

Act 1
Scene Two

Scene 2

Narrator - In the grand dining room of Wakefield Manor, the guests are finishing up their lavish meal. Seated alone at the head of the elegant dining table is Dr. Davidson, and far at the other end, among the assembled guests, sits his beautiful young wife Kitty. As dinner draws to a close...

[Murmurs and dishes sfx]

Oliver - My compliments on the meal, Kitty. The pheasant was superb.

Kitty (slightly bored) - Yes, Hannah is an absolute treasure. James is so very fussy about what he can and can't eat, and when he wants to be served - goodness, I don't know how she does it.

Harrison - *When* he wants to be served? How do you mean?

Kitty - Well, for instance... (lowers to a whisper) between you, me and the lamppost... did you know he makes Hannah bring him a cup of cocoa in his study at 1 am every single night? Can you imagine? Every single night, without fail...and it has to be on time or he roars the house down. The poor dear, she's up with the birds every morning, she must be just exhausted.

Marlena (dryly) - He used to make our mother do that, before Hannah came along.

Sadie (adding) - He says it helps him sleep.

Kitty (brittle laugh) - Well, he'd never get me to wait on him like that! What foolishness.

Rodney (whispers) - I think he just likes to make sure the servants know their place.

Kitty - So your mother was a *servant* to him, then?

Rodney - Isn't everyone?

[sfx of a fork against a wine glass]

DD (Clearing his throat) Everyone....everyone...if you please...

[all noise stops][chair being pushed back as he stands]

DD - You are most certainly wondering why I've called you all here on this most dreadful of nights. Well. I shan't keep in suspense any longer. I've gathered you all here because I have an important announcement to make.

Marlena (sotto voce) - Dear God, don't say Kitty's expecting.

DD (continuing without hearing her)- And it involves every person present here tonight. To be quite blunt, I have an appointment with my solicitor tomorrow morning, the purpose of which is... to amend my will.

[murmurs]

DD (speaking a little louder over the murmurs) - And it is my intention... to disinherit you all.

[louder gasps]

[all saying at once]

Sadie - Papa!

Rodney - What?

Oliver - Dear God, man!

Harrison - I say, what the devil..?

DD - Silence, all of you! I will have silence! For many years now I have suffered through your constant appeals for money, your complaints, your scheming. At last I have made my decision; I have supported all of you long enough. I earned my fortune, through long study and hard work, and it's high time all of you did as well.

Marlena - Papa, please...please explain what has brought this on? Have we offended you in some way?

DD - You offend me with your very existence! I have been a loving father for more than half my life and how am I repaid? With your hand out! And not just your hand...nor your hand Sadie, nor yours, Rodney. But yours, too, gentlemen, my useless sons-in-law.

[all at once]

Harrison - Really, James, this is out of line!

Oliver - I resent the implication-

Sadie - So unfair of you, Papa...

Marlena - We're your family-

DD - Enough, all of you! There isn't one among you that has spared a thought for me, throughout the whole of your lives! You have lived off my money and my tender concern without once thinking of what I might need and deserve in return.

Sadie (upset) - Papa, that is untrue! Oliver and I live close by so we can attend to you should you ever need help -

Rodney - And I gave up that sailing trip to South America when you fell ill last year. I never left your side!

Sadie - (continuing) - And Marlena won't say it, but she and Harrison nearly divorced over the bankruptcy-

Marlena - Sadie!

Harrison (angry) - How dare you!

Sadie (continuing quickly) - but she sided with *you*, Papa, over her own husband!

DD - Of course she didn't! She sided with that Spanish scoundrel, make no mistake! She eloped with him against my express wishes, didn't she?

“Harrison Smythe”...I’ll have you know I had my investigator on him, his real name is Enrique Herrero and he’s wanted by -

Marlena - Papa! Stop this at once! I told you that in the strictest of confidence!

Harrison - (Curses in Spanish)(In English) I’ll kill you, you....you....

DD - (pounding the table) I will not hear another word! Vultures, all of you! I’m beset by vultures! And now you’re all clamouring to deny your selfish, heartless behaviour! It abhorrent, I say. Unconscionable!

Oliver - This is outrageous! Disinheriting your own flesh and blood? Calling *them* selfish because they aren’t more devoted to *you*? That’s the height of hypocrisy, James, the very height!

