

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY.

AN ORIGINAL DRAMA,

IN ONE ACT.

BY

W. S. GILBERT.

*First performed at the Lyceum Theatre, London,
Saturday, January 26th, 1884.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

DUC D'ORLEANS, <i>Regent of France</i>	MR. J. H. BARNES
D'AULNAY, <i>Clarice's Husband</i>	MR. G. ALEXANDER
DOCTOR CHOQUART	MR. E. F. EDGAR
ABBÉ DUBOIS	MR. E. T. MARCH
DE GRANCY	MR. F. GRIFFIN
DE LA FERTÉ	MR. A. LEWIS
DE COURCELLES	MR. F. RAPHAEL
VISCOMTE DE MAUZUN	MR. N. CHISNELL
DE BROGLIO	MR. G. LEWIS
JOSEPH, <i>a Servant</i>	MR. W. RUSSELL
PAULINE, <i>Clarice's Sister</i>	MISS O'REILLY
CLARICE, <i>an Actress</i>	MISS MARY ANDERSON

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY

SCENE. – Apartment in CLARICE'S house; night. A glass door opens on to a garden.
The room is lighted as if for a reception.

As the curtain rises, JOSEPH enters, ushering PAULINE, in travelling-dress. She is much agitated.

PAUL. (*removing her hat, veil, and cloak*). Where is my sister? I must see her at once.

JOS. Madame is dressing.

PAUL. Dressing? Is she going out tonight?

JOS. No Mademoiselle; Madame has a supper party at home.

PAUL. Her husband – Monsieur D'Aulnay – where is he?

JOS. Monsieur D'Aulnay? Oh, has not Mademoiselle heard?

PAUL. (*much agitated*). It is true then – they *are* separated?

JOS. Alas, Mademoiselle, too true!

PAUL. It is terrible – terrible! They loved each other so dearly, and they have not been married a year.

JOS. Indeed, Monsieur seemed devoted to Madame.

PAUL. Seemed! Did he not give up his commission in the Royal Body Guard and take service as a humble actor that he might be near her? Did he not forego rank, wealth, friends, everything – that he might marry her? And now, after one short year, their love is dead and they are strangers! When did this dreadful separation take place?

JOS. A week ago, yesterday.

PAUL. (*rises*). And my sister gives a supper party tonight! Why, the scandal will be known all over Paris tomorrow.

JOS. Alas! Mademoiselle, it is already a matter of common gossip!

PAUL. And whom does she expect tonight?

JOS. Well, Mademoiselle must know, sooner or later. They are not such guests as Madame has been in the habit of receiving, or as Monsieur would approve if he were here. Madame expects, among others, Monsieur de la Fere, the Abbé Dubois, Monsieur de la Ferté, and, I regret to add, the Regent, Monseigneur le Duc d'Orleans.

PAUL. The Duc d'Orleans! Do I understand you that my sister has invited the Regent to sup with her? Oh, you must have been misinformed!

JOS. Mademoiselle, it is, unhappily, too true! I had it from Madame's own lips. I will send word to her that Mademoiselle awaits her. [Exit JOSEPH.]

PAUL. The Duc d'Orleans! The villain whose insolent admiration of her is a by-word throughout Paris! The libertine who dared to couple her fair name with lies unspeakable, whose disgraceful attentions have embittered her life and her husband's for twelve months past! This man coming to sup with her tonight. Oh, it cannot be, it cannot be! (*PAULINE starts up, hearing CLARICE.*)

CLAR. (*as she enters and descends staircase*). Mind, plenty of wine, plenty of music, and plenty of light, and, above all, things, remember that, after my guests have arrived, no one is to interrupt us. (CLARICE *hurriedly makes for the door leading to the garden. As her hand is on the lock she sees PAULINE. She is much agitated, but with an effort recovers herself.*) Pauline! you here? Why, my darling child, this is indeed a surprise! What do you do in this city of iniquity, you little innocent country primrose? Who has picked you and brought you into this perilous atmosphere? And why? Come! Tell me all about it!

