

MANHATTAN MEDIUM

By Michael F. Bruck

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A One Act Comedy

By Michael F. Bruck

SYNOPSIS: Everyone's a skeptic and that's bad for Manhattan's once famous TV medium, Miriam. With no clients, business is dwindling and to make matters worse she's stuck at home with her two children—Tina, whose traditional standards are far too high and Tommy, who has no personal standards at all. However, tonight, is the night things change, when Clary—a disbeliever with old fashioned values—arrives for a reading. Secrets are revealed, sparks fly, and Clary may just leave with more than he bargained for—with nods to the Roaring Twenties this comedic one-act is sure to raise audiences' spirits.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 female, 2 male)

- MIRIAM (f)A down on her luck Medium about 50 years of age. Her goal is to see her daughter secure a boyfriend and her son secure a job. When she channels Clara Bow, she speaks as Clara with a thick Brooklyn accent. *(198 lines)*
- TINA (f)The pretty, 22-year-old daughter of Miriam who has an obsession with old movies and movie stars of days gone by. *(109 lines)*
- TOMMY (m)The dense, unambitious, and always hungry, 18-year-old son of Miriam. He appears shirtless and shoeless throughout the play. *(48 lines)*
- CLARY (m)A handsome, clean cut, 25-year-old that comes to Miriam in hope of communicating with an ancestor. He dresses very well in a suit and tie. *(132 lines)*

DURATION: 40 minutes

TIME: Spring evening, present year.

SETTING: Miriam's Apartment

AT START: *The scene opens in MIRIAM'S living room. We see MIRIAM hurry out on stage with a tablecloth in her hands. She sees her work table full of books and is annoyed.*

MIRIAM: *(To herself.)* What the hell are all these books doing here? *(Picks up a couple of books and reads aloud the book titles.)* *The Hollywood Dish* by Lillian Gish, *Clara Bow: The Eternal Flapper*, *Roy Rogers and Trigger: A Love Story...* and I thought he loved Dale Evans... *(Shouts to an offstage room.)* Tina! *(No answer so she shouts louder.)* Tina!!

TINA: *(From offstage.)* What?!

MIRIAM: Get out here young lady!

TINA: I'm watching a movie!

MIRIAM: Get out here now!

TINA: *(Enters.)* Why are you yelling like that? Has someone written another nasty article about your career as a Medium?

MIRIAM: Don't be smart. Now will you please tell me why you have your books scattered all over my table?

TINA: Yes. I have nowhere else to put them. Now can I get back to my movie? *(Turns and starts to leave.)*

MIRIAM: Not so fast! You're not going to turn my work table into your bookcase. Get back here and help me remove these books!

TINA: But Mom, I'm watching *Dark Victory* on TCM and it's getting to the good part where Bette Davis climbs the stairs to her bedroom to die.

MIRIAM: Did that woman ever make a happy movie? Come on; help me clean up this table and not a word out of you.

TINA: What's the big rush?

MIRIAM: I have a client coming for a reading, that's the big rush and I need this table.

TINA: I thought your career as a Medium was over.

MIRIAM: I never said it was over. I said I was just taking a little break to rest my mind. My work is very taxing.

TINA: You sit in a chair and talk to the air. How could that be taxing?

MIRIAM: I'll have you know it takes a lot of energy to communicate with spirits. Now help me get these books out of here. I need this table pronto. My client will be here any minute.

TINA: So, I guess not everyone read that scathing story on you in the New York Times.

MIRIAM: Don't remind me. My blood boils every time I think of it.

TINA: That reporter sure put the kibosh on your business. You know what you should do? You should put a spell on him.

MIRIAM: I connect with spirits; I don't practice witchcraft, though when I think of that nasty Times reporter it's awfully tempting.

TINA: With a little witchcraft you could turn him into a reporter for the National Enquirer. That would serve him right.

MIRIAM: Can we save the chit chat for later? I'm really pressed for time.

