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THE DAME OF SARK

A Play

WILLIAM DOUGLAS HOME

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON
NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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ISBN 978-0-573-11093-1

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I read the Dame of Sark's autobiography some years ago and made a mental note that I would like to write a play about the wartime occupation of her island by the Germans. This spring I wrote asking for her blessing and enquiring whether she would let me use her name or if she would prefer that I should fictionalise the story. She replied that she would like to read the play before deciding. I sent it to her during the first week in June. On 11th June she wrote back: "Dear Mr Douglas Home, I do not see anything that would be disagreeable to me in letting my name be used in your play." She went on, "Would you care to come and spend a couple of days with me?" Alas, the sad news of her death came ten days before my wife and I, our two young children and Celia Johnson were due to call on her. Charles Hickman, however, who had been over earlier to photograph the room in which the play is set, had a long and fruitful conversation with her. He also met Cecile, now in her late seventies. I made one promise to the Dame, which was that I would put a note in the programme to the effect that although Major Lanz and Dr Braun were indeed the first two German officers to land on Sark, they did not in fact remain there throughout the war (as they do in the play for dramatic convenience) but were replaced by other officers of similar character and rank. "I like your idea of a note in the programme," she wrote. "It will spare me masses of letters pointing out that they had gone by Christmas 1940." The period of Colonel von Schmettau's sojourn in the Channel Islands was exactly as depicted in the play.

William Douglas Home

BBC News Broadcast

At the beginning of each scene (except Scene 6) there is a short radio announcement. These announcements should be heard on the front-of-house speakers with the footlights lighting the Curtain.

Enquiries regarding recordings of the speeches should be made to Samuel French Ltd.

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THE DAME OF SARK

An Oxford Theatre Festival Production, first presented at Wyndham's Theatre, London, by Ray Cooney on the 17th October 1974, with the following cast of characters:

Bob Hathaway	Alan Gifford
Sibyl Hathaway	Celia Johnson
Cecile	Jill Raymond
Major Lanz	John Pennington
Dr Braun	Nicholas Loukes
Colonel von Schmettau	Tony Britton
Wilhelm Muller	Peter Settelen
Colonel Graham	Nicholas Courtney
Jim Robinson	Hugh Wooldridge
Mr Bishop	Martin Carroll
Mrs Bishop	Brenda Duncan
The Cowman	Scott Taylor

The play directed by Charles Hickman
Setting by Anthony Holland

The action takes place in the drawing-room of the Seigneurie on Sark

SCENE 1	1940	Summer
SCENE 2	1941	Spring
SCENE 3	1942	Autumn
SCENE 4	1943	Winter
SCENE 5	1944	Summer
SCENE 6	1945	Summer

Period—the Second World War

PRELUDE TO SCENE 1

This is the BBC Home Service. Here is the first news for today, Monday the first of July nineteen forty, and this is Alvar Lidell reading it.

Early this morning two enemy aircraft were shot down over this country, and an enemy seaplane was brought down over the North-East coast. Our bombers have continued their raids on Germany and our fighters have had successes over France. There have also been successful air operations in Africa. The Russian occupation of Rumanian territory continues.

The following statement has just come in from the Ministry of Information:

The Channel Islands have been demilitarised. It is learned that enemy landings have been made in Jersey and Guernsey. Telegraphic and telephonic communications have been cut, and no further information is at present available.

In a communiqué which reached us half an hour ago, the RAF . . .

