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Hay Fever

Noël Coward

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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by Noël Coward

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HAY FEVER was first produced at the Ambassadors Theatre in London on June 8, 1925, with the following cast:

JUDITH BLISS	Miss Marie Tempest
DAVID BLISS	Mr. W. Graham Browne
SOREL BLISS	Miss Helen Spencer
SIMON BLISS	Mr. Robert Andrews
MYRA ARUNDEL	Miss Hilda Moore
RICHARD GREATHAM	Mr. Athole Stewart
JACKIE CORYTON	Miss Ann Trevor
SANDY TYRELL	Mr. Patrick Swands
CLARA	Miss Minnie Rayner

The original Broadway production of ***HAY FEVER*** was produced by Messrs. Shubert (Lee and J. J.) at the Maxine Elliott's Theatre in New York City on October 05, 1925. This production was directed by Noël Coward and Laura Hope Crews. The cast was as follows:

SOREL BLISS	Frieda Inescourt
SIMON BLISS	Gavin Muir
CLARA	Alice Belmore Cliffe
JUDITH BLISS	Laura Hope Crews
DAVID BLISS	Harry Davenport
SANDY TYRELL	Reginald Sheffield
MYRA ARUNDEL	Phyllis Joyce
RICHARD GREATHAM	George Thorpe
JACKIE CORYTON	Margot Lester

CHARACTERS

SOREL BLISS

SIMON BLISS

CLARA

JUDITH BLISS

DAVID BLISS

RICHARD GREATHAM

SANDY TYRELL

MYRA ARUNDEL

JACKIE CORYTON

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in the hall of the Blisses' house
at Cookham in June.

TIME

ACT I: Saturday afternoon

ACT II: Saturday evening

ACT III: Sunday morning

ACT I

(Scene – the Hall of DAVID BLISS' house is very comfortable and extremely untidy. There are several of SIMON's cartoons scattered about the walls, masses of highly-coloured American and classical music strewn about the piano, and comfortable furniture. A staircase ascends to a small balcony leading to the bedrooms, DAVID's study and SIMON's room. There is a door leading to the library down left. A service door above it under the stairs. There are French windows at back and the front door on the right.)

(When the curtain rises it is about three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in June.)

(SIMON, in an extremely dirty tennis shirt and baggy grey flannel trousers, is kneeling in the middle of the floor, drawing on cartridge paper, of which there are two pieces by him.)

(SOREL, more neatly dressed, is stretched on left end of the sofa, reading a very violently-bound volume of poems which have been sent to her by an aspiring friend.)

SOREL. Listen to this, Simon. *(She reads.)*

“Love's a Trollop stained with wine,
Clawing at the breasts of Adolescence,
Nuzzling, tearing, shrieking, beating –
God, why were we fashioned so!”

(She laughs.)

SIMON. *(looking up from his drawing)* The poor girl's potty!

SOREL. I wish she hadn't sent me the beastly book. I must say something nice about it.

SIMON. The binding's very dashing.

SOREL. She used to be such fun before she married that gloomy little man.

SIMON. She was always a fierce poseuse. It's so silly of people to try and cultivate the artistic temperament. *Au fond* she's just a normal, bouncing Englishwoman.

SOREL. You didn't shave this morning.

SIMON. I know I didn't, but I'm going to in a minute, when I've finished this. *(pointing to drawing)*

SOREL. I sometimes wish *we* were more normal and bouncing, Simon.

SIMON. Why? *(starts to draw again)*

SOREL. I should like to be a fresh, open-air girl with a passion for games.

SIMON. Thank God you're not.

SOREL. It would be so soothing.

SIMON. Not in this house.

SOREL. Where's mother?

SIMON. In the garden, practising.

SOREL. Practising?

SIMON. *(stops drawing and looks at SOREL)* She's learning the names of the flowers by heart.

SOREL. What's she up to?

SIMON. I don't know. *(looks down at drawing)* Damn! That's crooked.

SOREL. I *always* distrust her when she becomes the Squire's lady.

SIMON. So do I. *(starts drawing again)*

SOREL. She's been at it hard all day – she tapped the barometer this morning.

SIMON. She's probably got a plan about impressing somebody.

SOREL. *(taking a cigarette from table behind sofa)* I wonder who.

SIMON. Some dreary, infatuated young man will appear soon, I expect.

SOREL. Not today? (*lights cigarette*) You don't think she's asked anyone down today, do you?

SIMON. (*stops drawing and looks up*) I don't know. Has father noticed anything?

SOREL. No; he's too immersed in work.

SIMON. Perhaps Clara will know.

SOREL. Yell for her.

SIMON. (*rises and goes up center, calling off door below stairs*) Clara! Clara! ...

SOREL. (*moves to right end of sofa*) Oh, Simon, I do hope she hasn't asked anyone down today.

SIMON. (*coming down to right end of sofa*) Why? Have you?

SOREL. Yes.

SIMON. (*crossly*) Why on earth didn't you tell me?

SOREL. I didn't think you'd care one way or another.

SIMON. Who is it?

SOREL. Richard Greatham.

SIMON. (*goes back to drawing*) How exciting! I've never heard of him.

SOREL. I shouldn't flaunt your ignorance if I were you – it makes you look silly.

(**SIMON**, *rising and picking up one sheet of cartridge paper, and pencil*.)

SIMON. Well, that's done.

(*He rolls up the cartridge paper*.)

SOREL. Everybody's heard of Richard Greatham.

SIMON. (*amiably*) How lovely for them! (*going to piano*)

SOREL. He's a frightfully well-known diplomatist – I met him at the Mainwarings' dance.

SIMON. He'll need all his diplomacy here. (*puts pencil on piano*)

SOREL. I warned him not to expect good manners, but I hope you'll be as pleasant to him as you can.

SIMON. (*gently – moves to center*) I've never met any diplomatists, Sorel, but as a class I'm extremely prejudiced against them. They're so suave and polished and debonair.

SOREL. You could be a little more polished without losing caste.

SIMON. (*moves to SOREL*) Will he have the papers with him?

SOBEL. What papers?

