

Sebastian & Lydia

SEBASTIAN. Oh good, darling, you're back. The heating has gone wrong.

LYDIA Has it? It seems all right in here.

She gets briskly to her feet and feels an ancient radiator

Yes it's on.

SEBASTIAN (at the book-case). It's icy in my room.

LYDIA goes through the open door of the work-room. SEBASTIAN, left alone, pulls down a book and begins to search for some reference. Vainly. He puts that one on a pile near him and picks another. Same process. LYDIA comes out and quietly takes his glass from his hand.

Oh thank you so much, darling -

She fills up his glass, a procedure she can carry out in her sleep.

LYDIA. You hadn't turned it on.

SEBASTIAN. What on?

LYDIA. The heat.

SEBASTIAN (*deep in a book*). Really?

He says it as if it were a matter of the most breathless interest, a sure sign with him that he hasn't heard a word.

LYDIA comes back with his glass

Oh thank you, darling. What kept you out so long? Oh, of course, old Doctor Scheister. What did he say?

LYDIA. Schuster. He's very pleased indeed..

SEBASTIAN. What did I tell you? And you got held up by the bus-strike?

LYDIA. Not really. I found a new way on the Tube.

SEBASTIAN (*worried*). Should you have?

LYDIA. Oh, it was quite easy -

SEBASTIAN. I meant isn't it a bit like strike-breaking?

LYDIA. Your social conscience would have preferred I walked?

SEBASTIAN. It's not all that far, is it?

LYDIA. About as far as Fleet Street — to which I notice you've had a hire-car the last three days.

SEBASTIAN. A hire-car is different.

LYDIA. Why?

SEBASTIAN. I charge it to the paper, so it's on their conscience not mine. Good. I've got what I'm looking for — which is a wonder. Darling, our books have got in the most terrible mess again.

He pulls a book out.

Norman Mailer in the poetry section. Why?

Seeing something.

And — I can't believe it — Tarzan of the Apes. How did that get there?

LYDIA. You must have reviewed it, some time.

SEBASTIAN. Don't make tasteless jokes. . . Oh yes. I remember. There was a book on Rousseau called *The Noble Savage*, and I had to research.

Throwing her the book

Well that's for your favourite charity. . . What is it?... 'The Little Sisters of the Poor', or do you think it might give those nuns ideas?

LYDIA. Hardly give them. Remind them possibly.

SEBASTIAN (*pointing to the shelf*). Darling, it's an awful muddle. Couldn't Mrs Mackintyre — ?

LYDIA. Mrs Reedy. It hasn't been Mrs MacKintyre for three months.

SEBASTIAN. I call her Mrs MacKintyre.

LYDIA. She's noticed that.

SEBASTIAN pulls out another book, clicking his teeth. LYDIA takes it.

SEBASTIAN. Well couldn't she—?

LYDIA. No. She isn't, oddly enough, a trained librarian. She isn't a trained anything, come to that. She comes three times a week for two hours a day, never stops eating and costs a bomb.

SEBASTIAN. Is she worth having then?

LYDIA. Yes.

SEBASTIAN. I mean if she costs a bomb —

LYDIA (*loudly*). She's worth having.

SEBASTIAN. A little tetchy this afternoon, are we?

He reaches up and grabs another book.

Plain Talk About Sex - next to Peter Pan.

LYDIA (*taking it*). That's mine.

SEBASTIAN. For God's sake, why?

LYDIA. I bought it for a train, sometime.

SEBASTIAN (*taking off his spectacles*). That doesn't answer my question. Darling, I mean, with your early life -

LYDIA. Perhaps it needed a bit of brushing up.

Pause.

SEBASTIAN (*blowing on his glasses, carefully*). A criticism?

LYDIA. No. A comment. Where shall I put these books?

SEBASTIAN. In their proper sections. Where I suggest you might have put the others. You might go through them when you have a little time.

LYDIA. When I have a little time, it will be high on my list.

SEBASTIAN. You're in a stinking mood this evening, aren't you?

LYDIA. Am I?

SEBASTIAN. Was it what I said about your early misadventures?

LYDIA (*smiling*). No, stupid. You of all people have the right to talk about that. I mean thirty years after - nearly thirty - St. George must have occasionally reminded his damsel of the dragon he rescued her from.

SEBASTIAN (*embarrassed*). St George! Really! Anyway St George didn't have several ding-dongs with his damsel before he rescued her -

LYDIA. How do you know he didn't?

SEBASTIAN. Well, he wouldn't have been a saint, would he?

LYDIA. I think it was about what you said about 'criticism'. As if I would -

SEBASTIAN. But you said 'comment'.

LYDIA. There can be good comment as well as bad, can't there?

SEBASTIAN. In theory, yes. In fact, no. Remember, darling, that you're speaking to a critic. You meant something a bit harsh by 'comment'. Oh yes. I know. Now, darling you must realise -

LYDIA. You can't be expected to poke an old skeleton. I know.

SEBASTIAN. Darling, really! That wasn't very - tasteful, was it?

LYDIA. It was your taste. You said it.

SEBASTIAN. Then you shouldn't have remembered it. Not the actual words.