

CLASSICS TO GO
THE
PHILANDERER



BERNARD SHAW

The Philanderer

Bernard Shaw

ACT I

A lady and gentleman are making love to one another in the drawing-room of a flat in Ashly Gardens in the Victoria district of London. It is past ten at night. The walls are hung with theatrical engravings and photographs—Kemble as Hamlet, Mrs. Siddons as Queen Katharine pleading in court, Macready as Werner (after Maclise), Sir Henry Irving as Richard III (after Long), Miss Ellen Terry, Mrs. Kendal, Miss Ada Rehan, Madame Sarah Bernhardt, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, Mr. A. W. Pinero, Mr. Sydney Grundy, and so on, but not the Signora Duse or anyone connected with Ibsen. The room is not a perfect square, the right hand corner at the back being cut off diagonally by the doorway, and the opposite corner rounded by a turret window filled up with a stand of flowers surrounding a statue of Shakespear. The fireplace is on the right, with an armchair near it. A small round table, further forward on the same side, with a chair beside it, has a yellow-backed French novel lying open on it. The piano, a grand, is on the left, open, with the keyboard in full view at right angles to the wall. The piece of music on the desk is "When other lips." Incandescent lights, well shaded, are on the piano and mantelpiece. Near the piano is a sofa, on which the lady and gentleman are seated affectionately side by side, in one another's arms.

The lady, Grace Tranfield, is about 32, slight of build, delicate of feature, and sensitive in expression. She is just now given up to the emotion of the moment; but her well closed mouth, proudly set brows, firm chin, and elegant carriage show plenty of determination and self respect. She is in evening dress.

The gentleman, Leonard Charteris, a few years older, is unconventionally but smartly dressed in a velvet jacket and cashmere trousers. His collar, dyed Wotan blue, is part of his shirt, and turns over a garnet coloured scarf of Indian silk, secured by a turquoise ring. He wears blue socks and leather sandals. The arrangement of his tawny hair, and of his moustaches and short beard, is apparently left to Nature; but he has taken care that Nature shall do him the fullest justice. His amative enthusiasm, at which he is himself laughing, and his clever, imaginative, humorous ways, contrast strongly with the sincere tenderness and dignified quietness of the woman.

CHARTERIS (impulsively clasping Grace). My dearest love.

GRACE (responding affectionately). My darling. Are you happy?

CHARTERIS. In Heaven.

GRACE. My own.

CHARTERIS. My heart's love. (He sighs happily, and takes her hands in his, looking quaintly at her.) That must positively be my last kiss, Grace, or I shall become downright silly. Let us talk. (Releases her and sits a little apart from her.) Grace: is this your first love affair?

GRACE. Have you forgotten that I am a widow? Do you think I married Tranfield for money?

CHARTERIS. How do I know? Besides, you might have married him not because you loved him, but because you didn't love anybody else. When one is young, one marries out of mere curiosity, just to see what it's like.

GRACE. Well, since you ask me, I never was in love with Tranfield, though I only found that out when I fell in love with you. But I used to like him for being in love with me. It

brought out all the good in him so much that I have wanted to be in love with some one ever since. I hope, now that I am in love with you, you will like me for it just as I liked Tranfield.

CHARTERIS. My dear, it is because I like you that I want to marry you. I could love anybody—any pretty woman, that is.

GRACE. Do you really mean that, Leonard?

CHARTERIS. Of course. Why not?

GRACE (reflecting). Never mind why. Now tell me, is this your first love affair?

CHARTERIS (amazed at the simplicity of the question). No, bless my soul. No—nor my second, nor my third.

GRACE. But I mean your first serious one.

CHARTERIS (with a certain hesitation). Yes. (There is a pause. She is not convinced. He adds, with a very perceptible load on his conscience.) It is the first in which I have been serious.

GRACE (searchingly). I see. The other parties were always serious.

CHARTERIS. No, not always—heaven forbid!

GRACE. How often?

CHARTERIS. Well, once.

GRACE. Julia Craven?

CHARTERIS (recoiling). Who told you that? (She shakes her head mysteriously, and he turns away from her moodily and adds) You had much better not have asked.

GRACE (gently). I'm sorry, dear. (She puts out her hand and pulls softly at him to bring him near her again.)

CHARTERIS (yielding mechanically to the pull, and allowing her hand to rest on his arm, but sitting squarely without the least attempt to return the caress). Do I feel harder to the touch than I did five minutes ago?

GRACE. What nonsense!

CHARTERIS. I feel as if my body had turned into the toughest of hickory. That is what comes of reminding me of Julia Craven. (Brooding, with his chin on his right hand and his elbow on his knee.) I have sat alone with her just as I am sitting with you—

GRACE (shrinking from him). Just!

CHARTERIS (sitting upright and facing her steadily). Just exactly. She has put her hands in mine, and laid her cheek against mine, and listened to me saying all sorts of silly things. (Grace, chilled to the soul, rises from the sofa and sits down on the piano stool, with her back to the keyboard.) Ah, you don't want to hear any more of the story. So much the better.

GRACE (deeply hurt, but controlling herself). When did you break it off?

CHARTERIS (guiltily). Break it off?

GRACE (firmly). Yes, break it off.

CHARTERIS. Well, let me see. When did I fall in love with you?

GRACE. Did you break it off then?

CHARTERIS (mischievously, making it plainer and plainer that it has not been broken off). It was clear then, of course,

that it must be broken off.

GRACE. And did you break it off?

