

Sarah Wants the Moon

By

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Sarah Wants the Moon a play in one act

Characters

Sarah Bernhardt, a young actress
Jean, a young actor. Sarah's ex lover
Perrin, Director at the Comedie Francaise
Sophie, a rival actress
Youle, Sarah's mother
Male voice, offstage

Paris, Late nineteenth century

(A bare, dimly lit stage at the Comedie Francaise in Paris. Mid afternoon in January 1874. A young woman enters hurriedly from the wings, removes her straw hat and turns on a rehearsal lantern. She is dressed severely in a black frock with a white ruff at the neck. She removes a book from her string purse and holds a marked place in it to the light, then takes a pen from an inkstand atop a small cabinet and attempts to mark something in the book but finds that the inkwell is empty. Book in hand, she silently reads as she moves back toward the wings, only to glide back towards center until she feigns being startled by something she sees. Her face registers pain, her arms writhe in anguish. The silhouette of a man appears at the other end of the stage and is apparently watching her.)

YOUNG MAN

Are you in pain, my love?

SARAH

AHHHHH! Who's there? Who are you?

YOUNG MAN

Don't you know me Sarah?

SARAH

Come closer

(turns up the lantern)

Jean? Jean is that you?

JEAN

Yes, it's me.

SARAH

But, you're so handsome. Were you that handsome before?

JEAN

(shrugs)
I think so.

SARAH

Impossible! I would have noticed it.

JEAN

You only see things on the stage. You saw me here, on these boards as your lover, but not in your boudoir.

SARAH

Nonsense! I have never deceived you. I was yours completely. My love for you was all over me like a tattoo.

JEAN

You deceived me Sarah.

SARAH

Hah! You think you know me, but you don't. Of course I loved you, but it was like being in chains in an airless room,

JEAN

You deceived me. You deceived me every time you moaned in ecstasy and dug into my back with your pretty pink claws.

SARAH

I love you very much, but I'm no longer in love with you. I needed to do something big, something important. You killed my love for you with your tight reins, No. The only sensible thing was to end that foolishness and become friends. Now. Kiss me.

JEAN

What?

SARAH

Kiss me Jean.

JEAN

What on earth for?

SARAH

To show you. I may have simulated ecstasy in your bed, but I have no need to do it here.

JEAN

And why is that? I would love to know.

SARAH

Because this is where I live. Here I could seduce the public. And I'm repaid, satisfied by all those rising climaxes of applause. It gives me more pleasure than a thousand nights in your bed. Do you understand?

JEAN

Have you ever tried to understand me? I was fresh from the Sticks where most women know only one man, where they live for him and their children. I come to Paris and fall in love with Bernhardt. I didn't know about free women and it scared me to death. It still does.

SARAH

I suppose your constant, hammering lovemaking was done out of Fear. You were never scared...physically.

JEAN

Only a matter of hydraulics.

SARAH

Hah!

JEAN

It's true. For years I thought that thing down there was a Bone. I imagined it. Just as you live in a world of make believe. There's a danger in trying to create a world that can't exist.

SARAH

It DOES exist. The curtain goes up and I see my whole life under the lights. No painted palaces, no painted clouds. They are all real for me...and they are all MINE! So, here we are on the stage of the Comedie Francaise. I know why I'm here. What about you?

JEAN

Didn't Perrin tell you? I'm replacing Monfort as the husband in this piece. I'm playing your deceptive husband. Ironic isn't it?

Now I get a chance to deceive YOU.

SARAH

Wonderful! We play well together. We always seem to spark each Other...on the stage. I don't have the lead part in this you know. Sophie has that, and we all know why.

JEAN

I never saw you as a gossip. I thought she was your friend.

SARAH

She is. There's no gossip, she's already being talked about. Of course she's my friend...walking in the park eating chocolates, but, as you know, backstage is not a pretty place.

JEAN

I like your role. Sympathetic. I think it suits you, only do yourself A favor. Make sure your mother isn't around. The more she ignores you The better you are on the stage.

SARAH

Really? How strange. This role is a lot better than my last character. Her father was a Carolinian planter and her mother a mulatto slave. The planter remarks that she is pretty, and I am born of that remark. There wasn't much more to it. I am either constantly miscast, or ignored. But I intend to shine in this one. It's my big moment. I could feel that. You Know the scene where she catches her husband in his lover's arms? She is Bathed in moonlight, and she stands there stunned and helpless. It's so poignant.

