GAMBONI AND MAID

Gamboni is animated, pointing indiscriminately at the portrait as he talks.

GAMBONI

I have several portraits painted by the masters, but they pale in comparison. The artist's skill is evident in his capturing such a realistic likeness of a woman's face.

Gamboni focuses on the portrait's image.

GAMBONI

The choice of colors and delicate brushstrokes so enhance the image it would not surprise me if she stepped down from the mantle.

Maid's face has a look of disbelief.

MAID

Really, sir? I never took notice.

INT. EXTREME CLOSE UP - SIDE VIEW - GAMBONI'S HEAD: CHIN TO FOREHEAD

Gamboni's eyes are fixed, unblinking, and trance-like while he speaks.

GAMBONI

And her eyes are alive with sparkle, ready for conversation, and seem to follow when I move.

For a few moments, there is silence as we watch beads of perspiration form on Gamboni's temples. A vessel in his temple pulses faster. His nostrils flair and increase in frequency. He licks his dry lips. Then he blinks once, twice. His eyes are moist, glisten.

INT. CLOSE UP OF GAMBONI AND MAID

Gamboni wipes his temples with his kerchief and turns away from the portrait.

GAMBONI

Yes, Emma was a most ravishing young woman.

MAID

Yes, sir, she was. I never seen a more beautiful woman than her.

Maid shows Gamboni to the smoking chair.

MAID

Please have a seat here, sir. I'm sure my mistress will be joining you, shortly.

GAMBONI

Thank you, miss.

The maid curtseys and leaves.

GAMBONI (VO)

Odd... A stuffed smoking chair... It's out of character with the Art Nouveau pieces in the room. Wonder why? No matter, it's quite comfortable.

Gamboni glances around the room.

GAMBONI (VO)

Gold, silver, crystal... Everywhere I gaze. This old darling is loaded. I must be on my best performance, this evening.

INT. CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI

Gamboni relaxes, and he sinks into the folds of the chair. He touches his fingers, tent-like, and stares at the roaring fire.

GAMBONI (VO)

What makes Mrs. Winnaford tick? Born Abigail Smythe, some seventy years ago this past December. Was married to Johnathan Winnaford for forty-two years until widowed nine years ago.

Gamboni draws numbers in the air as if solving a math problem.

GAMBONI (VO)

That means she was nineteen when she married.

She developed a keen interest in the occult during her sister's illness. She and Emma devised a code word to expose mediums claiming to have contacted her in the hereafter. Not knowing the code word would be problematic, but with my skill as a hypnotist, the old lady will reveal it.

I've been forewarned about Mrs. Winnaford, so I intend to tread with caution. Several tried to contact Emma and failed. In the process, the widow exposed them as fakes. Well, she never met me, The Great Gamboni.

We are all fakes, but I am the best, the greatest, the master of our craft. Using ventriloquism, I will convince Mrs. Winnaford that Emma is speaking to her from the grave. I am ready for the challenge. Now, where is she?

INT. WIDE VIEW OF LIBRARY - FIREPLACE, GAMBONI IN CHAIR, AND SIDE DOOR

Side door opens with a bang. Light floods in. The maid stumbles on threshold. Mrs. Winnaford is close on her heels.

WINNAFORD

Step lively, Anna. Must you always be underfoot? I haven't all day.

The maid sheepishly curtsseys while holding the door.

MAID

Sorry, ma'am.

INT. CUT TO CLOSE UP OF MRS. WINNAFORD

The light illuminates Mrs. Winnaford's face with some makeup, slightly wrinkled, but her underlying beauty still evident.

GAMBONI (VO)

Amazing... Only eighteen years separated Emma and Abigail, yet the similarities between Mrs. Winnaford's facial structure and Emma's portrait are remarkable.

INT. A WIDE VIEW OF WINNAFORD, GAMBONI, FIREPLACE, AND PORTRAIT.

Mrs. Winnaford gracefully moves toward Gamboni.

GAMBONI (VO)

Are the rumors true that Emma was Abigail's daughter, born out of wedlock before her marriage to Johnathan Winnaford? After seeing her and Emma's portrait together, I cannot discount them. However, they could just as well be sisters as she claims.

INT. CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI'S FACE

Gamboni is tense, focused, and nervous.

GAMBONI (VO)

I must focus and earn as large a reward as possible.

