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SF PERUSALS

THE MOTHER

by Florian Zeller
Translated by Christopher Hampton

SAMUEL FRENCH

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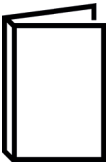
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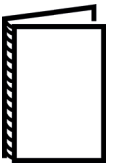
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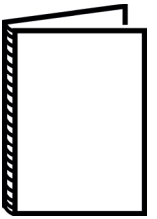
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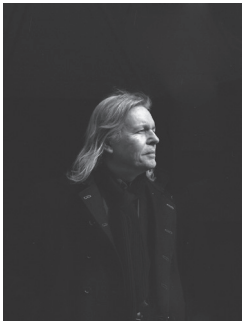
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Christopher Hampton became involved in theatre while studying French and German at Oxford University, and wrote a play in his first year. The Royal Court's production was so successful that it transferred to the Comedy Theatre while he was still a student, making him the youngest writer ever to have a play performed in the West End – a record which still stands. He said at the time that he also hoped to become the oldest writer to have a play in the West End, an ambition he has yet to achieve.

His plays, musicals and translations have so far garnered four Tony Awards, three Olivier Awards, five Evening Standard Awards and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award; prizes for his film and television work include an Oscar, two BAFTAs, a Writers' Guild of America Award, the Prix Italia, a Special Jury Award at the Cannes Film Festival, Hollywood Screenwriter of the Year, and The Collateral Award at the Venice Film Festival for Best Literary Adaptation.

His works for the stage include original plays (*Appomattox, The Talking Cure, White Chameleon, Tales from Hollywood, Treats, Savages, The Philanthropist, Total Eclipse* and *When Did You Last See My Mother?*); plays adapted from novels (Ödön von Horváth's *Youth Without God*, Sándor Márai's *Embers*, Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, George Steiner's novella *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*); musicals (*Sunset Boulevard, Dracula: The Musical* and, most recently, *Stephen Ward*, all with Don Black); libretti (*Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Appomattox* and *The Trial*, all with composer Philip Glass); and many translations (plays by Chekhov, Ibsen, Molière, Horváth, Yasmina Reza, Daniel Kehlmann and Florian Zeller; and a German musical based on Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*).

Hampton's screenplays include most recently *Ali and Nino* (based on the novel by Kurban Said), *Adore* (based on Doris Lessing's *The Grandmothers*), *A Dangerous Method* (based on his play *The Talking Cure*), *Chéri* (from the novel by Colette), *Atonement* (from the novel by Ian McEwan), *Imagining Argentina* (which he also directed), *The Quiet American* (from the Graham Greene novel), *The Secret Agent* (from Joseph Conrad's novel, and which he also directed), *Mary Reilly* (from Valerie Martin's novel inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*), *Total Eclipse* (from his play of the same name, and in which he also performed), *Carrington* (the first film he also directed), *Dangerous Liaisons* (based on his play *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*), *The Good Father* (from the novel by Peter Prince), *The Honorary Consul* (from Graham Greene's novel), *Tales from the Vienna Woods* (from the von Horváth play) and *A Doll's House* (based on his translation of the play by Ibsen).

His television scripts include mini-series *The Ginger Tree* (from the novel by Oswald Wynd), *Hôtel Du Lac* (from the Anita Brookner novel), *The History Man* (from Malcolm Bradbury's novel), *Able's Will* and most recently *The Thirteenth Tale* starring Vanessa Redgrave and Olivia Colman, based on the novel by Diane Setterfield.