PAUL. Clarice, I came in great haste because I heard you were unhappy. It seems that in that, at least, I was misinformed.

CLAR. (*bitterly*). Unhappy! Yes, I am unhappy – or should be, if I stopped to think. But (*with forced gaiety*) I don't stop to think. I don't give myself time to think. I take things as I find them, and I make the best of them. Ha! ha! ha! That's true philosophy, Pauline. Of course you have heard what has taken place. Well, it's a pity, but it could not be helped.

PAUL. But what in the world has caused this calamity?

CLAR. Oh, I hardly know! No great thing – many small things; things ridiculous in detail, but serious in the aggregate. Besides, you forget – I have been married a year, and a year is a long time – in Paris.

PAUL. Along time! And you loved him so dearly!

CLAR. Ye-es-oh yes – I certainly loved D'Aulnay – in my way – once.

PAUL. Once!

CLAR. Yes. A pretty fellow whom one sees once a week for an hour or so one loves – but a pretty fellow one sees every day for a year! My dear Pauline, you've not tried it. Besides – haven't you heard? Husbands are going out – they are not to be worn at all this season.

PAUL. (*reproachfully*). Clarice!

CLAR. Why one must be in the fashion, child! Next season, perhaps – or the next but one – they may come in again. Well, in that case I have D'Aulnay's address.

PAUL. Will he come, do you think, when he learns that the Regent is an invited guest at your house?

CLAR. Oh, you have heard that. Well, I confess I see a difficulty there – D'Aulnay is so straight laced. Monsieur d'Orleans is a man of fashion, and is, perhaps, rather too much accustomed to look on women as playthings. (*This is said with involuntary and half-concealed bitterness.*) It is his only weakness. Let us be charitable, and look over it.

PAUL. I cannot express the distress with which I listen to such sentiments. I can scarcely believe that they are uttered by the Clarice whose purity of life has shamed the attacks even of her unmanly persecutor. Think what you are losing! Hitherto even those who condemn the stage as infamous have excepted you from their sweeping denunciations. (*Goes to her.*) For Heaven's sake pause before you risk the proud and honoured position you have attained!

CLAR. (*bitterly*). Proud! Honoured! Bah! You play with words. I am an actress – by law proscribed, by the Church excommunicated! While I live women gather their skirts about them as I pass; when I die I am to be buried, as dogs are buried, in unholy ground. (PAULINE *turns away in grief.*) In the mean time, I am the recognized prey of the spoiler – the traditional property of him who will best pay for me: an actress, with a body, God help her! but without a soul: unrecognised by the State, abjured by the Church, and utterly despised by all! In the face of these compliments, believe me, it is not easy to preserve one's self-respect, Pauline.

PAUL. But the Regent – who has insulted you unspeakably – whose liveried servants have actually attempted to carry you away from your husband’s arms, and who has treated his repeated challenges with cowardly and contemptuous silence – is this man to be an honoured guest at your table?

CLAR. Ah, my dear, a pretty woman must not bear too hardly upon those whose heads her beauty has turned. Monsieur le Duc has been imprudent – reckless – culpable if you will; but then, remember, the poor fellow is in love. If you put a kettle of water on the fire, it is not the fault of the water if it boils – it is the fault of the fire, my dear! As to my husband’s challenges, why, notwithstanding his noble birth and his services in the Royal Body Guard, he is now but a stage-player – a mummer – a vagabond! No, he must draw the line somewhere; and he draws it at vagabond’s wives!

PAUL. I see that my mission is fruitless. I will go. (*Resuming her mantle.*)

CLAR. Yes, better go, my child. The scene that is to come is one that perhaps you had better not see.

PAUL. I can believe it. Adieu, Clarice. I came in hope that I might yet save my sister. I go, broken-hearted that my sister should be beyond saving.

[*Exit PAULINE.*]

[*CLARICE watches PAULINE off, then locks the door by which she has gone out, and hurriedly opens the door leading to the garden.*]

CLAR. D’Aulnay! My husband! Quick!

