

A
NIGHT OF SUSPENSE.

A Monologue.

AS PERFORMED BY
MRS. STIRLING.

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A NIGHT OF SUSPENSE.

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CLARA Mrs. STIRLING.

[This Drama is the property of Mr. T. H. Lacy.]

A NIGHT OF SUSPENSE.



SCENE.—*An elegant Apartment, c.; in that, L. C, a window closed, opening inwards, with balcony outside; a small door, R. 2 E., which opens inward; at 1st wing, R., a secretaire; opposite L, a fireplace with looking-glass over the mantel, on which stand a clock and set of ornaments ; a little in front a small table upon which is a lighted candle, books, &c. ; chairs ; door to open, L.2.E.*

As curtain rises, a SERVANT in very handsome livery stands at door, L., with a branch candlestick in his hand ; the door is open and he is supposed to be lighting some one out; when the curtain has entirely risen, he follows this person and closes the door after him.

CLARA. *(attired in an elegant ball dress, half opens the small door, R. and calls in a timid voice)* Frederic! *(louder)* Frederic! *(coming on and advancing, c.)* Gone! *(goes hastily towards bed)* Gone! *(coming forward with air of sadness)* And he leaves me thus! He is angry with me, and wherefore? What have I said? what have I done? We were both just ready, and on the point of starting for my aunt's ball, when he received a letter which he endeavoured carefully to conceal from me, but he failed both in the attempt to hide the letter, and to check the emotion it evidently gave rise to. He is gone to the ball at the Opera, and for the life of me I cannot keep down my suspicions. "Take me with you, Frederic," I said. "Impossible! I will conduct you to your aunt's, and leave you there," he replied. "But why should we separate? Can you not take me with you to the Opera?" "No, it is not proper." "Then, sir, I have cause for suspicion." "No, Clara, you are wrong—and since I must

tell you, know that it is for Edward—it is on your brother's account I go there. I have told you all," he concluded. " Now will you go to your aunt's ? " Then, I confess, I lost my temper and said—perhaps too hastily—" I prefer remaining where I am." He then flew into a passion, and quitting me, retired to his own room, and when I, kind, tender-hearted creature as I am, fly to see him, to acknowledge that I have been too hasty and petulant, I find him gone, positively gone, (*walking about vexed, gradually becoming more and more agitated*) I am afraid, very, very much afraid, " my brother" is a mere excuse—and as to the propriety portion of the story—pshaw! not proper indeed!—Why it's perfectly ridiculous! Who, I should like to know, would recognise me in a mask ! Oh, I dare not think of it—I dare not look into my own thoughts, they make me tremble for my future happiness! It's lucky I'm not of a jealous disposition—no, no, thank goodness, I am not jealous. Certainly I never before noticed the fascinating accomplishments of my husband—but, strangely enough, at this moment I see them all—I love him, yes, I *do* love him, and if I dreaded but *one* rival, and knew there was but *one*, I would soon learn who she was, and then I could compare myself with her (*sits herself and looks complacently into the glass*) I might perhaps say—but that would be in a whisper to myself—" Surely I am superior to that creature !" (*turns away mournfully*) But alas, I tremble in thinking on the many beauties that will beset him at the Opera. Besides, my brother, too wild and gay a young man by far, will be with him. (*rises and walks about*) But for this unfortunate ball to-night such thoughts would never have entered my head. My husband seems to love me. And after all why should not his going out be an act of necessity ? He said it was, and I *will* believe him. (*listening*) I hear some one—yes, I guessed right, it is he. (*runs to door—suddenly stops and smiles*) No, that would be wrong, quite wrong ; I'll put on a very severe look, that this kind of thing may not occur again, (*sits herself in a chair, puts on an imposing appearance, and after a moment's silence proceeds*) Well! why doesn't he come in ? (*rises, goes on tiptoe, peeps through keyhole, and then returns with a feel-*

