

The Lovers

A Playlet  
by  
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Translated  
by  
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CHARACTER NAME

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

AGE

GENDER

KLARA

MATT

The Narrator

The theatre is decked out as a park, in moonlight. To the right, a stone bench at the foot of a tree, whose branches fall to the ground.

At curtain up the stage is empty. The Narrator enters SL. She is dressed in black with white gloves, very solemn. She advances elegantly, with small steps, to the proscenium and addresses the audience.

## SCENE ONE

### THE NARRATOR

Ladies, gentlemen, this scene represents a corner of a park, in the evening. The evening is mild, filled with the mingling of sweet aromas. Against the sky, bathed in moonlight, the leaves intertwine like black lace on purple silk. Between the shadows, between soft and strange silhouettes, veiled in silver clouds, off in the distance, shines a blanket of light. Pond, lake, one can't say, whatever you please. Divine and misty night! Love is everywhere, its mystery circulates through invisible avenues, over the undergrowth, in the clearings, and its breath gently stirs the branches. It's exquisite! (Indicating the bench, tenderly.) And here is a bench, an old bench, not too mossy, not too overgrown. An old stone bench, broad and smooth as an altar. An altar where one celebrates the rites of love.

(She proclaims.)

I love stone benches, deep in the woods in the evening.

(A beat.)

Ladies, gentlemen, when the curtain rises on a stage where one sees a bench to the right, close by a tree, a fountain, or whatever it may be, inevitably it must be the setting for a love scene. Is it necessary for me to tell you that very soon, during this trembling night, oh the sadness of amorous hearts! The lover, according to custom, will come and sit down on this bench, close to his love, and there the two of them in turn will murmur, moan, weep, sob, sing, celebrate the eternal truths. (Looking across the park.) What did I say? I hear the sound of brushing leaves, I see two shadows advancing slowly through the branches. Here they are. Oh how sad they seem!

(The two lovers enter slowly. They are both sad. MATT wears a dinner jacket, KLARA is wrapped in lace. As they arrive the Narrator salutes the audience and leaves, stepping away discreetly.)

## SCENE TWO

KLARA

Ah! Here's the bench, the dear bench. (KLARA comes forward to the bench, with his arm around KLARA waist, tenderly.) The dear old stone bench, so often the scene of our intoxication, of our ecstasy.

MATT

(Aside.) Again with the bench.

KLARA

You look tired. Would you like to rest a little?

MATT

(Distractedly.) I suppose so.

KLARA

Give me your hand.

MATT

(Aside.) Always with the bench!

KLARA

How wonderful you are! You're more wonderful than ever this evening. And it's such a wonderful evening too.

(They sit on the bench, MATT to the right, unwillingly. KLARA leans towards him and taking his hands, looks into his eyes. Quite a long silence.)

MATT

(Still distracted and vague.) Exquisite.

KLARA

Isn't it?

MATT

(Same air.) Yes.

KLARA

(Lyrically.) Oh, what a powerful mystery is love? Every evening we come here, with the same surroundings, the same clearing, the same nocturnal dreamscape. And yet, every evening it seems that I find a renewed joy, even stronger and even more mysterious. And more enigmatic and sweet, so sweet!

(A bird in the tree above them wakes, gives a terrified cry and flies away. KLARA goes quiet. KLARA drops her hands, looks in the direction where the bird has flown, then takes her hands again more forcefully.)

So sweet. (Silence.) So utterly sweet! (Silence again.) Isn't it?

MATT

What?

KLARA

Isn't it sweet?

MATT

What is?

KLARA

(Rather disconcerted.) But ... I don't know ... the clearing, this nocturnal dreamscape, this little flying bird. (All of a sudden more enthusiastically.) And our happiness, our crazy happiness.

MATT

Oh! Yes, sorry, so sweet! (MATT sighs.)

KLARA

(After a little silence. Hurt.) Is there something wrong?

MATT

What?

KLARA

Your voice is odd, I don't recognise it. You've changed. (A beat.) My beloved. (Silence.) Dearest soul. (Silence again. Insistent.) Dearest treasure of my heart. (Silence. KLARA comes closer to her and tries to embrace her more tightly. MATT draws away a little.) Why won't you say anything? What are you thinking about?

MATT

Nothing.

KLARA

You're thinking about nothing? Are you angry?

MATT

Angry?