SCENE 1

The drawing-room of the Seigneurie on Sark. Summer, 1940

There are doors leading to the hall and the rest of the house, and to the study; french windows to the garden, from which there is a view of the drive; a fireplace with firestool. (*See plan on page 55*)

When the CURTAIN *rises, a charming man is discovered sitting, smoking his pipe, playing patience. He is in his fifties. The door opens and his wife comes in. She is about the same age—firm, good-looking and determined, with no fuss about her*

Sibyl They'll be here in ten minutes.
Bob Good for them. Maybe I'll have got this out by then.
Sibyl Do you realize this is the first time an enemy has set foot on British soil since William the Conqueror?
Bob And he came from round here, the bastard, didn't he?
Sibyl How can you be so calm?
Bob Could be because I'm neutral.
Sibyl You'll never get away with that!
Bob No? You just watch me, honey! After all, why shouldn't I? I'm an American as plain as plain. And they're not to know that I was naturalized in nineteen-nineteen. They've a lot on their hands just at present.
Sibyl They'll find out in the end.
Bob I daresay. But until they do, it'll maybe help a little.
Sibyl How?
Bob Well, like a referee helps in a boxing match. If you get in a clinch with them, I'll step right in and break it up.
Sibyl Then you're going to be quite busy!
Bob Don't go looking for a quarrel, sweetie. Play it cool, that's my advice. Don't put their backs up. If you do, they'll take it out on all of us. They're here to stay until this darned war's over. That's a fact we've got to live with, and we may as well face up to it. Has anyone gone down to meet them?
Sibyl Yes, I've sent the Seneschal down to the harbour and he's going to bring them straight up here.
Bob What—all of them? When I looked at that boat through my binoculars, it looked like they were packed together like sardines.
Sibyl There must be someone in command.
Bob Let's hope so.
Sibyl And I've been up to the school to reassure them all.
Bob How did you manage that?
Sibyl I told the children every German's not like Hitler necessarily.

Bob Right.
Sibyl So not to be frightened of them and treat them just like the ordinary tourists.
Bob Right.
Sibyl And don't keep saying "Right"!
Bob Why not? I'm paying you a compliment. You've done all the right things so far.
Sibyl I hope so.
Bob Course you have. You couldn't have done better. So relax.
Sibyl How can I, Bob?
Bob Why not? We've been expecting this since Dunkirk.
Sibyl I know. But now it's happened.
Bob Right. Sorry, sweetie, it slipped right out. Hey, it's coming out, I think. Sweetie—honey—come over here and help me.

Sibyl moves to the table

There—there—no, maybe not. Which one? This or that one?
Sibyl (*tapping a card*) That one.
Bob O.K. Be it on your head if it's the wrong one. Now what?
Sibyl (*tapping another card*) That one

Bob moves the card

Now that—no, that. Now that. And that.
Bob Well, what do you know! Well done, sweetie—I never could have done it without you. (*He begins collecting his cards*) Do you think there's time for one more?
Sibyl No, I don't. We must get ready for them.
Bob Ready for them! Put out drinks, you mean?
Sibyl No, I don't. You tidy up the cards and I'll pouff up the cushions.
Bob Listen to her! Pouff the cushions! What a woman you are!
Sibyl (*pouffing the cushions*) Put the cards away, Bob, and stop laughing at me.
Bob I'm not laughing at you, honey. I'm struck dumb with admiration for you.
Sibyl Dumb's not quite the right word, is it?
Bob (*putting the cards on the bookcase and replacing the table*) Pouffing up the cushions for a lot of bloody Germans who, for all you know, are going to hold you down and rape you.
Sibyl Over your dead body, I hope!
Bob I'm neutral, don't forget!
Sibyl (*abandoning the joking suddenly*) Oh, Bob, I'm frightened.

Bob sits with her on the firestool

Bob Take it easy, sweetie. I was only joking.
Sibyl I know, but we shouldn't joke about it—it might happen.
Bob Not while I'm around it won't.
Sibyl But they might shoot you.
Bob Shoot a United States' citizen? They wouldn't dare.

Sibyl I hope you're right.

Bob Of course I'm right. So relax. All Germans aren't like Hitler, as you just said. Try to remember that, honey, when you're dealing with them. Soldiers are just puppets, so it's no use blaming them—the guy responsible is the manipulator.

Sibyl What about the dreadful things they did in Poland?