ing of dejection) It's only Justine, (*looking at timepiece and arranging things on mantel-shelf*) Well, it is but one o'clock, (*violent knock at street door*) Ah, this time it is he ! I am sure of it—quite sure of it I my heart did not deceive me—and yet I tremble! How long they are opening the door, what can they be about? (*listens a few moments very anxiously*) No—the door is closed again, and no sound of a carriage going away, (*falls in chair, R.*) My fortitude has forsaken me! (*with sudden anger*) He shall beg my pardon—on his knees? (*with grief*) Oh, that I could sleep—sleep, and drive away these hateful, these distracting thoughts. (*Music—a moment's silence, during which she expresses the double feeling of fatigue and ennui—she takes up a book, attempts to read, throws it aside, then takes up another, seems to read a few lines, and at length falls asleep, her arm drops, and the volume glides from her hand—as she drops off to sleep, the music begins ppp., and continues at intervals—between the pauses, she utters the following in half-broken words, and a low voice*) Sleep! delightful! soothing! true ! But why is sleep so agitated? The frame droops exhausted, but the mind remains active. Thought still lives. Sleep is not repose, it is suffering, (*opening her eyes which she keeps fixed—calls*) Justine, my domino! (*to herself*) He is at the ball, I will go thither, (*to JUSTINE*) My mask! (*to herself*) He will not now know me. (*she seems to robe and mask—here a bar of music rather loud—she then suddenly rises as in a dream, with the look of a somnambulist*) What a blaze of light! What beautiful fancy dresses ! What countless dominoes ! This then is the ball at the Opera, (*in a listening attitude*) Hark ! 'tis my favourite quadrille, " La Poule," they are playing. (*hums the air, then sings, adapting the song to " La Poule"*)

Oh, come with me, for Pleasure calls
 The young, the gay, to join her throng;
 Light dancers bound in her ivory halls,
 And wine-cups flow the whole night long !
 Oh, come, while Joy invites thee thus—
 Come ere the night shall yield to day;
 Garlands are blooming there for us,
 And lips their welcome long to say.

(*at the conclusion of the song she turns suddenly round, and utters a slight scream*) Ah ! I am followed, and have no one to protect me. How indiscreet to come to such a place alone! Gentlemen, I—I entreat of you to leave me. (*suddenly, and as if seeing some one*) Ah, Edward, my brother, is it you ? Your arm—give me your arm, I say. " Why am I here," you ask, "unknown to my husband?" Because he is here unknown to me—I am sure of it. Come, come let us find him. (*Music—she moves about like a person who has taken another's arm—places her hand to her face as if she held a mask, and walks about in an agitated manner—starts suddenly as though she had discovered her rival*) Tell me, Edward—that—that majestic-looking creature yonder in the blue domino—is she not (*pointing*) my rival ? You must know her. What charm is she gifted with that enables her to rob me of my Frederic's heart ? (*as if she had received an answer*) Beauty, you say ?—sprightliness, which captivate, enchain him ! Is it because she dances like this ? (*she imitates a cachucha, gracefully burlesquing it*) Well, I can dance also; so can anyone, (*suddenly*) Ah! they want an opposite couple, Edward—did you hear ? I'm ready, (*standing up as if in a quadrille*) Now, then, I'll quite overpower him. (*dances and speaks every time that she fancies she passes her husband*) I find you in very agreeable company, sir—upon my word, Frederic! My coming here was very improper, was it, sir ? Surely a wife may go where her husband goes, (*passing over*) A separation! (*her voice choking with tears*) Oh, yes, by all means—an excellent idea!—with all my heart, sir. (*suddenly stops, strongly agitated, and looks on every side*) Heavens ! Gone! Where are they ? Edward, come, let's follow them, (*she seems to drag some one along, and falls into chair, L.*) Ah ! I see them together—yonder—look ! look! (*points towards a private box, and, after a moment's agitation, utters a cry, then rubbing her eyes, starts up quite awake, and looks round her with an expression of extreme joy*) No ball! No rival! still in this room! Thank heaven it was a dream. (*after a moment's thought, changing the expression of her countenance*) No, it wasn't a dream, it was a warning voice from heaven—dreams often are. He is deceiving

