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SF PERUSALS

THE LOVER

by Harold Pinter

SAMUEL FRENCH

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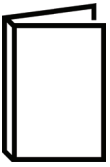
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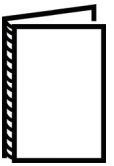
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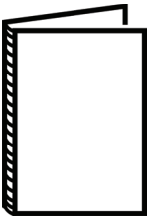
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harold Pinter was born in London in 1930. He lived with Antonia Fraser from 1975 until his death on Christmas Eve 2008. (They were married in 1980).

After studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the Central School of Speech and Drama, he worked as an actor under the stage name David Baron. Following his success as a playwright, he continued to act under his own name, on stage and screen. He last acted in 2006 when he appeared in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Royal Court Theatre, directed by Ian Rickson.

He wrote twenty-nine plays including *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *A Slight Ache*, *The Hothouse*, *The Caretaker*, *The Collection*, *The Lover*, *The Homecoming*, *Old Times*, *No Man's Land*, *Betrayal*, *A Kind of Alaska*, *One For The Road*, *The New World Order*, *Moonlight* and *Ashes to Ashes.* Sketches include *The Black and White*, *Request Stop*, *That's your Trouble*, *Night*, *Precisely*, *Apart From that* and the recently rediscovered, *Umbrellas*.

He directed twenty-seven theatre productions, including James Joyce's *Exiles*, David Mamet's *Oleanna*, seven plays by Simon Gray (one of which was *Butley* in 1971 which he directed the film of three years later) and many of his own plays including his last, *Celebration*, paired with his first, *The Room* at The Almeida Theatre, London in the spring of 2000.

He wrote twenty-one screenplays including *The Pumpkin Eater*, *The Servant*, *The Go-Between*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Sleuth*.

In 2005 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Other awards include the Companion of Honour for services to Literature, the Legion D'Honneur, the European Theatre Prize the Laurence Olivier Award and the Moliere D'Honneur for lifetime achievement. In 1999 he was made a Companion of Literature by the Royal Society of Literature. Harold Pinter was awarded eighteen honorary degrees.

THE LOVER

Presented by Michael Codron and David Hall at the Arts Theatre, London, W.C.2, on 18th September 1963, with the following cast of characters:

(in order of their appearance)

RICHARD	(both in their middle thirties)	Scott Forbes
SARAH		Vivien Merchant
JOHN		Michael Forrest

The play produced by Harold Pinter
assisted by Guy Vaesen

SCENE

A detached house near Windsor in summer

Time—the present

SCENE*—SARAH's *and* RICHARD's *house near Windsor. Morning.

The living-room, hall and bedroom are seen. The living-room occupies the right side of the stage, the bedroom, on a rostrum, the left side. Up right centre in the living-room is a window with Venetian blinds, in a small bay. A door leads to the kitchen off right. The front door is in the hall up centre. In the living-room is a sofa, with half-back, and above it a table. Another table, of full height, is left centre, with a small armchair left of it. An upright chair is down right, and a drinks cupboard stands in the window bay. There is a clothes cupboard in the hall. The window bay and hall are on a low rostrum, from which further steps lead to the bedroom rostrum. A double bed is up left, with bed tables on each side; below the entrance a low book case, and down left a dressing-table and stool. A door leads to the bathroom off left. Down left, on the bedroom rostrum, a broken wall suggests a window leading on to a balcony which juts out below the room and is surrounded by a wrought-iron railing.

When the curtain rises, **SARAH** *is by the window in the living-room dusting and emptying ashtrays. She wears a crisp, demure dress.* **RICHARD** *enters down left to the bedroom, collects his money and keys from the shelf left of the bed, goes to the hall cupboard and takes out his briefcase, then moves to left of* **SARAH** *and kisses her on the cheek, looking at her for a moment, smiling.* **SARAH** *smiles.*

RICHARD *(amiably)* Is your lover coming today? *(He unzips his case and looks in it)*

SARAH Mmnn.

RICHARD What time?

SARAH Three.

RICHARD Will you be going out…or staying in?

SARAH Oh… I think we'll stay in.

RICHARD I thought you wanted to go to that exhibition.

SARAH I did, yes…but I think I'd prefer to stay in with him today.

RICHARD Mmn-hmmm. Well, I must be off.

SARAH Right.

RICHARD *(collecting his hat from the hall)* Will he be staying long, do you think?

SARAH Mmmnnn…

RICHARD About…six, then.

SARAH Yes.

RICHARD Have a pleasant afternoon.

SARAH Mmnn.

RICHARD 'Bye-'bye.

