

THE TREES OF NATURE

Cast of characters:

Daisy

Simon

During the play both characters age from late teens to late forties

Sound effects:

Wind, sea, waves breaking

Pub background noise

Recorded pub singing: "O love it is teasing ..."

Loud pub applause

Birdsong and summer breeze

Heavy rain

Recorded extracts from the wedding service

Mendelssohn's Wedding March

Light polite applause

Notes:

Costume – minor changes of costume to mark the passing of time

Music – pop songs of the era (for example, *I'm Her Yesterday Man*)

THE TREES OF NATURE

SFX Fade up sound of wind, sea, waves breaking

Daisy Simon? Yes, I remember Simon. Fair hair. Blue eyes. A black corduroy jacket that he used to wear ...

SFX Fade down wind etc

Daisy Think about him? No, not often. Once in a while. Yes, once in a while maybe.

Simon No, I don't know what happened to Daisy. Someone told me she'd left London. Moved to Scotland. I've no idea where.

I picture her by the sea. Racing clouds, crashing waves. A lonely croft. And her hair. I see her hair blowing in the wind. And there are times — I know this sounds strange — but there are times when I think I hear her singing. Yes, I'm sorry I lost touch with Daisy.

SFX Fade up sounds of crowded pub

Simon The Enterprise. A grubby old pub near Chalk Farm. Where our local folk club used to meet ...

SFX Fade in crowd singing

*O love it is pleasing
And love it is teasing
And love is a pleasure
When first it's new ...*

Simon *(over the singing)* Beer-stained floor. Wooden chairs. Two old church pews at the side. Clouds of cigarette smoke.

SFX Crowd singing

*But as it grows older
So love it grows colder
And fades away
Like the morning dew.*

Simon *(over the singing)* Traditional folk music was enjoying a revival. We used to go there every Sunday evening. Me and a group of friends.

SFX Fade up crowd & then begin to fade down

*O love it is pleasing
And love it is teasing etc*

Simon *(over the singing)* Our singing was more joyful than tuneful. A crowd of sound. Volume over melody. And then I heard her voice. Clean and clear, behind me.

THE TREES OF NATURE

SFX *Fade out crowd singing*

Daisy

(singing alone)

“O love it is pleasing
And love it is teasing
And love is a pleasure
When first it’s new ...”

Simon turns to look at Daisy

Daisy

(singing alone)

“But as it grows older
So love it grows colder
And fades away
Like the morning dew.”

SFX *Loud applause*

Simon You have a very sweet voice.

Daisy *(shy)* Thank you. You’re very kind.

Simon I’m not being kind. It’s true.

And there, that evening, that’s how we met.

Daisy Fair hair. Biscuit-coloured. Blue – sea-blue – eyes. Black jacket a size too big for him ...

Simon I’m Simon. Can I buy you a drink?

Daisy Hello, Simon. I’m Daisy. No, thank you. I’m fine.

We were all still at school, you see. Our A-level year. None of us had much money and I thought ... I’m not sure what I thought. Perhaps I knew there’d be other times to buy each other drinks?

Daisy Simon had a very lovely smile. A friend’s smile. As if we’d known each other for years and years.

SFX *Sounds of birdsong and summer breeze*

Daisy That summer. The summer before university. A shimmering interlude before a new beginning ...

Simon School was finished and I’d nothing much planned ... Daisy and I spent a lot of time together. Most days, in fact.

Daisy Galleries, museums, lunchtime concerts.

