Charles & Elvira

Elvira: 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* L *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!

ELVIRA. You seem to forget *why* I went! You seem to forget that you had spent the entire evening making sheep's eyes at that overblown harridan with the false pearls.

CHARLES. A woman in Cynthia Cheviot's position would hardly wear false pearls.

ELVIRA. They were practically all she was wearing.

CHARLES. I am pained to observe that seven years in the echoing vaults of eternity have in no way impaired your native vulgarity.

ELVIRA. That was the remark of a pompous ass.

CHARLES (*moving upstage* R *to above the sofa, by the writing-table*) There is nothing to be gained by continuing this discussion.

ELVIRA. You always used to say that when you were thoroughly worsted.

CHARLES. On looking back on our married years, Elvira, I see now, with horrid clarity, that they were nothing but a mockery.

ELVIRA. You invite mockery, Charles. It's something to do with your personality, I think. A certain seedy grandeur!

CHARLES (*crossing towards Elvira below the sofa*) Once and for all, Elvira . . .

ELVIRA. You never suspected it, but I laughed at you steadily from the altar to the grave—all your ridiculous petty jealousies and your fussings and fumings——

CHARLES. You were feckless and irresponsible and morally unstable. I realized that before we left Budleigh Salterton.

ELVIRA. Nobody but a monumental bore would have thought of having a honeymoon at Budleigh Salterton.

CHARLES. What's the matter with Budleigh Salterton?

ELVIRA. I was an eager young bride, Charles—I wanted glamour and music and romance. All I got was potted palms, seven hours a day on a damp golf course, and a three-piece orchestra playing 'Merrie England'.

CHARLES. It's a pity you didn't tell me so at the time.

ELVIRA. I did, but you wouldn't listen. That's why I went out on the moors that day with Captain Bracegirdle. I was desperate.

CHARLES. You swore to me that you'd gone over to see your aunt in Exmouth!

ELVIRA. It was the moors.

CHARLES. With Captain Bracegirdle?

ELVIRA. With Captain Bracegirdle.

CHARLES (*furiously*) I might have known it! What a fool I was —what a blind fool! Did he make love to you?

ELVIRA (*sucking her finger and regarding it thoughtfully*) Of course.

CHARLES. Oh, Elvira!

ELVIRA. Only very discreetly—he was in the cavalry, you know.

CHARLES. Well, all I can say is that I'm well rid of you.

ELVIRA (*rising and moving to* L *below the piano*) Unfortunately you're not. ←