SIMON. (*vaguely*) Oh, any papers. (*goes up center and puts paper on chair*)

SOREL. I wish you'd confine your biting irony to your caricatures, Simon.

SIMON. (*coming down to SOREL*) And I wish you'd confine your girlish infatuations to London, and not force them on your defenceless family.

SOREL. I shall keep him out of your way as much as possible.

SIMON. Do, darling. (*goes to piano and lights cigarette*)

(*Enter CLARA from door below stairs. She is a hot, round, untidy little woman. She stands left by door.*)

(*sits on form by piano*) Clara, has mother asked anyone down this weekend?

CLARA. I don't know, dear. There isn't much food in the house, and Amy's got toothache.

SOREL. I've got some oil of cloves somewhere.

CLARA. She tried that, but it only burnt her tongue. The poor girl's been writhing about in the scullery like one o'clock.

SOREL. You haven't forgotten to put those flowers in the Japanese room?

SIMON. The Japanese room is essentially feminine, and entirely unsuited to the Pet of the Foreign Office.

SOREL. Shut up, Simon!

CLARA. The room looks lovely, dear – you needn't worry. Just like your mother's dressing-room on a first night.

SIMON. How restful!

CLARA. (*moves to SOREL*) Have you told her about your boyfriend?

SOREL. (*pained*) Not boyfriend, Clara.

(**CLARA** *picks up drawing that SIMON has left on floor center.*)

CLARA. Oh, well, whatever he is. (*puts drawing on chair up center*)

SIMON. I think Sorel's beginning to be ashamed of us all, Clara – I don't altogether blame her; we are very slapdash.

CLARA. (*coming down center – speaking to SIMON*) Are you going to leave that picture in the guests' bathroom, dear? I don't know if it's quite the thing – lots of pink, naked women rolling about in a field.

SIMON. (*severely*) Nudity can be very beautiful, Clara.

CLARA. Oh, can it! Perhaps being a dresser for so long 'as spoilt me eye for it.

(**CLARA** *goes out door below stairs.*)

SIMON. Clara's looking tired. We ought to have more servants and not depend on her so much.

SOREL. You know we can never keep them. You're right about us being slapdash, Simon. I wish we weren't.

SIMON. Does it matter?

SOREL. It must, I think – to other people.

SIMON. It's not our fault – it's the way we've been brought up.

SOREL. Well, if we're clever enough to realize that, we ought to be clever enough to change ourselves.

SIMON. I'm not sure that I want to.

SOREL. We're so awfully bad-mannered.

SIMON. Not to people we like.

SOREL. The people we like put up with it because they like *us*.

SIMON. What do you mean, exactly, by bad manners? Lack of social tricks and small talk?

SOREL. We never attempt to look after people when they come here.

SIMON. Why should we? It's loathsome being looked after.

SOREL. Yes, but people like little attentions. We've never once asked anyone if they've slept well.

SIMON. I consider *that* an impertinence, anyhow.

SOREL. I'm going to try to improve.

SIMON. (*puts feet upon form*) You're only going on like this because you've got a mania for a diplomatist. You'll soon return to normal.

SOREL. (*earnestly*) Abnormal, Simon – that's what we are. Abnormal. People stare in astonishment when we say what we consider perfectly ordinary things. I just remarked at Freda's lunch the other day how nice it would be if someone invented something to make all our faces go up like the Chinese, because I was so bored with them going down. And they all thought I was mad!

SIMON. It's no use worrying, darling; we see things differently, I suppose, and if people don't like it they must lump it.

(*Enter JUDITH from the garden. She is carrying an armful of flowers and wearing a tea-gown, a large garden hat, gauntlet gloves and goloshes.*)

JUDITH. (*coming down to behind sofa table*) You look awfully dirty, Simon. What have you been doing?

SIMON. (*nonchalantly*) Not washing very much.

JUDITH. (*puts basket on table, and starts to take off gloves*) You should, darling, really. It's so bad for your skin to leave things about on it.

SOREL. Clara says Amy's got toothache.

JUDITH. Poor dear! There's some oil of cloves in my medicine cupboard. Who is Amy?

SOREL. The scullery-maid, I think.

JUDITH. (*puts gloves on table and comes center*) How extraordinary! She doesn't look Amy a bit, does she? Much more Flossie. Give me a cigarette.

(*SIMON gives her a cigarette from box on piano.*)

Delphiniums are those stubby red flowers, aren't they?

SIMON. (*lights cigarette for JUDITH*) No, darling; they're tall and blue.

JUDITH. Yes, of course. The red ones are somebody's name – Asters, that's it. I knew it was something opulent.

(*JUDITH sits on stool below piano. SIMON takes off her goloshes and puts them by the side of the stool.*)

I do hope Clara has remembered about the Japanese room.

SOREL. Japanese room!

JUDITH. Yes; I told her to put some flowers in it and take Simon's flannels out of the wardrobe drawer.

SOREL. So did I.

JUDITH. (*ominously*) Why?

SOREL. (*airily*) I've asked Richard Greatham down for the weekend – I didn't think you'd mind.

JUDITH. (*rises and crosses to SOREL*) Mind! How dared you do such a thing?

SOREL. He's a diplomatist.

(*JUDITH goes behind table and starts to sort out flowers.*)

JUDITH. That makes it much worse. We must wire and put him off at once.

SOREL. It's too late.

JUDITH. Well, we'll tell Clara to say we've been called away.

SOREL. That would be extremely rude, and, anyhow, I *want* to see him.

JUDITH. You mean to sit there in cold blood and tell me you've asked a complete stranger down for the weekend, and that you *want* to see him!

SOREL. I've often done it before.

JUDITH. I fail to see how that helps matters. Where's he going to sleep?

SOREL. The Japanese room.

(JUDITH crosses with bunch of flowers to talk below door right.)

JUDITH. Oh, no, he isn't – Sandy Tyrell is sleeping there.

SIMON. (*coming center*) There now! What did I tell you?

SOREL. Sandy – what?

JUDITH. Tyrell, dear.

SIMON. Why didn't you tell us, mother?