TINA: Okay, okay. Here, just pile everything in my arms. I'll put them on the floor in your bedroom.

MIRIAM: Your bedroom, not mine! *(Starts piling books in TINA'S arms.)*

TINA: But I don't have any more room!

MIRIAM: Find room! Now come on. Get a move on.

TINA groans.

MIRIAM: Look at this, you have one biography after another here and each and every one is about some movie star from the last century. *(As she piles the books into TINA'S arms.)* Not one contemporary person in the bunch. *Rudolph Valentino: The Man and the Myth, The Many Loves of Gary Cooper, The Secret Life of Ramon Navarro* ...who the hell is Ramon Navarro? ...Tina, when are you ever going to start living in today's world? You'll never find a boyfriend cooped up in your bedroom watching old movies on TCM all day.

TINA: I don't want a boyfriend. There's not a man alive today that suits me.

MIRIAM: There is someone for everyone and somewhere out there is a nice, young man for you. You need to get out there and look around.

TINA: I've seen what's out there and I refuse to date some grubby looking man with 5-day stubble and freaky tattoos who has jeans hanging halfway down his ass. I want a man with class, someone like Cary Grant or William Powell.

MIRIAM: Tina, no such man exists anymore. You're living in a dream world.

TINA: Say what you will, but I know one day the right man will come my way. I don't care if I have to wait till, I'm a hundred years old.

MIRIAM suddenly looks upward into the air and speaks to Horace, the spirit of her husband.

MIRIAM: Hello, dear. *(To TINA.)* It's your father. *(To Horace's spirit.)* That's what I'm trying to tell her, but she won't listen.

TINA: What's he saying?

MIRIAM: He said you're a pretty girl and you need to get out and start dating. *(To Horace's spirit.)* What's that, Horace? *(To TINA.)* He said staying cooped up in your room watching movies is getting you nowhere.

TINA: It's funny how Dad always pops in at moments like this just to agree with you.

MIRIAM: *(To Horace's spirit.)* What's that dear? *(To TINA.)* Your father says there are plenty of fish in the sea and you need to get out more.

TINA: But that's just it; I don't want any old fish from the sea. He's got to have something special or I'm not interested. I want a man with the charm of Jimmy Stewart and the looks of Tyrone Power.

MIRIAM: *(To the air above.)* Do you see what I'm dealing with Horace?

TINA: Ask Dad if he's met John Barrymore yet?

MIRIAM: *(To Horace's spirit.)* Have you, Horace? *(To TINA.)* No, but he says he's met Fatty Arbuckle.

TINA: Fatty Arbuckle?! *(Rolls her eyes and groans.)* Sorry, but not interested.

MIRIAM: *(To TINA.)* Your father says: "You're being shallow." *(To Horace's spirit.)* Well, don't blame me, she's your daughter too. Okay Horace, I've got to run. I have a client coming any minute. I'll talk to you later. *(Waves to Horace's spirit above.)* Bye, dear. *(To TINA.)* Say goodbye to your father.

TINA: *(Halfheartedly waves.)* Bye, Dad.

MIRIAM: Let's get your brother to help us with these books. Where is he anyway?

TINA: Where else? In his room on the internet, chatting with big breasted women.

MIRIAM: Oh please, don't tell me that!

TINA: Do you ever walk by his door and hear all the moaning? I can assure you he isn't watching *The Ten Commandments* in there.

MIRIAM: All that money I wasted on sending him to Catholic School. It breaks my heart.

TINA: You have no idea how I wish my room wasn't right next to his.

MIRIAM: He barely speaks. What could he possibly say to those online bimbos?

TINA: Believe me, you don't want to know.

MIRIAM: (*Screams loudly.*) Tommy! You better not be doing anything naughty in there!

TINA: Well, if that doesn't put an end to it, I don't know what will.

MIRIAM: You're supposed to set an example for your little brother.