Upcoming plays in 2018 include *Tartuffe* in the West End and *The Height of the Storm* at Wyndham's Theatre, London. *The Height of the Storm* is the fifth Florian Zeller play Hampton has translated, following *The Mother, The Father, The Truth* and *The Lie*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Florian Zeller is a French novelist and playwright. He won the prestigious Prix Interallié in 2004 for his third novel, *Fascination of Evil (La Fascination du pire)*. His plays include *L'Autre*, *Le Manège*, *Si tu mourais*, nominated for a Globe de Cristal, *Elle t'attend* and *La Vérité*. *La Mère (The Mother)* received a Molière Award for Best Play in 2011 and *Le Père (The Father)* received the Molière Award for Best Play in 2014, starring Robert Hirsch and Isabelle Gelinas (Molière Awards for Best Actor and Actress respectively). It received the Prix du Brigadier in 2015. His last play, *Une Heure de tranquillité (A Bit of Peace and Quiet)* opened with Fabrice Luchini, and has since been adapted for the screen, directed by Patrice Leconte. *Le Mensonge (The Lie)* will be staged in autumn 015 with Pierre Arditi and actress wife Evelyne Bouix.

THE MOTHER

The Mother, in this translation by Christopher Hampton, was commissioned by the Ustinov Studio, Theatre Royal Bath, and first presented on 21 May 2015. The cast was as follows:

THE MOTHER (**ANNE**)	Gina McKee
THE FATHER (**PIERRE**)	Richard Clothier
THE SON (**NICOLAS**)	William Postlethwaite
THE GIRL (**ÉLODIE**)	Cara Horgan

Director Laurence Boswell
Designer Mark Bailey
Lighting Designer Colin Grenfell
Sound Designer and Composer Jon Nicholls
Movement Director Lucy Cullingford

La Mère in its original French production was first presented at the Théâtre de Paris, Paris, on 4 November 2010.

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CHARACTERS

THE MOTHER – Anne

THE FATHER – Pierre

THE SON – Nicolas

THE GIRL – Élodie

ACT ONE

Scene One

The **MOTHER** *and the* **FATHER**. *A soundscape underlining a growing tension and creating a strange atmosphere.*

MOTHER Ah, there you are.

FATHER Yes.

MOTHER You're a bit late.

FATHER A bit, yes. All right?

MOTHER Yes, yes.

Pause. She resumes, not accusingly.

Where were you?

FATHER Mm?

MOTHER This afternoon.

FATHER What did you say?

MOTHER Where were you?

FATHER Why?

MOTHER Just wondered. That's all.

Pause.

FATHER What about you? Good day?

MOTHER Why are you asking me that? When you know the answer.

FATHER Wanted to know.

MOTHER You're interested?

FATHER Yes.

MOTHER You know perfectly well my day was shitty.

FATHER *(astonished by her answer)* What's the matter with you? Anne...

MOTHER Nothing. I'm just wondering why you bother to pretend.

FATHER Me? Pretend what?

MOTHER To be interested.

FATHER But I'm not pretending at all, Anne. What are you talking about? I am interested. Very interested.

MOTHER Well, it's not very interesting. I stayed in, did nothing. Waited.

Pause. The start of a palpable unease.

Your seminar, is it tomorrow?

FATHER Yes.

MOTHER You're leaving tomorrow?

FATHER Yes. In the morning.

MOTHER Good. Are you happy?

FATHER It's only a seminar.

Pause.

You seem upset.

MOTHER No, it's just... Nicolas.

FATHER What?

MOTHER He still hasn't phoned.

FATHER Why should he have phoned?

MOTHER Because I'm his mother. I left him a message, but he hasn't called back. As usual. I don't understand why he

never tells me what's happening in his life. Why he never comes by to see me. Never. He behaves as if I didn't exist.

FATHER He's busy.

MOTHER Doing what?

FATHER Mm? I don't know. Living.

She shrugs her shoulders. Pause.

MOTHER So?

FATHER What?

MOTHER Where were you?

FATHER What do you mean, where was I?

MOTHER This afternoon.

FATHER In the office, darling. Why?

Pause. He looks at her, vaguely anxious.

What's the matter with you?

MOTHER I called the office just now.

FATHER My office?

MOTHER Yes. Just now.