JUDITH. (*starting to arrange flowers in vase*) I did. I've talked of nothing but Sandy Tyrell for days – I adore Sandy Tyrell.

SIMON. (*goes back to form and sits*) You've never mentioned him.

SOREL. Who is he, mother?

JUDITH. He's a perfect darling, and madly in love with me – at least, it isn't me really, it's my Celebrated Actress glamour – but it gives me a divinely cosy feeling. I met him at Nora Trent's. (*crosses to behind sofa table*)

SOREL. Mother, I wish you'd give up this sort of thing.

JUDITH. (*taking more flowers from basket*) What exactly do you mean by "this sort of thing," Sorel?

SOREL. You know perfectly well what I mean.

(JUDITH puts down flowers and goes to right corner of sofa.)

JUDITH. Are you attempting to criticize me?

SOREL. I should have thought you'd be above encouraging silly, callow young men who are infatuated by your name.

JUDITH. (*goes back to table and picks up flowers*) That may be true, but I shall allow nobody but myself to say it. I hoped you'd grow up a good daughter to me, not a critical aunt.

SOREL. (*moves to left end of sofa*) It's so terribly cheap.

JUDITH. Cheap! Nonsense! How about your diplomatist?

SOREL. Surely that's a little different, dear?

JUDITH. If you mean that because you happen to be a vigorous *ingénue* of nineteen you have the complete monopoly of any amorous adventure there may be about, I feel it my firm duty to disillusion you.

SOREL. But, mother –

(JUDITH crosses to top end of piano and picks up empty vase, which she gives SIMON to hold while she fills it with flowers.)

JUDITH. Anyone would think I was eighty, the way you go on. It was a great mistake not sending you to boarding schools, and you coming back and me being your elder sister.

SIMON. It wouldn't have been any use, darling. Every one knows we're your son and daughter.

JUDITH. Only because I was stupid enough to dandle you about in front of cameras when you were little. I knew I should regret it.

SIMON. I don't see any point in trying to be younger than you are.

JUDITH. At your age, dear, it would be indecent if you did.

(Having finished arranging flowers, she puts vase back on piano, and crosses to right corner of sofa.)

SOREL. But, mother darling, don't you see it's awfully undignified for you to go flaunting about with young men?

JUDITH. I don't flaunt about – I never have. I've been morally an extremely nice woman all my life – more or less – and if dabbling gives me pleasure, I don't see why I *shouldn't* dabble.

SOREL. But it *oughtn't* to give you pleasure anymore.

JUDITH. You know, Sorel, you grow more damnably feminine every day. I wish I'd brought you up differently.

SOREL. I'm proud of being feminine.

JUDITH. (*sits on sofa beside SOREL – kissing her*) You're a darling, and I adore you; and you're very pretty, and I'm madly jealous of you.

SOREL. (*with her arms round her*) Are you really? How lovely!

JUDITH. You will be nice to Sandy, won't you?

SOREL. (*sits up*) Can't he sleep in "Little Hell?"

JUDITH. My dear, he's frightfully athletic and all those hot water pipes will sap his vitality.

SOREL. They'll sap Richard's vitality too.

JUDITH. He won't notice them; he's probably used to scorching tropical Embassies with punkahs waving and everything.

SIMON. He's sure to be deadly, anyhow.

SOREL. You're getting far too blasé and exclusive, Simon.

SIMON. Nothing of the sort. Only I loathe being hearty with your men friends.

SOREL. You've never been even civil to any of my friends, men or women.

JUDITH. Don't bicker.

SIMON. (*rises and crosses to center*) Anyhow, the Japanese room's a woman's room, and a woman ought to have it.

JUDITH. I promised it to Sandy – he loves anything Japanese.

SIMON. So does Myra!

JUDITH. Myra!

SIMON. Myra Arundel. I've asked her down.

JUDITH. You've – what!

SIMON. I've asked Myra down for the weekend – she's awfully amusing.

SOREL. Well, all I can say is, it's beastly of you. You might have warned me. What on earth will Richard say?

SIMON. Something exquisitely noncommittal, I expect.

JUDITH. This is too much! Do you mean to tell me, Simon –

SIMON. (*goes to JUDITH – firmly*) Yes, mother, I do. I've asked Myra down and I have a perfect right to. You've always brought us up to be free about things.

JUDITH. Myra Arundel is straining freedom to its *utmost* limits.

SIMON. Don't you like her?

JUDITH. No, dear, I detest her. She's far too old for you, and she goes about using sex as a sort of shrimping-net.

SIMON. Really, mother – !

JUDITH. It's no use being cross. You know perfectly well I dislike her, and that's why you never told me she was coming until too late to stop her. It's intolerable of you.

SOREL. (*grandly*) Whether she's here or not is a matter of extreme indifference to *me*, but I'm afraid Richard won't like her very much.

SIMON. You're afraid he'll like her *too* much!

SOREL. That was an offensive remark, Simon, and rather silly.

JUDITH. (*plaintively*) Why on earth don't you fall in love with nice young girls, instead of self-conscious vampires?

SIMON. She's not a vampire, and I never said I was in love with her.

SOREL. He's crazy about her. She butters him up and admires his sketches.

SIMON. (*leaning across JUDITH and shouting at SOREL*) What about you picking up old gentlemen at dances?

SOREL. (*furiously – shouting back at him*) He's *not* old!

(*JUDITH stretches her arms up and parts them. SIMON goes center.*)

JUDITH. You've both upset me thoroughly. I wanted a nice restful weekend, with moments of Sandy's ingenuous affection to warm the cockles of my heart when I felt in the mood, and now the house is going to be full of discord – not enough food, every one fighting for the bath – perfect agony! I wish I were dead!

SIMON. You needn't worry about Myra and me. We shall keep out of every one's way.

SOREL. I shall take Richard on the river all day tomorrow.

JUDITH. In what?

SOREL. The punt.

JUDITH. I absolutely forbid you to go near the punt.

SIMON. It's sure to rain, anyhow.

JUDITH. What your father will say I tremble to think. He needs complete quiet to finish off "The Sinful Woman."

