

MAREX. There is no central station there. We are on the Luxeuil central.

RIVOIRE. Telephone to Luxeuil then — tell them to send someone.

MAREX. That's much too far. Oh, I am beginning to be frightened, too — I am — I don't know what's the matter with me.

RIVOIRE. It's all right.

MAREX. Yes; see here, I am thinking — Blaise leaving so soon after me — this coincidence ——

RIVOIRE. That's foolish. Come, come.

MAREX. Yes, it is foolish. *(At telephone.)* What do you mean? The revolver's not there? That's impossible. Come along — look for it quick. Everywhere? In the drawer? At the back? Nothing? Where do you think it can be? I left it there. *(To the RIVOIRES.)* Ah, my friends!

RIVOIRE. Yes? *(He and his wife go up, their emotion increasing until the end of the scene; they are standing, following every word and movement of MAREX.)*

MAREX. What? Nothing? Then it has been taken? — Who? — Not Blaise? Then whom? — A Tramp! Ah, speak more clearly — I can't hear you — there's a buzzing in my ears. — What do you say? Oh, Martha, don't be afraid, I entreat you, I implore you — I am here — I am here. It's cracking! Being forced! Impossible! The shutters are solid. Ah, I hear you trembling! The baby is crying. Don't make a noise. Make him be quiet. — Be quiet, my pet, I beg you, dear little Pierre. Yes, put out the lamp. Tell Nanette — directly — that will drive them away, perhaps — I don't know — I — I — Ah, my God! Now under the window shutters — you think — several people — and also behind the door! They're slipping something underneath — Ah! — call! shout! — frighten them! — scream — call — cry 'Help!' — it's ghastly! Yes, you're right. Don't scream. Run away and take the child. Yes, run away — run through the kitchen. Run! Ah! *(Utters a piercing cry.)* Oh! who was that who screamed! Martha! Martha! Was that you? Answer! Answer! I say! What are they doing? What are they doing to you? Ah! — they're being killed! They're being strangled — ah! — Help! — Murder! Help!

(Leaving the telephone and rushing out like a madman, while MONSIEUR and MADAME RIVOIRE try to restrain him.)
Help! — Murder! — Murder! — Help! *(Continues to scream as the curtain falls.)*

CURTAIN

MAREX (*gaily*). Seventy kilometers from one mouth to the other.

RIVOIRE. Your coffee is cold.

MAREX. Oh, that doesn't matter. (*Drinks.*) Just fancy, we have an old servant who is very devoted, but most incredibly nervous — the least noise upsets her. She always thinks there are thieves — murderers ——

(*RIVOIRE lights a cigarette.*)

RIVOIRE. I suppose the place is quite safe?

MAREX. Oh, Lord, yes, quite safe, I think — the same as anywhere else. We're rather lonely, it's true, but Mad——

MADAME RIVOIRE. Haven't you a manservant who sleeps in the house when you're not there?

MAREX. Yes, Blaise, a good fellow, but it happens he has been called away to his mother, who is very ill.

RIVOIRE. Oh, then they're alone?

MAREX. Oh, only for an hour or two. I must confess I am a little worried, but I wouldn't say so to Martha. Besides, she couldn't do anything else under the circumstances. There's no danger — it's quite ridiculous to worry one's self over such things as that.

MADAME RIVOIRE. My goodness! one can never take too many precautions; one reads such frightful things in the papers.

MAREX. Why, you're as bad as Nanette. (*Telephone bell rings again.*)

RIVOIRE (*going to telephone*). Well, what's the matter now? What — Ah! (*going to MAREX.*) It's your wife, old man. (*Hands him the receiver.*)