KLARA

Yes.

MATT

Why do you think I should be angry?

KLARA

(Tenderly.) I don't want to ... I want you ... I beg you ... Are you angry?

MATT

Should I be angry?

KLARA

(Very sad.) But you haven't said anything ... I'm talking to you ... I'm talking about things ...

MATT

That are so sweet!

KLARA

Yes, I'm talking to you ... and you say nothing!

MATT

I'm not angry.

KLARA

Are you sad?

MATT

No! What an idea! Why would I be sad?

KLARA

There's something ... you're hiding something ...

MATT

No, honestly, there's nothing wrong.

KLARA

You can't fool me, you can't fool my heart, my heart tells me that there's something wrong, what is it?

MATT

Nothing.

KLARA

(Insisting passionately.) Tell me, tell me, what's wrong?

MATT

(Irritated, MATT rises and goes SL.) Nothing, nothing. (MATT cries.) There's nothing wrong.

KLARA

(Running and trying to embrace her.) You're crying. Oh! You're crying.

MATT

No, I'm not crying, I'm not crying.

KLARA

Yes, yes, you're crying.

MATT

Leave me alone.

KLARA

I can hear you crying. Why are you crying?

MATT

It's my nerves. The night maybe. (A bit bitter.) Or maybe it's the clearing, this nocturnal dreamscape, and our happiness! It's nothing you see, I'm not crying. (MATT sobs.) But it's absurd, I don't want to, I don't want to cry.

KLARA

(Troubled and looking for words.) My love, my beloved, love of my heart, because you're mine aren't you? And I'm yours. (MATT gives a gesture of sad denial.) Yes, we belong to one another, the two of us.

MATT

(Shaking her head and sighing.) Oh! Not really!

KLARA

Listen, I don't want you to cry. You mustn't, you can't cry. When you cry it makes me mad, I can't live any more ... I ... I ... Speak to me, take pity on me, tell me. (Looking at his hand.) Oh! A tear has fallen on your hand, a dear teardrop from your dear eyes, on your hand!

MATT

No it hasn't.

KLARA

Yes, yes it has.

MATT

It's a drop of dew, that's all.

KLARA

Dew from your eyes ... on your hand. (KLARA takes her hand.) Dear little teardrop on the hand. (A beat.) Did I hurt you?

MATT

Why would you have hurt me?

KLARA

I don't know, without knowing it, did I hurt you?

MATT

No, no.

KLARA

So, someone else hurt you? (Heroically.) If I knew that who'd hurt you? (Very agitated.) I'd show them what for. (KLARA menaces far away ghosts.)

MATT

Calm down, let me go, what's the use? You don't understand. It's not your fault, you're a woman and I'm a man.

KLARA

(Tenderly. Cynical all of a sudden.) Oh yes of course, that's obvious.

MATT

(Pushing him away.) You're so crude!

KLARA

(Taking her hands.) Oh!

MATT

You know very well that you can't understand. You need to be a man to understand ... to understand what I suffer. (MATT takes a few steps, plaintively.)

KLARA

You're suffering!

MATT

No.

KLARA

I knew that you were suffering.

MATT

Forget it, you're tiring me, take me back to the house.

KLARA

I beg you, tell me about your suffering, your dear suffering. Aren't I your ... your ...  
(Lower.) Your lover. The lover of your lips, of your eyes, of your hair ... and all of your  
burning and secret flesh.

MATT

Oh that! Of course.

KLARA

Aren't I the lover of your thoughts, of your heart, of your soul? (Passionately.) Aren't I  
the soul of your soul? It'd be horrible, I beg you ...

MATT

No, leave me alone. Take me back to the house, nothing you say can change things, I was  
wrong to show you how I suffer, it would be better if I suffered alone.

KLARA

Suffer alone? Oh no. I won't allow it, never. I want to share your sorrow.

MATT

That's enough, you'll upset me, it would be much better if ...

KLARA

(Exalted.) I want to share everything. Your sorrows, your dear sorrows, everything do you  
understand? Suffer alone? Monstrous! How can you say that? (Caressingly.) I want you  
to be happy.

MATT

How can I be happy now, since ...

KLARA

Since ...

MATT

Since you don't love me any more.

KLARA

Good God! I don't love you?

MATT

Obviously.

KLARA

How can you say that?

MATT

I can say that because you don't love me any more.