SOREL. I see no reason for there to be any noise, unless Sandy What's-his-name is given to shouting.

JUDITH. If you're rude to Sandy I shall be extremely angry.

(SIMON and SOREL bend over JUDITH and all talk loudly at once.)

SOREL.	} <i>(together)</i> {	Now, look here, Mother –
SIMON.		Why you should expect –
JUDITH.		He's coming all the way down specially to be nice to me –

(Enter DAVID down stairs. He looks slightly irritable.)

DAVID. *(coming down to center)* Why are you all making such a noise?

(SIMON crosses to piano and picks up book.)

JUDITH. I think I'm going mad!

DAVID. Why hasn't Clara brought me my tea?

JUDITH. I don't know.

DAVID. Where is Clara?

JUDITH. Do stop firing questions at me, David.

DAVID. Why are you all so irritable? What's happened?

(Enter CLARA from below stairs, with a tray of tea for one, and thrusts it into DAVID's hands.)

CLARA. Here's your tea. I'm sorry I'm late with it. Amy forgot to put the kettle on – she's got terrible toothache.

DAVID. Poor girl! Give her some oil of cloves.

SOREL. If anyone else mentions oil of cloves, I shall do something desperate! (*rises and moves a step left*)

DAVID. It's wonderful stuff. Where's Zoe?

SIMON. She was in the garden this morning.

DAVID. I suppose no one thought of giving her any lunch!

CLARA. I put it down by the kitchen table as usual, but she never came in for it.

SOREL. She's probably mousing.

DAVID. She isn't old enough yet. She might have fallen into the river, for all you care. I think it's a shame!

CLARA. Don't you worry your head – Zoe won't come to any harm; she's too wily. (*exit door below stairs*)

DAVID. I don't want to be disturbed.

(*He takes his tray and goes upstairs; then he turns.*)

Listen, Simon. There's a perfectly sweet flapper coming down by the four-thirty. Will you go and meet her and be nice to her? She's an abject fool, but a useful type, and I want to study her a little in domestic surroundings. She can sleep in the Japanese room.

(*He goes off, leaving behind him a deathly silence.*)

SOREL drops into chair down left.)

JUDITH. (*pause*) I should like someone to play something very beautiful to me on the piano.

SIMON. (*stamps up to French window center*) Damn everything! Damn! Damn! Damn!

SOREL. Swearing doesn't help.

SIMON. It helps me a lot.

SOREL. What does father mean by going on like that?

JUDITH. In view of the imminent reception, you'd better go and shave, Simon.

(SIMON comes down and leans on piano.)

SOREL. (*rising and bursting into tears of rage*) It's so beastly! Whenever I make any sort of plan about an always done in by someone. I wish I were earning my own living somewhere – a free agent – able to do whatever I liked without being cluttered up and frustrated by the family –

JUDITH. (*picturesquely*) It grieves me to hear you say that, Sorel.

SOREL. Don't be infuriating, mother!

JUDITH. (*sadly*) A change has come over my children of late, I have tried to shut my eyes to it, but in vain. At my time of life one must face bitter facts!

SIMON. This is going to be the blackest Saturday-till-Monday we've ever spent!

JUDITH. (*tenderly*) Sorel, you mustn't cry.

SOREL. Don't sympathize with me; it's only temper.

JUDITH. (*pulling her down on to sofa beside her*) Put your head on my shoulder, dear.

SIMON. (*bitterly*) Your head, like the golden fleece...

SOREL. (*tearfully*) Richard'll have to have "Little Hell" and that horrible flapper the Japanese room.

JUDITH. Over my dead body!

SIMON. (*comes over to his mother*) Mother, what *are* we to do?

(*JUDITH pulls him down on his knees and places his head on her right shoulder, SOREL's head on her left. Makes a charming little motherly picture.*)

JUDITH. We must all be very, very kind to every one!

SIMON. Now then, mother, none of that!

JUDITH. (*aggrieved*) I don't know what you mean, Simon.

SIMON. You were being beautiful and sad.

JUDITH. But I am beautiful and sad.

SIMON. You're not particularly beautiful, darling, and you never were.

JUDITH. Never mind; I made thousands think I was.

SIMON. And as for being sad –

JUDITH. (*pushes SIMON on the floor*) Now, Simon, I will not be dictated to like this! If I say I'm sad, I *am* sad. You don't understand, because you're precocious and tiresome... There comes a time in all women's lives –

SOREL. (*rises and stands at left corner of sofa*) Oh dear! (*with pained expression*)

JUDITH. What did you say, Sorel?

SOREL. I said, "Oh dear!"

JUDITH. Well, please don't say it again, because it annoys me.

SOREL. (*smiling*) You're such a lovely hypocrite!

JUDITH. (*casting up her eyes*) I don't know what I've done to be cursed with such ungrateful children! It's very cruel at my time of life –

SIMON. There you go again!

JUDITH. (*pause – inconsequently*) You're getting far too tall, Sorel.

SOREL. Sorry, mother!

JUDITH. Give me another of those disgusting cigarettes –
(*SIMON rises and goes to piano – quickly takes cigarette.*)
I don't know where they came from.

(*JUDITH rises and goes center. SIMON moves center and gives JUDITH cigarette.*)

SIMON. Here!

(*He lights it for her.*)

JUDITH. I'm going to forget entirely about all these dreadful people arriving. My mind henceforward shall be a blank on the subject.

SOREL. It's all very fine, mother, but –

JUDITH. I made a great decision this morning.

SIMON. What kind of decision?

JUDITH. It's a secret.

SOREL. Aren't you going to tell us?

JUDITH. Of course. I meant it was a secret from your father.

SIMON. What is it?

(JUDITH goes up center and looks off left to make sure no one is listening, then returns to center.)

JUDITH. I'm going back to the stage.

SIMON. I knew it! (*drops on to form below piano*)

JUDITH. I'm stagnating here. I won't stagnate as long as there's breath left in my body.

SOREL. Do you think it's wise? You retired so very finally last year. What excuse will you give for returning so soon?