D’AULNAY *enters from garden.*

D’AUL. My darling wife! (*embraces her*). Is it certain that we shall not be interrupted?

CLAR. Quite certain! I have locked the only door by which any one could surprise us.

D’AUL. And all is ready?

CLAR. All is ready.

D’AUL. The story of our separation is accepted?

CLAR. Implicitly. I have made no secret of it, believe me. There is not a soul about the Court who does not believe that we are parted for ever.

[*CLARICE and D’AULNAY seated.*]

D’AUL. And the Regent – the Duc d’Orleans?

CLAR. Oh, he has fallen readily enough into the snare. I did as you bade me. I gave out, far and near, that I was weary of the humdrum respectability of sober married life – that, being free again, I intended to take my own course and enjoy myself. To disarm suspicion, I invited a dozen of his friends – the Abbé Dubois, De Courcelles, De la Ferté and others – and eventually the Regent himself: humbly, and with a sense of what was due from such as I to such as he, I invited the Regent himself! D’Aulnay, he will be here in half an hour.

D’AUL. At last! At last! Oh, my child, how long and how bitterly have we waited for this! Tortured as I have been by the agony of impotent fury – goaded into frenzy by the sense of my utter helplessness under an accumulation of intolerable insult; and then to find *him* at last helpless and at *my* mercy! It is a revenge that is almost satisfying! In half an hour I shall be avenged, or beyond the reach of vengeance. If I fall, my poor Clarice –

CLAR. (*rises*). No, no. For God’s sake keep that thought from me, or my resolution will give way! If I am to go through with this, I must nerve myself to it by

every means at my command! I must keep before me his repeated, his incessant insults – at the theatre – in the streets – nay, at my very door. I must remember his threats, his letters, his dastardly attempt to take me from you by force, and his mean and cowardly evasion when brought by you to book. It is enough to remember these things, for, when I do so, my blood is a-fire, and I am as brave as you are.

D'AUL. My darling! (*Embrace. Noise of carriage wheels heard without.*)

CLAR. Hush! They are coming! You must go now. When they have all arrived, I will contrive to detain him here alone! Oh, it will not be difficult! Wait in the garden and watch your opportunity. Never fear but that it will come!

D'AUL. God bless my darling, and give her courage!

CLAR. I have it, D'Aulnay! Fear not for me – I am brave as a man! Farewell!

[*He embraces her, and exit into garden. Voices heard laughing and talking without.*]

CLAR. They are coming! If he should be with them! If he should come fraught with death to my love! But there, this won't do. Courage, Clarice, courage! Remember the part you have to play!

Enter JOSEPH, announcing,

JOS. Monsieur de la Ferté, Monsieur de Courcelles, and his Excellency the Vicomte de Mauzun.

Enter the three Gentlemen named (severally).

CLAR. (*with great gaiety*). Ah! Monsieur de la Ferté, over-joyed, indeed, to see you – how kind of you to come! I'm a lone widow now, and must be consoled. De Courcelles? No, no, I'm not going to call you Monsieur de Courcelles. (*COURCELLES bows and sits.*) If we are not old friends now, we shall be some day, and we'll discount the intimacy that is to be. Mauzun! Of all men Mauzun! Now this is indeed delightful! (*MAUZUN bows ceremoniously.*) Ah, bah! how you great people bow and scrape and how we little people laugh at you for it! Come, let's all be little people tonight?

MAUZUN. We are indeed little people in the presence of Madame D'Aulnay.

CLAR. Clarice! Clarice, if you love me. D'Aulnay's gone, and let his name go with him. (*MAUZUN bows and converses with COURCELLES.*) May it do him more good than it did me. Ha! ha! I believe, though, that ladies and gentlemen of the dignified aristocracy don't get to Christian names all at once.

LA FERTÉ. Well, not all at once, perhaps; but we generally get to them in time.