MAREX (*rather anxiously rises and crosses to telephone*). Is that you? How differently your voice sounds! What's the matter? You hear footsteps — in the garden? Perhaps it's Blaise. Then — you'll be well protected. Perhaps it's the dogs on the gravel walk? A kind of muffled noise — near the door? Come now, I beg you, I entreat you not to lose your head. Are you listening to me? Yes, I entreat you. Baby is crying — I hear him. You are frightening him. Please calm yourselves. Nanette is very much to blame — it's she who has frightened you — yes, you *are* frightened. Behind the door? Still? Come, come, it's impossible. Listen, it's quite easy to make sure. You know there's the revolver in the table drawer; I left it there — loaded. Listen! Open one of the windows very quietly. You don't dare? Why, I hardly know you — you who are so brave! Open the window, not the shutters, just the window, and fire the revolver once. Never mind if it does spoil them — that'll frighten them — if there's anyone there; but I don't think there is — it's impossible. — *It is?* Ah! perhaps it's some animal — a fox. — I entreat you not to tremble like that. Do what I tell you — fire; take care not to hurt yourself. Warn baby so that he is not frightened. Do what I tell you. I am listening. — You can tell me ——

RIVOIRE (*rather moved, goes to MAREX*). Why, what's the matter?

MAREX (*to RIVOIRE*). My dear fellow, they are frightened to death — that's all. They say they hear noises — steps — creakings — all sorts of things on the other side of the door opening onto the park. It's all imagination. Nevertheless, if there were a train that could take me back, I'd go ——

RIVOIRE. Why don't you telephone to the village?

MADAME RIVOIRE. The Curé at Vitré offered us fifty francs a bottle for it.

RIVOIRE. Don't let's talk of him.

MAREX (*sipping slowly*). Oh, exquisite. You were right, it's marvelous.

RIVOIRE (*offering cigarettes*). Well, are you comfortable there in that castle of yours, a hundred miles from anywhere?

MAREX. Comfortable! Very uncomfortable, old man. You don't catch us there next summer.

MADAME RIVOIRE. Where do you think of going?

MAREX. To Touraine — it's not so far from Paris and it's more cheerful.

RIVOIRE. You pay very high rent at La Chesnaye?

MAREX. Very. It's not only that, it's the situation. We're away from everything, it's so inconvenient — we have to change trains three times to get to Paris. It's almost impossible for me with my business to see to. I've had to go to the expense of a telephone, and a nice penny it's cost me!

MADAME RIVOIRE. I am not surprised. Between Luseuil and Servon there is a stretch of road ——— (*At this moment the telephone bell begins to ring.*)

MAREX Yes — (*Goes to telephone.*) Hullo! hullo! Ah! is that you, darling? Yes, very pleasant journey. Your friends are quite well. How are you? Not in bed yet, Blaise not there! — His mother? — oh, poor boy! You were quite right, certainly. Nanette was wrong. Poor fellow. Did you tell him to hurry back — to take a carriage? — That's right —. I don't think you're frightened. Are you? What a good thing! A noise just now? The dogs! That happens every evening. Do you remember that row last Monday? — Nanette is a silly old coward — worse than a baby. Has he gone to bed? No? You're waiting for Blaise? — That will be better — Ah! — he's asleep — the bell woke him up. Bring him and let him say good-night to me. — Good-night, my pet, were you asleep? If you have been very good when I go back — (*Turns to the RIVOIRES, laughing.*) He doesn't know how to hold the receiver. (*Into the telephone.*) Tell him he shall perhaps have his little sister. I have been thinking it over, I think I can promise him one — (*Laughs.*) Shall we buy one between us? Yes — quite new — eh? (*Pause.*) What's the matter? Nanette hears something else? Tell her to come and let me scold her. Is that you, Nanette, Are you never going to change? Noises, eh? What sort of noises? What are you afraid of? You're well locked in — well bolted — it's folly. Come, go to sleep. Blaise will be back in an hour at the outside. I forbid you ever to read the stories in the *Petit Journal* again — they go to your head. All right. Good. night. — Pleasant dreams. — Good-night, dear little wife — till to-morrow. Don't you think it's wonderful? You are close to me — I hear the slightest inflection in your voice — almost every movement — can very nearly see you — yes, I see you, little wife. You know what that is. (*Kisses her through telephone.*)

MADAME RIVOIRE. One would think you were turtle doves.

RIVOIRE. Don't mind us.

MAREX (*into the telephone*). Our friends are chaffing me — but I don't mind. Good-bye till to-morrow. Yes, my darling. To-morrow. (*Leaves off speaking and hangs up the receiver.*)

RIVOIRE. If we had not been here ———

MADAME RIVOIRE. To what lengths might they not have gone!