INT. CLOSE UP OF GAMBONI SUNKEN IN CHAIR

By this time, the chair so conforms to his physique Gamboni cannot, without considerable strain, rise and greet Mrs. Winnaford, but he manages to extend his hand.

GAMBONI

Mrs. Winnaford, I presume. Mr. Gamboni at your serv...

INT. CLOSE UP OF WINNAFORD STANDING OVER GAMBONI - A
DOMINEERING STANCE

She dismissively waves her hand.

WINNAFORD

Don't bother to stand, Mr. Gamboni.
Though your reputation precedes you as
one of the *better* channelers, I must
confess I've become entirely skeptical.

She leans forward - in his face, making direct eye contact.

WINNAFORD

I've experienced my share claiming to
have made contact with my sister, but,
I hasten to add, they were all frauds.
What about you, Mr. Gamboni, are you a
fraud, too?

In a tone as humble as he is able, Gamboni offers his usual
introduction.

GAMBONI

If I may be of some small service, Mrs.
Winnaford, I would consider it an
honor.

Gamboni hands her his card, hoping to deflect and gain the
upper ground, or at least an even ground.

INT. CLOSE UP OF WINNAFORD AND GAMBONI

Winnaford sits in the chair opposite him. She turns his
card over and over in her fingers with a skill any card-
shark would envy.

WINNAFORD

The... Great... Gamboni.

She holds his card erect with the tips of her fingers.

WINNAFORD

That's all that's printed on your card,
Mr. Gamboni.

Gamboni squirms in his chair. Her tone makes him feel the inferior in a duel with a chess master.

WINNAFORD

The...Great...Gamboni. Nothing more to
say, Mr. Gamboni, but these three
words?

She presses the attack.

WINNAFORD

They're rather pretentious, don't you
think?

She brings the card up and touches its edge to her cheek. Gamboni shrinks deeper in to the chair's embrace. Her direct assault causes his left brow to twitch. Staring at him with her steel gray eyes, she pierces him through.

Several moments of silence pass.

WINNAFORD

Great... at... what, Mr. Gamboni?

Words stick in his throat.

GAMBONI

We... shall... see.

Gamboni cannot think of anything clever to say, but he would have been better off saying nothing.

WINNAFORD

Yes, we shall, Mr. Gamboni. We shall,
indeed.

Appearing not to give his card any additional thought, she lets it slip through her fingers, and it tumbles to the table between them.

She calls for the maid.

WINNAFORD

Anna. Anna, where are you?

INT. WIDE VIEW OF LIBRARY TO INCLUDE SIDE DOOR

The side door opens and the maid enters.

MAID

Yes, ma'am.

WINNAFORD

Anna, we'll have tea and sandwiches, now.

MAID

Yes, ma'am.

The maid leaves by the side door.

A relieved look is on Gamboni's face. He engages her in small talk.

INT. WIDE VIEW - LIBRARY, WINNAFORD, GAMBONI, FIREPLACE, AND SIDE DOOR.

The maid returns, wheeling in a tablecloth-draped cart with a tray of crust-trimmed cucumber sandwiches and Earl Grey tea. Fine china setting and solid silver serving pieces are arranged for each with a silver tray with the dainty sandwiches and tea.

The maid pours each a cup of tea, hands one with saucer to Winnaford and the other to Gamboni. Using silver tongs, she selects two sandwiches for each and serves them on a fine china plate.

INT. CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI'S FACE

Gamboni's eyes focus on the sandwiches and tea. A forced smile forms on his lips. His brow furls.

GAMBONI (VO)

Good God, cucumber and Earl Grey!

Gamboni's face contorts as he holds back an urge to retch. He nibbles the corner of a sandwich and sips the tea.

When he brings the cup to his lips for a second taste, he notes it is the finest, most expensive bone china, as are the serving pieces. His eyebrow arches. A smile forms in the corner of his mouth as he picks up a spoon.

GAMBONI (VO)

Solid silver! Spoon... Fork... Knife...

INT. EXTREME CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI'S EYES

Gamboni's eyes turn glassy, distant. For several moments, we see the reflection of china and silver pieces dance in his eyes.

INT. CLOSE UP OF GAMBONI AND WINNAFORD

Winnaford picks up her cup of tea and holds it with both hands. She turns to face him.

