

## A Song at Twilight audition extracts

HUGO:

CARLOTTA. Chocolate soufflé!

HUGO. I hate familiarity with servants.

CARLOTTA. Oh, eat up your soufflé for God's sake and stop being so disagreeable.

HUGO. (*Outraged.*) How dare you speak to me like that!

CARLOTTA. Dare? Really, Hugo. What have I to fear from you! (*She continues eating.*)

HUGO. I consider your rudeness insufferable.

CARLOTTA. And I consider your pomposity insufferable.

HUGO. (*Itily.*) I should like to remind you that you are my guest.

CARLOTTA. Of course I am. Don't be so silly.

HUGO. And as such I have the right to demand from you at least a semblance of good manners.

CARLOTTA. "Semblance of good manners!" Talk about clichés. That's a clanger if ever I heard one.

HUGO. (*Quivering with rage.*) Once and for all, Carlotta . . .

CARLOTTA. For heaven's sake calm down. Your wife told me earlier on that it was bad for you to overexcite yourself. You'll have a fit in a minute if you don't stop gibbering.

HUGO. (*Beside himself, shouting.*) I am not gibbering! (*He puts his serviette on the table and rises to the window R. There is silence for a moment. CARLOTTA continues to eat her soufflé. HUGO moves to L. of the desk. With superb control.*) I think, Carlotta, that as we really haven't very much more to say to each other it would be considerate of you to leave as soon as you've finished eating. I am sorry if I appear to be discourteous, but after all it was you who forced us both into this—this rather unprofitable meeting. I have done my best to receive you kindly and make the evening a pleasant one. That I have failed is only too obvious. I am sorry also that I was unable to accede to your request. I am sure, after you have given yourself time to think it over, that you will realize how impertinent it was.

CARLOTTA. Why impertinent?

HUGO. Not having read your book, I have naturally no way of judging whether it is good, bad or indifferent. I am perfectly aware, however, that, whatever its merits, the inclusion of private letters from a man in my position would enhance its value considerably. The impertinence, I think, lies in your assuming for a moment that I should grant you permission to publish them. We met and parted many years ago. Since then we have neither of us communicated with each other. You have pursued your career, I have pursued mine. Mine, if I may say so without undue arrogance, has been eminently successful. Yours, perhaps less so. Doesn't it strike *you* as impertinent that, after so long a silence, you should suddenly ask me to provide you with my name as a stepping-stone?

CARLOTTA. The letters really are very good, Hugo. It's disappointing that you won't allow me to use them. They *are* love letters, of course, up to a point, and brilliantly written. The more ardent passages are exquisitely phrased, although they do give the impression that they were commissioned by your head rather than dictated by your heart.

HUGO. I have no wish to discuss the matter any further.

CARLOTTA. It seems a pity that posterity should be deprived of such an illuminating example of your earlier work.

HUGO. (*Moving to L. of the desk.*) I really am very tired, Carlotta. I feel that my age entitles me to ask you to leave me alone now. Perhaps we may meet and talk again within the next few days.

CARLOTTA:

HUGO. I hope you had the sense to take it out of its frame.

CARLOTTA. We had been together for well over a year before I began to realize my exact status in the cautious pattern of your life.

HUGO. (*Turning away.*) Really, Carlotta, do you consider it entirely relevant to continue this musty, ancient soul searching?

CARLOTTA. Yes, I do. I most emphatically do. (*Rising.*) It was your dishonesty and lack of moral courage in those far-off days that set you on the wrong road for the rest of your life.

HUGO. It is hardly for you to decide whether the course of my life has been wrong or right.

CARLOTTA. You might have been a great writer instead of merely a successful one, and you might also have been a far happier man.

HUGO. (*Rising to L. of the desk.*) And what bearing has all this on that dreadful wound I inflicted on your feminine vanity in the nineteen-twenties?

CARLOTTA. Because you have consistently, through all your glittering years, behaved with the same callous cruelty to everyone who has been foolish enough to put their trust in your heart.

HUGO. (*Near violence again.*) In what way was I so callous and cruel to you?

CARLOTTA. You used me. You used me and betrayed me as you've always used and betrayed every human being who has ever shown you the slightest sign of true affection.

HUGO. In what way did I use you any more than you used me?

CARLOTTA. You waved me like a flag to prove a fallacy.

HUGO. What fallacy?

CARLOTTA. That you were normal, that your morals were orderly, that you were, in fact, a "regular guy." (*She moves below the sofa.*)

HUGO. Was that so unpardonable? I was young, ambitious and already almost a public figure. Was it so base of me to try to show to the world that I was capable of playing the game according to the rules?

CARLOTTA. It wasn't your deception of the world that I found so unpardonable; it was your betrayal of me, and all the love and respect and admiration I felt for you. If you had had the courage to trust me, to let me share your uneasy secret, not in the first year perhaps, but later on, when things were becoming strained and difficult between us, if then you had told me the truth, I would very possibly have been your loyal and devoted friend until this very minute. As it was you let me gradually, bit by bit, discover what my instincts had already half guessed. You elbowed me out of your life vulgarly and without grace, Hugo, and I can even now remember the relief in your voice when you said good-bye and packed me off to America.

HUGO. I didn't pack you off to America. You went with an excellent contract and in a first-class state-room.

CARLOTTA. (*With a sigh, turning away.*) I see clearly that I am wasting my time.