RIVOIRE. Fortunately the two phones are rather far apart.

very good — if you'll hold the wire, Madame. (*He lays down the receiver and crosses to door at back. At this moment same door opens and MONSIEUR and MADAME RIVOIRE and MAREX enter.*)

MADAME RIVOIRE (*to SERVANT*). Justin, you can serve the coffee here.

SERVANT. Very good, Madame. (*To MAREX.*) Someone for you on the telephone, M. Marex.

MAREX. Ah! (*Looks round for telephone.*)

RIVOIRE (*pointing to telephone*). There it is on the table.

(*SERVANT enters with tray.*)

RIVOIRE (*to SERVANT*). You may bring in the old brandy — you know, the one with the red seal.

SERVANT. Very good, Monsieur. (*He goes out.*)

MAREX (*at telephone*). Hullo! Hullo! Hullo! Hullo! (*A pause.*)

RIVOIRE. Can't you get an answer?

MAREX. No. (*At telephone again.*) Is that you? Hullo! Hullo!

MADAME RIVOIRE. They've cut you off already. They are always playing that trick!

RIVOIRE (*to MAREX*). Yes, always — if one's not there to answer immediately.

MAREX. It's the same thing everywhere. Well, my wife must ring me up again. (*Hangs up receiver.*)

MADAME RIVOIRE (*pouring out coffee for MAREX*). Sugar?

MAREX. Thanks, no.

RIVOIRE (*a cup in his hand*). My dear fellow, the telephone is a fine invention — very useful, but badly organized — at any rate in France.

MAREX. All the same, it's better than nothing. It may be my fault — it's a most astonishing thing, but if I were to telephone twenty times a day, I should never get the hang of the blessed thing; it beats me — it seems weird and uncanny. (*Reënter SERVANT with a bottle.*)

SERVANT. The brandy, Monsieur. (*Puts it on table and goes out.*)

RIVOIRE (*to MAREX*). Now, look here, I m going to let you taste my finest and oldest — 1857.

MAREX. 1857?

RIVOIRE. A marvel.

MARTHA. Unless ——?

NANETTE. They *can't* bark now!

MARTHA. How foolish! (*a long pause.*) I hear nothing but the storm. You see ——

NANETTE. Yes?

MARTHA (*quickly chaffing her*). You see, it was nothing.

NANETTE (*regaining her courage*). Let's hope so.

MARTHA. Come, pull yourself together, Nanette.

NANETTE. I'm trembling all over. You're pale, too, Madame.

MARTHA. Well, it's all over now. Really, you quite upset me for a moment. Make the fire up a little, it's going out. (*To herself, impatiently.*) It's only eight o'clock! (*Trying to think of something else.*) André must have reached M. Rivoire's house by now. They are nice people, the Rivoires. You remember them, Nanette?

NANETTE (*reassuring herself*). Oh, yes, master's there by now, quite comfortable.

MARTHA. I've a good mind to telephone him and tell him that Blaise's mother is so ill.

NANETTE (*delighted*). Yes, yes, do, Madame. It'll be a distraction for us, — (*pointing to telephone*) to hear his voice at the other end of that wire; it'll almost seem as if he were here with us. You'll let me listen, Madame?

MARTHA. Yes, yes. (*Takes off receiver and rings.*) Hullo! Hullo!

NANETTE. Oh, what a wonderful invention that is! There's the master miles away — and yet he can talk to us as if he were quite close to us in this room.

MARTHA (*at the telephone*). Hullo! Hullo!

NANETTE. I'm quite sure I'll feel better when I hear his voice. I shan't be frightened then. It'll be as if the master were here.

MARTHA (*at the telephone, as the curtain falls*). Ah! Will you give me Vitré 27632? Quick — quick —— Good! Thank you, I'll hold the wire.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE 2

A study. Chairs and arm chairs. Telephone on table Center. As the curtain rises, the telephone rings; at the same moment the door at back opens and a MANSERVANT enters and goes to telephone.

SERVANT (*speaks into telephone*). Hullo! Hullo! Madame — ah — Monsieur Marex — Who is it? Oh, very good, Madame —. Yes, he is here with Monsieur and Madame Rivoire in the dining-room — just arrived. I'll call him —. Yes, Madame —

NANETTE. Someone whistling.