Bob Wars are dreadful things, and dreadful things get done in them. But we're not in a war zone. We're demilitarized.

Sibyl They bombed Guernsey last week.

Bob Right. But that could have been a mistake.

Sibyl A mistake! Machine gunning our fishermen on their way home? You mustn't make excuses for them, Bob.

Bob Right. I'll wait and let them make their own.

Sibyl If they can think of any.

Bob Sibyl. (*He turns her round to face him*) Look me in the eye and tell me if you're really frightened.

Sibyl Yes, I am. I'm frightened for myself, and you for everyone on Sark—aren't you?

Bob No. I'm apprehensive, I admit. After all, who wouldn't be? Not frightened though. And nor are you. Those Germans walking up the road won't know what's hit them when they meet you. You will put them in their place and you will keep them in their place until the War's won—mark my words, you will.

Sibyl It's you who should be doing that. You're the Seigneur. (*She goes to ring the bell*)

Bob Right. But you're the boss. I'm just your husband. Who are you ringing for?

Sibyl Cecile.

Bob Why?

Sibyl To prepare her.

Bob That's right. You're all right now the bell's gone. You've come right out of your corner fighting. And you won't be back in it until Armistice Day.

Sibyl When will that be, Bob?

Bob One month if you go down. Five years if you hang on. More, maybe. But never worry. We'll see it through no matter how long it lasts.

Sibyl But what about the islanders? Those that are left?

Bob They'll see it through as well—if we do. So just be calm, and don't fly off the handle when you see that uniform. Remember they're Germans and its regulation issue!

Cecile enters, behind her in the doorway are Mr and Mrs Bishop and the Cowman

Cecile You rang, Madam?

Sibyl Yes, I did, Cecile. There'll be some Germans here at any minute.

Cecile Yes, Madam. So they tell me.

Sibyl Who?

Cecile The Seneschal. He saw their boat coming in.
Sibyl That's right. I've sent him down to the harbour and told him to bring them up here.
Cecile Yes, Madam.
Sibyl Don't be frightened of them, Cecile.
Cecile No, Madam.
Sibyl Come in, Mrs Bishop.

Mr and Mrs Bishop and the Cowman come into the room

Now listen to me. As I've just told Cecile—you mustn't be frightened.
Mrs Bishop No, Madam.
Sibyl All Germans aren't like Hitler.
All No, Madam.
Sibyl And if they're soldiers, they're likely to be well behaved.
Mrs Bishop They say they weren't—not in Poland, Madam.
Sibyl I know. But we aren't in a war zone. We're demilitarized.
Mrs Bishop Yes, Madam.
Sibyl So there's no need to be frightened. Treat them like you treat the ordinary tourists. I've just told the children to do that, and they're quite looking forward to it.
Mrs Bishop I'm not wanting to be raped, Madam.
Sibyl No, Mrs Bishop, I don't think any of us are, but perhaps you and I need not be concerned too much on that score. We're not as young as we were, are we?
Mrs Bishop No, Madam, that's the trouble.

She sounds regretful and they all laugh

Bob Talking of rape, Mrs Bishop, I hope you're not like the African who told her boss that she wouldn't go home through a certain wood because a girl had been raped there the night before. And her boss said, "Don't be silly, Agnes, why should anyone want to rape you?" And she said—"Waal, baas, ma trouble is that I rape very easily."

They all laugh

Sibyl All right, remember what I said. Now, go back to the farm and carry on as usual.
Chorus Yes, Madam, thank you, Madam, etc.

Mr and Mrs Bishop and the Cowman leave

Cecile moves to the door

Sibyl (*to Cecile, as she is about to follow the others*) Now, Cecile, when they get here, treat them just as you would any other guests.
Cecile Yes, Madam.
Sibyl Ask their names, then show them in here.
Cecile Yes, Madam.

Sibyl All right, Cecile, thank you.

