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SF PERUSALS

PRIVATE ROOMS

A One Act Comedy
in the Viennese Style

by

J. B. PRIESTLEY



LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH LIMITED

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ISBN 978-0-573-11653-7

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CHARACTERS

MAX, a famous actor, elderly

FLORIAN, a young poet

JULIA, a distinguished actress, middle-aged

ELSA, a young ballet dancer

A WAITER

The action takes place in two adjoining private rooms of a restaurant in a Central European capital

Time: about 1900

PRIVATE ROOMS

SCENE—*Two adjoining private rooms of a restaurant in a Central European capital, about 1900. Night.*

The stage is divided into two equal parts by the wall between the two rooms. Each has a door up C *near the dividing wall. The decoration of the rooms can be left to the producer and designer, who should, however, bear in mind the period and also aim at an effect of cosy intimacy. The dividing wall and the two doors must be solid and real, but the walls* R *and* L *can be suggested by dark curtains.*

In each room there is a supper table with a chair either side of it; if possible there should also be a settee in each room by the R *and* L *walls. The lighting must be warm and intimate, not spread evenly over each room but directed on to a tiny acting area in each case. It should be so contrived that it is possible to fade out the* LIGHTS *in one room quickly and at the same time bring up the* LIGHTS *in the other room.*

(*See the Ground Plan at the end of the play*)

When the CURTAIN *rises both rooms are lit, but preferably not too brightly. The tables in both rooms are laid for supper; and in both roughly the same stage of supper has been reached—the final stage of dessert wine and fruit, coffee and liqueurs. In the room* R MAX *is sitting* L *of the table and* ELSA *at* R *of it. He is a fine-looking man, of a theatrical type, who looks middle-aged but is actually elderly. He wears full evening dress.* ELSA *is a very pretty little thing, wearing a simple dress of the period. She is nibbling little cakes or fruit and taking occasional, rather nervous, sips of wine or liqueur.* MAX *is lighting a cigar with the air of a man who has supped well.*

In the room L JULIA *is sitting* R *of the table and* FLORIAN *at* L *of it. She is a very handsome middle-aged actress, wearing full evening dress of the period with plenty of jewellery.* FLORIAN *is an attractive young man in his twenties, shabbily dressed in the bohemian-artist style of the period. He is care-*

fully lighting Julia's cigarette; then he lights his own. No words are spoken for a minute or so but we should not feel they have been deliberately suppressed and that we are seeing a scene in dumbshow, but that the characters are naturally silent for a few moments, being full of food and drink.

The LIGHTS *fade on the room* L. *At the same time there is a discreet knocking on the door of the room* R *and the* WAITER *enters.*

MAX. Yes?

WAITER. Is there anything more you will be requiring, sir?

MAX (*glancing at the table*) No—nothing.

WAITER. Thank you, sir. Supper was satisfactory?

MAX (*considering this*) Um—yes—on the whole . .

ELSA (*bursting out*) It was *wonderful.*

(*The* WAITER *smiles and bows, then looks at Max*)

MAX. But you can tell your maître d'hôtel that I still think that the Steak Chateaubriand is better at the *Bristol.* There is something . . . However, I'll go into that another time. Nothing more now.

WAITER. Thank you, sir. Then you will not be disturbed again, sir.

(*The* WAITER *bows, smiles and exits. The* LIGHTS *fade in the room* R. *At the same time the* LIGHTS *come up on the room* L. *The* WAITER *is heard knocking at the door of the room* L, *then he enters*)

JULIA. No, I don't think there's anything else we want. You can leave us now.

WAITER. Thank you, madam. And supper was satisfactory?

JULIA. Most of it—yes. But I didn't ask for orange salad with the duck. You really ought to know by this time that I prefer prunes. I didn't want to make a fuss—I hate making a fuss—but please remember next time—no orange salad—prunes. That's all.

WAITER. Thank you, madam. You will not be disturbed again.

(*The* WAITER *bows, smiles and exits*)

JULIA. Don't you agree about the duck?

FLORIAN. If you say so—yes. But I hardly knew what I was eating.

JULIA. That's absurd. You must always know what you're eating. We have to eat so we might as well eat properly. Besides, why should I take the trouble to order a delicious supper for you, when I have so many important things to think about, if you don't appreciate it? Ungrateful boy! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

FLORIAN (*smiling at her*) No—dear Julia—I'm not. A poet doesn't think of the menu when he's supping with a goddess.

JULIA (*smiling at him*) You're very sweet. (*She puts her hand over his on the table*)

(*The* LIGHTS *fade in the room* L. *At the same time the* LIGHTS *come up in the room* R)

ELSA (*enthusiastically*) I can still hardly believe it . . .

MAX (*smiling at her over his cigar*) Believe what, my dear child?

ELSA. That I'm actually sitting here with you—*you*! That this is a private room in our most famous restaurant, which all the girls are dying to visit, and that I've had supper—oh, such a wonderful supper—alone—with *you*. You can't imagine. It's like a dream.

MAX. The restaurant—the supper—or the man?

ELSA. I suppose in a way I can't separate them.

MAX. I wish you could. After all, any fool with a little money to spare could bring you here—give you supper.

ELSA. Oh—no—that wouldn't be the same at all. Naturally—I've had—invitations. Most of the girls get them. Oh—no, it's being here with you.

MAX. That's what I hoped, my dear.

ELSA (*in confidential, almost childish tones*) You see, I think it's through you that I fell in love with the Theatre. The first time I was ever allowed to go—for my parents were very strict—was to see you. We lived at Brinz, you know. You must remember coming to Brinz . . .

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