MARTHA (*dryly*). No, nothing; it's the wind howling. (*NANETTE takes up her knitting.*) Did you pay the laundress?

NANETTE (*rises, puts her knitting on the arm-chair, and crosses to the door*). There, again! That's not the wind. Don't you hear it?

MARTHA (*going to her — listening*). The dogs — they're growling. Well?

NANETTE (*to herself*). There's someone in the grounds.

MARTHA (*impatiently*). Perhaps Blaise has forgotten something and has come back.

NANETTE. The dogs know him — they're barking — they're far away, near the back door.

MARTHA (*impatiently*). There's someone passing ——

NANETTE. Or a thief!

MARTHA. They often bark like that. You are too absurd!

NANETTE. Not like that. They're rushing about.

MARTHA (*listens — beginning to get nervous*). Yes.

NANETTE. Ah, Madame, they're coming nearer — they are chasing someone — they are quite close; now they're further off. Ah, the footsteps are coming nearer! I hear them on the gravel.

MARTHA. Nanette! Nanette!

NANETTE. There, quite close — the other side of the door, maybe.

MARTHA. Nanette.

NANETTE (*to herself*). Yes, there, the other side; perhaps they're trying to get in — to force the shutters.

MARTHA (*frightened*). Be quiet, Nanette. (*Extends her hands to NANETTE.*)

NANETTE (*takes her hands*). Ah, Madame, you are frightened, too; your hand is trembling.

MARTHA. It's you. These fancies of yours are foolish. You'll end by making me frightened.

NANETTE. I'm terrified, Madame. (*Falls into a chair.*)

MARTHA (*nervously, in a weak voice*). Come now, you silly woman, if there were thieves there — at the door — the dogs would bark. We hear nothing.

NANETTE. That's true — unless —— (*They look at each other.*)

MARTHA. Close the shutters before you go. (*To NANETTE.*) We mustn't be selfish. We should never forgive ourselves for not allowing him to see his mother for the last time. (*Aloud to BLAISE.*) That's all right. Now go.

BLAISE. You have a kind heart, Madame. The house is all shut up. I shall run all the way. I'll drive back. I should like to see her before — (*Breaks down.*) I shan't be more than two hours at the outside, I promise you, Madame. I'll be back before nine.

NANETTE (*nervously*). Oh, yes, before nine.

MARTHA. That'll be all right — wrap yourself up, it's raining. I'll lock the door behind you, Nanette hasn't the courage.

BLAISE. Thank you, Madame, thank you. (*He goes out, followed by MARTHA.*)

NANETTE. Oh, no, I haven't the courage! This great lonely house terrifies me; one might be strangled before help could come. I read in the paper only yesterday that —

(*Door slams off Right. MARTHA reënters.*)

MARTHA. I have shut the door after him. There, now we're all right. Quite safe — we'll wait here till Blaise comes back; the child is still asleep.

NANETTE (*going to the sofa*). Yes, he's fast asleep, bless him. Shall we put him to bed?

MARTHA. No, let him be. We'll all go up to bed when Blaise comes back. (*Sits down at the table again.*) We'll go on with the accounts. Where was I? (*To NANETTE.*) You paid the butcher, you said?

NANETTE. Yes, Madame.

MARTHA. Have we the book?

NANETTE (*fumbling for it*). Here it is.

MARTHA. Good. You must order six bottles of Vichy tomorrow. Don't forget.

NANETTE. The usual kind?

MARTHA. Yes, of course — for Monsieur.

NANETTE (*laughing*). And Blaise.

MARTHA. How do you mean, Blaise?

NANETTE. Oh, he takes a glass from time to time.

MARTHA (*laughing*). Oh, very well.

NANETTE. But don't say I said so. (*Stops suddenly.*) Madame, what's that? Don't you hear —?

MARTHA. What? Again?

to see if he is observed, gets close to the drawer, takes out the revolver, goes on tip-toe to the half open door and quickly disappears.)

PIERRE (*in his sleep*). Nanette!

