

THE SILVER CORD, Act II Scene 3

CHRISTINA

Poor Hester! . . . I don't feel like going to bed yet. I want to talk. Do you mind?

DAVID

Look here, Chris... Don't you get mixed up in this business, will you?

CHRISTINA

I wonder if I'm not mixed up in it already?

DAVID

Well, don't "take sides".

CHRISTINA

I wonder if I can help taking sides?

DAVID

It's none of our business.

CHRISTINA

I wish I were sure of that. (*Baffled at David's attitude she changes her attack*) Poor little Hester goes tomorrow morning. How long are we staying?

DAVID

Oh, I dunno.

CHRISTINA

A week?

DAVID

We can't do less, can we?

CHRISTINA

Can't we?

DAVID

Don't you want to?

(There is another pause before Christina shakes her head. David frowns, rises and moves L.)

You see what comes of taking things so hard? I'm just as distressed over what's happened as you are. Maybe more. But I certainly don't want to run away. It wouldn't be right. Mother'd never understand. I'd feel like a brute going off and leaving her in the lurch after this. Think what Rob's put her through today, and what she'll have to go through with Hester's family and all her friends and everybody else before she's done.

CHRISTINA

She seems to be bearing up.

DAVID

You can't be sure with Mother.

CHRISTINA

Can't you?

DAVID

She's so damned game!

CHRISTINA

Is she?

DAVID

Can't you see that? And anyway, I've got to look around.

CHRISTINA

What at? The houses in Phelps manor?

DAVID

I know how you feel, Chris, about Mother's helping hand. But I can't be throwing away opportunities, now, can I, with the baby coming?

CHRISTINA

No, Dave. Of course you can't. Neither can I.

DAVID

How do you mean?

CHRISTINA

Forgotten all about *my* opportunities, haven't you!

DAVID

What opportunities?

CHRISTINA

My appointment.

DAVID

Didn't Mother say she could scare up something for you here?

CHRISTINA

She thought she might "scare up" a place where I could "potter around" and keep myself "happy and contented" when the "real doctors" weren't working.

DAVID

She didn't mean anything unkind, Chris. Just give Mother a chance and ... What are you crying for?

CHRISTINA

(Hotly untruthful) I'm not crying.

DAVID

You are!

CHRISTINA

I can't help it...

DAVID

But what's the matter?

CHRISTINA

It doesn't look as if I'm to have much of a show for my eight years of hard work, does it?

DAVID

Mother and I'll dope out something. I couldn't leave her now. You know that. And, anyway, I've got to stay till I get my shirts washed. I've only got two left.

CHRISTINA

Then we stay, of course.

DAVID

And I must say, Chris, that I don't think you're quite playing the game to judge my home and my family entirely on what you've seen tonight. Besides, the whole purpose of this visit was to bring you and Mother together and to show Mother that a lady scientist mayn't be as bad as she sounds. Because you and Mother have just got to hit it off, you know.

CHRISTINA

Have we?

DAVID

You're apt to be impatient, Chris, and I'm afraid you're intolerant.

CHRISTINA

Those are bad faults in a scientist.

DAVID

They're bad faults in anybody. Now, you just give me time and you'll see how things straighten out.

CHRISTINA

Aren't you satisfied with the way our meeting has come off?

DAVID

There's no use pretending it was ideal. I believe in facing the facts always. But don't you worry. Mother gets on *my* nerves sometimes. You just have to remember what a hard life she's had.

CHRISTINA

How has it been hard?

DAVID

Oh, lots of ways! My father wasn't much, you know.

CHRISTINA

I didn't know. You've never mentioned him.

DAVID

He died when I was five.

CHRISTINA

What was the matter with him? Women or drink?

DAVID

Nothing like that. He just didn't amount to much.

CHRISTINA

Made a lot of money, didn't he?

DAVID

Lots.

CHRISTINA

And left your mother rich. What other troubles has she had?

DAVID

Well, her health.

CHRISTINA

It doesn't seem so bad.

DAVID

It is, though. Heart. And I wish I could tell you half of what she's gone through for Rob and me.

CHRISTINA

Go on and tell me. I'd like to hear.

DAVID

I've heard her say she was born without a selfish hair on her head.

CHRISTINA

No!

DAVID

And that's about true. Why, I've seen her nurse Rob through one thing after another when she'd admit to me that she was twice as sick as he was. I've seen her come in here after taking care of him, and she'd be half fainting with her bad heart, but there'd be nothing doing when I'd beg her to get him a nurse. She said we were her job, and she just wouldn't give in. And the way she always took interest in

everything we did! Why, when she used to come up to the school, all the boys just went crazy about her.

CHRISTINA

I'm sure they did. How did your girlfriends get on with her?

DAVID

Oh, they loved her, too! Mother used to give us dances here.

CHRISTINA

Did she invite the girls you were in love with?

DAVID

I never fell in love! Not really. Not till I met you.

CHRISTINA

Darling! What was the name of the one your mother thought could wear my dress?

DAVID

Clara Judd?

CHRISTINA

Weren't you sweet on Clara?

DAVID

I dunno. What made you ask that?

CHRISTINA

Just something in the way your mother spoke of her this evening. Weren't you?

DAVID

Mother thought so.

CHRISTINA

Used to pester you about Clara, didn't she.

DAVID

She was afraid I was going to marry Clara.

CHRISTINA

Anything wrong with her?

DAVID

With Clara? No. Damn nice girl. You'll meet her.

CHRISTINA

Then why didn't your mother want you to marry her.

DAVID

Thought I was too young.

CHRISTINA

When was it?

