

ELVIRA. (*Obviously retreating from someone.*) Well, of all the filthy low-down tricks...!

(She runs across, below the sofa, shielding her head with her hands and screaming.)

Ow – stop it – Ruth! – leave go...!

(ELVIRA runs above the sofa to the door and out of the room, slamming the door. It opens again immediately and slams again.)

(CHARLES, standing still by the telephone, stares aghast.)

(Light Cue No. 05. Act II, Scene Three.)

(Curtain.)

ACT III

Scene One

(Light Cue No. 1. Act III, Scene One.)

(The time is evening a few days later. The doors are shut, the curtains are drawn. The windows, behind the curtains, are open.)

(CHARLES is standing before the fire drinking his after dinner coffee. On both arms he wears a band of deep mourning. He finishes his coffee, puts the cup down on the mantelpiece, lights a cigarette and settles himself comfortably on the settee. He adjusts a reading lamp, and with a sigh of well-being opens a novel and begins to read.)

(There is a ring at the front door bell. With an exclamation of annoyance he puts down the book, gets up and goes into the hall. After a moment or so MADAME ARCATI comes in. CHARLES follows her and shuts the door. MADAME ARCATI is wearing the strange, rather barbaric evening clothes that she wore in Act I.)

Start
MADAME ARCATI. I hope you will not consider this an intrusion, Mr. Condomine.

CHARLES. Not at all. Please sit down, won't you?

MADAME ARCATI. Thank you.

(She sits at the left end of the sofa.)

CHARLES. (*Center.*) Would you like some coffee or a liqueur?

MADAME ARCATI. No, thank you. I had to come, Mr. Condomine.

CHARLES. (*Politely.*) Yes?

MADAME ARCATI. I felt a tremendous urge, like a rushing wind, and so I hopped on my bike and here I am.

CHARLES. It was very kind of you.

MADAME ARCATI. No, no, no. Not kind at all – it was my duty. I know it strongly.

CHARLES. Duty?

MADAME ARCATI. I reproach myself bitterly, you know.

CHARLES. Please don't. There is no necessity for that.

(He sits in the armchair.)

MADAME ARCATI. I allowed myself to get into a huff the other day with your late wife. I rode all the way home in the grip of temper, Mr. Condomine. I have regretted it ever since.

CHARLES. My dear Madame Arcati –

MADAME ARCATI. (*Holding up her hand.*) Please let me go on. Mine is the shame, mine is the blame. I shall never forgive myself. Had I not been so impetuous, had I listened to the cool voice of reason – so much might have been averted.

CHARLES. You told my wife distinctly that you were unable to help her. You were perfectly honest. Over and above the original unfortunate mistake I see no reason for you to reproach yourself.

MADAME ARCATI. I threw up the sponge! In a moment of crisis, I threw up the sponge instead of throwing down the gauntlet.

CHARLES. Whatever you threw, Madame Arcati, I very much fear nothing could have been done. It seems that circumstances have been a little too strong for all of us.

MADAME ARCATI. I cannot bring myself to admit defeat so easily. It is gall and wormwood to me. I could at least have concentrated – made an effort.

CHARLES. Never mind.

MADAME ARCATI. I do mind. I cannot help it. I mind with every fibre of my being. I have been thinking very carefully, I have also been reading up a good deal during the last few dreadful days... I gather that we are alone?

CHARLES. (*Looking round.*) My first wife is not in the room, she is lying down; the funeral exhausted her. I imagine that my second wife is with her; but of course I have no way of knowing for certain.

MADAME ARCATI. You have remarked no difference in the texture of your first wife since the accident?

CHARLES. No, she seems much as usual; a little under the weather, perhaps, a trifle low spirited, but that's all.

MADAME ARCATI. Well, that washes that out.

CHARLES. I'm afraid I don't understand.