MARTHA (*goes to the child and leans over the couch, her back to the table*). Nanette's coming soon. Never mind, dear, we're going to put you to bed — there, go to sleep, go to sleep. Mamma is with you. He's too far away from the fire. (*She draws chair nearer the fire.*) Besides, the door is open. Will you shut the door, if you — (*Turns round.*) Why, where is he? (*Drawing herself up.*) Gone! I told him to stay; he couldn't have understood. Perhaps he is waiting outside. (*Crosses to French window and looks out.*) No, there's no one there. (*Closes the window to the Right.*) He's gone, he couldn't have understood. (*Enter NANETTE.*) Well?

NANETTE. I gave Blaise the letter — he read it; the poor fellow cried. Why, where is that boy? (*Looks around.*)

MARTHA. He's gone. He didn't understand. Blaise! Well, Blaise, I'm so sorry. (*BLAISE enters, wiping his eyes.*)

BLAISE. Madame, my mother is ill — dying, they say; she wants to see me; she keeps asking for me.

MARTHA. Oh, my poor Blaise, did she write to you?

BLAISE. No, she couldn't write the letter. One of the neighbors has written for her. (*Weeps.*)

NANETTE. Poor Blaise! What are you going to do?

BLAISE (*undecided*). I don't know. What can I do,

MARTHA. Nanette, Blaise must go at once; his mother is dying — he must see her.

BLAISE. Can you spare me, Madame, I'll not be long.

MARTHA. Go at once. (*BLAISE starts for the door.*)

NANETTE. We'll be all alone.

BLAISE (*turns round and stops*). Madame, I can't leave you alone. Master left you in my care.

NANETTE. He'll be very angry.

BLAISE. I had better go to-morrow morning — at daybreak. You won't be afraid at daybreak, Madame?

MARTHA (*crosses to BLAISE, who withdraws a little*). I'm not frightened — what is there to be frightened of? We'll lock up carefully. Nanette's absurd. You go, Blaise, leave us. I'll explain to Monsieur; I'll tell him that I insisted. Go. You can be in Servon in half an hour.

BLAISE. Oh, in less than that.

MARTHA. You can get a cab to bring you back. You need not be very long.

BLAISE. You may take my word for it, I shall lose no time, Madame.

NANETTE (*opens window to shut the shutters*). Yes. (*Draws back quickly.*) Ah!

MARTHA. What's the matter?

NANETTE. There's someone in front of the window.

MARTHA (*turning*). What! Oh, nonsense! It's the reflection of the lamp.

NANETTE (*frightened and terrified*). No!

MARTHA (*goes to her*). Nanette, your nerves —

NANETTE (*draws back*). Oh, Madame, my heart's beating! Blaise must shut them, I can't. I'm too frightened.

MARTHA. What a coward! This is really going a little too far. Who do you think can be there? Come now, let me look.

(*Crosses to door at back, opens it, then recoils suddenly, uttering a stifled cry. She sees a tramp with his cap in his hand. TRAMP enters, leaving the door half open.*)

TRAMP. Beg pardon, lady —

MARTHA. Who are you? What do you want?

TRAMP (*looks round quickly*). I've got a letter. (*Feels in his pocket.*)

MARTHA. A letter! Where do you come from?

TRAMP (*feels in another pocket*). I've come up from the village.

MARTHA (*excitedly*). How did you get in? Why didn't you ring at the front door!

TRAMP (*looks round*). Don't know where the front door is. I took a short cut, came through the wood. (*Takes out tattered letter from his pocket and hands it to her.*)

MARTHA. Who is the letter for? Who gave it to you?

TRAMP. It's for Blaise, your servant; his mother's dying.

MARTHA (*with great emotion*). His mother dying! Nanette, take it to Blaise at once.

NANETTE. Yes, Madame. (*She goes out.*) Poor fellow! Oh, poor fellow!

MARTHA. Make haste! Make haste! (*To TRAMP.*) Who gave you the letter?

TRAMP. Somebody I don't know — he told me where I was to take it — said I was to run, that's all.

MARTHA. Wait a moment, there may be an answer. (*Little PIERRE in his sleep knocks over the picture-book lying near him on the arm-chair. MARTHA looks at him.*) Are you asleep, dear! (*Goes towards the sofa where the child is lying, tries to make him more comfortable and says without turning round.*) Sit down. Blaise is coming and you can explain to him. (*The TRAMP is seated at some distance from the table. His eyes fall on the open drawer. He sees the revolver, looks round*

BLAISE. Very good, and I'd better let the dogs loose, too?

