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Lunch Hour

A Play in One Act

John Mortimer

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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LUNCH HOUR

First produced at The Playhouse, Salisbury, on the 20th June 1960. Later produced at the Arts Theatre Club, London, on the 18th January 1961, and subsequently transferred to the Criterion Theatre, with the following cast of characters:

(*in the order of their appearance*)

THE MAN	*Emlyn Williams*
THE GIRL	*Wendy Craig*
THE MANAGERESS	*Alison Leggatt*

Directed by DONALD MCWHINNIE

Setting designed by BRIAN CURRAH

The action of the Play passes in a bedroom in a small hotel near King's Cross

Time—the Present

LUNCH HOUR

SCENE—*A small hotel room near King's Cross.* 1 *p.m. exactly of a winter's day.*

There is a double bed C, *set diagonally with the foot pointing down* R. *The door is* R *of the bed in the back wall, and there is a window* R *looking out over railway signals and the tops of houses.* L *of the bed is a shilling-in-the-slot gas-fire with a mantelpiece. On the mantelpiece are a Bible, an A.B.C. train time-table and a chiming clock. A wooden chair stands down* L *of the fire.*

When the CURTAIN *rises, the room is empty and the gas-fire unlit. There is a sound of trains off. The clock chimes one. The* GIRL *enters and looks cautiously round the room. She is* 23, *a textile designer. She wears an overcoat. The* MAN *follows her. He is in his early forties, and is Policy Director of a department in the firm for which the girl works. He wears an overcoat, a hat and horn-rimmed spectacles. The* GIRL *crosses to the fireplace and picks up the A.B.C. She begins to laugh gently. The* MAN *puts his spectacles in his pocket and takes off his hat.*

MAN. Why're you laughing?

GIRL. I don't know. (*She puts the A.B.C. back on the mantelpiece*)

MAN. You're happy?

GIRL. I laugh when I'm hungry too.

MAN (*disappointed*) If you'd rather eat . . .

GIRL. Not at all.

(*The* MAN *throws his hat on the bed. They meet* C)

(*She takes his hands*) You look so big in that overcoat—like a house.

MAN. I'll take it off. (*He unbuttons the overcoat*)

GIRL. Not yet. (*She crosses to the window*) What's this place?

MAN (*crossing to the fireplace*) Just a hotel . . .

GIRL. A hotel?

MAN. By the station. It's convenient . . .
GIRL (*turning*) What for?
MAN. The North of England.
GIRL (*dreamily*) You say the most ridiculous things . . .

(*They meet* C *and hug*)

And no-one knows we're here?

(*They come out of the hug*)

MAN. I'm having a long business lunch with the textile buyers in the Tudor room . . .
GIRL. And I'm alone with an open continental sandwich in a dark corner of the coffee-bar with the rubber plants brushing my cheek.
MAN. And I'm saying: "Well, gentlemen, have a large plate of smoked salmon on the Commissioners of Inland Revenue."
GIRL. But if they looked for us in those places . . .
MAN. They wouldn't find us.
GIRL. No, we're nowhere . . .
MAN. We're here.
GIRL. We've disappeared . . . We don't exist.
MAN. For an hour—or longer. (*He tries to kiss her*)

(*The* GIRL *steps back a pace*)

GIRL. No.
MAN. Business lunches go on for ever.
GIRL (*moving away* R) You can't spend much time on an open continental sandwich.

(*There is a pause*)

MAN (*taking a step back*) You look so small in that overcoat.
GIRL. What do I look like?
MAN. A child in the park on a snowy morning. A woman who's disguised herself to run away to sea . . .
GIRL. Go on talking . . .
MAN. The inexperienced wife of an arctic explorer . . . (*He pauses*)
GIRL. Go on.

MAN. I've run out.
GIRL. What of?
MAN. Words.

(*The* GIRL *laughs. The* MAN *looks at his watch. The* GIRL *sees this and her laugh dies. There is a pause*)

GIRL. As a matter of fact they're quite good, those sandwiches.
MAN. Are they?
GIRL. And they have other things, too—hamburgers, hot franks in soft floury rolls, great tubes of mustard . . .
MAN. You don't say.
GIRL. Such up-to-date and convenient foods.
MAN. Would you rather be in a coffee-bar?
GIRL. This is much more . . .
MAN. What?
GIRL. Exciting.
MAN. You mean that? (*He steps forward*)
GIRL (*stepping back*) Because I love you.
MAN. And me!
GIRL. How long?
MAN. Since the day you walked into my office . . .
GIRL. With the new design for bedspreads.
MAN. Spanish ivy!
GIRL. You remember!
MAN. And said, "Is this the way to the duplicating department?"
GIRL. And you said . . .
MAN / GIRL (*together*) "No, but I'll show you . . ."
GIRL. And you rose up with the light from the window behind you so you appeared all silver——
MAN. Did I?
GIRL. —like a shining statue . . .
MAN. And I took you to Mr Jevons . . .
GIRL. Down the long dark corridors, past the rude and elderly stares of the typing pool . . .
MAN. In the lift.
GIRL. You didn't say a word!
MAN. We certainly established sympathy . . .

