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PRIVATE LIVES

An Intimate Comedy

by Noël Coward

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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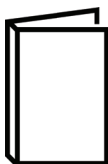
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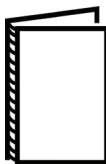


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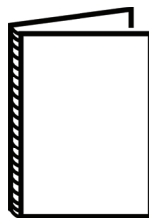
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Noël Peirce Coward was born in 1899 and made his professional stage debut as Prince Mussel in *The Goldfish* at the age of 12, leading to many child actor appearances over the next few years. His breakthrough in playwriting was the controversial *The Vortex* (1924) which featured themes of drugs and adultery and made his name as both actor and playwright in the West End and on Broadway. During the frenzied 1920s and the more sedate 1930s, Coward wrote a string of successful plays, musicals and intimate revues including *Fallen Angels* (1925), *Hay Fever* (1925), *Easy Virtue* (1926), *This Year of Grace* (1928), and *Bitter Sweet* (1929). His professional partnership with childhood friend Gertrude Lawrence, started with *Private Lives* (1931), and continued with *Tonight at 8.30* (1936).

During World War II, he remained a successful playwright, screenwriter and director, as well as entertaining the troops and even acting as an unofficial spy for the Foreign Office. His plays during these years included *Blithe Spirit*, which ran for 1997 performances, outlasting the War (a West End record until *The Mousetrap* overtook it), *This Happy Breed* and *Present Laughter* (both 1943). His two wartime screenplays, *In Which We Serve*, which he co-directed with the young David Lean, and *Brief Encounter* quickly became classics of British cinema.

However, the post-war years were more difficult. Austerity Britain – the London critics determined – was out of tune with the brittle Coward wit. In response, Coward re-invented himself as a cabaret and TV star, particularly in America, and in 1955 he played a sell-out season in Las Vegas featuring many of his most famous songs, including *Mad About the Boy*, *I'll See You Again* and *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*. In the mid-1950s he settled in

Jamaica and Switzerland, and enjoyed a renaissance in the early 1960s becoming the first living playwright to be performed by the National Theatre, when he directed *Hay Fever* there. Late in his career he was lauded for his roles in a number of films including *Our Man In Havana* (1959) and his role as the iconic Mr. Bridger alongside Michael Caine in *The Italian Job* (1968).

Writer, actor, director, film producer, painter, songwriter, cabaret artist as well as an author of a novel, verse, essays and autobiographies, he was called by close friends 'The Master'. His final West End appearance was *Song at Twilight* in 1966, which he wrote and starred in. He was knighted in 1970 and died peacefully in 1973 in his beloved Jamaica.

For further information on Noël Coward's life and work, visit www.noelcoward.com and to join the Noël Coward Society, visit www.noelcoward.net.

PRIVATE LIVES

Produced at the Phoenix Theatre, London, on September 24th, 1930, with the following cast of characters:

SIBYL CHASE	Adrianne Allen
ELYOT CHASE	Noël Coward
VICTOR PRYNNE	Laurence Olivier
AMANDA PRYNNE	Gertrude Lawrence
LOUISE	Everley Gregg

The play produced by Noël Coward

This Acting Edition has been made in accordance with the production at the Apollo Theatre, London, on October 31st, 1944, in which the cast was as follows:

SIBYL CHASE	Peggy Simpson
ELYOT CHASE	John Clements
VICTOR PRYNNE	Raymond Huntley
AMANDA PRYNNE	Kay Hammond
LOUISE	Yvonne Andre

The play produced by John Clements

ACT I	The terrace of a hotel in France. A summer evening
ACT II	Amanda's flat in Paris. A few days later. Evening
ACT III	The same. Next morning

ACT I

The terrace of a hotel in France.

There are two french windows at the back opening on to two separate suites. The terrace space is divided by a line of small trees in tubs, and, down stage, running parallel with the footlights, there is a balustrade. Upon each side of the line of tree tubs is a set of suitable terrace furniture, two chairs, and a table. There are orange and white awnings shading the windows, as it is summer.

When the curtain rises it is about 8 p.m. There is an orchestra playing not very far off. SIBYL CHASE opens the windows on the right and steps out on to the terrace. She is very pretty and blonde, and smartly dressed in travelling clothes. She comes down stage, stretches her arms wide with a little sigh of satisfaction, puts her bag on the balustrade and regards the view with an ecstatic expression.