DD - (thundering) You’re one to talk about hypocrisy! Why, with what I know about you I could have you disbarred. In fact I probably should, for the public good!

Sadie - Papa!

Rodney - If this is some sort of gag it’s badly done, old chap. Very badly done.

DD - Everything may be a joke to you, Rodney, but I assure you I don’t find it the least bit amusing. You’re the most ungrateful group of leeches I’ve ever seen.

Marlena - Kitty, can you not talk some sense into him?

Kitty - He’s right! None of you have ever appreciated him! I’ve seen it myself, you’re all just using him, playing up to him so you can ask for more money.

Dulcie - Mrs Davidson, that’s absolutely untrue. I’ve only worked for Dr. Davidson a short time but I can promise you, I’ve seen genuine concern for their father from the family-

DD - Miss Pangiottis, that is quite enough from you! Do not think yourself spared - consider your employment terminated effectively immediately.

Dulcie - What? But...but...I don’t understand...why?

DD - A winsome young lady such as yourself, withering away behind a typewriter for 60 pounds sterling a year? Wearing such revealing attire and those new 'false eyelashes' so you can bat your eyes at me more fetchingly, dousing yourself in that French perfume that enters the room before you do? You can have no other object but usurping Mrs. Davidson!

Dulcie (shocked) Dr. Davidson, I swear, I never-

Sadie (outraged) Oh Papa!

Kitty (snidely, triumphant) - His heart belongs to me, Dulcie, never forget that.

DD - Does it, Kitty dear? You cold-hearted, empty-headed, gold-digging little prude - consider yourself cut off without a penny!

Kitty (almost a shriek) What?

[Increasing murmurs of dismay and disbelief from around the table]

DD - Do you think it has escaped my notice that before our wedding you were flirtatious and adventurous and attentive to a man's needs...and after the ceremony all affection between us ceased? When you redecorated my late wife's rooms and took to them in solitude?

Marlena - Papa, this is horrid! Stop this at once!

Oliver - James, you're upsetting everyone-

DD - how long has it been since you warmed my bed, Kitty? Can you even remember?

Kitty (sputtering) I....I.....

DD - Well, I remember. It was the night of our wedding, and no night since! Well, I will no longer tolerate such neglect from my own wife. Not only are you cut out of my will, I am filing for divorce in the morning!

Kitty (crying) James....James, please....I love you, I'm so sorry...

[Murmuring and talking grows louder]

DD (speaking loudly over the din) That is all I have to say. I have made up my mind, I will not be persuaded otherwise, a good housecleaning is long overdue. In fact...Hannah...Hannah! Come in here please, this instant.

Hannah (entering) - Yes, Doctor? Is everything alright?

DD - It is certainly not. Your services are no longer required in this household.

Hannah - sputtering...I beg your pardon?

DD - I have just informed my family, and now I'm informing you. Thank you for your many years of service, some of which I will no doubt look back on with fond memories, but your employment here has come to an end. I have found a buyer for Wakefield Manor and will be releasing all the staff. I will, naturally, give you your last two weeks' pay, but by the end of the month you must find another position.

Hannah - Oh my heavens! But doctor...I..

Sadie - (crying) Papa, you can't do this terrible thing...you simply can't!

DD - I can and I will. You may fund your home for harlots with your own money, if that husband of yours still has a career when I'm done with him.

Sadie (angry sobbing, running from the room) You vile, horrible man! I hate you! I wish you were dead!

Oliver - I say, James, that was a cruel thing to say...Sadie...Sadie, dear, come back...(following her out of the room)

Rodney - Father, you simply can't do this. It's...it's...monstrous

DD - It's done, boy. Every penny of my estate will go to the Church of England Temperance Society, your mother's favourite charity. Now... I shall retire to the solitude of my bedroom. You, Kitty, will find the door locked, in case your conscience persuades you to try to be a better wife to me. The rest of you are permitted to stay the night on account of the storm, but I want all of you gone by morning. Good evening.

DD leaves

[shocked sounds, tears, murmurs]

Narrator - Ah yes, avarice and greed, man's greatest failings. But can we not add to this list...self-pity? Was Dr. Davidson right about his family's neglect? Or were Sadie and Harrison justified in wishing him dead? Join us next time for some answers...