WINNAFORD

Before you begin, Mr. Gamboni, I would like to ask you a few personal questions if you don't mind.

Gamboni smiles and nods. He holds the cup and saucer in his lap.

GAMBONI

Why, of course, Mrs. Winnaford, I don't mind. What would you like to know?

Over the top of her teacup, her penetrating eyes make contact with his.

WINNAFORD

Are you about forty-eight years of age?

She takes a sip her tea and awaits an answer. Gamboni looks surprised.

GAMBONI

Your skill is most remarkable, madam.
I'll be forty-nine on my birthday next
month.

Gamboni breaks eye contact, and returns his cup and saucer
to the serving tray.

WINNAFORD

I'll venture another guess. Are you
about six feet tall, Mr. Gamboni?

She puts her cup and saucer next to his.

GAMBONI

Almost. Five-ten-and-a-half.

He focuses on her eyes and tries gauging the intent behind
Mrs. Winnaford's interrogations, but they are fixed on him
and impassive. Her face does not reveal her intent, either:
eyebrows balanced, forehead flat, and jaw and lips relaxed.
She masks the unconscious *tells* most people find difficult
to hide.

WINNAFORD

And about hundred and eighty pounds?

GAMBONI

Exactly one-eighty-three. But why all
these questions about me, Mrs.
Winnaford?

He tries shifting his posture in the chair, but it
constrains his efforts.

WINNAFORD

In good health, too, Mr. Gamboni?

He again attempts to change his position. He is flush.
Perspiration forms on his brow.

GAMBONI

Well...Yes, I am in excellent health. But must
you...

WINNAFORD

Good. Good. Are you virile?

With this latest inquiry, her face is more expressive: eyebrows arched, lips turned up in a smile, and eyes glistened.

On the other hand, a blush rushes from his collar, up his neck, to his cheeks and forehead. Gamboni hesitates in answering, for his speech struggles to keep pace with his thoughts.

GAMBONI

Virile? I say, Mrs. Winnaford...
Really, need you inquire about my...
You are delving too deeply...

Undaunted, she presses her insistence.

WINNAFORD

Come, now, Mr. Gamboni. These are the
Roaring Twenties, and such a question
shouldn't startle you.

He tries to think of a clever response, but could not. He looks perplexed.

GAMBONI

(Stammering)

Well...Well, if you..."

He clears his throat and blurts.

GAMBONI

Well, if you must know, madam, I am
most virile.

This track of the conversation catches Gamboni off his guard and perspiration trickles down his temples. He tries to divert the subject.

GAMBONI
(CONTINUED)

Don't you think we should start the
séance?

Winnaford sits stiff-backed in her chair with a stern look
on her face.

WINNAFORD
No, Mr. Gamboni, I do not. I am well
aware of you and your theatrics like
throwing your voice and claiming it's
your spirit-world contact. From what
I've been told, you're an accomplished
ventriloquist. And then there's your
skill as a hypnotist. I suppose you
were going to get me to tell you my
code word. Well, it won't work, Mr.
Gamboni. You're a fraud like all the
rest.

INT. CUT TO CLOSE UP OF GAMBONI'S FACE

Beads of sweat form on his upper lip. His eyes widen. He
swallows. He has a stunned look on his face.

GAMBONI
Thank you for your hospitality, Mrs.
Winnaford, but I think it best I take
my leave.

He struggles to extricate himself from the chair.

WINNAFORD
No, please don't go, Mr. Gamboni. I
receive so few visitors.

She dismisses his attempts to rise with a wave of
her hand.

GAMBONI
But you said I was a fraud like...

She smiles.

WINNAFORD

We can still enjoy a dessert coffee before you depart, don't you think, Mr. Gamboni?

She turns her attention to the maid.

WINNAFORD

Anna, bring two coffees.

The maid curtseyed.

MAID

Yes, ma'am.

In a few minutes, the maid returns and serves two coffees on a silver tray. Gamboni picks up a cup and brings it to his lips.

WINNAFORD

Em, what do you think?

Gamboni looks surprised and confounded. Gamboni looks around and sees no one else. No one is in the room other than Mrs. Winnaford, the maid, and Gamboni.

GAMBONI (VO)

Who and where was Em?

Winnaford raises her voice.

WINNAFORD

Em? Emma dear, are you here?

A voice comes from the direction of the portrait above the mantle.

EMMA

Yes, Abigail, I am here.

