

# David, Simon, Judith, Sorel, Clara

20

HAY FEVER

SIMON. You needn't worry about Myra and me. We shall keep out of every one's way.

SOREL. I shall take Richard on the river all day tomorrow.

JUDITH. In what?

SOREL. The punt.

→ flat bottom boat pushed along the river with a

JUDITH. I absolutely forbid you to go near the punt.

SIMON. It's sure to rain, anyhow.

JUDITH. What your father will say I tremble to think. He needs complete quiet to finish off "The Sinful Woman."

SOREL. I see no reason for there to be any noise, unless Sandy What's-his-name is given to shouting.

JUDITH. If you're rude to Sandy I shall be extremely angry.

(SIMON and SOREL bend over JUDITH and all talk loudly at once.)

SOREL.

SIMON.

JUDITH.

(together)

Now, look here, Mother –

Why you should expect –

He's coming all the way down specially to be nice to me –

(Enter DAVID down stairs. He looks slightly irritable.)

DAVID. (coming down to center) Why are you all making such a noise?

(SIMON crosses to piano and picks up book.)

JUDITH. I think I'm going mad!

DAVID. Why hasn't Clara brought me my tea?

JUDITH. I don't know.

DAVID. Where is Clara?

JUDITH. Do stop firing questions at me, David.

DAVID. Why are you all so irritable? What's happened?

(Enter CLARA from below stairs, with a tray of tea for one, and thrusts it into DAVID's hands.)

CLARA. Here's your tea. I'm sorry I'm late with it. Amy forgot to put the kettle on – she's got terrible toothache.

DAVID. Poor girl! Give her some oil of cloves.

SOREL. If anyone else mentions oil of cloves, I shall do something desperate! *(rises and moves a step left)*

DAVID. It's wonderful stuff. Where's Zoe?

SIMON. She was in the garden this morning.

DAVID. I suppose no one thought of giving her any lunch!

CLARA. I put it down by the kitchen table as usual, but she never came in for it.

SOREL. She's probably mousing.

DAVID. She isn't old enough yet. She might have fallen into the river, for all you care. I think it's a shame!

CLARA. Don't you worry your head – Zoe won't come to any harm; she's too wily. *(exit door below stairs)*

DAVID. I don't want to be disturbed.

*(He takes his tray and goes upstairs; then he turns.)*

Listen, Simon. There's a perfectly ~~sweet flapper~~ coming down by the four-thirty. Will you go and meet her and be nice to her? She's an abject fool, but a useful type, and I want to study her a little in domestic surroundings. She can sleep in the Japanese room.

*(He goes off, leaving behind him a deathly silence.)*

SOREL drops into chair down left.)

JUDITH. *(pause)* I should like someone to play something very beautiful to me on the piano.

SIMON. *(stamps up to French window center)* Damn everything! Damn! Damn! Damn!

SOREL. Swearing doesn't help.

SIMON. It helps me a lot.

SOREL. What does father mean by going on like that?

JUDITH. In view of the imminent reception, you'd better go and shave, Simon.

*(SIMON comes down and leans on piano.)*

SOREL. (*rising and bursting into tears of rage*) It's so beastly! Whenever I make any sort of plan about an always done in by someone. I wish I were earning my own living somewhere – a free agent – able to do whatever I liked without being cluttered up and frustrated by the family –

JUDITH. (*picturesquely*) It grieves me to hear you say that, Sorel.

SOREL. Don't be infuriating, mother!

JUDITH. (*sadly*) A change has come over my children of late, I have tried to shut my eyes to it, but in vain. At my time of life one must face bitter facts!

SIMON. This is going to be the blackest Saturday-till-Monday we've ever spent!

JUDITH. (*tenderly*) Sorel, you mustn't cry.

SOREL. Don't sympathize with me; it's only temper.

JUDITH. (*pulling her down on to sofa beside her*) Put your head on my shoulder, dear.

SIMON. (*bitterly*) Your head, like the golden fleece...

SOREL. (*tearfully*) Richard'll have to have "Little Hell" and that horrible flapper the Japanese room.

JUDITH. Over my dead body!

SIMON. (*comes over to his mother*) Mother, what *are* we to do?

(*JUDITH pulls him down on his knees and places his head on her right shoulder, SOREL's head on her left. Makes a charming little motherly picture.*)

JUDITH. We must all be very, very kind to every one!

SIMON. Now then, mother, none of that!

JUDITH. (*aggrieved*) I don't know what you mean, Simon.

SIMON. You were being beautiful and sad.

JUDITH. But I am beautiful and sad.

SIMON. You're not particularly beautiful, darling, and you never were.

JUDITH. Never mind; I made thousands think I was.

SIMON. And as for being sad –

JUDITH. (*pushes SIMON on the floor*) Now, Simon, I will not be dictated to like this! If I say I'm sad, I *am* sad. You don't understand, because you're precocious and tiresome... There comes a time in all women's lives –

SOREL. (*rises and stands at left corner of sofa*) Oh dear! (*with pained expression*)

JUDITH. What did you say, Sorel?

SOREL. I said, "Oh dear!"

JUDITH. Well, please don't say it again, because it annoys me.

SOREL. (*smiling*) You're such a lovely hypocrite!

JUDITH. (*casting up her eyes*) I don't know what I've done to be cursed with such ungrateful children! It's very cruel at my time of life –

SIMON. There you go again!

JUDITH. (*pause – inconsequently*) You're getting far too tall, Sorel.

SOREL. Sorry, mother!

JUDITH. Give me another of those disgusting cigarettes –

(*SIMON rises and goes to piano – quickly takes cigarette.*)

I don't know where they came from.

(*JUDITH rises and goes center. SIMON moves center and gives JUDITH cigarette.*)

SIMON. Here!

(*He lights it for her.*)

JUDITH. I'm going to forget entirely about all these dreadful people arriving. My mind henceforward shall be a blank on the subject.

SOREL. It's all very fine, mother, but –

JUDITH. I made a great decision this morning.

SIMON. What kind of decision?

JUDITH. It's a secret.

SOREL. Aren't you going to tell us?

JUDITH. Of course. I meant it was a secret from your father.