TINA: I do. I don't watch porn.

MIRIAM: Isn't there some kind of law that prevents children from viewing pornography online?

TINA: Yeah, Mom there is, but seeing how Tommy is 18 now, it no longer applies.

MIRIAM: Okay, I haven't got time to think about Tommy's sordid life right now, let's clear these books out of here.

A shirtless and shoeless TOMMY enters the room and we hear a woman moaning from offstage from his bedroom.

TOMMY: You call me?

MIRIAM: Tommy, what is that I'm hearing?!!

TOMMY: (*Acts innocent.*) What?

MIRIAM: (*Pauses to listen and we hear a woman still moaning.*) That! And don't think I'm so old that I don't know what that sound is.

TINA: Mother please, you're grossing me out!

TOMMY: That's coming from next door.

TINA: Yeah, next door to me!

MIRIAM: You turn off that computer young man and do something constructive. Read a book or read the paper. Or better yet, go look for a job!

TOMMY rolls his eyes, turns, and leaves.

MIRIAM: *(Shouting after TOMMY.)* And for heaven's sake Tommy, put a shirt on. This is not a nudist colony!

TINA: Mom, you're wasting your breath. He's a few circuits short of a full brain.

SFX: the doorbell rings.

MIRIAM: Oh my God, he's here! And right on time too, dammit! Quick, get these books out of here. *(Furiously starts piling books in TINA'S arms.)*

TINA: Mom, stop, you're killing me! I'm not Francis X. Bushman.

MIRIAM: Who?!! ...Never mind, just get these books out of here!

SFX: the doorbell rings, again.

MIRIAM: Oh my, God! *(Yells towards the door.)* I'm coming!!!

TOMMY: *(Enters.)* Doorbell.

MIRIAM: Well answer it, why don't you?! No, don't! Help your sister!

SFX: the doorbell rings, again.

TOMMY: Doorbell, again.

MIRIAM: Thank you. What would I do without you? *(Shouts in the direction of the door.)* Coming!!! *(To TOMMY.)* For once in your life do something and help your sister take these books to her room. *(Hurriedly shoves books in TOMMY'S arms.)*

TOMMY: What's going on, man?

MIRIAM: I have a new client that's what's going on, man. I need this table and quick. This is no time for you to move like a tree sloth.

TOMMY: *(Snickers.)* Tree sloth.

MIRIAM: Don't just stand there, Tommy! Come on, help me!

TOMMY: Okay, okay. Cool your jets.

MIRIAM: This reading has to go well. We need the money; I'm a month behind in the rent, no thanks to you.

TOMMY: I didn't do nothing.

MIRIAM: Exactly! Get a job already! Now skedaddle, the both of you!
And don't come out of your rooms till the session is over. I need to have full concentration.

TOMMY and TINA exit and MIRIAM quickly drapes a table cloth over the table.

MIRIAM: *(To herself.)* Okay, I'm ready.

SFX: The doorbell rings again and TINA enters.

TINA: You better answer the door Mom or your client's going to leave.

MIRIAM: Alright! *(Screams at the door.)* I'm coming!!!

TINA exits.

MIRIAM: *(Takes a deep breath.)* Okay, composure, Miriam, composure.

MIRIAM exits the stage to answer the door, TOMMY enters.

TOMMY: Doorbell.

TOMMY looks around, sees no one there, shrugs and exits. MIRIAM enters, returning with CLARY, a handsome young man dressed in a suit.

CLARY: *(Out of breath.)* I didn't know 5th floor walkups existed anymore. That was a workout.

MIRIAM: Well, this is an older building but, I like to think this building has lots of character.

CLARY: How does someone your age manage those stairs?

MIRIAM: How old do you think I am? Never mind, don't answer that.

CLARY: You used to have a cable TV show, didn't you?

MIRIAM: I still do. I'm just on a little hiatus while they try to find new sponsors.

CLARY: Yeah, okay.