Mrs. Winnaford stands, facing the portrait.

WINNAFORD

What do you think of Mr. Gamboni, Emma?
Is he a suitable companion?

The portrait's eyes look toward him. The portrait speaks.

EMMA

Yes, Abigail, he is quite suitable. I
have been dreadfully alone all these
years.

WINNAFORD

Yes, Em, I know, and I've wept for you
often.

Mrs. Winnaford turns to him.

WINNAFORD

What's the matter, Mr. Gamboni? Has the
sudden storm startled you? You look
pale.

Gamboni's body shudders as if a cold shiver raced from his
head to his toes. Rain, lightning, and thunder converge at
that very moment.

GAMBONI (VO)

I've always considered spirits a myth.
But what else could this be? Is Emma's
spirit speaking through the portrait?
My mouth is so dry I can't even
swallow.

WINNAFORD

Why Mr. Gamboni, you haven't touched
your coffee.

INT - CLOSE UP ON GAMBONI'S FACE

Gamboni's eyes are wide open and his mouth is agape.

GAMBONI (VO)

Yes, it must be true. Mrs. Winnaford is communicating with her dead sister, and she is here, in this room, in the portrait, looking at me. Contacting the afterlife was *my* act--a sham, a way of bilking gullible old ladies--but this is real.

Coffee? I need something stronger than coffee.

Gamboni gulps the coffee in one swallow. His face contorts. He swallows repeatedly. His eyes tear up. His face reddens.

WINNAFORD (OS)

How did you like the coffee, Mr. Gamboni?

Gamboni tries to clear his throat but sputters.

GAMBONI

Un-Unusual.

Gamboni coughs and sputters.

GAMBONI

Very... odd... flavor.

GAMBONI (VO)

What else could I say? It tastes like a brew of copper pennies and burnt coffee. The metallic after-flavor is ghastly, and it won't go away. My mouth and throat are on fire.

INT - PULL BACK TO INCLUDE GAMBONI, WINNAFORD, THE CHAIR,
FIREPLACE

Gamboni struggles to gain his freedom from the chair's embrace. He liberates himself and stands. But his knees buckle. They can't sustain his weight.

The room, the maid, and Mrs. Winnaford spin. While he tries in vain to focus, two of everything swirl and exchange positions. He reaches for something to hold onto. He propels the serving tray and cups aside with a resounding crash and side-rolls to the floor.

Mrs. Winnaford kneels beside him and sweeps aside strands of hair that have fallen on his face. She speaks softly in his ear.

WINNAFORD

It won't be long, Mr. Gamboni, not long at all. The poison is most effective, and you should know, Mr. Gamboni, you were the *greatest* of the charlatans. None of the other mediums was a suitable companion for Emma. The two of you should make the perfect couple.

While he listens, her voice drifts farther away as the paralyzing concoction circulates in his veins and accomplishes its worst. His heart skips a beat, and then more beats.

WINNAFORD

In just a few moments, Mr. Gamboni, you'll pass over.

She stands, facing the portrait.

WINNAFORD

Em? Emma, have you been watching Mr. Gamboni's passing?

EMMA

Yes, Abigail, I have been watching, and
I will be waiting for him.

Everything goes black.

INT - DARK TUNNEL WITH BRIGHT LIGHT AT FAR END

At the end of a long dark passage, a light shines with a singular brilliance. We see Gamboni raise his hand to shield his eyes from its intensity. Fear is written across his face.

GAMBONI (VO)

What is this place?

He moves toward the brightness. He grows accustomed to it and lowers his hand. Standing silhouetted against the illumination is a woman in a gossamer gown. Gamboni stops and looks around. There's nothing but blackness around him except for the light ahead. He shuffles toward the woman.

INT - CLOSE UP OF GAMBONI AND THE WOMAN

The woman is beautiful, nicely proportioned, and handsomely endowed. She is wearing a sheer gown that leaved nothing to Gamboni's imagination. She extends her hand.

EMMA

Mr. Gamboni, I presume.

SAM (GAMBONI)

Yes, I am. Actually, my name is Samuel Albertson. Please call Sam.

EMMA

Emma is my name. Emma Smythe, Abigail's daughter.

SAM (GAMBONI)

Her daughter?

EMMA

Yes, her daughter. Surely, you've heard the rumors. They are true.