Pause.

I wanted to talk to you.

FATHER Oh, yes?

MOTHER And they told me you weren't there.

FATHER When?

MOTHER This afternoon. They told me you weren't there.

FATHER I was in a meeting.

MOTHER Oh, so that's it...

FATHER Yes.

MOTHER Ah, right.

FATHER Yes. Didn't my secretary tell you?

Pause. No answer.

MOTHER *(blandly and lightly, as if she's posing the question for the first time)* Everything all right?

FATHER Fine...

MOTHER *(still unemphatic)* Where were you this afternoon?

FATHER Mm? I told you, I was in the office.

MOTHER You were in a meeting?

FATHER Yes.

MOTHER You were preparing tomorrow's seminar?

FATHER No, no connection.

MOTHER *(suspiciously)* Really? *(Pause)* Is it tomorrow, your seminar?

FATHER You're worrying me, Anne.

MOTHER I am?

FATHER Yes. You're weird... You are, I promise you, you're weird this evening.

MOTHER I'm not...not at all. What makes you say that? I spend my days on my own bored sick, while you're banging little bitches in hotel rooms, so obviously...

FATHER *(as if he hadn't heard)* Sorry?

MOTHER Mm?

FATHER What did you say?

MOTHER *(as if nothing had been said)* I said I'm aware of a great void.

FATHER It's your fault as well, you know... You don't do anything. You haven't developed any enthusiasms. You stay here, doing nothing. So obviously...the world seems...dreary to you.

MOTHER What am I supposed to do?

FATHER I don't know.

MOTHER See.

Pause.

FATHER You have no interests. Since the children left home, it's as if... I mean, you have to find yourself something to do. Some focus of interest. Some...

MOTHER I've been had. That's the truth of it. I've been had. All the way down the line.

FATHER What are you talking about?

MOTHER There were the children, yes. I took care of them. I certainly took care of the children. Two children, that's quite something. I say two...three, including you. Because I took care of you as well. And then I took care of this house.

FATHER You did.

MOTHER But now everyone's gone. And here I am on my own. In this big house. Nobody needs me any more. And not even a phone call...

FATHER You're exaggerating...

MOTHER He never phones me. Never. Sara, I'm not saying. But him... Nicolas... Not even a phone call... To ask how I am. To, I don't know, let me hear his voice. He's cut me out of his life.

FATHER He's in love. It's natural...

Brief pause.

MOTHER *(as if to herself)* Little bitches in hotel rooms...

FATHER You... What's the matter with you? Anne... Are you all right? You don't look very...

MOTHER *(her tone suddenly completely normal)* I'm fine. What about you? Had a good day?

FATHER *(disconcerted)* Mm? Yes.

MOTHER You had meetings?

FATHER Why are you doing this?

MOTHER Why am I doing what?

FATHER You keep repeating yourself.

MOTHER You didn't have a meeting?

FATHER I did. I told you I did.

MOTHER Just one?

FATHER Yes.

MOTHER So? Did it go well? Did you close the deal?

FATHER Mm? Yes.

MOTHER Great. I'm very happy for you.

Pause.

FATHER *(walking on eggshells)* And you...

MOTHER Oh, I just stayed here. I didn't do much. Tidied up a bit. Oh, yes, I did go out... Did some shopping. I bought a dress. Want me to show it to you? You won't like it, though. It's not your style. It's red. Need some bravado to carry it off. Or else some really important occasion. I'll wear it to your funeral.

FATHER Have you been drinking today?

MOTHER Me?

FATHER Yes. Have you been drinking?

MOTHER Not a drop.

FATHER You haven't been drinking?

MOTHER No. Why are you looking at me like that?

FATHER No reason.

Pause.

MOTHER Actually, I should never have had children.

FATHER What?

MOTHER I realise now. I should never have had children. Especially with someone like you. Someone who works, I mean. Who has meetings. And seminars.