CLAR. Ah! then we of the *coulisses* begin with them. *We* only come to surnames when we quarrel, which we don't mean to do, do we?

Re-enter JOSEPH, announcing, followed by the ABBÉ DUBOIS and MONSIEUR DE GRANCY.

JOS. Monsieur l'Abbé Dubois, Monsieur de Grancy.

CLAR. Monsieur le Ministre, your very good servant to command. De Grancy, I'm overjoyed to see you. His Royal Highness? Will he come?

DUB. His Royal Highness will be here shortly, but unhappily his stay will be but brief.

CLAR. It is well – he will come. It is most kind of him to condescend to visit my humdrum home! But I don't intend to be humdrum any more. Will you teach me how not to be humdrum?

DUB. Alas, Madame! I have no pretensions to teach experts.

CLAR. No pretensions. The Abbé Dubois – the great conversationalist, the brilliant epigrammist! What was that you said about poor Clopin, the dramatic critic, who wrote a bad play – that Clopin forgot that his mission was not to *write* plays, but to teach people *how* to write plays. I'd have given a week's salary to have said that!

DUB. Madame, it is difficult not to be epigrammatic when one speaks of a dramatic author. (*Sits.*)

Re-enter JOSEPH.

JOS. Monsieur de Broglio and Monsieur le Docteur Choquart.

Enter the Gentlemen named.

CLAR. Welcome, De Broglio. Why, Doctor – my dear, dear Doctor, I had no idea that you were in Paris! Why, how grave you are! This is not a professional visit. You look as glum as if you had come to attend a patient *in extremis!*

DOCT. Shall I confess to you, Madame, that I am attending one who, I fear, is in a very dangerous state.

CLAR. (*aside*). What do you mean? As I am in perfect health, I must suppose you are employing a figure of speech.

[The guests are conversing in groups during this, till the DUC D'ORLEANS is announced.]

DOCT. It is no figure of speech so to describe a good and virtuous lady who, for the first time in her life, is playing hostess to the *roués* of the Palais Royal.

CLAR. Doctor, you presume on your footing in my house.

DOCT. Madame, I am D'Aulnay's friend.

CLAR. Then what do you here? These are not D'Aulnay's friends.

DOCT. I am here to protect you.

CLAR. I need no protector. Trust me, I can protect myself!

Re-enter Joseph, announcing.

JOS. His Royal Highness the Regent of France.

Enter the DUC D'ORLEANS attended by four Gentlemen. All rise; the guests bow ceremoniously.

DUKE. Madame, I have the honour to salute you.

CLAR. (*curtseying formally*). Your Royal Highness is too good. I am indeed honoured by Monseigneur's visit. That my poor house should be so complimented is a distinction of which I may be permitted to be vain.

DUKE. If it be indeed a distinction, it is one that I would have gladly conferred many months since, had I been permitted to do so.

CLAR. Ah, Monseigneur, be generous. You know how I was situated; my husband –

DUKE. Ah, the selfishness of these husbands! They are the curse of enterprise!

CLAR. Nay, be just to them; if there were no husbands there would be no enterprise.

DUKE. No doubt. How true it is that nothing, however insignificant, was created without an object. Even husbands have their value in the economy of nature
(*Converses with the other guests.*)

CLAR. Come, gentlemen, let us all adjourn to the drawing-room. We shall find cards, dice, and wine ready for us. Monsieur le Ministre, we'll follow you; but surely, I forget: your Royal Highness should have led the way. Oh, forgive my inexperience!
(*The guests, some of whom have already ascended the staircase, begin to enter the room above, in conversation with each other as they go off.*) Monseigneur will perhaps permit me to take his arm?

DUKE. With every pleasure, Madame.

[*By this time the party have all disappeared, and Clarice is alone on the stage with the DUKE.*]

CLAR. Stop – one moment – my smelling-bottle.

DUKE. Clarice – why, you are fainting. (*She leans on a table by the stairs.*)

CLAR. No, no; it is nothing; I am subject to this. I shall be strong again directly. May I trouble you to open the window?