SIBYL (*calling*) Elli, Elli dear, do come out. It's so lovely.

ELYOT (*inside*) Just a minute.

After a pause ELYOT comes out. He is about thirty, quite slim and pleasant looking, and also in travelling clothes. He walks right down to the balustrade to left of SIBYL and looks thoughtfully at the view. SIBYL slips her arm through his.

ELYOT Not so bad.

SIBYL It's heavenly. Look at the lights of that yacht reflected in the water. Oh dear, I'm so happy.

ELYOT (*smiling*) Are you?

SIBYL Aren't you?

ELYOT Of course I am. Tremendously happy.

SIBYL Just to think, here we are, you and I, married!

ELYOT Yes, things have come to a pretty pass.

SIBYL Don't laugh at me, you mustn't be *blasé* about honeymoons
just because this is your second.

ELYOT (*breaking left, frowning*) That's silly.

SIBYL Have I annoyed you by saying that?

ELYOT Just a little.

SIBYL Oh, darling, I'm so sorry. (*She holds her face up to his*)
Kiss me.

ELYOT (*doing so and putting an arm round her shoulder*) There.

SIBYL Ummm, not so very enthusiastic.

ELYOT (*kissing her again*) That better?

SIBYL Three times, please. I'm superstitious.

ELYOT (*kissing her*) You really are very sweet.

SIBYL Are you glad you married me?

ELYOT Of course I am.

SIBYL How glad? (*She takes a step back, holding his hand*)

ELYOT Incredibly, magnificently glad.

SIBYL How lovely.

ELYOT We ought to go in and dress. (*Still holding her hand he moves up stage*)

SIBYL (*moving up stage*) Gladder than before?

ELYOT (*dropping her hand*) Why do you keep harping on that?
(*He breaks down stage*)

SIBYL It's in my mind, and yours too, I expect.

ELYOT It isn't anything of the sort. (*He sits on the chair by the tubs*)

SIBYL (*coming down to the balustrade*) She was pretty, wasn't she? Amanda?

ELYOT Very pretty.

SIBYL Prettier than I am?

ELYOT Much.

SIBYL Elyot!

ELYOT She was pretty and sleek, and her hands were long and slim, and her legs were long and slim, and she danced like an angel. You dance very poorly, by the way.

SIBYL Could she play the piano as well as I can?

ELYOT She couldn't play the piano at all.

SIBYL (*triumphantly*) Aha! Had she my talent for organization?

ELYOT No, but she hadn't your mother either.

SIBYL I don't believe you like Mother.

ELYOT Like her! I can't bear her.

SIBYL Elyot! She's a darling, underneath.

ELYOT I never got underneath.

SIBYL (*moving slightly right and running a finger along the balustrade*) It makes me unhappy to think you don't like Mother.

ELYOT Nonsense. (*He rises*) I believe the only reason you married me was to get away from her.

SIBYL (*turning to him*) I married you because I loved you.

ELYOT Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!

SIBYL (*making a slight move towards him*) I love you far more than Amanda loved you. I'd never make you miserable like she did.

ELYOT (*taking out a cigarette*) We made each other miserable.

SIBYL It was all her fault, you know it was.

ELYOT (*with vehemence*) Yes, it was. Entirely her fault.

SIBYL She was a fool to lose you.

ELYOT We lost each other.

SIBYL She lost you, with her violent tempers and carryings on.

ELYOT Will you stop talking about Amanda?

SIBYL (*moving to the chair right, and sitting*) But I'm very glad, because if she hadn't been uncontrolled, and wicked, and unfaithful, we shouldn't be here now.

ELYOT She wasn't unfaithful.

SIBYL How do you know? I bet she was. I bet she was unfaithful every five minutes.

ELYOT It would take a far more concentrated woman than Amanda to be unfaithful every five minutes. (*He lights a cigarette*)

SIBYL (*after a pause; anxiously*) You do hate her, don't you?

ELYOT No, I don't hate her. I think I despise her.

SIBYL (*with satisfaction*) That's much worse.

ELYOT (*leaning both hands on the balustrade and staring out front*) And yet I'm sorry for her.

SIBYL Why?

ELYOT Because she's marked for tragedy; she's bound to make a mess of everything.

SIBYL If it's all her fault, I don't see that it matters much.

ELYOT She has some very good qualities.