MARTHA. Yes, oh, Blaise!

BLAISE. Madame?

MARTHA. It seems very lonely now your master is gone. I wonder — I wonder whether you'd mind sleeping on this floor to-night, You could make up a bed here.

BLAISE. Certainly, Madame, if you'd feel easier.

MARTHA. Thank you, Blaise, I am sure —— (NANETTE *reënters with a lamp in her hand, brings on book. BLAISE goes out. MARTHA says to NANETTE*) I am asking Blaise to make his bed here in this room; you'll feel more comfortable.

NANETTE (*in a low voice*). Much more. We shan't be so nervous. (*Puts lamp on table.*)

MARTHA. "We?" Why don't you say I, my good Nanette?

NANETTE. Well, I shall be the more comfortable. I don't pretend to be brave.

MARTHA. I do pretend, but I'm not.

NANETTE. Ah, well, I am quite an old woman. Never mind, three days pass quickly; the master will be back Wednesday at the latest, won't he? He didn't care about going, I know.

MARTHA. When we go upstairs to put the child to bed, Blaise can make his bed.

NANETTE. Yes. Look at him. Doesn't he look pretty? He is sleeping like a top. Will you have time to look through my books, Madame, before we put Pierre to bed?

MARTHA. He's sound asleep. Yes, it won't take ten minutes, will it?

NANETTE. Oh, not five.

MARTHA (*sitting left of table, takes up an account book; looking at book; to NANETTE*). I gave you twenty francs yesterday ——

NANETTE. Yes, Madame.

MARTHA. Good (*makes a calculation*). You paid the baker?

NANETTE. Yes, Madame — six francs, ten sous.

MARTHA. Six francs, ten sous — and the butcher, too?

NANETTE. Yes, here's his book. (*The wind blows and the rain increases.*)

MARTHA. How the wind's howling. (*Rises.*) Fasten the shutters. The wind sounds so dreary at night. (*Comes Left.*)

BLAISE. Monsieur can rely on me.

MAREX. Put my bag in the fly. (BLAISE *executes the order and goes out.*)

MAREX (*kisses the child*). Good-bye, old sportsman; be good, or I'll forget all about that present.

PIERRE. Yes, Daddy, I'll be a very good boy.

MAREX. What would you like me to bring you?

PIERRE. Oh, Papa! Bring me back a little sister.

MAREX. My goodness, that's too expensive.

PIERRE. But, Papa, I want one all the same.

MAREX. Well, we'll see.

PIERRE. If a new one is too expensive, buy a second-hand one.

MAREX (*laughs and kisses the child*). A second-hand one! Very well, dear. (*Kissing his wife.*) Good-bye, Nanette, don't think any more of those silly things — you needn't be frightened. (BLAISE *enters.*) Blaise is here. Ah, that reminds me. I say, Blaise — (*Points to table and pulls out drawer.*) One never knows — it's best to be prepared — to frighten the ugly faces, as Nanette calls them; there is — look — in this drawer, you'll see a loaded revolver. (*Tries to shut the drawer.*) Why, I can't. You must keep it shut and be very careful; don't let the child get at it. Good-bye. Good-bye, dear one. I shall just make it by the skin of my teeth. (MARTHA, NANETTE *and* PIERRE *go up with him.*)

MARTHA. Good-bye.

MAREX (*stopping MARTHA*). Don't come out, you'll catch cold. (*He goes out. Then is heard:*) Now then, coachman, fast as you can, or we'll miss the train. Mind, Blaise, remember what I told you — I leave everything in your charge. (*Door slams.*)

PIERRE (*running suddenly to door*). Good-bye, Daddy; don't forget my little sister. (*Then he comes down to NANETTE.*)

NANETTE. Yes, Papa won't forget. Come and look at the pictures. (*She takes the child on her knee; he gradually falls asleep.*)

MARTHA (*at window*). There he is at the end of the avenue. I hope he'll be in time. What weather — a fog — you can hardly see the lamps; the carriage is turning round by the little wood — it's out of sight now; the rain's worse than ever. How dark it is already. This part of the country is very dull. Nanette!