DUKE. By all means. (*He opens the doors leading into the garden.*)

CLAR. Thank you. How the air refreshes me! I am better now. Let us follow the others.

DUKE. No – not yet, Clarice. Sit down here, with me, for a few minutes. The fresh air will revive you.

CLAR. Then pray join your friends. I will follow presently. I am better, indeed.

DUKE. Nay; I must remain to watch the effect of my prescription.

CLAR. But what will they say? Your friends will remark our absence!

DUKE. Have no fear. My friends are not in the habit of canvassing my proceedings. (*Sits beside her.*) They are happy enough without us. Let us be happy without them.

CLAR. I am – very happy.

DUKE. And so there is an end of D'Aulnay at last?

CLAR. Yes; I suppose so! Poor D'Aulnay. They say he is at Marseilles.

DUKE. Why do you sigh? Are you sorry for him?

CLAR. A little, perhaps. But I'm sure I gave him every chance. I bore with him for a year.

DUKE. What forbearance!

CLAR. At first he was well enough. I mean, that when we quarrelled, he owned I was right, and gave in. That did very well. Then he vowed I was wrong – but gave in. Well, that was endurable. But at length it came to this, that he vowed I was wrong, and he wouldn't give in. so, of course, we parted. Still, he was not a bad fellow – his faults were mere faults of temper.

DUKE. Madame, he has my profound consideration. I am told that he is in the habit of expressing angry sentiments towards me – indeed, he has, on more than one occasion, done me the honour of suggesting that I should cross swords with him. It distressed me that I was unable to gratify him, but under the artificial conditions of modern society, it was unhappily impossible. I can conceive a highly rarefied state of civilization in which it might be permitted to high and low to run each other through the body without distinction of rank; but to that Utopian condition we have unhappily not yet arrived. (*Rises.*) When we do, I shall be pleased to oblige him; but in the mean

time the only balm that I am permitted to pour into his wounded soul is the assurance of my profound consideration.

CLAR. Still, duke, D'Aulnay is a man of noble birth.

DUKE. Clarice, he is an actor.

CLAR. He became an actor for love of me.

DUKE. He did well and wisely. But when he resigned his commission in the Body Guard, and took to the stage for his living, he did me the injury of placing it out of my power to recognize him as a gentleman.

CLAR. Well, enough of D'Aulnay. Let us leave him alone.

DUKE. With all my heart. (*Returns, sits as before.*) I trust that he will return the compliment. (*Taking her hand.*)

CLAR. Nay, duke, you go too far.

DUKE. You are not in earnest when you say that. You cannot be angry with me for loving you. (*Putting his arm round her waist.*)

CLAR. No, no, duke, I cannot allow this. Pray be careful; we shall be overheard.

DUKE. Nay, Clarice, you *shall* hear me now. For months you have received my homage with indignation, or with what is still harder to bear, with silence. Maddened by my passion I forgot what was due to you – ay, and to myself. You dismissed me with contempt, and you were right, and I loved you for it. Your eyes flashed scorn upon me. I deserved it, and I loved you for it. Your lips withered with their contempt. I had earned it, and I loved you for it.

CLAR. Nay, duke – have pity – have pity!

DUKE. After a bitter time of sickening disappointment, I am raised to a pinnacle of happiness by this invitation. I take it as an overture of peace – am I wrong? I take it as a token of reconciliation – am I wrong? (*D'AULNAY appears through open door.*) I take it as an admission that you can pity – forgive – love. Tell me, am I wrong?

D'AUL. Yes, M. le Duc d'Orleans, you are wrong!

DUKE. (*starting to his feet – after a pause*). This is a trap.

CLAR. (*rises*). Yes, sir, it is a trap.

DUKE. You have deceived me – cheated me!

CLAR. Yes – I have deceived you – cheated you.

DUKE. Why have you done this, actress?