MADAME ARCATI. Just a little theory I had. In the nineteenth century there was a pretty widespread belief that a ghost who had participated in the death of a human being disintegrated automatically.

CHARLES. How do you know that Elvira was in any way responsible for Ruth's death?

MADAME ARCATI. Elvira – such a pretty name – it has a definite lilt to it, hasn't it?

(She hums for a moment.)

Elvira – El-vi-ra...

CHARLES. (*Rather agitated.*) You haven't answered my question. How did you know?

MADAME ARCATI. It came to me last night, Mr. Condomine. It came to me in a blinding flash. I had just finished my Ovaltine and turned the light out when I suddenly started up in bed with a loud cry – 'Great Scott!' I said – 'I've got it!' After that, I began to put two and two together. At three in the morning – with my brain fairly seething – I went to work on my crystal for a little. But it wasn't very satisfactory – cloudy, you know.

CHARLES. (*Uneasily.*) I would be very much obliged if you would keep any theories you have regarding my wife's death to yourself, Madame Arcati...

MADAME ARCATI. My one desire is to help you. I feel I have been dreadfully remiss over the whole affair. Not only remiss, but untidy.

CHARLES. I am afraid there is nothing whatever to be done.

MADAME ARCATI. (*Triumphantly.*) But there is - there is!

(She produces a piece of paper from her bag and brandishes it.)

I have found a formula - here it is! I copied it out of Edmondson's *Witchcraft and its Byways*.

CHARLES. (*Irritably.*) What the hell are you talking about?

MADAME ARCATI. (*Rising.*) Pluck up your heart, Mr. Condomine! All is not lost!

CHARLES. (*Rising.*) Now look here, Madame Arcati -

MADAME ARCATI. You are still anxious to dematerialize your first wife, I suppose?

CHARLES. (*In a lower voice, with a cautious look towards the door.*) Of course I am - I'm perfectly furious with her - but...

MADAME ARCATI. But what?

CHARLES. Well - she's been very upset for the last few days. You see, apart from me being angry with her, which she always hated even when she was alive, Ruth, my second wife, has hardly left her side a moment. You must see that she's been having a pretty bad time what with one thing and another.

MADAME ARCATI. Your delicacy of feeling does you credit; but I must say, if you will forgive my bluntness, that you are a damned fool, Mr. Condomine.

CHARLES. (*Moving away to the left by the gramophone. Stiffly.*) You are at liberty to think whatever you please.

MADAME ARCATI. Now, now, now - don't get on your high horse! There's no sense in that, is there? I have a formula here that I think will be able to get rid of her

without hurting her feelings in the least. It's extremely simple and requires nothing more than complete concentration from you and a minor trance from me. I may even be able to manage it without lying down. Stop

CHARLES. Honestly, I would rather -

(At this moment the door opens and ELVIRA comes quickly into the room. She is obviously very upset.)

(Light Cue No. 02. Act III, Scene One.)

ELVIRA. Charles!

(She moves to above the sofa.)

CHARLES. What on earth's the matter?

ELVIRA. (*Seeing MADAME ARCATI.*) Oh! What's she doing here?

CHARLES. She came to offer me her condolences.

ELVIRA. (*Moving above the sofa to the mantelpiece, then across, below MADAME ARCATI, and up to the piano.*) They should have been congratulations.

CHARLES. Please don't say things like that, Elvira - it is in the worst possible taste. Madame Arcati, allow me to introduce my first wife, Elvira.

MADAME ARCATI. How do you do?

ELVIRA. What does she want, Charles? Send her away.

(She walks about the room.)

MADAME ARCATI. In what part of the room is she at the moment?

CHARLES. She's moving about rather rapidly. I'll tell you when and where she settles.

ELVIRA. She's the one who got me here in the first place, isn't she?

CHARLES. Yes.

ELVIRA. Well, please tell her to get me away again as soon as possible. I can't stand this house another minute.

CHARLES. Really, Elvira - I'm surprised at you.