JUDITH. My public, dear – letters from my public!

SIMON. Have you had any?

JUDITH. One or two. That's what decided me, really – I ought to have had hundreds.

SOREL. (*kneels on right corner of sofa*) We'll write some lovely ones, and you can publish them in the papers.

JUDITH. Of course.

SOREL. You will be dignified about it all, won't you, darling!

JUDITH. I'm much more dignified on the stage than in the country – it's my *milieu*. I've tried terribly hard to be "landed gentry," but without any real success. (*moves up center with out-stretched arms*) I long for excitement and glamour. (*comes down to right corner of sofa*) Think of the thrill of a first night; all those ardent playgoers willing one to succeed; the critics all leaning forward with glowing faces, receptive and exultant – emitting queer little inarticulate noises as some witty line tickles their fancy. The satisfied grunt of the "Daily Mail," the abandoned gurgle of the "Sunday Times," and the shrill, enthusiastic scream of the "Daily Express"! I can distinguish them all –

SIMON. Have you got a play?

JUDITH. I think I shall revive "Love's Whirlwind."

SOREL. (*collapsing on to sofa*) Oh, mother! (*She gurgles with laughter.*)

SIMON. (*weakly*) Father will be furious.

JUDITH. I can't help that.

SOREL. It's such a fearful play.

JUDITH. It's a marvellous part.

(SOREL opens her mouth to speak.)

You mustn't say too much against it, Sorel. I'm willing to laugh at it a little myself, but, after all, it *was* one of my greatest successes.

SIMON. Oh, it's appalling – but I love it. It makes me laugh.

JUDITH. The public love it too, and it doesn't make them laugh – much. (*Moves to center, and, very dramatically, she recites.*) “You are a fool, a blind pitiable fool. You think because you have bought my body that you have bought my soul!” (*turning to SIMON*) You must say that's dramatic – “I've dreamed of love like this, but I never realized, I never knew how beautiful it could be in reality!” (*wipes away imaginary tears*) That line always brought a tear to my eye.

SIMON. The second act *is* the best, there's no doubt about that.

JUDITH. (*turning to SOREL*) From the moment Victor comes in it's strong – tremendously strong... Be Victor a minute, Sorel –

SOREL. (*rising*) Do you mean when he comes in at the end of the act?

JUDITH. Yes. You know – “Is this a game?”

SOREL. (*going to JUDITH and speaking in a very dramatic voice*) “Is this a game?”

JUDITH. (*with spirit*) “Yes – and a game that must be played to the finish.”

SIMON. (*rising and moving to JUDITH, and speaking in deep dramatic voice*) “Zara, what does this mean?”

JUDITH. “So many illusions shattered – so many dreams trodden in the dust!”

(SOREL runs behind JUDITH and in front of SIMON to down right.)

SOREL. I'm George now – "I don't understand! You and Victor – My God!" (*strikes dramatic pose*)

JUDITH. (*moving a little to left – listening*) "Sssh! Isn't that little Pam crying?"

SIMON. (*savagely*) "She'll cry more, poor mite, when she realizes her mother is a –"

(*The front door bell rings.*)

JUDITH. Damn! There's the bell!

SOREL. (*rushing to the glass – on piano*) I look hideous!

SIMON. (*moves to right side of piano*) Yes, dear!

(*CLARA enters from door below stairs and crosses to door right.*)

JUDITH. Clara – before you open the door – we shall be eight for dinner.

CLARA. (*comes to right center*) My God!

SIMON. And for breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner tomorrow.

JUDITH. (*vaguely*) Will you get various rooms ready?

CLARA. I shall have to – they can't sleep in the passage!

SOREL. Now we've upset Clara!

JUDITH. It can't be helped – nothing can be helped. It's fate – everything that happens is fate. That's always a great comfort to me.

CLARA. More like arrant selfishness!

JUDITH. You mustn't be pert, Clara.

CLARA. Pert I may be, but I 'ave got some thought for others. Eight for dinner – Amy going home early! It's nothing more nor less than an imposition!

(*The bell rings again.*)

SIMON. Hadn't you better let them all in?

(*CLARA goes to the front door and admits SANDY TYRELL, who is a fresh-looking young man; he has an unspoilt, youthful sense of honour and rather big hands, owing to a misplaced enthusiasm for amateur boxing.*)

(*CLARA goes out through door below stairs.*)

(SANDY, *crossing to JUDITH and shaking hands:*)

SANDY. I say, it's perfectly ripping of you to let me come down.

JUDITH. Are you alone?

SANDY. (*surprised*) Yes.

JUDITH. I mean, didn't you meet anyone at the station?

SANDY. I motored down; my car's outside. Would you like me to meet anybody?

JUDITH. Oh, no, I must introduce you. This is my daughter Sorel, and my son Simon.

(SANDY *moves to SOREL and offers his hand, which she ignores:*)

SANDY. How do you do?

SOREL. (*coldly*) I'm extremely well, thank you, and I hope you are.

(*brushes past him and exits upstairs*)

SIMON. So do I. (*does the same*)

(SANDY *looks shattered.*)

(JUDITH *crosses in front of SANDY and glares after SIMON and SOREL.*)

JUDITH. You must forgive me for having rather peculiar children. Have you got a bag or anything?

SANDY. Yes; it's in the car.

JUDITH. We'd better leave it there for the moment, as Clara has to get the tea. We'll find you a room afterwards.

SANDY. I've been looking forward to this most awfully.

JUDITH. It is nice, isn't it? (*moves to window*) You can see as far as Marlow on a clear day, so they tell me.

SANDY. (*goes up to her*) I meant I've been looking forward to seeing you.

JUDITH. How perfectly sweet of you! (*crosses to sofa and sits left corner*) Would you like a drink?

SANDY. No, thanks. I'm in training.

JUDITH. (*motioning him to sit beside her*) How lovely! What for?

SANDY. I'm boxing again in a couple of weeks.

JUDITH. I must come to your first night.

SANDY. (*sits on sofa*) You look simply splendid.

JUDITH. I'm so glad. You know, you mustn't mind if Simon and Sorel insult you a little – they've been very bad-tempered lately.