D'AUL. I, actor, will tell you. For more than a year, you, the Duc d'Orleans, Regent of France, strong in the security of a rank which I tell you, sir, you sully and degrade, have blighted our home-happiness as with the breath of an obscene pestilence. In this, sir, you, Regent of France, have acted like a knave. You have dared to assume that, because my wife is an actress, you would find her the easy prey of your carrion instincts. In this, sir, you, Regent of France, have acted like a madman. When, goaded to frenzy by your incessant insults, I tried to bring you to book, you entrenched yourself behind your dignity, and declined to recognize me. In this, sir, you, Regent of France, acted like a coward. Thrice have I challenged you, and thrice have you ignored my challenge. I have stooped to this trap that I might lure you into a confidence that would place you at my command. And, sir, I command you to fight me!

DUKE. If I refuse?

D'AUL. If you refuse, I will whip you like a dog. (*Turns to CLARICE.*)

DUKE. A strong measure.

D'AUL. I hope so.

DUKE. (*after a pause*). Hark ye, sirrah, I am not in the habit of explaining my course of action, and if I do so now, it is that you may understand how little your

threats affect me. I refused to fight you because you are an actor, proscribed by the State, excommunicated by the Church – a statutory vagabond and a social outcast. If a scullion were to challenge me, I should so far recognize him as to have him flogged. An actor is entitled to no recognition at all. Now, sir, you have your answer. Stand aside and let me pass!

D'AUL. Stay. As you say, I am an actor, and the law proscribes me. As an actor I have just attained the summit of an actor's ambition – an engagement at the Theatre Français, and that engagement is here. (*Taking out a paper.*) Well, sir, I destroy that engagement (*tearing it up; throws it at his feet*), and, on the honour of an officer and a gentleman, I will never set foot upon the stage again. Now, sir, I am no longer an actor. I have resumed my rank, and you cannot refuse to fight me.

DUKE. It shall be as you wish. I only stipulate that it shall never be known to any but our three selves that I have condescended to meet a person of your calling.

D'AUL. Sir, the degradation I am about to inflict upon you shall never be published by either of us.

DUKE. Good! But one word. (*To CLARICE.*) Madame, I am free to admit that I have wronged you and your husband, and I should be loth to do further injury to yourself or to him. But, Madame, it is right that you should, as you are your husband's accomplice in this scheme of revenge, know that I am an unerring swordsman, and if I fight your husband I kill him.

CLAR. (*after a pause*). Monsieur le Duc, you must fight.

DUKE. So be it. When and where?

D'AUL. Now, in the garden.

DUKE. You are mad. The house is full of my friends.

CLAR. Have no fear of them. I will take upon myself to say that they shall not interfere. I charge myself with the task of keeping their attention engaged until the issue is known.

DUKE. As you please. Have the goodness, sir, to show the way. Madame, I regret that you compel me to atone for the reparable wrong I have done you, by inflicting upon you an injury that nothing can repair. Accept the assurance of my sympathy.

[*Exeunt DUKE into garden; D'AULNAY embraces CLARICE, and follows.*]

CLAR. What have I done? Am I mad? He will be killed – D'Aulnay will be killed! Oh no, no, no – not that – not that! It cannot be. D'Aulnay – my dearly loved! my heart! my life! Grace of Heaven, what have I done? I cannot bear it! I must stop them! (*DOCTOR enters from upper room in converse with LA FERTÉ; rest of the guests follow, laughing, and in conversation. DOCT. The silver mark is at 120 lives, gold 800 – a depreciation of 70 per cent.*) D'Aulnay – D'Aulnay – come back! (*Runs to window-door and opens it. As she does so half a dozen guests come down the stairs laughing and talking. She suddenly closes the door and puts her back to it.*)

DUB. Eight thousand francs! you shall have them on Thursday. Against, such devil's luck who can fight? I'faith not I! Clarice, alone? Why, where's the Regent? (*Two more come down the stairs, one counting out money into the other's hand.*)

CLAR. Alas! Gone! Despatches to dictate, I believe. You will forgive my absence, but the Duke's time was precious, and he feared to join you lest he might be tempted to overstay his leisure. But are you tired of play already? (*Three more come down.*)

DUB. Nay, we came to seek you. To tell the truth, without you the fun began to flag.