THE TREES OF NATURE

- Simon** Not normally my thing, but Daisy was good company.
- Daisy** And in between we walked in London's parks. Regent's Park, Kensington Gardens, St James's Park.
- That was where it happened. Such a strange incident. Quite bizarre. I can picture it still. We were sitting on a bench and Simon was talking about Chloe or Zoe or Daphne or whoever it was he was seeing at the time ...
- Simon** My life was a little complicated in those days and Daisy was always such a very good listener ...
- Daisy** (*pointing*) Simon. Look! Over there. The pelican. It's ... It's swallowing a pigeon.
- Simon** And it was. We sat and watched it. Appalled and fascinated. There was nothing we could do. The pelican took twenty minutes to swallow the pigeon completely, and then it was gone.
- Wow. That was ... Wasn't that ... ?
- Daisy** Wasn't it? Poor pigeon.
- Simon** (*looking at his watch*) Sorry, Daisy. I really ought to be going.
- Daisy** Yes, of course. No problem. Off you go.
- Simon** Shall we meet somewhere else tomorrow?
- Daisy** Yes, Simon. I'll call you. Somewhere else tomorrow.
- Simon** Right, then. See you.
- Daisy** Somewhere else tomorrow. And the next day. And the day after that. For the whole of the rest of that summer.
- (*taking out and unfolding a letter*) At university Simon wrote to me every week — sometimes twice a week — and I wrote back. In those days everyone wrote letters. I'm fairly certain Simon enjoyed writing his letters to me more than reading mine to him. My university life wasn't nearly as full as his.
- Simon** The next summer Daisy and I didn't see very much of each. We were doing different things. You know how it is. Our paths simply didn't cross ...
- SFX** *Party music ("I'm her yesterday man"?)*
- Daisy** Then one evening we found ourselves at the same party. Somewhere in South London.
- Simon** Daisy. Hi. You haven't seen Rosie anywhere, have you?

THE TREES OF NATURE

- Daisy** Hello, Simon. Who's Rosie?
- Simon** No. That's right. You don't know her, do you? She's the girl I came with, but I seem to have lost her.
- Daisy** Oh, dear. What's she look like?
- Simon** Oh, you know. The usual. Blonde. Slim. Pretty. Doesn't matter. She must have gone home. What time is it? (*looking at watch*) Damn. Missed the last train. Oh, well. I'll have to walk. Unless there's a night bus.
- SFX* *Cut music*
- Daisy** I'm living in Balham at the moment, Simon. You can come back with me if you like.
- Simon** Can I? That would be ... You're sure you don't mind?
- Daisy** Of course I don't. As long as you don't mind a sleeping-bag on the floor.
- (*giving Simon a sleeping-bag and pillow*) Here. And here's a pillow. Will you be all right?
- Simon** I'll be fine, Daisy. I've slept on floors before. Don't worry about me.
- Daisy** But he looked so very uncomfortable. I rehearsed what I was going to say. I rehearsed it and then I said it.
- Are you cold?
- Simon** No. Well, yes. Just a little.
- Daisy** You can come and sleep in my bed if you like.
- It was a biggish bed and I didn't take up much room. Simon fell asleep right away. I don't know what I'd expected but I lay awake most of the night.
- Then in the morning ... Would you like some breakfast?
- Simon** Daisy? Good morning. (*yawning and stretching*) What's the time? (*looking at his watch*) Oh. Listen. I really ought to get going. Thanks for the bed, Daisy.
- Daisy** That's okay. No problem. See you, then.
- Although, as it happened, we didn't see each other again. Not that summer. Or for the several summers after that.
- SFX* *Music?*

THE TREES OF NATURE

- Daisy** Growing up. First job. First love. First heartbreak. Moving on. Seeing things differently. Seeing them much more clearly. Beginning to find out who I really was.
- SFX* *Fade in sound of rain falling*
- Daisy** It was very last minute. I knew, of course, that when Simon invited me to join him, he must have been let down by someone else. I didn't mind. I love walking. I love the sea. The Pembrokeshire coast path sounded wonderful. So I said 'yes'.
- SFX* *Fade up sound of rain*
- Simon** It rained non-stop for three full days. Rain, rain and more rain. Amy would have hated it. Wouldn't have stood it. She'd have demanded we go home. But Daisy was a great walker and never complained.
- Daisy** Gentle rain. Warm breezes. Soft light. And seabirds circling under the clouds. I loved it.
- Daisy** That night – our last night as it happened – we were warm and dry in our tent, and it all felt very 'right' somehow. As if everything was meant to be.
- Simon** Seeing you sitting in the torchlight, Daisy ... You know you really have the most beautiful hair.
- SFX* *Rain*
- I meant what I said. Her hair looked lovely. A golden curtain. I thought she'd be pleased. But instead of smiling back at me as she normally did, Daisy's eyes filled with tears. She put down her comb, turned off the torch and the next morning we went home. A pity because the sun had finally come out.
- SFX* *Background noise of pub*
- Simon** The truth is I'd been feeling really wretched about Amy. Things hadn't been going well. (*taking a piece of paper from his pocket*) Writing poetry seemed to relieve the pain.
- Daisy** The Lamb and Flag in Covent Garden. An old pub. One of the oldest in London. Why did I go? Because he sounded so miserable, I suppose. And, yes. To check what it felt like to see him again.
- Simon** Showing anyone a poem is a risky business. I knew that. But I thought I could show it to Daisy.
- Daisy** This is the pub where John Dryden was set upon by thugs. (*explaining*) John Dryden, the poet. The first poet laureate.
- Simon** John Dryden? Really? Listen. Do you mind I read you my poem?