(PERRIN and SOPHIE enter chatting. SOPHIE is
Cont.
Wearing a dress with multicolored scrolls and
Stripes printed on it.)

SOPHIE

...but I think a rose colored gown would make the moonlight seems less somber. She is young, and she is in love after all.

PERRIN

Whatever you wish my dear. I understand that sentiment, thanks to you and
(Sees Sarah and Jean)
Ah, you're already here. Good. We can work until dinnertime.

SARAH

Who's going to want dinner after one of these rehearsals?

PERRIN

We have to work out the lighting. It must be perfect. It must be Dramatic. (Calls) ARE YOU UP THERE MICHEL?

VOICE

OUI MONSIEUR

SARAH

It must be lit exactly the right way.

SOPHIE

Hello Sarah. You look like a school Mistress.

SARAH

Hello Sophie. You look like a Babylonian Road Woman.

PERRIN

Let's begin with act three. As you know it takes place in a forest glade. Take your places for the kiss (Sophie and Jean go to center)

SOPHIE

(To Sarah)

What did you say I looked like?

SARAH

I said you look as vibrant as a babbling brook.

PERRIN

Bernhardt, you come in from the left and....

SARAH

Do you mean my left, or the left of the audience?

PERRIN

It's always from the actor's left at the Comedie. You Should know that.

SARAH

Yes, but....

PERRIN

But, WHAT?

SARAH

It's a very cold area to enter from.

PERRIN

Then, put on your wrap.

SARAH

I'm serious. Cold. In the sense of eerie, ghostly, uh, Sinister. It's the entrance for Lady Macbeth.

PERRIN

Yes. You should play her sometime.

SARAH

Why don't you like me Monsieur? I always try to please.

PERRIN

It's nothing. I just don't like you.

SARAH

That is not my responsibility. (Shakes script in his face.)
THIS is. My character Berthe is young and sensitive. She is faithful to her husband. Downstage right, is warmer. It has a friendly feeling.

PERRIN

I don't care if you enter from the gates of hell. Let's get on With this.

SARAH

I am perfectly happy to but...

PERRIN

Now, what is it?

SARAH

I would like to make a note of that.

PERRIN

Of what? The gates of hell?

SARAH

Of my entrance.

PERRIN

What, Mademoiselle is preventing you from doing that?

SARAH

The inkwell is empty.

PERRIN

Are you asking me to fill it for you? There is a reserve in the cabinet. You have only to look.

SARAH

Oh, let's not waste time. I can do it later.

PERRIN

Now. As I said. The setting is a forest glade. Sophie is discovered by you in your husband's arms.

SARAH

I cross a footbridge. I see them in the moonlight and I....

PERRIN

If it's alright with you . I can manage this direction without
Your help.

SARAH

It says right here that I must drop my cloak when I see them and...

PERRIN

What you must do is follow my direction. Do you understand?

SARAH

Of course Monsieur.

PERRIN

You stop and pose. You are convulsed by what you see.

SARAH

I am bathed in moonlight. I look irresistibly poignant.

PERRIN

Alright, alright. MICHEL, GIVE THEM THE MOONLIGHT.

(Jean and Sophie move to center. Sarah goes
Downstage right, preparing for her entrance.
A spotlight falls on the couple who are kissing
rapturously. Sarah glides towards center as she
had at the beginning of the play. She stops
Registering shock at seeing them as another spot
light falls on her.)

PERRIN (continuing)

Marvelous! That kiss will bring a great ovation. But one moon is enough.
MICHEL, TURN IT OFF FOR BERNHARDT. (Lights off on Sarah. Jean and Sophie
Await further direction.)

SARAH

EXCUSE ME MONSIEUR PERRIN. You have no right to take away my moon.

PERRIN

I have a directors right. (Sarah draws herself up and takes heavy strides
Toward Perrin with enormous energy.)

SARAH

What about the author's right?

(Reads from script)

"Berthe advances, pale in the moonlight convulsed with emotion." I AM
pale, I AM convulsed. I WANT MY MOON.

PERRIN

Nothing personal, but Mademoiselle Croizette happens to be the
Lead in this play, so she should have the spotlight. Don't you see?

SARAH