SANDY. It's awfully funny you having a grown-up son and daughter at all. I can hardly believe it.

JUDITH. (*quickly*) I was married very young.

SANDY. I don't wonder. You know, it's frightfully queer the way I've been planning to know you for ages, and I never did until last week.

JUDITH. I liked you from the first, really, because you're such a nice shape.

SANDY. (*slightly embarrassed*) Oh, I see...

JUDITH. Small hips and lovely broad shoulders – I wish Simon had smaller hips. (*slight pause*) Do you think you could teach him to box?

SANDY. Rather – if he likes!

JUDITH. That's just the trouble – I'm afraid he won't like. He's so dreadfully un – that sort of thing. You must use your influence subtly. I'm sure David would be pleased.

SANDY. Who's David?

JUDITH. My husband.

SANDY. (*surprised*) Oh!

JUDITH. Why do you say "Oh" like that? Didn't you know I had a husband?

SANDY. I thought he was dead.

JUDITH. No, he's not dead; he's upstairs. (*pointing to stairs*)

SANDY. You're quite different from what you were the other day.

JUDITH. It's this garden hat. I'll take it off. (*She does so and puts it on table behind sofa.*) There! I've been pruning the calceolarias.

SANDY. (*puzzled*) Oh? –

JUDITH. I love my garden, you know – it's so peaceful and quaint. I spend long days dreaming away in it – you know how one dreams.

SANDY. Oh, yes.

JUDITH. (*warming up*) I always longed to leave the brittle glamour of cities and theatres and find rest in some old world nook. That's why we came to Cookham.

SANDY. Awfully nice place, Cookham.

JUDITH. (*slight pause*) Have you ever seen me on the stage?

SANDY. Rather!

JUDITH. Oh, what in?

SANDY. That thing when you pretended to cheat at cards to save your husband's good name.

JUDITH. Oh, "The Bold Deceiver." That play was never quite right.

SANDY. You were absolutely wonderful. That was when I first fell in love with you.

JUDITH. (*delighted*) Was it, really?

SANDY. Yes; you were so frightfully pathetic and brave.

JUDITH. (*basking*) Was I?

SANDY. Rather!

(*There is a pause.*)

JUDITH. Well, go on...

SANDY. (*flustered*) I feel such a fool, telling you what I think, as though it mattered.

JUDITH. Of course it matters – to me, anyhow.

SANDY. Does it – honestly?

JUDITH. Certainly.

SANDY. It seems too good to be true – sitting here and talking as though we were old friends.

JUDITH. We *are* old friends – we probably met in another life. Reincarnation, you know – fascinating!

SANDY. You do say ripping things.

JUDITH. Do I? Give me a cigarette.

(He takes cigarette from box on table and gives it to her.)

And let's put our feet up.

(She puts her feet up behind SANDY, and he lights her cigarette.)

SANDY. All right.

(They settle themselves comfortably at opposite ends of the sofa, smoking.)

JUDITH. Can you punt?

SANDY. Yes – a bit.

JUDITH. You must teach Simon – he always gets the pole stuck.

SANDY. I'd rather teach you.

JUDITH. You're so gallant and chivalrous – much more like an American than an Englishman.

SANDY. I should like to go on saying nice things to you forever.

JUDITH. *(giving him her hand)* Sandy!

(There comes a loud ring at the bell.)

There now!

(Takes her feet off sofa.)

SANDY. Is anyone else coming to stay!

JUDITH. Anyone else! You don't know – you just don't know.

(CLARA enters and crosses over to door right, opens it and lets it fall back in MYRA's face, then exits, left.)

SANDY. You said it would be quite quiet, with nobody at all.

JUDITH. I was wrong. It's going to be very noisy, with herds of angry people stamping about. Give me my hat.

(He gives her her hat, which she puts on.)

(**MYRA** pushes open door, and puts her suitcase and tennis racket just outside door, and enters, coming to center and holding out her hand to **JUDITH**.)

(**SANDY** rises.)

MYRA. (*advancing*) Judith – my dear – this is divine!

JUDITH. (*rises and meets MYRA, center – empty*) Too, too lovely! Where are the others?

MYRA. What others?

JUDITH. Did you come by the four-thirty?

MYRA. Yes.

JUDITH. Didn't you see anyone at the station?

MYRA. Yes, several people, but I didn't know they were coming here.

JUDITH. Well, they are.

MYRA. Sorel said it was going to be just ourselves this weekend.

JUDITH. (*sharply*) Sorel?

MYRA. Yes – didn't she tell you she'd asked me? Weren't you expecting me?

JUDITH. Simon muttered something about your coming, but Sorel didn't mention it. (*looks at MYRA and gives a chuckle*) Wasn't that odd of her? (*crosses to piano*)

MYRA. You're a divinely mad family! (*to SANDY*) How do you do? It's useless to wait for introductions, with the Blisses. My name's Myra Arundel.

JUDITH. (*airily*) Sandy Tyrell, Myra Arundel; Myra Arundel, Sandy Tyrell. There!

MYRA. Is that your car outside?

SANDY. Yes.

MYRA. (*moving to JUDITH again*) Well, Judith, I *do* think you might have told me someone was motoring down. A nice car would have been so much more comfortable than that beastly train.

JUDITH. I never knew you were coming until a little while ago.

MYRA. It's heavenly here – after London! The heat was terrible when I left. You look awfully well, Judith. Rusticating obviously agrees with you.

JUDITH. I'm glad you think so. Personally, I feel that a nervous breakdown is imminent.

MYRA. My dear, how ghastly! What's the matter!

JUDITH. Nothing's the matter yet, Myra, but I have presentiments.

(Crosses in front of MYRA and takes SANDY's hand. She begins to go upstairs, followed by SANDY. Then she turns.)

Come upstairs, Sandy, and I'll show you your room. I'll send Simon down to you. He's shaving, I think, but you won't mind that will you?

(She goes off. MYRA makes a slight grimace after her, then she help herself to a cigarette and wanders to piano.)