HUGO. You most certainly are. And mine. The only interesting fact that has emerged from your impassioned tirades this evening is that, in spite of a full life, three husbands, and an excessive amount of plastic surgery, you have managed to keep this ancient wound so freshly bleeding. You must be suffering from a sort of emotional haemophilia.

CARLOTTA. I salute you. You're an unregenerate old bitch!

## HILDE:

CARLOTTA. Why does he mean so much to you? Why are you so loyal to him?

HILDE. Because he is all I have. (*She sits on the R. arm of the sofa.*) You have lived so differently from me, Miss Gray, that I quite see why you must find my attitude difficult to understand. I have only loved one man

in my life, one of my own countrymen, who was destroyed by my own countrymen in nineteen forty-two. When I came to Hugo as secretary I was desolate and without hope, and when, a little later, he asked me to marry him, it seemed like a sudden miracle. Please do not misunderstand me. I was not in love with him and I knew that he could never be in love with me. I also knew why and was not deceived as to his reasons for asking me. I recognized his need for a "façade" and was quite content to supply it. I thought that it was a most realistic and sensible arrangement, and, what is more, I think so still. I am not pretending that our married life has been twenty years of undiluted happiness. He is frequently sarcastic and disagreeable to me and I have often been unhappy and lonely. But then, so has he. The conflict within him between his natural instincts and the laws of society has been for the most of his life a perpetual problem that he has had to grapple with alone.

CARLOTTA. Wouldn't it at least have eased the problem if he had trusted you enough to share it with you?

HILDE. Possibly. But it would have been out of character. He has made his career and lived his life in his own way according to the rules he has laid down for himself. Now, when the passing years have diminished the conflict, he is growing to rely on me more and to need me more, and that, with my sentimental, Teutonic mentality, is the reward that I have been waiting for.

HUGO. (*Very gently.*) Hilde . . .

HILDE. (*Rising.*) Don't interrupt for a moment, Hugo; I have not quite finished. (*She turns back to CARLOTTA, sitting R. on the sofa.*) To revert to the Perry Sheldon letters. You must, of course, dispose of them as you see fit. If Mr. Justin Chandler wishes for them and you wish to give them to him, there is nothing we can do to prevent you. But I must warn you that, according to law, he will not be allowed to publish them without Hugo's written permission. He may possibly quote them and paraphrase them to a certain extent, I believe, but I cannot

feel that a really good writer would waste time in referring to them at all. If Perry Sheldon had been in any way significant as a human being; if he had been in any way worthy of attention on his own account, apart from the fact of his early relationship with Hugo, there might be some point in disclosing them. But he wasn't. He was a creature of little merit; foolish, conceited, dishonest and self-indulgent.

CARLOTTA. How do you know?

HILDE. Through Liesel. Curiously enough, we were talking about him this evening. She knew him for years when she was a script-writer in Hollywood. She lent him money on several occasions, but, as she said, it is no use lending money to the morally defeated. They only spend it on further defeat.

## FELIX

HILDE. That will be all for the moment, Felix. Sir Hugo's guest is due at eight o'clock, but it is possible that she might be a little late, so I think you should be prepared to serve the dinner at about eight-thirty, but not before.

FELIX. A touch of garlic in the salad dressing as usual?

HILDE. Yes. But only the smallest touch. We don't want a repetition of last Friday, do we?

FELIX. Friday night is much to be regretted, Milady. But if you will remember, I was off duty. Giovanni is a most willing boy, but he is not yet accustomed to Sir Hugo's tastes.

HILDE. You will warn him to be more careful next time.

FELIX. Very good, Milady. (FELIX bows and exits up C.)

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HILDE. I shouldn't count too much on that, anyhow. The Maalox tablets are in the table drawer if you should need them. (FELIX enters C. with a bucket of ice, and moves to the drinks table. HILDE, moving U. C.) Give Sir Hugo a vodka on the rocks, will you, Felix.

FELIX. Very good, Milady.

HILDE. I won't be more than a few minutes. (HILDE exits U. C., closing the doors. FELIX pours a vodka on the rocks.)

HUGO. (With charm.) I missed you sadly last evening, Felix. Where did you disappear to?

FELIX. It was my half-day off, sir.

HUGO. Your substitute lacked charm. He also breathed like an old locomotive.

FELIX. That was Giovanni, sir. He comes from Calabria.

HUGO. The railway journey must have made a profound impression on him.

FELIX. (Moving to L. of HUGO.) Your vodka, sir.

HUGO. (Taking it.) Thank you. Did you enjoy your half-day off?

FELIX. Oh, yes, sir. We went to swim in the piscine at Vevey, it is not so crowded as the one here, and then we came back and went to a film.

HUGO. We?

FELIX. My friend and I. He is the assistant barman at the Hotel de la Paix. He is a champion swimmer and has won many trophies.

HUGO. You look as though you should be a good swimmer yourself, with those shoulders.

FELIX. Not as good as he is, but I myself love to water-ski. It is a great sport.

HUGO. It must be. Water-skiing was not invented when I was your age. (HILDE enters U. C., leaving the doors open, moves down to the desk and sits.) Thank you, Felix. You will bring the dinner when I ring?

FELIX. Very good, sir. (He moves U. C.)

HUGO. It should be in about half an hour's time, depending on when my guest arrives.

FELIX. Bien, monsieur. (FELIX bows and exits, closing the doors. HILDE starts to stamp letters.)