CLAR. Well, let's whip it up again. What shall we do? Tableaux? Charades? Proverbs? Come, for Heaven's sake suggest something, somebody!

LA FERTÉ. Shall we say tableaux?

DUB. Gentlemen, we have all heard of Clarice's talent for improvisation. May we pray that we may be favoured with an example thereof?

ALL. Yes, yes – an improvisation.

DOCT. Yes, by all means!

CLAR. An improvisation – good. Be it so! On what subject shall I improvise? Quick, quick – a subject; you must give me a subject – any subject – tragedy, comedy – anything you like – only, for Heaven's sake, be quick!

LA FERTÉ. We are here to amuse ourselves, and Clarice excels in comedy.

SEVERAL GUESTS. Comedy! Comedy!

MAUZUN. Yes, she's great in comedy.

DOCT. Comedy, by all means.

CLAR. Comedy, then.

DUB. Gentlemen, to say that Clarice excels in comedy is to admit that you have forgotten her "Death of Cleopatra."

LA FERTÉ. Nothing to her "Quack Dentist with the Toothache."

DUB. The "Lament of Artemisia of Halicarnassus."

LA FERTÉ. Not a patch on her "Pig-driver in a Fog!"

CLAR. Shall it be comedy, then?

DUB. Tragedy!¹

LA FERTÉ. Comedy!

DOCT. Gentlemen, let us benefit by this difference of opinion. Let us say comedy first, and tragedy afterwards.

ALL. Good, by all means, *etc.*

CLAR. Good – that's understood: comedy first, tragedy afterwards. Come, give me a subject, quick, a comedy subject? Heavens, how slow you are!

MAUZUN. Stay – one moment. (*All attentive.*)

CLAR. What is it?

MAUZUN. I heard a noise in the garden.

CLAR. Oh, the servants amusing themselves, that's all. We have our fun here, they have their fun there. Come, quick, a subject.

MAUZUN. Nay, I heard the clashing of swords – I am sure of it. (*Going towards garden door.*)

CLAR. No, no! Gentlemen, you must do me a favour; you must not venture into that garden! The truth is I am preparing a little surprise for you; if you go into the garden now you will spoil it all. I am sure I need not say more. (*Locking door and giving the key to the DOCTOR.*) Here, Doctor, I entrust you with the key. I charge you – allow no one to open that door on any consideration. Now then, quick, a subject – a subject – a subject!

DUB. Let me see. You are a strolling player; you enter a tavern – you are challenged as to who you are, and you describe yourself. There!

ALL. Bravo! Very good! *etc.*

CLAR. Good! I am an actor – a strolling actor – and I describe myself. That's very good; that will do. (*All listening intently, some grouped on the staircase, others seated.*) One moment – ah – now. (*Recites with animated gestures.*) "Who am I gentlemen? I am Artaxerxes! I am Anthony the Great! I'm a doge, a king, a

¹ This and the next line are printed thus in *Original Plays, Fourth Series.*

LA FERTÉ. Tragedy!

DUB. Comedy!

councillor, a burgess, a lackey. I am the constable who seizes the beggar; nay, I am the beggar seized by the constable. I am everybody; I am nobody. I command and I obey. I feast starving; I starve feasting. Beware of me, for I am a very rogue – a swaggering roysterer, with ragged elbows, hat a-cock, and bilbo ready.” (*All laugh admiringly.*)

DOCT. Don’t interrupt!