FATHER Anne...

MOTHER It's true... When we met, I was what, twenty-two? Naive. How could I have known? If you're twenty-two, you have no idea what a huge cheat life is. You don't know anything about it. You can be had so easily. Especially by a man like you. Apparently presentable, superficially at least. Later, as time passes, you find you have to dig a bit deeper. And that's when you find out the extent of the disaster. Anyway, and I don't mean this as a compliment, Pierre, you were a...pathetic father. Really. I've been meaning to tell you.

FATHER Me?

MOTHER Yes. Pathetic. The complete opposite of a role model. At least for Nicolas.

FATHER Why are you saying this?

MOTHER It's what Nicolas told me. He told me he's always taken you as an anti-role model. Obviously, he's an artist. He told me that as far as he was concerned, to be anything like you would mean his life was a failure. To some extent, I agree with him.

FATHER Are you listening to what you're saying to me? Anne... Are you listening to yourself?

MOTHER As for Sara... Well. She may have admired you a bit. Yes. Vaguely. Until she was nine or ten. You can't blame her for it. After all, you are her father. And then she's not very... Not very intelligent, if you think about it.

FATHER Are you talking about Sara? Are you talking about your daughter?

MOTHER Oh, don't make that face... It's never been a secret. I've always preferred Nicolas... Where's the harm in it? But Sara, I don't know... *(Whispering, so as not to be overheard)* I find her unsympathetic. Don't you? Right from the time she was born, really. I noticed right away that she was unsympathetic. It's something physical. Something about her face. Some expression. Don't you think? I remember that first day, yes, the day she was born, I remember feeling strangely repelled.

Pause.

What about you, how was your day?

FATHER What were you doing while...

MOTHER *(suddenly accusatory)* While *what*?

Brief pause.

(playfully) I had you there, didn't I? You didn't know what to say...

FATHER I was late back. Is that it? Is that why you're angry with me?

Pause.

Is that why?

MOTHER Your meeting went on longer than anticipated.

FATHER Yes. But...

MOTHER So? What's the problem? There is no problem... Why do you always make things so complicated? Are you hungry?

FATHER I've already eaten.

MOTHER See.

Pause.

FATHER Listen... Seems to me there's something funny going on. You... Are you feeling a bit tired? Perhaps I should call a doctor...

MOTHER No, it's just...

FATHER Just what?

Pause.

MOTHER It's that girl...

FATHER What girl?

MOTHER You know very well.

Pause.

That girl...

FATHER Who?

MOTHER Please...

FATHER What?

MOTHER Stop it...

Pause.

FATHER You mean...

MOTHER Yes.

Pause.

The girl he's in love with.

FATHER Nicolas?

MOTHER Yes. D'you think she has something against us? I mean, against me?

FATHER No, I don't think so. I mean, I've no idea. Why?

MOTHER It's since he's been seeing her. Before, he used to drop by the house. On Sundays. Not every Sunday, admittedly. But some Sundays. Whereas now... I leave him messages, he doesn't even answer.

FATHER He's growing up.

MOTHER You call that growing up? I call it being cruel. I hate it.

FATHER He's twenty-five.

MOTHER I know he's twenty-five.

FATHER Sometimes you seem to forget.

MOTHER How could I possibly forget? Let me remind you I was there the day he was born.

Pause.

No, it's not that. It's something else. I want him to be in love and to live with that…*girl*. He does what he likes. It's his life. But that's no reason to forget me. I mean…it's ridiculous, but I'm becoming jealous. Can you understand? Jealous of that…*girl*. When I'm his mother. It's just incredible. It's incredible. Sometimes I tell myself… I should never have had children with a man like you. Cowardice is in the genes. It gets passed on. Like ugliness.

FATHER Right. Listen… I'm going to call a…

MOTHER No.

FATHER What?

MOTHER I don't want you to leave me alone.

FATHER Let me at least fetch you a glass of water.

