

**ERNEST**

*Please prepare with a standard British accent*

Side 1 of 2

GILDA. [*with tremendous gaiety*] Ernest! What a surprise!

ERNEST. What's the matter with Miss Hodge?

GILDA. The matter with her? I don't know – I haven't examined her.

ERNEST. It was foolish of you to tell her you and Leo weren't married.

GILDA. It slipped out; I'd forgotten she didn't know. Have you come from Paris?

ERNEST. Yes, last night. There's been a slight argument going on for weeks.

GILDA. Argument? What kind of an argument?

ERNEST. One of those Holbein arguments.

GILDA. Somebody said it wasn't, I suppose?

ERNEST. Yes, that's it.

GILDA. Was it?

ERNEST. In my humble opinion, yes.

GILDA. Did your humble opinion settle it?

ERNEST. I hope so.

GILDA. Admirable. Quiet, sure, perfect conviction – absolutely admirable.

ERNEST. Thank you, Gilda. Don't imagine that the irony in your tone escaped me.

GILDA. That wasn't irony; it was envy.

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ERNEST. It's high time you stopped envying me.

GILDA. I don't think I ever shall.

ERNEST. How's Leo?

GILDA. Not very well.

ERNEST. What's wrong with him?

GILDA. Tummy; he's had an awful night. He didn't close an eye until about five,  
but he's fast asleep now.

ERNEST. I'm sorry. I wanted to say good-bye to you both.

GILDA. Good-bye?

ERNEST. I'm going back to Paris this afternoon and sailing for America on  
Wednesday.

GILDA. You do flip about, don't you, Ernest?

ERNEST. Not any more. I've decided to live in New York permanently. I've  
been angling for a particular penthouse for years and now I've got it.

GILDA. How lovely. Is it very high?

ERNEST. About thirty floors.

GILDA. [*gaily*] Do you want a housekeeper?

ERNEST. Yes, badly. Will you come?

GILDA. Perhaps.

[*She laughs.*]

ERNEST. You seem very gay this morning.

GILDA. I'm always gay on Sundays. There's something intoxicating about  
Sunday in London.

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ERNEST. It's excellent about the play. I read all the reviews.

GILDA. Yes, it's grand. It ought to run for years and years and years and years and years!

ERNEST. I suppose Leo's delighted.

GILDA. Absolutely hysterical. I think that's what's upset his stomach. He was always over-sensitive, you know; even in Paris in the old days he used to roll about in agony at the least encouragement, don't you remember?

ERNEST. No, I can't say that I do.

GILDA. That's because you're getting a bit 'gaga', darling! You've sold too many pictures and made too much money and travelled too much. I expected every day to get a wire from somewhere or other saying you'd died of something or other.

ERNEST. Do stop, you're making me giddy.

GILDA. Perhaps you'd like a little Sherry?

ERNEST. No, thank you.

GILDA. It's very good Sherry; dry as a bone!

ERNEST. You seem to be in a very strange mood, Gilda.

GILDA. I've never felt better in my life. Ups and downs! My life is one long convulsive sequence of Ups and Downs. This is an Up – at least, I think it is.

ERNEST. You're sure it's not nervous collapse?

GILDA. I never thought of that; it's a very good idea. I shall have a nervous collapse!

ERNEST. Will you ever change, I wonder? Will you ever change into a quieter, more rational person?

GILDA. Why should I?

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ERNEST. What's wrong now?

GILDA. Wrong! Everything's right. God's in His heaven, all's right with the world – I always thought that was a remarkably silly statement, didn't you?

ERNEST. Unreasoning optimism is always slightly silly, but it's a great comfort to, at least, three-quarters of the human race.

GILDA. The human race is a let-down, Ernest; a bad, bad let-down! I'm disgusted with it. It thinks it's progressed, but it hasn't; it thinks it's risen above the primeval slime, but it hasn't – it's still wallowing in it! It's still clinging to us, clinging to our hair and our eyes and our souls—

ERNEST. [*weakly*] I think, perhaps, I would like a glass of Sherry after all.

GILDA. It's all right, Ernest, don't be frightened! You're always a safety valve for me. I think, during the last few years, I've screamed at you more than anyone else in the world.

[*She hands him the bottle.*]

Here you are.

ERNEST. [*looking at it*] This is brandy.

GILDA. So it is. How stupid of me. [*She finds the Sherry and two glasses.*] Here we are!

ERNEST. [*putting the brandy bottle on the desk*] I'm not sure that I find it very comfortable, being a safety valve!

GILDA. It's the penalty you pay for being sweet and sympathetic, and very old indeed.

ERNEST. [*indignantly*] I'm not very old indeed!

GILDA. *Only in wisdom and experience, darling.* [*She pours out Sherry for them both.*] *Here's to you, Ernest, and me, too!*

**ERNEST**

*Please prepare with a standard British accent*

Side 2 of 2

ERNEST. Do you seriously imagine that you have the slightest right to walk into my house like this and demand my wife?

OTTO. Do stop saying 'my wife' in that complacent way, Ernest; it's absurd!

LEO. We know entirely why you married Gilda; and if we'd both been dead it would have been an exceedingly good arrangement.

ERNEST. You are dead, as far as she's concerned.

OTTO. Oh, no, we're not! We're very much alive.

LEO. I fear your marriage is on the rocks, Ernest

ERNEST. This is one of the most superb exhibitions of brazen impertinence I've ever encountered.

OTTO. It's inconvenient, I do see that. It may quite possibly inconvenience you very much.

LEO. But no more than that; and you know it as well as we do.

ERNEST. [*with admirable control*] Aren't you taking rather a lot for granted?

OTTO. Only what we know.

ERNEST. I won't lose my temper with you, because that would be foolish—

OTTO. And ineffective.

ERNEST. But I think you had better put on whatever clothes you came in, and go away. You can come back later, when you're in a more reasonable frame of mind.

LEO. We're in a perfectly reasonable frame of mind, Ernest. We've never been more reasonable in our lives; nor more serenely determined.

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ERNEST. [*with great calmness*] Now look here, you two. I married Gilda because she was alone, and because for many, many years I have been deeply attached to her. We discussed it carefully together from every angle, before we decided. I know the whole circumstances intimately. I know exactly how much she loved you both; and also, I'm afraid, exactly how little you both loved her. You practically ruined her life between you, and you caused her great unhappiness with your egotistical, causal passions. Now you can leave her alone. She's worked hard and made a reputation for herself. Her life is fully occupied; and she is completely contented. Leave her alone! Go away! Go back to Manila or wherever you came from-and leave her alone!

LEO. Admirable, Ernest! Admirable, but not strictly accurate. We love her more than anyone else in the world and always shall. She caused us just as much unhappiness in the past as we ever caused her. And although she may have worked hard, and although her life is so fully occupied, she is far from being contented. We saw her last night and we know.

OTTO. She could never be contented without us, because she belongs to us just as much as we belong to her.

ERNEST. She ran away from you.

LEO. She'll come back.