CLAR. “A rogue, said I? Nay, a highwayman – a housebreaker – a murderer to command, at a purse of pistols the job, and short shrift to my quarry! (*Laughter.*) But take heart; I am the best of men. I love good. I give purses. I bless all. Yet do I curse freely, and, purses notwithstanding, I am but a greedy, grasping, miserly curmudgeon, who’d die i’ the dark to save a farthing rushlight – a very Barabbas too, or a High Pontiff, or a Grand Seigneur, with a dancing seraglio, as it shall please you. I die thrice a-night, but they bury me not; nay, I am a ghost, with none to lay me; But a ghost, look you, of flesh, and to spare, yet not spare of flesh, as this rotundity shall advise you. (*All exclaim, “Admirable!” “Excellent!” etc.*) And yet no ghost, but a very observable and most mortal man with a pretty taste in flagons and an eye for a plump brown wench, go to! I am a bundle of contradiction – a mass of incongruities; here today, gone tomorrow – a thing of no moment: a breath, a puff ball, a gossamer! Good sirs, I am an actor!” (*All applaud* – DOCT. Marvellous! A really fine piece of acting. DUB. Excellent indeed, without a doubt! *During this she is much overcome, looks anxiously towards window, totters, supports herself against chair.*)

CLAR. (*resuming with a great effort*). “If you ask me – if you ask me – “ (*A cry heard without – she breaks down.*) Gentlemen, I cannot go on; my heart leaves me. My husband! he is without, with the Duc d’Orleans. They are fighting! I heard his cry! He is wounded, perhaps killed! Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen, for the love of Heaven, separate them! I have caused this. He is my husband – my dear, dear husband! He is my life and I have caused this; and oh, God, he is dying! (*Sobs hysterically on her knees.*)

ALL. Admirable! excellent! (*Half aside to each other.*)

CLAR. You look at me, but you do not move. Gentlemen, I am not acting; I am in fearful earnest. Oh! my love! my love! And I have done this! As I speak my husband is being killed! Will none of you separate them? (*Goes to door, and beats frantically against it.*) D’Aulnay, D’Aulnay, I am coming to you! (*She wrenches at the door in vain, for it is locked; at last she leans exhausted against it.*)

ALL. Bravo! Admirable!

DUB. You see now why I asked for tragedy.

ALL. Excellent, indeed.

CLAR. Oh men, men! have you no eyes? Don’t you know when a wretched woman is breaking her heart? (*Suddenly.*) Doctor! I gave you the key. (*Rushing to DOCTOR and kneeling to him.*) You are D’Aulnay’s friend. The key! for God’s sake give me the key! (*All exclaim as before.*)

DOCT. (*looking attentively at her*). Gentlemen, this woman is not acting! Her colour comes and goes – she is in terrible earnest.

CLAR. Yes, yes, in terrible earnest! They are killing him! Oh, God, I cannot bear this.

DUB. Doctor, you have paid her the highest compliment an actress ever received. If she can impose on so old a hand as you, she is an actress indeed!

LA FERTÉ. Doctor, you’re too emotional.

DOCT. Gentlemen, at risk of encountering your ridicule, I shall take upon myself to believe she is in earnest – and, so believing, I shall unlock that door.

ALL. Ha! ha!

MAUZUN. Doctor, they're laughing at you.

CLAR. God bless you! he believes me! he believes me! Quick! the door – the door!

[The DOCTOR goes to the door, and unlocks it, as the others laugh at him.]

CLARICE rushes to the door and meets her husband – pale, without his coat and waistcoat, and with a sword in his hand, which he wipes with a handkerchief.

DOCT. D'Aulnay! *(All start. Momentary picture.)*

CLAR. *(hurriedly in a whisper.)* Are you unhurt?

D'AUL. Quite.

CLAR. And the Duke?

D'AUL. Wounded to the death.

CLAR. *(recovering herself with a supreme effort, and leading her husband forward).* Gentlemen, I told you I was preparing a little surprise for you – this is it! Doctor, your pardon for having made you an innocent accomplice in my little deception. *(DOCTOR, expressing annoyance, pulls out snuff-box; snuffs.)* Gentlemen, I have only to thank you for the kind applause with which you have been so good as to reward my humble effort to entertain you!

[Curtseys. All the guests applaud, some ridiculing the DOCTOR as the curtain falls.]