DAVID

Summer after the war.

CHRISTINA

You weren't so young, were you?

DAVID

You know Mother.

CHRISTINA

How about your brother - did he used to fall in love a great deal?

DAVID

I don't know that I'd call it "in love".

CHRISTINA

Why not?

DAVID

It's the family skeleton. She was a chorus girl, my dear. She cost Mother twelve thousand dollars.

CHRISTINA

That must have been Jolly! Was she the only one, or were there others?

DAVID

There were plenty of others. Only they didn't have lawyers.

CHRISTINA

And then Hester!

DAVID

Right!

CHRISTINA

Well, that's all very interesting.

DAVID

What are you trying to prove?

CHRISTINA

An idea this affair of Hester's put into my head.
And I must say it fits in rather extraordinarily.

DAVID

What does?

CHRISTINA

You're being too young to marry after the war, and
Robert taking to wild women... And you had to be three
thousand miles from home to fall in love with me!
Never mind... That's enough of that! Now let me tell
you something. Only you must promise not to get mad.

DAVID

I won't get mad.

CHRISTINA

Promise!

DAVID

Promise.

CHRISTINA

Shirts or no shirts, we've got to get out of here
tomorrow.

DAVID

Now, Chris, haven't we been over all that.

CHRISTINA

Yes, but not to the bottom of it.

DAVID

What more is there to say?

CHRISTINA

That a defenseless, trusting little girl has been cruelly treated! We've got to "take sides" here, Dave!

DAVID

What's the matter with Hester's own family? This is their business, not ours!

CHRISTINA

We owe it to ourselves to make it our business.

DAVID

I don't see it.

CHRISTINA

Why don't you see it? What have you put over your eyes that keeps you from seeing it? Do you dare answer that?

DAVID

Dare? What do you mean?

CHRISTINA

"Face the facts," Dave! "Face the facts!"

DAVID

Rot! You're making a mountain out of a molehill.

CHRISTINA

Cruelty to children isn't a molehill!

DAVID

You're exaggerating! Hester's engagement isn't the first that was ever broken.

CHRISTINA

Think how it was broken and by whom!

DAVID

You just said she was in luck to be rid of Rob. I'll grant you that. I haven't any more use for Rob than you have.

CHRISTINA

Who stands behind Rob?

DAVID

I don't know what you mean.

CHRISTINA

Don't you?

DAVID

No.

CHRISTINA

All right, I'll tell you.

DAVID

You needn't... Are you trying to pick a fight with me?

CHRISTINA

On the contrary. I'm asking you to stand by me.

DAVID

I won't go away and leave Mother in the lurch.

CHRISTINA

You see! You do know what I mean.

DAVID

I don't! I'm just telling you I won't let Mother down.

CHRISTINA

You'd rather stand by your mother than by the right, wouldn't you?

DAVID

Oh, the right!

CHRISTINA

Isn't Hester the right?

DAVID

I can't help it if she is. I won't let Mother down.

CHRISTINA

You'll let me down.

DAVID

Oh, Chris! It's late. Come on, let's turn in.

CHRISTINA

You'd rather stand by your mother than by me, wouldn't you.

DAVID

No, I wouldn't. I tell you, Hester's none of our business.

CHRISTINA

You'll admit *this* is?

DAVID

What is?

CHRISTINA

This!... Who comes first with you? Your mother or me?

DAVID

Now, what's the good of putting things that way?

CHRISTINA

That's what things come to! If your mother and I ever quarreled about anything; if it ever came up to you to choose between sticking by me and sticking by her, which would you stick by?

DAVID

I'd... I'd try to do the right thing...

CHRISTINA

That's an evasion.

DAVID

But why ask such a question?

CHRISTINA

Because I love you. Because I've got to find out if you love me. And I'm afraid... I'm afraid.

DAVID

Why?

CHRISTINA

Because you won't see the facts behind all this. I'm trying to tell you what they are and you won't listen. You can't even hear me.

DAVID

I can hear you. And a worse line of bunkum I've never listened to in my life.

CHRISTINA

The I can't hope for much, can I?... I feel awfully like a lost soul, right now... Oh, my God, what am I going to do? What am I going to do?

DAVID

I hope you're going to behave. You ought to be ashamed. Just as I was bringing Mother around to you and...

CHRISTINA

You'd better think a little about bringing *me* around to your mother!

DAVID

Chris!

CHRISTINA

Why should your mother and I get on?

DAVID

Because you should, that's why. Because she's an older woman and my mother. And you know, just as well as I do...

CHRISTINA

I know a great deal better than you that your mother dislikes me fully as much as I dislike her. You're wasting you time trying to bring your mother and me together, because we won't be brought. You say you believe in facing the facts. Well, let's see you face that one!

DAVID

I've never heard anything so outrageous! When you know what Mother means to me and what...

CHRISTINA

Your mother! Your mother! Always your mother! She's got you back! Dave, her big boy, who ran off and got married! She's got you back!

DAVID

I won't stand for any more of this! A man's mother is his mother!

CHRISTINA

And what's his wife, may I ask? Or doesn't she count?

DAVID

This is morbid rot! She warned me you'd be jealous of her!

CHRISTINA

Did she?

DAVID

But I never expected anything like this!

CHRISTINA

What's going to become of me?

DAVID

I won't stand for any more...

CHRISTINA

Hester's escaped, but I'm caught! I can't go back and be the old Christina again. She's done for. And Christina, your wife, doesn't even exist. I'm going to have a baby by a man who belongs to another woman!

DAVID

Damn it, Chris! Do you want Mother to hear you?

CHRISTINA

Do I not!