(SIMON comes downstairs very fast, putting on his coat. He has apparently finished his toilet.)

SIMON. *(runs over to MYRA)* Myra, this is marvelous! *(He tries to kiss her.)*

MYRA. *(pushing him away)* No, Simon, dear; it's too hot.

SIMON. You look beautifully cool.

MYRA. I'm more than cool, really, but it's not climatic coolness I've been mentally chilled to the marrow by Judith's attitude.

SIMON. Why, what did she say!

MYRA. Nothing very much. She was bouncing about on the sofa with a hearty young thing in flannels, and seemed to resent my appearance rather.

SIMON. You mustn't take any notice of mother.

MYRA. I'll try not to, but it's difficult.

SIMON. She adores you, really.

MYRA. I'm sure she does.

SIMON. She's annoyed today because father and Sorel have been asking people down without telling her.

MYRA. Poor dear! I quite see why.

SIMON. You look enchanting!

MYRA. Thank you, Simon.

SIMON. Are you pleased to see me!

MYRA. Of course. That's why I came.

SIMON. (*shouts*) Darling!

MYRA. Sssh! Don't shout.

SIMON. (*moving away to center*) I feel most colossally temperaments – I should like to kiss you and kiss you and kiss you and break everything in the house and then jump into the river.

MYRA. Dear Simon!

SIMON. (*He takes her hand and studies her.*) You're everything I want you to be – absolutely everything! Marvellous clothes, marvellous looks, marvellous brain – oh, God, it's terrible! (*drop her hand and moves left*)

MYRA. I dined with Charlie Templeton last night.

SIMON. Well, you're a devil! You only did it to annoy me. He's far too plump, and he can't do anything but dither about the Embassy in badly cut trousers. You loathe him really; you know you do – you're too intelligent not to. You couldn't like him and me at the same time – it's impossible!

MYRA. Don't be so conceited.

SIMON. (*running to her and clasping her in his arms*) Darling – I adore you!

MYRA. That's right.

SIMON. (*releasing her*) But you're callous – that's what it is, callous! You don't care a damn. You don't love me a bit, do you?

MYRA. Love's a very big word, Simon.

SIMON. It isn't – it's tiny. What are we to do?

MYRA. What do you mean?

SIMON. We can't go on like this.

MYRA. I'm not going on like anything. (*crosses over and sits in chair down left*)

SIMON. Yes, you are; you're going on like Medusa, and there are awful snakes popping their heads out at me from under your hat – I shall be turned to stone in a minute, and then you'll be sorry.

MYRA. (*laughing*) You're very sweet, and I'm *very* fond of you.

SIMON. (*crosses over to her and takes her hand*) Tell me what you've been doing – everything.

MYRA. Nothing.

SIMON. What did you do after you'd dined with Charlie Templeton?

MYRA. Supped with Charlie Templeton.

SIMON. Well! (*throws her hand down and goes to right corner of sofa and sits on arm*) I don't mind a bit. I hope you ate a lot and enjoyed yourself – there!

MYRA. Generous boy! Come and kiss me.

SIMON. You're only playing up to me now; you don't really want to a bit.

MYRA. I'm aching for it.

SIMON. (*runs to her and kisses her violently*) I love you!

MYRA. This week-end's going to be strenuous.

SIMON. (*moves away to center*) Hell upon earth – fifteen million people in the house. We'll get up at seven and rush away down the river.

MYRA. No, we won't.

SIMON. Well, don't let either of us agree to anything we say – we'll both be difficult. (*flings himself on sofa with his feet up on left end*) I love being difficult.

MYRA. You certainly do.

SIMON. But I'm in the most lovely mood now. Just seeing you makes me feel grand –

MYRA. Is your father here?

SIMON. Yes; he's working on a new novel.

MYRA. He writes brilliantly.

SIMON. Doesn't he? He drinks too much tea, though.

MYRA. It can't do him much harm, surely?

SIMON. It tans the stomach.

MYRA. Who is Sandy Tyrell?

SIMON. Never heard of him.

MYRA. He's here, with Judith.

SIMON. Oh, *that* poor thing with hot hands! We'll ignore him.

MYRA. I thought he looked rather nice.

SIMON. You must be mad! He looked disgusting.

MYRA. (*laughing*) Idiot!

SIMON. Smooth my hair with your soft white hands.

MYRA. (*rises and goes to right end of sofa – ruffling it*) It's got glue on it.

SIMON. (*catching her hand and kissing it*) You smell heavenly! What is it?

MYRA. Borgia of Rosine.

SIMON. How appropriate!

(*He tries to pull her down and kiss her.*)

MYRA. (*breaking away*) You're too demonstrative today, Simon.

(*The front door bell rings.*)

SIMON. Damn, damn! It's those drearies. (*takes his feet off sofa*)

(*CLARA enters and crosses to door right, opens it and lets it fall back in RICHARD's face, and starts to return to door left, but stops as he speaks. RICHARD GREATHAM and JACKIE CORYTON come in. There is, by this time, a good deal of luggage on the step. RICHARD is iron-grey and tall; JACKIE is small and shingled, with an ingenuous manner which will lose its charm as she grows older.*)

RICHARD. Is this Mrs. Bliss' house!

CLARA. (*off-hand*) Oh, yes, this is it.

RICHARD. Is Miss Sorel Bliss in?

CLARA. I expect so. I'll see if I can find her.

(*She goes upstairs.*)

(**RICHARD** closes door. **JACKIE** goes down right.)

(**SIMON** rises and crosses to **RICHARD**, carelessly shakes hands, then turns back to **MYRA**, ignoring **RICHARD**.)

SIMON. Hallo! Did you have a nice journey?

RICHARD. Yes, thank you, very nice. I met Miss Coryton at the station. We introduced ourselves while we were waiting for the only taxi to come back.

MYRA. (*taking a step down left center*) Oh, I took the only taxi. How maddening of me!

RICHARD. (*crosses to her and shakes hands*) Mrs. Arundel! How do you do? I never recognized you.

(**SIMON** goes behind **RICHARD** to right center and stares at **JACKIE** rudely.)

JACKIE. I did.