MIRIAM: Did you watch my TV show?

CLARY: No, my sister did. She said it was good show to watch if there was nothing else on.

MIRIAM: Thank you, I'm flattered.

CLARY: Look, I'm only here because my sister thinks maybe you can help me. I'll be honest with you, I'm very skeptical of psychics.

MIRIAM: Let me set you straight on something. I'm not a psychic, I'm a Medium.

CLARY: Okay... whatever. I don't mean to upset your apple cart, but I don't believe in mediums. It's all a crock of baloney if you ask me.

MIRIAM: Well, let's see if I can't make a believer out of you.

CLARY: Well, you better be extraordinary if you want to convince me.

MIRIAM: Oh, I am. My mind is sharp as a tack. Now, remind me what is your name again?

CLARY: You don't know? You just told me you're sharp as a tack.

MIRIAM: (*Exasperated.*) It's just that I've had so many clients come in and out today, I'm afraid your name has momentarily slipped my mind.

CLARY: It's Clary.

MIRIAM: Well, I hope I can be of help to you, Cary and make you leave here a happy man.

CLARY: It's Clary. And for the three hundred bucks you're charging me, I sure in hell hope so.

MIRIAM: I thought I said three fifty?

CLARY: Look, I had to break the bank for this session with you. Three hundred bucks take it or leave it.

MIRIAM: Okay, okay, three hundred. (*Laughs nervously.*) My, you're direct.

CLARY: I'm no pushover if that's what you thought. And yes, I'm direct. I think being direct shows strength of character, don't you?

MIRIAM: Yes, yes it does. I sensed your strength the moment you walked in. (*Reaches out to feel his vibrations.*) But beneath that strong exterior of yours, I feel your sensitivity. I sense some pain, some hurt. Did someone in your immediate family pass on recently?

CLARY: Nope, everyone's still alive and kicking.

MIRIAM: Okay, but maybe someone close to you has passed? ...A friend or a girlfriend... oh my... (*Sadly.*) Was it your girlfriend who crossed over to the other side?

CLARY: I haven't had a serious girlfriend in two years.

MIRIAM: I see.... Well, sometimes losing a pet can be equally as traumatic as losing a family member. I can talk to deceased pets too. I was having a nice chat with Lassie once till Mr. Ed stepped forward and interrupted. And boy, can that horse talk!

MIRIAM laughs while CLARY remains poker faced.

CLARY: Is that like a joke or something?

MIRIAM: I guess not. So, you haven't lost a pet, huh?

CLARY: I've never had a pet. And not to rain on your parade, but aren't you supposed to be telling me things instead of asking me questions?

MIRIAM: (*Nervously.*) Well, our session hasn't begun yet. I'm just merely engaging in polite conversation.

CLARY: While you're being polite, would you mind offering me a seat? I just got off work and I've been on my feet all day and I'm exhausted.

MIRIAM: Yes, please, sit down here at my table. What is your line of work, Cary?

CLARY: It's Clary and I manage a restaurant here in Murray Hill: The Cinema Grill over on Third Avenue. Maybe you know it.

MIRIAM: Oh yes, I know it, the restaurant with all the movie star photos on the wall. My daughter who is a big movie fan loves your restaurant.

CLARY: I'm just managing The Cinema Grill until I open my own restaurant next year.

MIRIAM: A man with ambitions! I like that. Listen, I have an 18-year-old son in need of a job. Might you have something for him at your restaurant?

CLARY: I have a bus boy's position opening up soon. You think he could handle busboy duties?

MIRIAM: You mean give out bread and water and clear a table? (*Hesitates.*) Uh... yes, I think he could do that.

CLARY: Okay, I suppose I could interview him.

MIRIAM: You're the answer to a mother's prayers. Okay, uh... well, I think it's time we begin. Now sit back and relax. Don't be nervous. This session will bring better results as long as you're not nervous.