KLARA

But that's insane, profoundly insane. It's utter madness. I don't love you? You know, that's blasphemy, it's madness. (MATT moves.) Yes, that's the word, madness. Where did you get this insane idea from?

MATT

It's obvious.

KLARA

Obvious? That's too vague. Be precise, I insist that you be specific.

MATT

You're not the same any more.

KLARA

I don't agree.

MATT

I feel like I bore you.

KLARA

Not at all.

MATT

You've started smoking again.

KLARA

But I've always smoked, darling, don't you remember, haven't I always smoked?

MATT

Not like now. Before, you wouldn't have dared to smoke after ...

KLARA

Oh, I see, yes.

MATT

And you've let yourself go.

KLARA

What!

MATT

You neglect yourself, you've let yourself go.

KLARA

Oh, I'm sorry.

MATT

A man in love notices these things.

KLARA

I didn't expect this ... that's really very unexpected. Let myself go? I can take a little criticism but let myself go? (Bitter and angry.) So you think I'm dirty?

MATT

Who said that?

KLARA

I disgust you?

MATT

There you go, you always exaggerate.

KLARA

Really, have I changed? It's humiliating, I'm humiliated ... beyond humiliated ... very, very humiliated. (Dignified.) On my honour, for the sake of our love, you must be more specific. Because I can't stand humiliation.

MATT

It's just a feeling, nothing specific.

KLARA

Tell me.

MATT

It's little things, subtleties, trivialities that add up to something that's hard to explain.

KLARA

Trivialities? But I'm not a trivial woman. It's unthinkable, it's extraordinarily humiliating. (A silence.)

MATT

Well, you're not denying it.

KLARA

What, not denying it? You're unbelievable this evening, yes I deny it, I deny it with all my heart.

MATT

No, that's where I can see that you no longer love me. Before, you would have jumped out of your skin.

KLARA

I jumped, I'm still jumping.

MATT

Not like before.

KLARA

It's too much ...

MATT

You've changed. Take this afternoon, I thought I was going to die.

KLARA

Die?

MATT

And you didn't even notice.

KLARA

Die, this afternoon? I've never seen you so happy, so charming, so joyful. Do you remember, in the drawing room, the curtains closed, the sofa, I caressed you ...you ungrateful ... we kissed ... you forget that?

MATT

What are you talking about?

KLARA

I took you in my arms, and when my hand wandered beneath your underwear. You were so wonderful, submissive ... swooning. I said ...

MATT

(Frigidly.) Shut up. You're beneath contempt.

KLARA

You thought you were going to die? Of pleasure perhaps.

MATT

Oh, you smug cow.

KLARA

So what did you think you were dying of this afternoon?

MATT

Don't ask.

KLARA

But I want to know. (With energy.) I want to know.

MATT

You know very well.

KLARA

I swear I don't.

MATT

Don't swear, it doesn't suit you.

KLARA

I swear, I'll find it, I'll remember. What happened this afternoon?

MATT

Nothing happened, what's the use of talking about it? You don't understand, I should have hidden the scars on my soul. What does my soul mean to you?

KLARA

Don't confuse things. It wasn't about your soul this afternoon, it was ...

MATT

Would you shut up?

KLARA

Really, darling, I don't understand anything that you've said. You're very strange this evening.

MATT

Strange, that's it, I'm strange. I was waiting for the insults.

KLARA

I didn't insult you, I just said you're acting strange this evening.

MATT

And what about you then? You've offended me.

KLARA

Offended you?

MATT

Do you love me? Oh, so courageous. You really need a lot of courage to love a young, handsome, desirable, rich man.

KLARA

That's not what it's about.

MATT

And you think you've left everything behind, sacrificed everything for him, and between two puffs of a cigar you think you love him.

KLARA

That's rubbish.

MATT

You love me? Do you even care if I'm happy?

KLARA

Certainly.

MATT

Have you, even for one second in your entire life given a thought to my reputation, to my peace of mind, to my honour? (KLARA moves to her.) Yes, my honour.

KLARA

But darling ...

MATT

Have you taken care to behave correctly, to respect me, to respect my family. No, never. I flattered you, I made you proud, and you wounded me. Of course!

KLARA

That's too much! That's just stupid.

MATT

Haven't you wounded me? Do you dare to say that you haven't?

KLARA

Let me speak, you must let me speak.