CHARTERIS. Oh, yes: / broke it off,

GRACE. But did she break it off?

CHARTERIS (rising). As a favour to me, dearest, change the subject. Come away from the piano: I want you to sit here with me. (Takes a step towards her.)

GRACE. No. I also have grown hard to the touch—much harder than hickory for the present. Did she break it off?

CHARTERIS. My dear, be reasonable. It was fully explained to her that it was to be broken off.

GRACE. Did she accept the explanation?

CHARTERIS. She did what a woman like Julia always does. When I explained personally, she said it was not not my better self that was speaking, and that she knew I still really loved her. When I wrote it to her with brutal explicitness, she read the letter carefully and then sent it back to me with a note to say that she had not had the courage to open it, and that I ought to be ashamed of having written it. (Comes beside Grace, and puts his left hand caressingly round her neck.) You see, dearie, she won't look the situation in the face.

GRACE. (shaking off his hand and turning a little away on the stool). I am afraid, from the light way in which you speak of it, you did not sound the right chord.

CHARTERIS. My dear, when you are doing what a woman calls breaking her heart, you may sound the very prettiest chords you can find on the piano; but to her ears it is just like this—(Sits down on the bass end of the keyboard. Grace

puts her fingers in her ears. He rises and moves away from the piano, saying) No, my dear: I've been kind; I've been frank; I've been everything that a goodnatured man could be: she only takes it as the making up of a lover's quarrel. (Grace winces.) Frankness and kindness: one is as the other—especially frankness. I've tried both. (He crosses to the fireplace, and stands facing the fire, looking at the ornaments on the mantelpiece and warming his hands.)

GRACE (Her voice a little strained). What are you going to try now?

CHARTERIS (on the hearthrug, turning to face her). Action, my dear! Marriage!! In that she must believe. She won't be convinced by anything short of it, because, you see, I have had some tremendous philanderings before and have gone back to her after them.

GRACE. And so that is why you want to marry me?

CHARTERIS. I cannot deny it, my love. Yes: it is your mission to rescue me from Julia.

GRACE (rising). Then, if you please, I decline to be made use of for any such purpose. I will not steal you from another woman. (She begins to walk up and down the room with ominous disquiet.)

CHARTERIS. Steal me! (Comes towards her.) Grace: I have a question to put to you as an advanced woman. Mind! as an advanced woman. Does Julia belong to me? Am I her owner—her master?

GRACE. Certainly not. No woman is the property of a man. A woman belongs to herself and to nobody else.

CHARTERIS. Quite right. Ibsen for ever! That's exactly my opinion. Now tell me, do I belong to Julia; or have I a right to belong to myself?

GRACE (puzzled). Of course you have; but—

CHARTERIS (interrupting her triumphantly). Then how can you steal me from Julia if I don't belong to her? (Catching her by the shoulders and holding her out at arm's length in front of him.) Eh, little philosopher? No, my dear: if Ibsen sauce is good for the goose, it's good for the gander as well. Besides (coaxing her) it was nothing but a philander with Julia—nothing else in the world, I assure you.

GRACE (breaking away from him). So much the worse! I hate your philanderings: they make me ashamed of you and of myself. (Goes to the sofa and sits in the right hand corner of it, leaning gloomily on her elbow with her face averted.)

CHARTERIS. Grace: you utterly misunderstand the origin of my philanderings. (Sits down beside her.) Listen to me: am I a particularly handsome man?

GRACE (turning to him as if astonished at his conceit). No!

CHARTERIS (triumphantly). You admit it. Am I a well dressed man?

GRACE. Not particularly.

CHARTERIS. Of course not. Have I a romantic mysterious charm about me?—do I look as if a secret sorrow preyed on me?—am I gallant to women?

GRACE. Not in the least.

CHARTERIS. Certainly not. No one can accuse me of it. Then whose fault is it that half the women I speak to fall in love with me? Not mine: I hate it: it bores me to distraction. At first it flattered me—delighted me—that was how Julia got me, because she was the first woman who had the pluck to make me a declaration. But I soon had enough of it; and at no time have I taken the initiative and persecuted women

with my advances as women have persecuted me. Never. Except, of course, in your case.

GRACE. Oh, you need not make any exception. I had a good deal of trouble to induce you to come and see us. You were very coy.

CHARTERIS (fondly, taking her hand). With you, dearest, the coyness was sheer coquetry. I loved you from the first, and fled only that you might pursue. But come! let us talk about something really interesting. (Takes her in his arms.) Do you love me better than anyone else in the world?

GRACE. I don't think you like to be loved too much.

CHARTERIS. That depends on who the person is. You (pressing her to his heart) cannot love me too much: you cannot love me half enough. I reproach you every day for your coldness—your— (Violent double knock heard without. They start and listen, still in one another's arms, hardly daring to breathe.) Who the deuce is calling at this hour?

GRACE. I can't imagine. (They listen guiltily. The door of the flat is opened without. They hastily get away from one another.)

A WOMAN'S VOICE OUTSIDE. Is Mr. Charteris here?

CHARTERIS (springing up). Julia! The devil! (Stands at the left of the sofa with his hands on it, bending forward with his eyes fixed on the door.)

GRACE (rising also). What can she want?

THE VOICE. Never mind: I will announce myself. (A beautiful, dark, tragic looking woman, in mantle and bonnet, appears at the door, raging furiously.) Oh, this is charming. I have interrupted a pretty tete-a-tete. Oh, you villain! (She comes straight at Grace. Charteris runs across behind the