MIRIAM starts nervously fidgeting with the table cloth, then cracks her knuckles.

CLARY: I'm not the least bit nervous. You seem a little fidgety though.

MIRIAM: Me? Certainly not. I'm a pro. I've been talking to spirits since I was a child. The first person I ever spoke to was Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

CLARY: He was alive when you were a child?

MIRIAM: His spirit! I talked to his spirit when I was a child! Alright, let's get started. Are you ready?

CLARY: I didn't climb five flights of stairs to chat the evening away with a stranger.

MIRIAM: Of course. Okay, so what brings you here today? You seem to be seeking answers, am I correct?

CLARY: Well, yeah. What else would bring me here? I'm seeking information that I can't find anywhere else. I'm desperate, very desperate and my last resort is you.

MIRIAM: Remember, you always find what you're looking for in the last place you look.

CLARY: Yeah okay, whatever. Can we get started now?

MIRIAM: Yes. I have a very good feeling that this evening you'll find all the answers to your questions, Cary.

CLARY: (*Exasperated.*) Clary!

MIRIAM: Sorry. That's a name one never hears.

CLARY: I hear it all the time.

MIRIAM: Yes, of course you do.

CLARY: I know my name is a bit unusual. Actually, my name was supposed to be Theodore, but my mother said that on the day I was born, the name Clary came to her like a voice out of the blue. As if someone whispered it in her ear. Weird, huh?

MIRIAM: Not weird at all. I would say that was the voice of a spirit! Now I want you to relax and open your mind, Clary. Close your eyes and let yourself go. Rid your mind of all its clutter...

CLARY: *(Closes his eyes.)* Okay, I'm decluttering...

MIRIAM: That's it... open your mind to anything and everything. All things are possible when you open your mind...

CLARY: Is it possible you might lower your price for this session?

MIRIAM: All things are possible, but that. Close your eyes and concentrate...

CLARY: *(Closes his eyes.)* I'm concentrating.

SFX: the telephone rings offstage.

MIRIAM: Let your whole being feel relaxed. Be unaware of all that surrounds you...

SFX: the telephone continues to rings offstage.

MIRIAM: Ignore the sound of the ringing phone, relax, and be peaceful. Let yourself go...

SFX: the telephone rings, again.

MIRIAM: *(Stands and screams.)* Tina! Would you please get the phone?!! *(To CLARY.)* Sorry, I forgot to silence the ringer.

SFX: the phone continues to ring.

MIRIAM: *(Shouts again to TINA who is offstage.)* TINA, GET THE DAMN PHONE!!!

TOMMY enters and we hear a woman moaning again in the background.

TOMMY: Phone's ringing.

MIRIAM: *(Exasperated.)* Tommy, tell your sister to answer my phone and tell whoever it is I am working now and I'll call them back later. Do you think you can manage that?

TOMMY: Think so. *(To CLARY.)* Hey, dude. What's up?

CLARY: Nothing much so far.

TOMMY: Cool. (*Starts to exit but turns to speak again.*) Watch your wallet, man.

While MIRIAM yells at TOMMY, CLARY gets up and starts to sneak away.

MIRIAM: Tommy that's not funny. Now get out of here and for the 100th time, will you please stay in your room until my session is over?!

TOMMY: Okay, okay.

MIRIAM: And turn off that computer young man, because if you don't, I'm going to storm your bedroom and throw it out the window! Do you hear me?!!

TOMMY snickers.

MIRIAM: Oh, you think that's funny?

TOMMY: Yeah. There's no window in my bedroom.

MIRIAM: Get out of here before you give me a nervous breakdown!

TOMMY exits and MIRIAM turns to see CLARY heading towards the door.

MIRIAM: Oh, Clary, don't leave! Come back, please. I'm sorry about the intrusion.

CLARY: Look, I don't think this is going to work out.

MIRIAM: No, no! We've only just begun. Sit down, Clary, I want you to go back to freeing your mind and just think about whom it is you would like to communicate with.