me—I know it I feel it. The conviction is in me, I know it as if I saw it The proof alone is wanting, and something tells me I shall find that too. (*her wandering eyes at length fix themselves on the secretaire*) Ah, the key in the secretaire! this the first time he has neglected to take it with him; He was too hurried when he left home to think of it. There's a coincidence! (*advancing quickly towards it*) If he has any secrets (*tapping the secretaire*) here they are. (*hesitating*) It would be rather treacherous in me to take advantage of such an opportunity—yet, he may be faithless, and my happiness, yes, my happiness depends on my being satisfied. I am resolved then, (*she places her hand on the key, then slops suddenly in great alarm, turning as if she heard a noise*) Ah! who's there I (*recovering*) No one! I'm frightened at my own shadow, I declare, (*opens secretaire quickly, looking around*) I'm alone, quite alone! (*places the candle upon the flap of the secretaire, hurriedly opens and examines all the drawers*) There is nothing—nothing. Papers of no interest—memorandums of no moment, (*reads*) "Diary of expenses." (*she throws this aside also, then pauses suddenly and picks it up, assuming great seriousness*) Stay! his expenses! well thought of—men's expenses are a safe clue to their habits, (*reads quickly and with much agitation*) "Seventeenth—lent Edward six thousand francs, and yesterday, paid for Edward ten thousand francs"—no doubt for his wedding presents. There is nothing—still I find nothing—surely I cannot have examined all carefully. What's this? a secret drawer! Oho! (*touches spring, drawer flies open in middle of secretaire*) Ah! what do I behold? a faded bouquet! Good heavens! he must have carried on this intrigue for some time, (*again examines drawer*) Ah! a miniature! in fancy costume! and in his secret drawer, (*places her hand to her heart and seems ready to faint*) She is very beautiful—O yes, much, much handsomer than I am! I dare say he worships it—There, there lies his idol, (*casts it on to the floor*) Broken I hope, like my heart, (*seizes with great eagerness a paper from the same drawer*) A letter too—in a woman's hand! (*examining it closely*) Why it's the very billet he received this evening. Oh,

now the discovery is complete, (*seating herself*) I shall now learn all. (*reading with great agitation*) " My dear Frederic"—(*speaking*) Her dear Frederic! (*reads*) " Tomorrow I start for London, you know it, and yet you come not to me"—(*speaking*) A gentle reproach for not keeping the assignation. This then was the cause of—but no matter, I will read on—(*reads*) " And he, how different from you, comes to me daily, (*speaking*) He! he ! Oh, a rival no doubt, (*reads*) " He has determined to follow me, and as I do not forget that I owe everything to you"—(*speaking*) Indeed! (*reads*)—" my first appearance and consequently my good fortune, for your sake I have hitherto struggled hard. But if I do not see you to-night at the ball of the Opera, (*reading with increasing emotion to the end*) where *he* will not fail to be before you, I cannot answer for myself, and then do not blame my heart" (*speaking*) Perfidious creature ! (*greatly exasperated*) And he is gone there! actually gone to meet her! False, treacherous being! (*while uttering this her rage gradually increases, till in her fury she overturns the candle—lights down*) Ha ! the light is out. Well, what need have I to know any more? The name of this woman ? What, what is it to me ? My husband loves me not, he never did love me, he married me for my fortune! (*walking about, stops suddenly*) I sought for a proof; well, here it is, a decided proof of guilt and shame ! I am duped, betrayed ! What, what is left me but despair and death ? (*firmly*) Yes, death is my only refuge, (*listens in greatest agitation*) Ha! (*a carriage rapidly approaches*) he returns then at last. Yes, I am resolved—I will fling myself under his horses' feet, and he shall witness my death. He shall behold the fearful sacrifice, and he will know what it means, (*she rushes to the window and throws it wide open*) No, no, I am deceived again ; it is gone by—Ha, I am cold, very cold—shivering, (*leaves that window quickly and seats herself near the one at back*) The first breeze of morning seems to thrill through my veins (*speaking slowly*) It has revived me—I no longer feel the same creature—I can breathe again—I am better, not so unhappy (*weeps as she approaches the balcony with her face to the audience—lights gradually up—in an afflicted*

