

Judith + Richard

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HAY FEVER

JUDITH. Do stop being noncommittal, just for once; it's doubly annoying in the face of us all having lost control so lamentably.

RICHARD. I'm sorry.

JUDITH. There's nothing to be sorry for, really, because, after all, it's your particular "thing," isn't it? – observing everything and not giving yourself away an inch.

RICHARD. I suppose it is.

JUDITH. You'll get used to us in time, and then you'll feel cosier. Why don't you sit down? *(She sits on sofa.)*

RICHARD. *(sits beside her)* I'm enjoying myself very much.

JUDITH. It's very sweet of you to say so, but I don't see how you can be.

RICHARD. *(laughing suddenly)* But I am!

JUDITH. There now, that was quite a genuine laugh! We're getting on. Are you in love with Sorel?

RICHARD. *(surprised and embarrassed)* In love with Sorel?

JUDITH. *(repentantly)* Now I've killed it – I've murdered the little tender feeling of comfort that was stealing over you, by sheer tactlessness! Will you teach me to be tactful?

RICHARD. Did you really think I was in love with Sorel?

JUDITH. It's so difficult to tell, isn't it? – I mean, you might not know yourself. She's very attractive.

RICHARD. Yes, she is – very.

JUDITH. Have you heard her sing?

RICHARD. No, not yet.

JUDITH. She sings beautifully. Are you susceptible to music?

RICHARD. I'm afraid I don't know very much about it.

JUDITH. You probably are, then. I'll sing you something.

RICHARD. Please do.

JUDITH. *(rises and crosses to piano; he rises and stands center)*

It's awfully sad for a woman of my temperament to have a grown-up daughter, you know. I have to put my pride in my pocket and develop in her all the

charming little feminine tricks which will eventually cut me out altogether.

RICHARD. That wouldn't be possible.

JUDITH. I do hope you meant that, because it was a sweet remark. *(She is at the piano, turning over music.)*

RICHARD. *(crosses to piano)* Of course I meant it.

JUDITH. Will you lean on the piano in an attentive attitude? It's such a help.

RICHARD. *(leaning on piano)* You're an extraordinary person.

JUDITH. *(beginning to play)* In what way extraordinary?

RICHARD. When I first met Sorel, I guessed what you'd be like.

JUDITH. Did you, now? And am I?

RICHARD. *(smiling)* Exactly.

JUDITH. Oh, well! ...

(She plays and sings a little French song. There is a slight pause when it is finished.)

RICHARD. *(with feeling)* Thank you.

JUDITH. *(rising from the piano)* It's pretty, isn't it!

RICHARD. Perfectly enchanting.

JUDITH. *(crosses to sofa)* Shall we sit down again? *(She re-seats herself on sofa.)*

RICHARD. *(moving over to her)* Won't you sing any more?

JUDITH. No, no more – I want you to talk to me and tell me all about yourself, and the things you've done.

RICHARD. *(sits beside her)* I've done nothing.

JUDITH. What a shame! Why not?

RICHARD. I never realize how *dead* I am until I meet people like you. It's depressing, you know.

JUDITH. What nonsense! You're not a bit dead.

RICHARD. Do you always live here?

JUDITH. I'm going to, from now onwards. I intend to sink into a very beautiful old age. When the children marry, I shall wear a cap.

RICHARD. (*smiling*) How absurd!

JUDITH. I don't mean a funny cap.

RICHARD. You're far too full of vitality to sink into anything.

JUDITH. It's entirely spurious vitality. If you troubled to look below the surface, you'd find a very wistful and weary spirit. I've been battling with life for a long time.

RICHARD. Surely such successful battles as yours have been are not wearying?

JUDITH. Yes, they are – frightfully. I've reached an age now when I just want to sit back and let things go on around me – and they do.

RICHARD. I should like to know exactly what you're thinking about – really.

JUDITH. I was thinking of calling you Richard. It's such a nice uncompromising name.

RICHARD. I should be very flattered if you would.

JUDITH. I won't suggest you calling me Judith until you feel really comfortable about me.

RICHARD. But I do – Judith.

JUDITH. I'm awfully glad. Will you give me a cigarette?

RICHARD. (*producing case*) Certainly.

JUDITH. (*taking one*) Oh, what a divine case!

RICHARD. It was given to me in Japan three years ago. All those little designs mean things.

JUDITH. (*bending over it*) What sort of things?

(*He lights her cigarette.*)

RICHARD. Charms for happiness, luck, ~~and~~ – love.

JUDITH. Which is the charm for love?

RICHARD. That one.

JUDITH. What a dear!