

THE LOVER

The stage consists of two areas. Living-room right, with small hall and front door up centre. Bedroom and balcony, on a level, left. There is a short flight of stairs to bedroom door. Kitchen off right. A table with a long velvet cover stands against the left wall of the living-room, centre stage. In the small hall there is a cupboard. The furnishings are tasteful, comfortable.

SARAH is emptying and dusting ashtrays in the living-room. It is morning. She wears a crisp, demure dress. RICHARD comes into the bedroom from bathroom, off left, collects his briefcase from hall cupboard, goes to SARAH, kisses her on the cheek. He looks at her for a moment smiling. She smiles.

RICHARD (*amiably*). Is your lover coming today ?

SARAH. Mmmn.

RICHARD. What time ?

SARAH. Three.

RICHARD. Will you be going out... or staying in ?

SARAH. Oh... I think we'll stay in.

RICHARD. I thought you wanted to go to that exhibition.

SARAH. I did, yes... but I think I'd prefer to stay in with him today.

RICHARD. Mmm-hmmn. Well, I must be off.

He goes to the hall and puts on his bowler hat.

RICHARD. Will he be staying long do you think ?

SARAH. Mmmmmnn...

RICHARD. About... six, then.

SARAH. Yes.

RICHARD. Bye-bye.

SARAH. Bye.

He opens the front door and goes out. She continues dusting. The lights fade.

Fade up. Early evening. SARAH comes into room from kitchen. She wears the same dress, but is now wearing a pair of very high-heeled shoes. She pours a drink and sits on chaise longue with magazine. There are six chimes of the clock. RICHARD comes in the front door. He wears a sober suit, as in the morning. He puts his briefcase down in the hall and goes into the room. She smiles at him and pours him a whisky.

Hullo.

RICHARD. Hullo.

He kisses her on the cheek. Takes glass, hands her the evening paper and sits down left. She sits on chaise longue with paper.

Thanks.

He drinks, sits back and sighs with contentment.

Aah.

SARAH. Tired ?

RICHARD. Just a little.

SARAH. Bad traffic ?

RICHARD. No. Quite good traffic, actually.

SARAH. Oh, good.

RICHARD. Very smooth.

Pause.

SARAH. It seemed to me you were just a little late.

RICHARD. Am I ?

SARAH. Just a little.

RICHARD. There was a bit of a jam on the bridge.

SARAH gets up, goes to drinks table to collect her glass, sits again on the chaise longue.

Pleasant day?

SARAH. Mmn. I was in the village this morning.

RICHARD. Oh yes ? See anyone ?

SARAH. Not really, no. Had lunch.

RICHARD. In the village ?

SARAH. Yes.

RICHARD. Any good?

SARAH. Quite fair. *(She sits.)*

RICHARD. What about this afternoon ? Pleasant afternoon ?

SARAH. Oh yes. Quite marvellous.

RICHARD. Your lover came, did he ?

SARAH. Mmmn. Oh yes.

RICHARD. Did you show him the hollyhocks ?

Slight pause.

SARAH. The hollyhocks ?

RICHARD. Yes.

SARAH. No, I didn't.

RICHARD. Oh.

SARAH. Should I have done ?

RICHARD. No, no. It's simply that I seem to remember your saying he was interested in gardening.

SARAH. Mmmn, yes, he is.

Pause.

Not all that interested, actually.

RICHARD. Ah.

Pause.

Did you go out at all, or did you stay in ?

SARAH. We stayed in.

RICHARD. Ah. (*He looks up at the Venetian blinds.*) That blind hasn't been put up properly.

SARAH. Yes, it is a bit crooked, isn't it ?

Pause.

RICHARD. Very sunny on the road. Of course, by the time I got on to it the sun was beginning to sink. But I imagine it was quite warm here this afternoon. It was warm in the City.

SARAH. Was it ?

RICHARD. Pretty stifling. I imagine it was quite warm everywhere.

SARAH. Quite a high temperature, I believe.

RICHARD. Did it say so on the wireless ?

SARAH. I think it did, yes.

He pours drinks.

RICHARD. I see you had the Venetian blinds down.

SARAH. We did, yes.

RICHARD. The light was terribly strong.

SARAH. It was. Awfully strong.

RICHARD. The trouble with this room is that it catches the sun so directly, when it's shining. You didn't move to another room ?

SARAH. No. We stayed here.

RICHARD. Must have been blinding.

SARAH. It was. That's why we put the blinds down.

Pause.

RICHARD. The thing is it gets so awfully hot in here with the blinds down.

SARAH. Would you say so ?

RICHARD. Perhaps no. Perhaps it's just that you feel hotter.

SARAH. Yes. That's probably it.

Pause.

What did you do this afternoon ?

RICHARD. Long meeting. Rather inconclusive.

SARAH. It's a cold supper. Do you mind ?

RICHARD. Not in the least.

SARAH. I didn't seem to have time to cook anything today.

She moves towards the kitchen.

RICHARD. Oh, by the way... I rather wanted to ask you something.

SARAH. What ?

RICHARD. Does it ever occur to you that while you're spending the afternoon being unfaithful to me I'm sitting at a desk going through balance sheets and graphs ?

SARAH. What a funny question.

RICHARD. No, I'm curious.

SARAH. You've never asked me that before.

RICHARD. I've always wanted do know.

Slight pause.

SARAH. Well, of course it occurs to me.

RICHARD. Oh, it does?

SARAH. Mmmn.

Slight pause.

RICHARD. What's your attitude to that, then?

SARAH. It makes it all the more piquant.

RICHARD. Does it really ?

SARAH. Of course.

RICHARD. You mean while you're with him... you actually have a picture of me, sitting at my desk going through balance sheets ?

SARAH. Only at... certain times.

RICHARD. Of course.

SARAH. Not all the time.

RICHARD. Well, naturally.

SARAH. At particular moments.

RICHARD. Mmmn. But, in fact, I'm not completely forgotten ?

SARAH. Not by any means.

RICHARD. That's rather touching, I must admit.

Pause.