SIBYL Considering what a hell she made of your life, I think you are very nice about her. Most men would be vindictive.

ELYOT (*moving up stage*) What's the use of that? It's all over now, such a long time ago. (*He leans against the window*)

SIBYL Five years isn't very long.

ELYOT (*seriously*) Yes it is.

SIBYL (*after a pause*) Do you think you could ever love her again?

ELYOT (*straightening up*) Now then, Sibyl.

SIBYL But could you?

ELYOT Of course not, I love you.

SIBYL Yes, but you love me differently; I know that.

ELYOT (*coming down behind her chair*) More wisely perhaps.

SIBYL I'm glad. I'd rather have that sort of love.

ELYOT You're right. Love is no use unless it's wise, and kind, and undramatic. Something steady and sweet, to smooth out your nerves when you're tired. Something tremendously cosy— (*He sits on the table*) —and unflurried by scenes and jealousies. That's what I want, what I've always wanted really. Oh my dear, I do hope it's not going to be dull for you.

SIBYL (*putting her hand on his*) Sweetheart, as though you could ever be dull.

ELYOT I'm much older than you.

SIBYL Not so very much.

ELYOT Seven years.

SIBYL The music has stopped now and you can hear the sea.

ELYOT We'll bathe tomorrow morning.

SIBYL (*rising and coming down to the balustrade, left centre*)
I mustn't get sunburnt.

ELYOT Why not?

SIBYL I hate it on women.

ELYOT (*rising and moving right round the table to the right end of the balustrade*) Very well, you shan't then. I hope you don't hate it on men.

SIBYL Of course I don't. It's suitable to men.

ELYOT You're a completely feminine little creature, aren't you?

SIBYL Why do you say that?

ELYOT Everything in its place.

SIBYL What do you mean?

ELYOT If you feel you'd like me to smoke a pipe, I'll try and master it.

SIBYL I like a man to be a man, if that's what you mean.

ELYOT Are you going to understand me, and manage me?

SIBYL I'm going to try to understand you.

ELYOT Run me without my knowing it?

SIBYL (*withdrawing slightly*) I think you're being a little unkind.

ELYOT No, I don't mean to be. I was only wondering.

SIBYL Well?

ELYOT I was wondering what was going on inside your mind, what your plans are really?

SIBYL (*turning to him*) Plans; oh, Elli!

ELYOT Apart from loving me and all that, you must have plans.

SIBYL I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about.

ELYOT Perhaps it's subconscious then, age-old instincts working away deep down, mincing up little bits of experience for future use, watching me carefully like a little sharp-eyed, blonde kitten.

SIBYL How can you be so horrid.

ELYOT I said kitten, not cat.

SIBYL Kittens grow into cats.

ELYOT Let that be a warning to you. (*He looks out front*)

SIBYL (*moving to him and slipping her arm through his again*)
What's the matter, darling, are you hungry?

ELYOT Not a bit.

SIBYL You're very strange all of a sudden, and rather cruel.
Just because I'm feminine. It doesn't mean that I'm crafty
and calculating.

ELYOT I didn't say you were either of those things.

SIBYL (*breaking left*) I hate these half-masculine women who
go banging about.

ELYOT I hate anybody who goes banging about.

SIBYL I should think you needed a little quiet womanliness
after Amanda.

ELYOT (*moving away right*) Why will you keep on talking about
her?

SIBYL It's natural enough, isn't it?

ELYOT (*sitting on the balustrade*) What do you want to find out?

SIBYL Why did you really let her divorce you?

ELYOT She divorced me for cruelty, and flagrant infidelity. I
spent a whole weekend at Brighton with a lady called Vera
Williams. She had the nastiest looking hair brush I have
ever seen.

SIBYL Misplaced chivalry, I call it. Why didn't you divorce her?

ELYOT It would not have been the action of a gentleman,
whatever that may mean.

SIBYL I think she got off very lightly.

ELYOT (*rising*) Once and for all will you stop talking about her.

SIBYL Yes, Elli dear.

ELYOT (*facing out front*) I don't wish to see her again or hear her name mentioned.

SIBYL (*facing out front*) Very well, darling.

ELYOT Is that understood?

SIBYL Yes, darling. (*She pauses*) Where did you spend your honeymoon?

ELYOT St Moritz. Be quiet.

SIBYL I hate St Moritz.

ELYOT So do I, bitterly.

SIBYL Was she good on skis?