Pause. He goes out to fetch a glass of water.

MOTHER I've been thinking about your seminar story, you know. This seminar tomorrow. It is tomorrow morning you're leaving? If you knew how much it makes me laugh. A seminar? I can just imagine you trying to think of some excuse to explain your trips away… You really think I'm jealous? I am, but not on your account. He's the one I miss. He's my son. And I'm in the process of losing him. My little darling. My joy. Whereas I've already lost you. Years ago. So go off with your girlfriends… Whatever happens, I'm already on my own. I've been had all the way down the line.

He comes back.

FATHER What were you saying?

MOTHER I was saying what an arsehole you are.

Pause.

Anyway, you have a good day?

FATHER *(not knowing what else to do)* Here. Take this.

The **MOTHER** *drinks.*

MOTHER *(disappointed)* Water?

FATHER Yes.

MOTHER Isn't there anything else?

FATHER No. Better not.

MOTHER I'd have preferred a...

FATHER I know, but no. It's water.

Pause. She finishes drinking.

MOTHER Thanks.

FATHER Better?

MOTHER All right.

Brief pause.

FATHER Sure?

MOTHER Yes, yes.

FATHER Better?

MOTHER Yes. Much better.

Brief pause.

FATHER You ought to go to bed.

MOTHER I'm not tired.

FATHER All the same, you ought to go. You ought to take a sleeping pill.

Pause. She takes a deep breath and tries to change the subject.

MOTHER *(lightly)* What about you? You have a good day?

FATHER Are you doing this on purpose? Anne, are you doing this on purpose?

MOTHER What?

FATHER You've already asked me dozens of times.

MOTHER Asked you what?

FATHER Asked me if I've had a good day...

MOTHER Me? Don't talk nonsense.

Pause. She suddenly looks at him suspiciously.

You seem peculiar, Pierre. You do, I promise you. Have you been drinking? Pierre... Look me in the eyes... Have you been drinking?

FATHER Look...

MOTHER You have been drinking.

FATHER What are you playing at?

MOTHER Me? Nothing. I'm just concerned about you, that's all.

Pause.

By the way, it is tomorrow, your seminar, isn't it?

FATHER Stop it. Do you hear me? Stop pissing me about.

Pause. Hiatus.

MOTHER I know very well you're going to end up leaving me. What difference does it make if it's tomorrow or some other day?

FATHER What are you talking about?

MOTHER I'm not an idiot. I may seem like one. But I'm not an idiot.

FATHER What are you talking about?

MOTHER I know very well you're going to end up leaving me.

FATHER Are you saying this because of the seminar?

MOTHER Now the children have gone, there's nothing to keep you here. I know all that.

FATHER You're talking gibberish.

MOTHER Stop treating me like an idiot. I know it's your turn. You all leave, one after the other. Having used me up. I'm no use to you any more. You've always told yourself you wouldn't leave, because of the children. Now they're not here any more. So? What are you waiting for? The door's wide open.

FATHER You're off your head, Anne.

MOTHER You're finally going to live the life you want to. No need to hide. It's going to be a huge relief to you. A huge relief. No need to invent these seminars for me… Or meetings. You'll be able to have it off with your little whores in broad daylight. Fuck them from behind. You know, basically, you're a really horrible man. *I hate to say this*, Pierre.

FATHER What?

MOTHER You're a horrible man.

Blackout.

Scene Two

Same situation as at the beginning of Scene One. Almost no transition. The actors' tones of voice are neutral and everyday.

MOTHER Ah, there you are.

FATHER Yes. I'm a bit late. Didn't you get a message from my secretary?

MOTHER Yes, I did... She told me you had a meeting.

FATHER Yes.

MOTHER Did it go well?

FATHER Yes, yes. We finally closed the deal.

MOTHER The Markousin deal?

FATHER Yes. Finally in the bag.

MOTHER Great. You must be pleased.