SAM (GAMBONI)

Well, the resemblance was unmistakable.

EXT - WIDER VIEW OF THIS PLACE, GAMBONI AND EMMA

EMMA

Come with me, Sam. You see, there is nothing to fear in this place.

SAM (GAMBONI)

Where are we?

EMMA

It's our new home, accommodations more expansive than you could imagine. We have all we'll ever need, and we have each other.

He takes her hand.

SAM (GAMBONI)

Emma, you're more beautiful than your portrait. The most stunning woman I've had the pleasure to meet.

EMMA

Thank you, Sam. You're most kind.

EXT - WIDE VIEW FOLLOWS THE COUPLE THROUGH THE GARDEN

She leads him along the trail and through a lilac garden to her cottage. They are holding hands and talking.

INT - INSIDE DWELLING - CLOSE UP SIDE VIEW OF GAMBONI AND EMMA

When they enter the front door, Emma turns to Sam.

EMMA

Would you kiss me, Sam?

SAM (GAMBONI)

Of course, Emma, my pleasure.

Sam takes Emma in his arms and kisses her hard on the lips. She presses her body against his.

EMMA

Like the feel of me against you, Sam?

SAM (GAMBONI)

Of course, Emma.

Emma steps back and drops her gown. We see a side view of her naked body from the waist up and Sam.

EMMA

You like this too, Sam?

SAM (GAMBONI)

I say, Emma... Why yes, I certainly do.

EMMA

Would you kiss me again, Sam?

Sam embraces Emma and they kiss. Emma breaks off the kiss and tugs at his hand.

SAM (GAMBONI)

Where are you taking me?

EMMA

To my boudoir of course... you know why, don't you, Sam.

SAM (GAMBONI)

Emma... Yes, I most certainly do. It would be delightful, actually quite heavenly.

EMMA

Oh no, Sam. You don't understand. This isn't Heaven. We attain no pleasure here yet are compelled to seek it throughout eternity.

SAM (GAMBONI)

What? I don't understand.

EMMA

We had basic, animal cravings or needs that we pursued during our time on Earth. Now, we are compelled to pursue them forever without the pleasure we sought when we were alive. My craving was... well, you'll find out, soon enough.

SAM (GAMBONI)

But why me?

EMMA

You were destined for this place, and I needed someone with vitality and virility to satisfy my cravings. Mother and I only hastened your day by a few years.

SAM (GAMBONI)

What? How could you have done this to me? I'll have no part of it. Both of you be damned. Go to Hell!

EMMA

We're already here, Sam. You and I are already here.

INT - WIDE VIEW OF VERANDA

Sam is sitting overlooking a garden of blooming lilacs. We see a tray of sandwiches and a pot of tea are on a table.

NARRATOR (VO)

Sam's smile faded eons ago. Sipping Earl Grey tea and nibbling cucumber sandwiches became tedious centuries past. The finest bone china and solid silver flatware hold no value to him and reappears whenever he destroys them.

Longing for a soft, deep-cushioned armchair, Sam seeks the comfort their Art Nouveau furniture's curving lines cannot provide. Lilacs are in perpetual bloom, yet their fragrance fails to mask the odor of death and decay carried on the occasional south wind. He hates their smell. When the heady-sweet aroma is at its peak, he cannot control his coughing.

Larger-than-life-size oils of Emma hang throughout their chambers, many with sensual poses. Meant to arouse him, Sam guesses, for Emma's cravings are insatiable, and she beckons him to her bed hour after hour, wanting "The Great Gamboni's finest performance." He is weary of that cliché, and of her. Removing the most explicit portraits is a wasted effort, since each day they reappeared anew, and more erotic than before. He refuses to take notice of them. Now, anesthetized to any feelings of lusty desire, duty alone stimulates him.

EMMA

I need you, Sam. Please come to bed.

SAM (GAMBONI)

Wait, damn it!

INT - CLOSE UP ON SAM

Sam pours more tea from the bottomless kettle and takes another sandwich from the endless pile. He yawns.

The spirit of hopelessness dwells on Sam's face. His eyes show the monotony of his existence. He searches for anything that will bring change to the tedium of his reality.

Then Sam on his face we see a spark of remembrance.

NARRATOR (VO)

His despair extinguished hope's last glimmer more years ago than Sam could count. This is the way it will be for eternity.

FADE OUT