and reproachful voice, mingled with sobs) Frederic has been all night from home ; his absence until one o'clock I could have borne without chiding—even till three o'clock. But to be all the night away, it is most cruel, unfeeling, unnatural! (*her eye falls on the letter which she had dropped near the window, she picks it up*) I hold within my hand again that fatal letter, (*raise lights a little here*) Day begins to break, and with its dawn rise thoughts more cheering in my troubled mind. I'll read this letter by the day-light then, it may assume a brighter aspect now. (*reads the letter slowly, turning the paper towards the window to catch the first light of day, which is represented at side scene*) " My dear Frederic"—(*turns away her eyes an instant, then goes on*) " To-morrow I start for London—you know it, yet you come not to me." (*breaking off*) Reproaches ! it is necessary to be urgent with him, then; he is perhaps less culpable than I imagined, (*continuing letter*) " And he—how different from you!" (*speaks*) Who, then, is this lady whose wondrous charms so fascinates them all? I can now see her signature ! (*turns the letter*) " Anais." (*struck with the name*) Anais! that name is familiar to me—yes, my brother refused a most excellent match for a lady called Anais. But let me proceed, (*reads*) " He has determined to follow me; and as I do not forget that I owe everything to you, my first appearance, and consequently my fortune"----- (*speaks briskly*) Yes, yes, so she does; and her engagement in London she owes to my husband, who made many sacrifices to tear her away from my infatuated brother. Why, he would have fled with her this very night! Oh ! (*joyfully*) then it was to prevent this indiscreet match that Frederic hastened to her at the ball, (*returning quickly to the secretaire, she replaces the letter of Anais upon the flap, and seeing the bouquet, picks it up*) But this bouquet! Alas! this admits of no such explanation. These flowers kept in secret! this—this proves his love for some one! (*examining the flowers closely, and exhibiting great emotion*) Here is myrtle—emblem of tenderness, constancy, and permanence ; violet, primrose, heart's-ease ! (*struck with the recollection*) Why, I seem to remember these flowers ! (*joyously*) Yes, the

last time we danced together I wore violets, heart's-ease, and myrtle. Now, if it were----- Yes, it is the same ! 'Tis mine—'tis mine! He took the bouquet from me, and has kept it ever since, (*pressing it with delight to her lips*) Dear, dear Frederic! (*in moving across the stage she kicks the miniature, which has remained on the floor*) Good heavens I what's this ?—the miniature! I fear I have broken it, and he is certain to discover who did it. (*picks it up and examines it*) No, no! I have not injured it—thanks to my lucky stars! What is this inscription engraven on the back ? (*approaches the window a little, and reads slowly*) " Marie, Countess of Lavignon, painted in"—In when ?—" in 1754!" (*hides her face in her hands, then recovering herself, bursts into a fit of laughter*) Ha, ha, ha! his grandmother! (*very archly*) So then I have been jealous of my husband's dear, good, venerable, and long since deceased—grandmamma! (*puts the miniature into the drawer of the secretaire—takes the bouquet and holds it up, smiling*) I've been jealous of my husband's wife, too ! How ridiculous do I now appear in my own eyes!—how groundless were all my apprehensions ! (*closes window, and returns to c. of stage—knock heard*) Ah, this time it is my husband! (*listens to footsteps*) Yes, he comes with my brother—dear, dear Frederic ! and I all but suspected him of infidelity, (*rushing towards door*) I will fly into his arms----- (*stops suddenly and says with great archness*) No! no! no ! that is too fond a reception to bestow upon my truant Frederic. Ha ! the door of the secretaire stands open, he must not suspect anything. (*carefully closes the secretaire*) If he knew that I had been jealous, I should tremble for the consequences, for the fact is, husbands misconstrue everything, even our love for them. Hush, hush! he comes, (*goes rapidly to door, R., which she opens, and as she passes out, says—*) The Night of Suspense is ended.

(*immediately as door R. closes, door L., opens—the SERVANT appears with candlestick as at rising of curtain, lighting some one who is about to enter*)

Curtain.