MYRA. Why? Have we met anywhere!

JACKIE. No; I mean I recognized you as the one who took the taxi.

RICHARD. (*to SIMON*) You are Sorel's brother?

SIMON. Yes; she'll be down in a minute. Come out into the garden, Myra –

MYRA. But, Simon, we can't...

(**SIMON**, reaching across **RICHARD**, grabbing **MYRA**'s hand and dragging her off through window:)

SIMON. Yes, we can. I shall go mad if I stay in the house a moment longer. (*over his shoulder to RICHARD and JACKIE*) Tea will be here soon.

(*He and MYRA go off into garden right.*)

(*There's a slight pause.*)

JACKIE. Well!

RICHARD. A strange young man! (*moving up to window, looking after them*)

JACKIE. Very rude, I think.

RICHARD. (*turning back into the room*) Have you ever met him before?

JACKIE. No; I don't know any of them except Mr. Bliss – *he's* a wonderful person.

RICHARD. (*puts his coat and hat on chair up left center*) I wonder if he knows you're here.

JACKIE. Perhaps that funny woman who opened the door will tell him.

RICHARD. Yes, allow me.

(**RICHARD** takes **JACKIE**'s coat and puts it on chair with his.)

It was fortunate that we met at the station.

JACKIE. I'm frightfully glad. I should have been terrified arriving all by myself.

RICHARD. (*Looks out of window again. Slight pause.*) I do hope the weather will keep good over Sunday – the country round here is delightful.

JACKIE. Yes.

(*another pause*)

RICHARD. There's nowhere like England in the spring and summer.

JACKIE. No, there isn't, is there!

(*another pause*)

RICHARD. There's a sort of *quality* you find in no other countries.

(*Another pause, in which JACKIE moves over to sofa and sits.*)

JACKIE. Have you travelled a lot?

RICHARD. (*modestly*) A good deal.

JACKIE. How lovely!

(**RICHARD** comes down and sits on form below piano.)

(There is a pause.)

RICHARD. Spain is very beautiful.

JACKIE. Yes, I've always heard Spain was awfully nice.

(pause)

RICHARD. Except for the bull-fights. No one who ever really loved horses could enjoy a bullfight.

JACKIE. Nor anyone who loved bulls either.

RICHARD. Exactly.

(pause)

JACKIE. Italy's awfully nice, isn't it?

RICHARD. Oh, yes, charming.

JACKIE. I've always wanted to go to Italy.

(pause)

RICHARD. Rome is a beautiful city.

JACKIE. Yes, I've always heard Rome was lovely.

RICHARD. And Naples and Capri – Capri's enchanting.

JACKIE. It must be.

(pause)

RICHARD. Have you ever been abroad at all?

JACKIE. Oh, yes; I went to Dieppe once – we had a house there for the summer.

RICHARD. *(kindly)* Dear little place, Dieppe.

JACKIE. Yes, it was lovely.

(JUDITH comes downstairs, followed by SANDY, with his arms full of cushions. Sits down on form and puts on her goloshes beside RICHARD, who rises. Then exits into garden without looking at RICHARD or JACKIE. SANDY picks up cushions and her gloves from table and goes out after her.)

JACKIE. Well!

(pause, and sitting again)

RICHARD. *Russia* used to be a wonderful country before the war.

JACKIE. It must have been... Was that her?

RICHARD. Who?

JACKIE. Judith Bliss.

RICHARD. Yes, I expect it was.

JACKIE. (*nearly crying*) I wish I'd never come.

RICHARD. You mustn't worry. They're a very Bohemian family, I believe.

JACKIE. I wonder if Mr. Bliss knows I'm here.

RICHARD. I wonder.

JACKIE. Couldn't we ring a bell, or anything?

RICHARD. Yes, perhaps we'd better.

(*Rises and crosses to door down left. He finds bell and presses it.*)

JACKIE. I don't suppose it rings.

RICHARD. (*comes to left corner of sofa*) You mustn't be depressed.

JACKIE. I feel horrid.

RICHARD. It's always a little embarrassing coming to a strange house for the first time. You'll like Sorel – she's charming.

JACKIE. (*desperately*) I wonder where she is.

RICHARD. (*consolingly*) I expect tea will be here soon.

JACKIE. Do you think they *have* tea?

RICHARD. (*alarmed*) Oh, yes – they must.

JACKIE. Oh, well, we'd better go on waiting, then.

RICHARD. (*takes cigarette case out of his pocket*) Do you mind if I smoke?

JACKIE. Not a bit.

RICHARD. Will you?

JACKIE. No, thank you.

RICHARD. (*sitting down on left end of sofa*) I got this case in Japan. It's pretty, isn't it?

JACKIE. *(takes case, turns it over and hands it back)* Awfully pretty.

(They lapse into hopeless silence.)

(Enter SOREL downstairs – comes to left center.)

SOREL. Oh, Richard, I'm dreadfully sorry! I didn't know you were here.

(They shake hands.)

RICHARD. We've been here a good while.

SOREL. How awful! Please forgive me. I was upstairs.

(JACKIE bobs up under their hands and stands in front of RICHARD.)

RICHARD. This is Miss Coryton.

SOREL. Oh!

JACKIE. How do you do?

SOREL. Have you come to see father?

(RICHARD lights his cigarette.)

JACKIE. Yes.

SOREL. He's in his study. *(moves away to center)* You'd better go up.

(JACKIE looks hopelessly at RICHARD, then goes to SOREL and clutches her arm:)

JACKIE. I don't know the way.

SOREL. *(irritably)* Oh, well – I'll take you. Come on! Wait a minute, Richard. *(She takes her to the bottom of the stairs.)* It's along that passage and the third door on the right.

JACKIE. Oh, thank you. *(She goes upstairs despondently.)*

SOREL. *(coming down again – to RICHARD)* The poor girl looks half-witted.

RICHARD. She's shy, I think.

SOREL. I hope father will find her a comfort. *(sits on right end of sofa)*

RICHARD. Tell me one thing, Sorel, did your father and mother know I was coming? *(sits beside her)*

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