

MADAME ARCATI. (*Clasping and unclasping her hands in a frenzy of excitement.*) This is first rate – it really is first rate! Absolutely stunning!

CHARLES. I'm so glad you're pleased.

ELVIRA. Please get rid of her. Ruth will be in in a minute.

CHARLES. Madame Arcati, would you think it most frightfully rude if I asked you to go into the dining room for a moment? My first wife wishes to speak to me alone.

MADAME ARCATI. Oh, must I? It's so lovely being actually in the room with her!

CHARLES. Only for a few minutes. I promise she'll be here when you come back.

MADAME ARCATI. Very well. Hand me my bag, will you? It's on the settee.

ELVIRA. (*Picking it up and handing it to her.*) Here you are.

MADAME ARCATI. (*Taking it and blowing her a kiss.*) Oh, you darling – you little darling!

(**MADAME ARCATI**, *humming ecstatically, goes out and into the dining room and shuts the door.*)

ELVIRA. How good is she really?

CHARLES. I don't know.

ELVIRA. Do you think she really could get me back again?

CHARLES. But my dear child...

ELVIRA. And don't call me your dear child. It's smug and supercilious.

CHARLES. There's no need to be rude.

ELVIRA. (*Moving downstage to the mantelpiece and turning away.*) The whole thing's been a failure – a miserable, dreary failure – and oh! what high hopes I started out with!

CHARLES. (*Moving towards ELVIRA.*) You can't expect much sympathy from me, you know. I am perfectly aware that your highest hope was to murder me.



ELVIRA. Don't put it like that. It sounds so beastly.

CHARLES. It is beastly. It's one of the beastliest ideas I've ever heard.

ELVIRA. There was a time when you'd have welcomed the chance of being with me forever and ever.

CHARLES. Your behaviour has shocked me immeasurably, Elvira. I had no idea you were so unscrupulous.

ELVIRA. (*Bursting into tears, and crossing below CHARLES to left center.*) Oh, Charles...

CHARLES. Stop crying.

ELVIRA. They're only ghost tears. They don't mean anything really – but they're very painful.

CHARLES. (*Moving to the mantelpiece.*) You've brought all this on yourself, you know.

ELVIRA. (*Coming to the back of the armchair.*) That's right – rub it in. Anyhow, it was only because I loved you. The silliest thing I ever did in my whole life was to love you. You were always unworthy of me.

CHARLES. That remark comes perilously near impertinence, Elvira.

ELVIRA. I sat there, on the Other Side, just longing for you day after day. I did really. All through your affair with that brassy-looking woman in the South of France I went on loving you and thinking truly of you. Then you married Ruth and even then I forgave you and tried to understand because all the time I believed deep inside that you really loved me best...that's why I put myself down for a return visit and had to fill in all those forms and wait about in draughty passages for hours. If only you'd died before you met Ruth, everything might have been all right. She's absolutely ruined you. I hadn't been in the house a day before I realized that. Your books aren't a quarter as good as they used to be, either.

CHARLES. (*Incensed.*) That is entirely untrue. Ruth helped me and encouraged me with my work, which is a damned sight more than you ever did.

ELVIRA. That's probably what's wrong with it.

CHARLES. All you ever thought of was going to parties and enjoying yourself.

ELVIRA. Why shouldn't I have fun? I died young, didn't I?

CHARLES. You needn't have died at all if you hadn't been idiotic enough to go out on the river with Guy Henderson and get soaked to the skin.

ELVIRA. So we're back at Guy Henderson again, are we?

CHARLES. You behaved abominably over Guy Henderson and it's no use pretending that you didn't.

ELVIRA. (*Sitting on the left arm of the armchair.*) Guy adored me. And anyhow, he was very attractive.

CHARLES. You told me distinctly that he didn't attract you in the least.

ELVIRA. You'd have gone through the roof if I'd told you that he did.

CHARLES. (*Moving to below the sofa.*) Did you have an affair with Guy Henderson?

ELVIRA. I would rather not discuss it, if you don't mind.

CHARLES. Answer me; did you or didn't you?

ELVIRA. Of course I didn't.

CHARLES. You let him kiss you though, didn't you?

ELVIRA. How could I stop him! He was bigger than I was.

CHARLES. (*Furiously.*) And you swore to me –

ELVIRA. Of course I did. You were always making scenes over nothing at all.

CHARLES. Nothing at all!

ELVIRA. You never loved me a bit really. It was only your beastly vanity.

CHARLES. You seriously believe that it was only vanity that upset me when you went out in the punt with Guy Henderson?

ELVIRA. It was not a punt. It was a little launch.

CHARLES. I don't care if it was a three-masted schooner! You had no right to go!