ELYOT (*turning to her*) Do you want to dine downstairs here, or at the Casino?

SIBYL (*crossing to him and putting her arms round his neck*) I love you, I love you, I love you.

ELYOT (*completely unresponsive; moving up stage, holding her right hand*) Good, let's go in and dress.

SIBYL (*pulling him back*) Kiss me first.

ELYOT *kisses her.*

ELYOT Casino?

SIBYL Yes. (*She collects her bag from the balustrade*) Are you a gambler? You never told me.

ELYOT Every now and then.

SIBYL (*taking his arm*) I shall come and sit just behind your chair and bring you luck.

ELYOT *That will be fatal.*

SIBYL *exits into the suite followed by ELYOT. There is a slight pause and then VICTOR PRYNNE enters from the left suite. He is quite nice looking, about thirty or*

thirty-five. He is dressed in a light travelling suit. He takes three deep breaths, looks at the view, and then turns back to the window.

VICTOR (*calling*) Mandy!

AMANDA (*inside*) What?

VICTOR Come outside, the view is wonderful.

AMANDA I'm still damp from the bath. Wait a minute—

VICTOR moves to the table left and knocks out his pipe. Presently AMANDA comes out on to the terrace. She is quite exquisite with a gay face and a perfect figure. At the moment she is wearing a negligée. She comes centre.

I shall catch pneumonia, that's what I shall catch.

VICTOR (*looking at her*) God!

AMANDA I beg your pardon?

VICTOR You look wonderful. (*He takes her hands*)

AMANDA Thank you, darling.

VICTOR Like a beautiful advertisement for something. (*He widens her arms*)

AMANDA Nothing peculiar, I hope.

VICTOR I can hardly believe it's true. You and I, here alone together—

Amanda puts her head on Victor's shoulder.

—married!

AMANDA (*rubbing her face on his shoulder*) That stuff's very rough.

VICTOR Don't you like it?

AMANDA A bit hearty, isn't it?

VICTOR Do you love me?

AMANDA Of course, that's why I'm here.

VICTOR More than you loved...

AMANDA (*breaking right*) Now then, none of that.

VICTOR No, but do you love me more than you loved Elyot?

AMANDA I don't remember, it's such a long time ago. (*She sits in the chair by the tubs*)

VICTOR Not so very long.

AMANDA (*flinging out her arms*) All my life ago.

VICTOR I'd like to break his damned neck. (*He moves up to the windows*)

AMANDA (*laughing*) Why?

VICTOR For making you unhappy. (*He turns to her*)

AMANDA It was mutual.

VICTOR Rubbish! It was all his fault, you know it was.

AMANDA Yes, it was, now I come to think about it.

VICTOR Swine! (*He comes down stage*)

AMANDA Don't be so vehement, darling.

VICTOR I'll never treat you like that.

AMANDA That's right.

VICTOR I love you too much.

AMANDA So did he.

VICTOR Fine sort of love that is. He struck you once, didn't he?

AMANDA More than once.

VICTOR Where?

AMANDA Several places.

VICTOR (*moving slightly up stage*) What a cad.

AMANDA I struck him too. Once I broke four gramophone records over his head. It was very satisfying.

VICTOR (*coming down stage again*) You must have been driven to distraction.

AMANDA Yes, I was, but don't let's talk about it, please. After all, it's a dreary subject for our honeymoon night. (*She holds out her hand*)

VICTOR He didn't know when he was well off. (*He moves to her and takes her hand*)

AMANDA Look at the lights of that yacht reflected in the water. I wonder whose it is.

VICTOR We must bathe tomorrow.

AMANDA Yes. I want to get a nice sunburn.

VICTOR (*reproachfully*) Mandy!

AMANDA Why, what's the matter?

VICTOR I hate sunburnt women.

AMANDA Why?

VICTOR It's somehow, well, unsuitable.

AMANDA It's awfully suitable to me, darling.

VICTOR Of course if you really want to. (*He moves behind her chair*)

AMANDA I'm absolutely determined. I've got masses of lovely oil to rub all over myself.

VICTOR Your skin is so beautiful as it is. (*He kisses her neck*)

AMANDA Wait and see. When I'm done a nice crisp brown, you'll fall in love with me all over again.

VICTOR (*moving to centre*) I couldn't love you more than I do now.

AMANDA Oh, dear. I did so hope our honeymoon was going to be progressive.

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