FATHER More exhausted than anything else. What about you? Everything all right?

MOTHER All right. Nothing special.

FATHER You stayed in?

MOTHER Yes. Tidied up a bit.

FATHER Have you eaten?

MOTHER Yes. There's some chicken left in the fridge, if you feel like it...

FATHER No, thanks. I'm not really hungry.

Pause.

So you stayed in? I mean, all day?

MOTHER Mm? Yes. Well, no. I did some shopping. I bought a dress. Guess what colour? Red!

FATHER Red?

MOTHER I know. Now I need to find the right occasion to wear it.

FATHER Are you all right? You seem…

MOTHER What?

FATHER I don't know. Gloomy. Are you?

MOTHER No, no.

Pause.

By the way, I meant to tell you… I left Nicolas a message. I suggested he come to lunch next Sunday. With…

FATHER With Élodie?

MOTHER Yes. With her. I'd like it if both of them could come to lunch. Don't you think?

FATHER What, *this* Sunday?

MOTHER Yes. It's M—

FATHER But you know very well I won't be here.

MOTHER How come?

FATHER I have this seminar, Anne. I told you about it…

MOTHER The one in Dijon?

FATHER Yes. I'm leaving in the morning.

MOTHER But I thought it was… It's going on till Sunday?

FATHER Of course. It lasts four days… You couldn't suggest the week after? If not, never mind, do it without me. Except I'd have liked to see them…

MOTHER Anyway, he hasn't even answered. When I leave him messages, it sometimes takes him a week to get back to me.

FATHER Listen, do what you like. And let me know.

MOTHER Yes.

Pause.

I don't know why he never calls me back.

FATHER Nicolas?

MOTHER Yes. I leave him messages. It sometimes takes him a week to get back to me.

FATHER It's natural.

MOTHER You think it's natural?

FATHER I mean…he has his life.

MOTHER Me too, I have my life. It doesn't stop me thinking about him.

Pause.

FATHER I expect he'll call you tomorrow.

MOTHER Yes.

Pause.

What about you? You're leaving tomorrow?

FATHER Yes. I get a train in the morning.

MOTHER I'm sure you haven't packed yet.

FATHER What makes you say that?

MOTHER I know you. Better than you think. I know you by heart, Pierre. By heart, you know what I mean?

She gazes at him intently, as if, behind this 'I know you by heart', lies the seminar, the afternoons in the hotel, the imminent departure, everything shown in the previous scene which doesn't appear here.

FATHER What makes you say that in that tone of voice?

MOTHER Well, I've been married to you for years. You know how long we've been married?

FATHER Of course I do.

MOTHER How long?

FATHER *(playing for time)* Mm?

MOTHER How long?

FATHER How long? That's easy...

MOTHER Twenty-five years.

FATHER Yes. Right. Twenty-five years. Happy years.

MOTHER In fact, I was thinking about all this just now. About our marriage. Yes. And I was thinking... You realise how young I was... I was twenty-two. I was Sara's age.

FATHER Sara's twenty-three.

MOTHER Mm?

FATHER I said, Sara's twenty-three.

MOTHER Yes. Well, that's what I mean, I was younger than she is. I was younger than our children.

FATHER Yes.

MOTHER Seems scarcely credible.

FATHER Yes. It's gone quickly.

MOTHER Too quickly, you mean. Seems like yesterday.

Brief pause.

Yesterday. And you're leaving tomorrow.

FATHER I'm not going very far.

MOTHER Yes, you are. You're going a long way. Much too far. You...

FATHER You think Dijon's a long way?

MOTHER Mm?

FATHER You think it's a long way, Dijon?

MOTHER No. You're right.

FATHER It's two hours in the train.

She suddenly looks sad. Brief pause.

MOTHER I hate to say this, Pierre…

FATHER What?

Pause.

What?

MOTHER No. Nothing.

Blackout.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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