

Act 2, Scene 1 Ruth & Charles

CHARLES. I really don't see what I've done that's so awful.

RUTH. You behaved abominably last night. You wounded me and insulted me.

CHARLES. I was the victim of an aberration.

RUTH. Nonsense. You were drunk.

CHARLES. Drunk?

RUTH. You had four strong dry martinis before dinner, a great deal too much Burgundy at dinner, Heaven knows how much port with Doctor Bradman while I was doing my best to entertain that mad woman - and then two double brandies later. I gave them to you myself. Of course you were drunk.

CHARLES. So that's your story, is it?

RUTH. You refused to come to bed, and finally when I came down at three in the morning to see what had happened to you, I found you in an alcoholic coma on the sofa with the fire out and your hair all over your face.

CHARLES. I was not in the least drunk, Ruth. Something very peculiar happened to me last night.

RUTH. Nonsense.

CHARLES. I know it looks like nonsense in the clear light of day, but last night it was far from being nonsense. I honestly had some sort of hallucination.

RUTH. I would rather not discuss it any further.

CHARLES. But you must discuss it. It's very disturbing.

RUTH. There I agree with you. It showed you up in a most unpleasant light. I find that extremely disturbing.

CHARLES. I swear to you that during the seance I was convinced that I heard Elvira's voice.

RUTH. Nobody else did.

CHARLES. I can't help that. I did.

RUTH. You couldn't have.

CHARLES. And later on I was equally convinced that she was in this room. I saw her distinctly and talked to her. After you'd gone up to bed we had quite a cosy little chat.

RUTH. And you seriously expect me to believe that you weren't drunk?

CHARLES. I know I wasn't drunk. If I'd been all that drunk I should have a dreadful hangover now, shouldn't I?

RUTH. I'm not at all sure that you haven't.

CHARLES. I haven't got a trace of a headache - my tongue's not coated - look at it. (He puts out his tongue)

RUTH. I've not the least desire to look at your tongue, kindly put it in again.

CHARLES. I know what it is. You're frightened.

RUTH. Frightened! Rubbish. What is there to be frightened of?

CHARLES. Elvira. You wouldn't have minded all that much, even if I had been drunk; it's only because it was all mixed up with Elvira.

RUTH. I seem to remember last night before dinner telling you that your views of female psychology were rather didactic. I was right. I should have added that they were puerile.

CHARLES. That was when it all began.

RUTH. When what all began?

CHARLES. We were talking too much about Elvira. It's dangerous to have somebody very strongly in your mind when you start dabbling with the occult.

RUTH. She certainly wasn't strongly in my mind.

CHARLES. She was in mine.

RUTH. Oh, she was, was she?

CHARLES. You tried to make me say that she was more physically attractive than you, so that you could hold it over me.

RUTH. I did not. I don't give a hoot how physically attractive she is.

CHARLES. Oh yes, you do. Your whole being is devoured with jealousy.

RUTH. This is too much

CHARLES. Women! My God, what I think of women.

RUTH. Your view of women is academic to say the least of it. Just because you've always been dominated by them, it doesn't necessarily follow that you know anything about them.

CHARLES. I've never been dominated by anyone.

RUTH You were hag - ridden by your mother until you were twenty- three, then you got in to the clutches of that awful Mrs. Whatever-her-name-was

CHARLES. Mrs Winthrop - Llewellyn.

RUTH. I'm not interested. Then there was Elvira. She ruled you with a rod of iron.

CHARLES. Elvira never ruled anyone, she was much too elusive. That was one of her greatest charms

RUTH Then there was Maud Charteris.

CHARLES. My affair with Maud Charteris lasted exactly seven and a half weeks; and she cried all the time.

RUTH. The tyranny of tears! Then there was -

CHARLES. If you wish to make an inventory of my sex life, dear, I think it only fair to tell you that you've missed out several episodes. I'll consult my diary and give you the complete list after lunch.

RUTH. It's no use trying to impress me with your amorous exploits . .

CHARLES. The only woman in my whole life who's ever attempted to dominate me is you. You've been at it for years.

RUTH. That is completely untrue.

CHARLES. Oh no, it isn't. You boss me and bully me and order me about. You don't even allow me to have an hallucination if I want to.

RUTH. Charles, alcohol will ruin your entire life if you let it get a hold on you now.

CHARLES. Once and for all, Ruth, I would like you to understand that what happened last night was nothing whatever to do with alcohol. I am willing to grant you that it was an aberration, some sort of odd psychic delusion but I was stone cold sober from first to last and extremely upset into the bargain.

RUTH. You were upset indeed? What about me?

CHARLES. You behaved with a stolid, obtuse lack of comprehension that frankly shocked me!

RUTH. I consider that I was remarkably patient. I shall know

better next time.

CHARLES. Instead of putting out a gentle comradely hand to guide me, you shouted staccato orders at me like a sergeant major.

RUTH. You seem to forget that you gratuitously insulted me.

CHARLES. I did not.

RUTH. You called me a guttersnipe. You told me to shut up. And when I quietly suggested that we should go up to bed you said, with the most disgusting leer, that it was an immoral suggestion.

CHARLES (*exasperated*) I was talking to Elvira!

RUTH. If you were, I can only say that it conjures up a fragrant picture of your first marriage.

CHARLES. My first marriage was perfectly charming, and I think it's in the worst possible taste for you to sneer.

RUTH. I am not nearly so interested in your first marriage as you think I am. It's your second marriage that is absorbing me at the moment. It seems to me to be on the rocks.

CHARLES. Only because you persist in taking up this ridiculous attitude.

RUTH. My attitude is that of any normal woman whose husband gets drunk and hurls abuse at her.

CHARLES (*shouting*) I was not drunk!

RUTH. Be quiet. They'll hear you in the kitchen.

CHARLES. I don't care if they hear me in Outer Mongolia. I was not drunk!

RUTH. Control yourself, Charles.

CHARLES. How can I control myself in the face of your idiotic stubbornness? It's giving me claustrophobia.

RUTH. You'd better ring up Doctor Bradman.