THE TREES OF NATURE

(reading) "When finally we parted
Those shy creatures
Of our love-world
Wept bitterly and died."

Simon passes the poem to Daisy

Daisy What do you want me to say?

Simon I don't know. Tell me what you think.

Beat

Daisy *(genuinely thinking)* What do I think? I think Amy may not be right for you.

Simon Oh. Really? I see.

Daisy Don't look like that. You asked me what I thought.

Simon Yes, I did, didn't I?

But I knew Daisy was wrong. I felt sure that Amy was right for me. I was certain she was.

Vicar *(recorded)* I am required to ask anyone present who knows a reason why these two persons may not lawfully marry to declare it now.

Daisy I've no idea why I was invited. I've no idea why I went.

Vicar *(recorded)* Simon Timothy, will you take Amy Bethany to be your wife? Will you love her, comfort her, honour and protect her, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

SFX *Fade up and fade down Mendelssohn wedding march*

Daisy I stood in a corner — a single spectator — a bland canape in one hand and a glass of warm champagne in the other. Amy was the perfect bride. Enchanting. Untouchable. And a little ridiculous.

Simon There you are, Daisy. I couldn't find you. Thank you so much for coming. I wasn't sure you would.

Daisy I wasn't sure I would, either.

Simon Well, then. How have you been?

Daisy Me? I've been fine.

I've just come back from Scotland. The West Coast. A walking holiday. I was lucky. The weather was wonderful

THE TREES OF NATURE

Simon I haven't been walking for – I don't know – ages. And I've never been to Scotland.

Daisy You should go. It was all so beautiful. The Isle of Skye. The Isle of Arran. The Isle of Mull. I visited Iona and ...

I didn't bring a present, I'm afraid, Simon.

Simon Don't worry about that. It's just very good to see you. I was wondering ... I'd love it if you'd sing for us. Would you?

Daisy Sing for you? Are you sure? Well, okay. What would you like me to sing?

Simon Whatever you choose.

Quiet, everyone. Quiet, please. Daisy is going to sing for us. She has the most beautiful voice.

Daisy

(singing alone)

“The tree of life my soul hath seen,
Laden with fruit and always green:
The trees of nature fruitless be
Compared to Christ the apple tree.”

SFX A brief silence followed by polite applause

Simon Marrying Amy is the right thing to do, you know.

Daisy Is it? Yes. I expect it is.

Simon Be happy for me, Daisy.

Daisy I am happy for you. Be happy for me, too.

Simon And away we went to live our separate lives.

SFX Fade up recorded sound of wind, sea, waves breaking

Simon Yes, I do think about Daisy. Not every day but quite a lot. Often at night ...

Daisy Simon? Not really. Hardly ever, in fact.

Simon Sometimes I hear her singing. I stop to listen. But it's the hum of late night London traffic. Or police sirens screeching like gulls in the early hours of the morning.

Daisy The truth is ... What is the truth? It was all so long ago. A lifetime away.

THE TREES OF NATURE

Our memories soften, don't they? They work themselves free and then they're gone. What do I remember? Let me think. I remember a poem he asked me to read. A truly terrible poem. And a tent we shared and the Pembrokeshire the rain. And lying in my bed in Balham, feeling cold and very lonely. What else? An odd incident in St James's Park. Sitting with Simon on a bench. It was very strange.

Simon Twenty minutes. That's how long it took for the pelican to swallow the pigeon. We watched. There was nothing we could do about it.

Daisy Nothing but watch.

SFX *Fade in recording*

"The tree of life my soul hath seen,
Laden with fruit and always green:
The trees of nature fruitless be
Compared to Christ the apple tree."

SFX *Cut.*

Silence.

THE END