SARAH 'Bye.

RICHARD *exits through the front door up centre.* **SARAH** *continues dusting.*

The lights fade to a black-out.

When the lights come up, **SARAH** *enters from the bedroom and moves to the drinks alcove up right. She is now wearing high-heeled shoes. She pours herself a drink, then sits on the left end of the sofa and reads the morning paper.* **RICHARD** *enters up centre.* **SARAH** *rises and goes to get him a drink. The clock chimes six.* **RICHARD** *is wearing a sober suit, as in the morning. He puts his briefcase down in the hall and enters the living-room.*

SARAH Hullo.

RICHARD Hullo. *(He goes to left of her and takes the drink)* Thanks. *(He gives her the evening paper, kisses her, then moves down left and sits. He drinks, leans back and sighs with contentment)* Aah.

SARAH Tired?

RICHARD Just a little.

SARAH Bad traffic?

RICHARD No. Quite good traffic, actually.

SARAH Oh, good.

RICHARD Very smooth.

A pause.

SARAH It seemed to me you were just a little late.

RICHARD Am I?

SARAH Just a little.

RICHARD There was a bit of a jam on the bridge.

SARAH *pours herself another drink and then sits on the sofa, right end.*

(watching her) Pleasant day?

SARAH Mmn. I was in the village this morning.

RICHARD Oh, yes? See anyone?

SARAH Not really, no. Had lunch.

RICHARD In the village?

SARAH Yes.

RICHARD Any good?

SARAH Quite fair.

RICHARD What about this afternoon? Pleasant afternoon?

SARAH Oh, yes, quite marvellous.

RICHARD Your lover came, did he?

SARAH Mmnn. Oh, yes.

RICHARD Did you show him the hollyhocks?

A slight pause.

SARAH The hollyhocks?

RICHARD Yes.

SARAH No.

RICHARD Oh.

SARAH Should I have done?

RICHARD No, no. It's simply that I seem to remember your saying he was interested in gardening.

SARAH Mmnn, yes, he is.

A pause.

Not all that interested, actually.

RICHARD Ah.

A pause.

Did you go out at all, or did you stay in?

SARAH We stayed in.

RICHARD Ah. *(He looks up at the Venetian blind)* That blind hasn't been put up properly.

SARAH Yes, it is a bit crooked, isn't it?

A pause.

RICHARD Very sunny on the road. Of course, by the time I got on to it the sun was beginning to sink. But I imagine it was quite warm here this afternoon. It was warm in the City.

SARAH Was it?

RICHARD Pretty stifling. I imagine it was quite warm everywhere.

SARAH Quite a high temperature, I believe.

RICHARD Did it say so on the wireless?

SARAH I think it did, yes.

There is a slight pause, then **RICHARD** *rises to up right.*

RICHARD I see you had the Venetian blinds down.

SARAH We did, yes.

RICHARD The light was terribly strong.

SARAH It was. Awfully strong.

RICHARD *(adjusting the blind)* The trouble with this room is that it catches the sun so directly, when it's shining. You didn't move to another room? *(He turns to her)*

SARAH No. We stayed here.

RICHARD Must have been blinding.

SARAH It was. That's why we put the blinds down.

A pause.

RICHARD The thing is it gets so awfully hot in here with the blinds down.

SARAH Would you say so?

RICHARD Perhaps not. Perhaps it's just that you feel hotter.

SARAH Yes. That's probably it. *(She pauses, then puts the paper down)* What did you do this afternoon?

RICHARD Long meeting. Rather inconclusive.

SARAH It's a cold supper. Do you mind?

RICHARD Not in the least.

SARAH *rises and moves up right by the drinks cupboard, then goes as if to exit right to the kitchen.* **RICHARD** *moves down left.*

SARAH I didn't seem to have time to cook anything today.

RICHARD Oh, by the way...

SARAH *stops.*

I rather wanted to ask you something.

SARAH What? *(She moves down right of the sofa)*

RICHARD *(sitting left centre)* Does it ever occur to you that while you're spending the afternoon being unfaithful to me I'm sitting at a desk going through balance sheets and graphs?

SARAH What a funny question.

RICHARD I'm curious.

SARAH You've never asked me that before.

RICHARD I've always wanted to know.

There is a slight pause. **SARAH** *moves below the left end of the sofa.*

SARAH Well, of course it occurs to me.

RICHARD Oh, it does?

SARAH Mmnn.

A slight pause.

RICHARD What's your attitude to that, then?

SARAH It makes it all the more piquant. *(She moves up centre)*

RICHARD Does it really?

SARAH Of course.