GIRL. Oh, love, how it attacks you!

(*The* MAN *steps forward. The* GIRL *steps back*)

You being so quiet in the lift was what I appreciated. Not saying any vulgar remark such as "Where have you been all my life?", or "Is there another one at home like you?" Not even looking . . .

MAN. I was genuinely impressed!

GIRL. Yes.

MAN (*moving to the bed*) And you seemed so lost and uncertain. Like I sometimes feel in that great organization.

GIRL. Such words—from the head of the textile buying department!

MAN. You mean the policy director. (*Thinking of his work*) I'm only the Number Two in that slow-moving set-up. Blast Harris! (*He sits on the bed*)

GIRL (*moving up to his* R) You don't think I'm the sort of girl who comes to a place like this?

MAN (*giving her all his attention again*) No!

GIRL. Then why'm I here?

MAN. My fault.

GIRL (*shaking her head thoughtfully*) I'm the sort to come here.

(*The sounds of a train come through the window*)

What's that?

MAN. The station.

(*There is a pause*)

GIRL (*struck by a thought*) And what about you? Is this how all your lunch hours are spent with some girl or other, and you have to creep out of the office at four o'clock every day for an enormous high tea?

MAN. I've never been here before.

GIRL. Honestly?

MAN. Yes.

GIRL. I'm sorry.

MAN. I love you.

GIRL. Say it again.

MAN. I love you.

GIRL. Mmm. (*She kneels* R *of him*)

MAN. For six months . . .

GIRL. All through the summer.

MAN. With nowhere to go.

GIRL. In spite of the office and your—home life.

MAN. It kept us alive.

GIRL. When we had only a few moments; standing by the tea trolley in the corridor . . .

MAN. Holding hands in the lift . . .

GIRL. You waiting for me in the Embankment Gardens, always first out of the office being on the executive planning side . . .

MAN. Always the same bench.

GIRL. With the flowers standing straight as soldiers and the one-stringed fiddle playing in front of the Tube and tramps asleep under their sheets of newspaper. We had ten minutes a day, now we've got . . .

(*The clock chimes a quarter. They rise. The* MAN *moves away* L)

MAN. Three-quarters of an hour.

GIRL. In this room . . .

MAN. You don't like it?

GIRL (*brushing dust from her knees*) It's not all that sordid really . . .

MAN. We could make ourself more at home—take off our coats. (*He opens his coat*)

GIRL. It's cold.

MAN. I'll light the gas. (*He moves to the fireplace, strikes a match and tries to light the fire*) It needs a shilling. (*He searches his pockets unsuccessfully for a shilling*) Damn!

GIRL. I'll look. (*She burrows in her handbag*) Only sixpences. Would it take two sixpences? (*She goes to the fire,* L *of the man, and puts in her sixpences. But the fire still fails to work*)

MAN. Now you've lost your money.

GIRL. It really doesn't matter.

MAN. Let me give it back to you.

GIRL. It couldn't matter less.

MAN. By the end of the week you'll be short of a coffee.

GIRL. No, really.

MAN. Here. (*Counting money to give her*) Sixpence—sevenpence—ninepence . . .

(*There is a quick knock at the door. The* MANAGERESS *enters*)

GIRL (*as the Manageress enters; almost shouting*) I don't want your money!

MANAGERESS (*coming to the foot of the bed*) Do you want something?

MAN. Ah, yes, a shilling for the gas.

MANAGERESS (*to the Girl, moving a little towards her*) You're cold. A journey does make you cold. Much snow up there?

GIRL. Up where?

MANAGERESS. The North of England.

(*There is a slight pause*)

MAN (*hastily*) Just a powdering of snow, didn't you say, dear?

GIRL (*bewildered*) I've no idea . . .

MAN. The train was going too fast to take a good look.

MANAGERESS. An express?

MAN. That's it.

MANAGERESS. They *can* be fast. Was it the Scotsman?

GIRL. Was what?

MANAGERESS. The Flying Scotsman. (*She moves closer*) My little boy collects engine numbers. Many a time he's seen the Scotsman, waiting at the end of the platform. Puffing and blowing. Would you like a cup of tea?

MAN. Not at all.

MANAGERESS (*to the Girl*) Wouldn't you?

GIRL. Well . . .

MANAGERESS. Isn't that husbands for you? Never appreciate the plain and simple fact that what we wives need after a long cold train journey is a home-made cup of tea. Much snow, did you say?

MAN. She had lunch on the train . . .

MANAGERESS. That doesn't take the place, dear, does it?

GIRL. What of?

Hungry for More?

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