

The Art of Living

By

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The setting is a Victorian style mansion; a large portrait hangs over the fireplace. Vivian Lund, a woman in her early forties, laments to her maid Eleanor that she misses the grand parties that they used to host in the late 1800s. Eleanor reminds her that although they are now dead, that they are still able to have great parties, now with the most interesting people in history (*"You Haven't Really Lived"*). Vivian, still not satisfied, comments that she is tired of being restricted by the confines of the mansion and that she recently visited the dreams of a young girl named Ily, who is in fact the current owner of the mansion. Eleanor scolds Vivian for her recklessness as Arthur; Vivian's 19-year-old son enters. Vivian assures Eleanor that nothing bad will come from her visit into Ily's dream, but she is interrupted by a car pulling up to the house. Frantic, they convince Arthur to hide from the outsiders, despite his protests over not being given the chance to see a living person for the first time.

Ily, a young woman in her early 20s and her free-spirited mother Gloria enter the house. Arthur leaves, but Eleanor and Vivian remain, though they make themselves invisible to the house's two living guests. While Ily complains to her mother about having to be on the run from Rocco Antonucci, the loan shark to whom Gloria lost eighty thousand dollars, Gloria tells her to try to make the best of the situation and that they should think of it as a little mother-daughter getaway (*"All In"*). Vivian and Eleanor leave to find Arthur and Gloria decides to go into town to get some supplies for their stay.

Left alone, Ily begins to settle in when she turns to see Arthur standing behind her. She screams at the sight of him, which in turn startles him, as he believed he would be invisible to her. Calming herself, she asks who he is. He explains that he and his mother, along with their maid Eleanor have inhabited the mansion since they all died in fire in 1847, when he was just a baby. Naturally, she is skeptical and asks why he now appears to be a young man if he in fact died when he was a baby. Arthur explains that, according to his mother, everyone is entitled to grow up, even ghosts, and anyone who dies a premature death is still able to mature in the after-life. In the same sense, old people are young again and sick people are healthy (*"Whatever This Is"*). She finds him charming, but is not convinced that he is actually a ghost until he tells her of his mother's ability to enter people's dreams. Ily shares with Arthur her dream in which Arthur's mother entered and told her about the existence of the house. She is clearly shaken and, though she is still guarded, she seems to find some comfort in Arthur's affection for her (*"Whatever This Is-Reprise"*). They are about to kiss when Vivian and Eleanor enter, interrupting them. Vivian and Eleanor introduce themselves to the still scattered Ily and invite her to stay for the night. After Eleanor leaves with Ily, Arthur tells Vivian that he feels like he may be in love with Ily. She informs him that there can never be a love between a living person and a ghost and that Arthur's only chance to be with her is if she was a ghost as well. Eleanor re-enters and pulls Vivian aside, telling her that it is dangerous to suggest that Arthur's problems may be solved if Ily was dead (*"If Only"*). Vivian and Eleanor exit.

Arthur, left alone onstage, reflects on his troubling situation and his lack of knowledge in the ways of love (*"I Met a Girl"*). He is joined by the ghosts of William Shakespeare and Elvis Presley as well as adventurer Casanova and silent film star Rudolph Valentino. Also joining them is an attractive young tennis player named Tiffany. They all offer various ways of winning Ily's affection; Shakespeare insists that Arthur try poetry, while Elvis claims that women cannot resist music. Valentino,

discouraged over his ridiculous sounding voice (which caused the downfall of his acting career) states that women want a man of action. Casanova points out that if a man is handsome enough, he does not need any of these “tricks.” Tiffany offers no real advice, yet it becomes clear that all of the other “love experts” are ready to beat each other senseless to win her favor. Eleanor re-enters just as the experts are ready to fight and tells Arthur that love is a mystery to everyone and that these “experts” do not know more about love than anyone else. It is something he will have to figure out for himself (*“The Best Game in Town”*).

Act II

Ily is alone on stage reflecting on her confusing emotions regarding Arthur (*“Alive Again”*). As Gloria reenters, Ily tells her about Arthur and the other ghosts in the house. As it is in her nature to believe the most outrageous things, and that she has never known Ily to have wool pulled over her eyes, she immediately trusts that the house is actually haunted, which she finds delightful. Ily explains that in her dream, Vivian told her about a treasure somewhere in the house. She thinks it may be some kind of art treasure, as the phrase, “Art is life,” or something to that effect keeps repeating in her mind. Gloria is excited over the prospect of having a mystery to solve and as the two of them begin to look for clues, they are joined by Sherlock Holmes (an attractive and intelligent female) and Dr. Watson. Ily, always the skeptic, points out that the Holmes is actually a man—and a fictional man at that. Taking her aside, “Dr. Watson” tells her that “Holmes” is actually a deceased meter-maid who has always dreamed of solving one, great mystery. Ready to take on the case, Holmes calls on Toby, his trusty blood-hound. A large dog enters and immediately recognizes Ily from when he was alive. As Toby tells the others how he passed away; chasing after a Frisbee thrown by Ily when she was a little girl (*“A Dog’s Life”*), Holmes finds what she believes to be a clue—a book entitled “Professor Iago’s Latin Thesaurus.” Recognizing the name Iago from the play “Othello,” they call on William Shakespeare for help. Shakespeare, along with Tiffany, enters and explains that Iago is one of his villains, whose main goal is to convince the hero to commit murder (*“The Game’s Afoot”*). With a new sense of urgency, they decide to split up and look for clues regarding the treasure of Lund manor and a possible impending murder.

Rocco Antonucci and his two thugs, Eddie and Morey enter and begin looking for Gloria and Ily. Eddie, who appears to be a little more on the ball than his fellow gangsters, spots the painting of Sophie Manon above the fireplace. He informs Rocco that the painting is priceless. Rocco decides to kill Gloria and Ily and keep the painting for himself. Arthur enters and believing that Rocco and his thugs are friends of Ily’s, explains that he is in love with her but because he is a ghost, they cannot be together. Rocco is certain that Arthur is insane, but sensing an opportunity, suggests that Arthur kill Ily so that the two of them can find true love (*“Take Her Out”*). Arthur exits, in order to find Ily. Proud of his ruse, but not certain that Arthur will carry out Rocco’s suggestion, Rocco and his goons leave in search of Gloria and Ily. Ily enters and sits alone. Arthur enters behind her and stands poised to kill her.

Will Arthur find a way to be with Ily? Will he have to kill her so that they can be together? Will Rocco kill Gloria and take the priceless painting? Will Holmes and Watson solve the mystery and discover the treasure of Lund manor?