CLARY: Just what exactly is supposed to happen here, anyway?

MIRIAM: I'll tell you what's going to happen. I'm about to open a whole new world to you.

CLARY: Am I going to see a spirit appear?

MIRIAM: You won't, but I will.

CLARY: Where's your crystal ball? Don't you need to look into a crystal ball?

MIRIAM: Crystal balls are for fortune tellers. I'm a Medium. I don't tell fortunes or make predictions.

CLARY: So, like what do you do?

MIRIAM: I channel the dead. The dead communicate with me from their next life in spirit form. They appear to me only and deliver messages that I in turn will deliver to you. I guess you could think of me as the middleman. Do you understand?

TINA: *(Enters.)* Mom, it's Mrs. Sanders on the phone. She has phlebitis and she wants to know if you could come over and wave your hands over her legs and get rid of it.

MIRIAM: Tina, please remind Mrs. Sanders that I'm a Medium and not a witch doctor.

TINA and CLARY'S eyes lock.

CLARY: *(Smiles at TINA.)* Hi, there.

TINA: *(Smiles.)* Hello.

MIRIAM: Tina, did you hear me?

TINA: *(Looking at CLARY the whole time.)* Yes... I'll tell her... you're a witch...

MIRIAM: No! I'm not a witch! Tina, you're not listening to me!

TINA: Oh... right! Okay, I'll tell her... uh... what you said. *(Exits.)*

After seeing TINA, CLARY starts toward the table again.

MIRIAM: I hope I've made everything clear to you about what a Medium does.

CLARY: *(Sits.)* I just decided I'll stay.

MIRIAM: Okay, so let's get down to business. Go back to opening your mind. Close your eyes and relax... that's it, that's it. Now, you are here today because you hope someone in the past might step forth...?

CLARY: Yes, that's right, an ancestor who is dead.

MIRIAM: Yes, that's a given. I only speak to the dead. Now, keep your mind free, Clary... as long as your mind is open and free, I will connect and communicate. Are you feeling free?

CLARY: I feel free. I feel very free... is anyone there yet?

TOMMY enters, stands and watches.

MIRIAM: Oh! I do feel a presence... I see a shadow approaching... I believe I see the shadow of a woman stepping forth...

CLARY: I'm getting chills...

TOMMY: If he's cold, I'll turn on the heat...

MIRIAM: No! It's summer for God's sake! Tommy why are you here again?

TOMMY: I told Tina.

MIRIAM: You told her what?

TOMMY: That the phone was ringing.

MIRIAM: *(Trying to keep her patience.)* Thank you. Now will you please go to your room and stay there?

TOMMY: Okay. *(Exits.)*

CLARY: Is the shadow still approaching?

MIRIAM: *(Closes her eyes and concentrates.)* Yes, the shadow draws nearer and nearer. I hear a voice... I hear a loud voice... what the hell? *(Beat.)* Mother! You're interrupting my session! *(Beat.)* Don't start with me... what have I told you? Mother, don't tell me how to raise my kids, that's my business, not yours... look, I haven't got time to discuss this now, I have a client here... yes, that's him... *(To CLARY.)* She says hello.

CLARY: Yeah, uh, okay... tell her I say hello.

MIRIAM: Okay mother, you heard him, he said hello—now go away! *(Waves hand at her mother.)* Go on... be gone with you! Woosh!

CLARY: That's how you talk to your mother?

MIRIAM: Only when she comes to visit.... Okay... where was I?

CLARY: You were trying to contact an ancestral spirit for me.

MIRIAM: Oh, of course, that's right.... Okay, I must concentrate again...

TINA enters and quietly tip toes across the room to get to the other side.

MIRIAM: Wait a minute... oh... I think I'm picking up something here.... Yes, I am... I'm picking up a presence again.... Someone draws nearer, yes... a presence comes nearer... and nearer...

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