RICHARD You mean while you're with him...you actually have a picture of me, sitting at my desk going through balance sheets?

SARAH Only at...certain times.

RICHARD Of course.

SARAH *(moving round the sofa to above centre of it)* Not all the time.

RICHARD Well, naturally.

SARAH At particular moments. *(She moves to the drinks cupboard and puts her glass on it)*

RICHARD Mmnn. But in fact I'm not completely forgotten?

SARAH Not by any means.

RICHARD That's rather touching, I must admit.

A pause.

SARAH How could I forget you?

RICHARD Quite easily, I should think.

SARAH But I'm in your house.

RICHARD With another.

SARAH But it's you I love.

RICHARD I beg your pardon?

SARAH *(moving up right)* It's you I love. Let's have another drink.

RICHARD What shoes are they?

SARAH Mmnn?

RICHARD Those shoes. They're unfamiliar.

SARAH *moves to the hall.*

Very high heeled, aren't they?

SARAH *(muttering)* Mistake. Sorry.

RICHARD *(not hearing)* Sorry? I beg your pardon?

SARAH I'll...take them off. *(She takes off the high-heeled shoes, puts them in the hall cupboard and puts on flat shoes)*

RICHARD *(moving to the drinks cupboard and pouring two whiskies)* Not quite the most comfortable shoes for an evening at home, I would have thought.

SARAH *moves to above the table left centre and lights a cigarette.*

So you had a picture of me this afternoon, did you, sitting in my office?

SARAH I did, yes. It wasn't a terribly convincing one, though.

RICHARD Oh, why not? *(He moves to right of her and gives her a drink)*

SARAH Because I knew you weren't there. I knew you were with your mistress.

A pause.

RICHARD Was I?

A pause.

SARAH Aren't you hungry?

RICHARD I had a heavy lunch.

SARAH How heavy?

RICHARD *(moving to the window)* What a beautiful evening.

SARAH Weren't you?

RICHARD *(turning and laughing)* What mistress?

SARAH Oh, Richard...

RICHARD No, no, it's simply the word that's odd.

SARAH Is it? Why? *(There is a pause. She moves down right below the sofa)* I'm honest with you, aren't I? Why can't you be honest with me?

RICHARD But I haven't got a mistress. *(He takes a bowl of olives from the drinks cupboard and sits left centre with it)* I'm very well acquainted with a whore, but I haven't got a mistress. There's a world of difference.

SARAH *(moving down centre)* A whore...

RICHARD Yes, just a common or garden slut. Not worth talking about. Handy between trains, nothing more.

SARAH You don't travel by train. You travel by car.

RICHARD Quite. A quick cup of cocoa while they're checking the oil and water.

A pause.

SARAH *(sitting centre on the sofa)* Sounds utterly sterile.

RICHARD No.

A pause.

SARAH I must say I never expected you to admit it so readily.

RICHARD Oh, why not? You've never put it to me so bluntly before, have you? Frankness at all costs. Essential to a healthy marriage. Don't you agree?

SARAH Of course.

RICHARD *(rising and sitting left of* **SARAH***)* I mean, you're utterly frank with me, aren't you?

SARAH Utterly.

RICHARD About your lover. I must follow your example.

SARAH Thank you.

A pause.

Yes, I have suspected it for some time.

RICHARD Have you really?

SARAH Mmnn.

RICHARD Perceptive.

SARAH But...quite honestly... I can't really believe she's just... what you say.

RICHARD Why not?

SARAH It's just not possible. You have such taste. You care so much for grace and elegance in women.

RICHARD And wit.

SARAH And wit, yes.

RICHARD Wit, yes. Terribly important, wit, for a man.

SARAH Is she witty?

RICHARD *(laughing)* These terms just don't apply. You can't sensibly enquire whether a whore is witty. It's of no significance whether she is or she isn't. She's simply a whore, a functionary who either pleases or displeases you.

SARAH And she pleases you?

RICHARD Today she is pleasing. Tomorrow...? *(He rises, starts to take off his jacket and moves up stage)* One can't say.

A pause.

SARAH I must say I find your attitude to women rather alarming.

RICHARD Why? I wasn't looking for your double, was I? I wasn't looking for a woman I could respect, as you; whom I could admire and love, as I do you. Was I? All I wanted was...how shall I put it...someone who could express and engender lust with all lust's cunning. Nothing more. *(He moves into the bedroom, puts down his jacket, sits on the bed, takes off his shoes and puts on his slippers)*

SARAH *rises, puts her glass down up right, then goes above the sofa and into the bedroom to right of* **RICHARD**.

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