MATT

The restaurants, the party in Hampstead, boxes at the opera. What do I know? And your friends, that you bought to my house, that you tell about our most intimate secrets. (Denials from him.) What do you call that?

KLARA

Be fair, you know - my friends, the restaurants, the opera, it was you darling who wanted those things.

MATT

Me?

KLARA

Yes, you, out of love for me.

MATT

That's the limit. You've got no sense of morality.

KLARA

Think, remember. How many times did I have to rein you in?

MATT

Rein me in?

KLARA

Yes, rein you in. How many times did I have to stop you behaving recklessly, imprudently.

MATT

That's rubbish.

KLARA

I'm not criticising you, try to understand darling. I was proud of you, I said to myself, 'What a great soul. He's such a free spirit. He loves me so much he's willing to ruin his reputation, to challenge the stupidity of conventional society.' You were sublime.

MATT

Really? You're amazing. Your ability to misunderstand is beyond imagination. So you think I had the great desire to shout to the world, 'This is my lover, have a good look, that's her.' The one who treats me like shit. (Angrily.) Is that what you think of me? Is that what you take me for? Some whore?

KLARA

What's that? Where did you get that from?

MATT

It's obvious, I was just a whore to you, another one on the list. I understand now. Now I see. It's evil, it's low. (MATT hides her face and sobs.) Oh the shame!

KLARA

You're crying again. My God. I don't know what to say, what to do.

MATT

Don't say anything, show some dignity.

KLARA

I'm baffled, stunned. You twist my words, you twist my actions.

MATT

Did I deserve to be treated like that? You're too cruel.

KLARA

Listen. (KLARA takes him in his arms and gently takes him back to the bench and makes him sit down.) Listen, I beg you.

MATT

Never, I don't want to. You don't deserve it, you're vile.

KLARA

Don't cry, it tortures me to hear you crying.

MATT

What do you care? What do you really care?

KLARA

Maybe I was wrong. I didn't know, but I'm sure I acted badly. I admit it, please forgive me.

MATT

(Tears in her voice.) I'm better off dead.

KLARA

Don't talk like that, I forbid you. Die? You don't have the right to die.

MATT

Yes, yes. It would be better if I died. My happiness is shattered forever, do you see? I'm nothing to you. Just a trophy, a bauble, a bit of fun. But I'm nothing to you. My soul means nothing to you.

KLARA

Your soul?

MATT

Yes, my soul ... you heartless witch ... my poor soul. What does it mean to you?

KLARA

Don't say that, your soul is everything to me.

MATT

It's nothing, nothing anymore.

KLARA

It's everything, it's my life, all my life, all my joy.

MATT

You don't even think about it. You don't think of me.

KLARA

I think of nothing but you.

MATT

I understand. Sometimes I'm like a child ...

KLARA

(Cradling her.) A little baby.

MATT

A capricious baby, sensitive, and mad.

KLARA

Oh baby, dear baby.

MATT

The baby needs to be cradled, consoled, for its soul to be caressed with sweet things.

KLARA

I'll cradle you, I'll console you, I'll caress you.

MATT

Always?

KLARA

Always!

MATT

Do you think you're smarter than me?

KLARA

How can you ...

MATT

You think I'm stupid?

KLARA

You?

MATT

Yes, you think I'm stupid. Do you think I'm stupid?

KLARA

There. (She hugs him.) Dear, dear love. Stupid? You're my sun, my soulmate, my everything, (Gaily.) My dearest little thing.

MATT

Because if you thought I was stupid?

KLARA

You are my courage, without you I'm nothing. When I'm not with you I'm lost, like a pour soul, like a lost voyager, like a dog wandering in the forest, or lost in a crowd.

MATT

Tell me again, that makes me happy.

KLARA

There isn't a day, not a minute, not a second when I'm without you. Day and night you're in my dreams, in my thoughts, in my work. Not one minute, you understand where your heart, your soul.

MATT

More more!

KLARA

Your heart, your soul, your eyes, your hands, your dear hands. Your dear eyes.

MATT

Is it really true? Swear on it.

KLARA

Yes, yes, I swear it! Your lips, give me your lips.

MATT

(Half-swooning.) Oh darling, darling you'll never hurt your baby?

KLARA

Of course I swear it, never, your soul, your mouth, your ... (Silence. Kissing.)

CURTAIN