

Sorel + Richard

40

HAY FEVER

JACKIE. (takes case, turns it over and hands it back) Awfully pretty.

(They lapse into hopeless silence.)

(Enter SOREL downstairs — comes to left center.)

SOREL. Oh, Richard, I'm dreadfully sorry! I didn't know you were here.

(They shake hands.)

RICHARD. We've been here a good while.

SOREL. How awful! Please forgive me. I was upstairs.

(JACKIE bobs up under their hands and stands in front of RICHARD.)

RICHARD. This is Miss Coryton.

SOREL. Oh!

JACKIE. How do you do?

SOREL. Have you come to see father?

(RICHARD lights his cigarette.)

JACKIE. Yes.

SOREL. He's in his study. (moves away to center) You'd better go up.

(JACKIE looks hopelessly at RICHARD, then goes to SOREL and clutches her arm.)

JACKIE. I don't know the way.

SOREL. (irritably) Oh, well — I'll take you. Come on! Wait a minute, Richard. (She takes her to the bottom of the stairs.) It's along that passage and the third door on the right.

JACKIE. Oh, thank you. (She goes upstairs despondently.)

SOREL. (coming down again — to RICHARD) The poor girl looks half-witted.

RICHARD. She's shy, I think.

SOREL. I hope father will find her a comfort. (sits on right end of sofa)

RICHARD. Tell me one thing, Sorel, did your father and mother know I was coming? (sits beside her)

SOREL. Oh, yes; they were awfully pleased.

RICHARD. A rather nice-looking woman came down, in a big hat, and went into the garden with a young man, without saying a word.

SOREL. That was mother, I expect. We're an independent family – we entertain our friends sort of separately.

RICHARD. Oh, I see.

(slight pause)

SOREL. It was sweet of you to come.

RICHARD. I wanted to come – I've thought about you a lot.

SOREL. Have you really? That's thrilling!

RICHARD. I mean it. You're so alive and vital and different from other people.

SOREL. I'm so frightened that you'll be bored here.

RICHARD. Bored! Why should I be?

SOREL. Oh, I don't know. But you won't be, will you? – or if you are, tell me at once, and we'll do something quite different.

RICHARD. You're rather a dear, you know.

SOREL. I'm not. *(rises and goes center)* I'm devastating, entirely lacking in restraint. So's Simon, It's father's and mother's fault, really; you see, they're so vague – they've spent their lives cultivating their arts and not devoting any time to ordinary conventions and manners and things. I'm the only one who sees that, so I'm trying to be better. I'd love to be beautifully poised and carry off difficult situations with a lift of the eyebrows –

RICHARD. I'm sure you could carry off anything.

SOREL. *(moves to right corner of sofa)* There you are, you see, saying the right thing! You *always* say the right thing, and no one knows a bit what you're really thinking. That's what I adore.

RICHARD. I'm afraid to say anything now, in case you think I'm only being correct.

SOREL. But you are correct. I wish you'd teach Simon to be correct too. *(sits beside RICHARD again)*

RICHARD. It would be uphill work, I'm afraid.

SOREL. Why, don't you like him?

RICHARD. I've only met him for a moment.

(There is an uncomfortable pause.)

SOREL. Would you like to see the garden?

RICHARD. *(He half rises.)* Very much indeed.

SOREL. No, as a matter of fact –

(RICHARD sits again.)

– we'd better wait until after tea.

(another pause)

Shall I sing you something?

RICHARD. Please – I should love it.

(They both rise. SOREL goes reluctantly to piano.)

SOREL. *(comes slowly to sofa)* I don't want to really a bit – only I'm trying to entertain you. It's as easy as pie to talk in someone else's house, like at the dance the other night, but here on my own ground I'm finding it difficult.

RICHARD. *(puzzled)* I'm sorry.

SOREL. Oh, it isn't your fault; honestly, it isn't – you're awfully kind and responsive. *(sits on sofa)* What shall we do?

RICHARD. I'm quite happy talking *(sits beside her)* to you.

(pause)

SOREL. Can you play Mah Jong?

RICHARD. No, I'm afraid I can't.

SOREL. I'm so glad – I do hate it so.

(CLARA enters, with a small stool for tea, and places it with a bang at RICHARD's feet.)

Here's tea!

CLARA. Where's your mother – dear?