Cecile exits

(*To Bob*) Where's *The House that Hitler Built* and *Sawdust Caesar*?
Bob In my study, I think.
Sibyl Get them, will you, Bob?
Bob What for? You are never going to read them to them, are you?
Sibyl No, of course not. Don't be silly. Hurry up, dear, they'll be here at any minute.
Bob Right.

Bob exits to the study

Sibyl stands contemplating the room. Then she moves two high-backed chairs to the window side of the dining-table, facing the room

Bob returns, carrying the books

Sibyl Thank you, darling.
Bob What's the idea of the two thrones?
Sibyl They're for you and me.
Bob We're not royal, honey.
Sibyl We're the equivalent on Sark. But that's not why I've done it. I got the idea from Mussolini. I read it in an article. Apparently that's what he does. He makes his visitors walk right from the door, right through the room, right up to his desk, and, by the time they've got there, they're so out of breath, Musso can do what he likes with them. (*During this speech she is deciding where to put the books, and finally places them, very prominently, on the little table by Bob's chair*)
Bob I guess his room's bigger than ours.
Sibyl Never mind that. We must do the best we can with what we've got.
Bob Right. What's the idea putting those there?
Sibyl To annoy them. And to see what sort of people they are. If they look at them and do nothing, it'll mean they're frightened of us. If they tell us to remove them, it'll mean they're petty-minded. And if they just ignore them maybe there's something to them.
Bob A barometer in covers—well I never.
Sibyl (*moving to the chairs*) Come and sit down, Bob. Which side do you prefer?
Bob I'm easy.
Sibyl Which side does the King sit when he opens Parliament?
Bob Don't ask me.
Sibyl On the right, I think. I'm sure he does.
Bob But you're the hereditary ruler.
Sibyl You're the Seigneur.
Bob Right, but you're still the boss.

Bob pulls out Sibyl's chair and she sits. He sits in the other one

Sibyl All right. (*She settles in*) All right?
Bob Yeah, I'm all right. But what about them?
Sibyl What about them?
Bob Aren't they going to sit down?
Sibyl Certainly not. Not to start with, anyway. Later on, if they're civil, I may consider it.
Bob (*laying a hand on her arm*) That's her—that's my Sibyl.
Sibyl What does that mean?
Bob It means that you've come out fighting, as I said you would. The Monstrous Regiment of Women!
Sibyl Bob!
Bob Don't get me wrong. I mean it as a compliment. Maybe the guy who wrote it didn't, but he was a man.
Sibyl Aren't you?
Bob Yes, but I'm broader-minded. (*Pause*) How long have we got to sit here?
Sibyl Till they come.
Bob Can I get my tobacco?
Sibyl From your study?
Bob No, the bookcase.
Sibyl If you hurry. (*She looks anxiously through the window*)
Bob (*getting up*) Thanks, Sarge! (*He goes to get his tobacco, and notices her anxious gaze through the window*)
Bob You remind me of the mother of the conchie at the Tribunal. I was told it in the Club the last time we were over on the mainland. Did I ever tell you?
Sibyl I expect so.
Bob Well, this conchie wouldn't budge. Whatever the Court said to him, he stuck his toes in, wouldn't go and fight at any price. Then finally the President, some peppery old colonel from my war, tried one last argument: "What would you do, young fellow, if a German soldier came here and attacked your mother?" he asked. And the conchie replied, "I'd lay three to one on Mum." (*He notices something through the window*) They're coming up the drive.
Sibyl How many are there?
Bob Two, that I can see.
Sibyl What? Officers or soldiers?
Bob They look pretty smart to me. Now watch your tongue. They could be tricky customers to deal with.
Sibyl We've done nothing wrong.
Bob So far.

There is a knock on the front door

Sibyl Come and sit down.
Bob Right.
Sibyl Oh, Bob, I'm really frightened now.
Bob No need to be. Just play it cool, and everything'll be O.K.

Cecile's voice is heard outside saying "Names, please?"