NANETTE. Hush! he's going to sleep.

MARTHA. Ah! put him gently on the sofa and go and fetch the lamp, it's too dark to see now. (*reënter BLAISE.*) Hush! the child's asleep. (*She goes out. NANETTE puts the child on the sofa and goes to fetch the lamp.*)

BLAISE (*in a low voice*). Monsieur is well on his way now; he has a wonderful horse.

MARTHA. Blaise, you might shut the shutters in the dining-room. And lock the outer gate.

MARTHA. And in Paris?

MAREX. Hotel Terminus — Room 16. (*Telephone rings. Speaking into telephone.*) Hullo! Is that you, old chap? Yes, yes, but I have had the telephone put in. Expensive, as there's no exchange at Servon. I am on the Luxeuil Exchange — most expensive of the lot; but it was a necessity for my business. Yes. I say I'm coming to take coffee with you this evening. I am going by the Paris Express. Urgent business. No, only coffee, I shall have dined. I'll be with you about eight. Hope I shan't disturb you.

MARTHA (*who has crossed to MAREX*). Say something pretty from me, and give my love to Lucienne.

MAREX (*speaking again into telephone*). Yes — she is here. She sends all sorts of kind messages to you and Lucienne.

MARTHA (*to her husband*). What! Did he hear?

MAREX (*still at the telephone*). Thanks. See you this evening. (*Hangs up the receiver.*)

MARTHA. Did he hear my voice?

MAREX. You were close to me. Never trust a telephone, if you're talking secrets.

MARTHA. Isn't it wonderful?

NANETTE (*listening*). I hear wheels.

MARTHA. Yes, it's the fly this time. (*A noise of hail heard.*)

NANETTE. It's coming through the wood.

MAREX. Thank goodness. I shall just make it.

PIERRE (*rising and crossing to his father*). Papa!

MAREX. Yes, old boy.

PIERRE. Daddy! I want you to bring me back a present.

MAREX. All right, old man. (*To MARTHA.*) Give me my bag. Where's Blaise?

MARTHA. In the dining-room. I'll call him. — Blaise! Blaise!

NANETTE (*looking out of window*). Here s the fly at last.

(*Enter BLAISE.*)

BLAISE. Yes, Madame?

MAREX. Oh! Blaise, here's my world, my dear little world; I leave it all in your care. I know I can trust you while I'm away.

NANETTE. But, Monsieur, listen! It is pouring torrents.

MARTHA. It's awful weather.

MAREX. Yes, it's coming down — beautiful September weather! We came to the country to breathe the fresh air, go out for long walks, and for three weeks we haven't been able to get our noses outside the door. Detestable place. I have come to hate it.

MARTHA (*closes bag*). We shan't come back here for our next holidays.

MAREX. Rather not. And so inconvenient, too! Damp, dull. The town is dirty, no means of communication

NANETTE. And so far away from everything! If we wanted to get anything — if anyone were taken ill in the night, one might die before the slightest help could come.

MARTHA. You might go and ask the neighbors.

NANETTE. Neighbors! They are all such a long way off.

MAREX. True. It *is* lonely.

MARTHA. It would not be so inconvenient if we could have afforded a horse and carriage of our own.

MAREX. And besides, it's too large; five or six servants are needed to keep all this up. There's that wood, seven acres — a small forest; what's the good of it? I don't shoot — no one walks in it.

NANETTE. No, thanks — full of horrid tramps. I met one the other day. Ugh!

MARTHA (*laughing*). You foolish old Nanette.

MAREX. Some beggar.

NANETTE. He had an ugly face, he'd only ——

MAREX. An ugly face! Is that all? Well, next year we'll take our holiday somewhere else.

NANETTE. A good idea. I couldn't live here if I had to stay all alone, but fortunately there's the master and Blaise.

MAREX. By Jove, I was forgetting! (*He goes to the telephone and rings.*)

MARTHA. What are you doing?

MAREX. I am telephoning to Rivoire. (*He speaks into the telephone.*) Hullo! Give me Vitré, 27632 — as quick as possible, please. Thanks. (*To MARTHA.*) I am going to tell them I arrive about eight this evening.

MARTHA. What train do you take back?

MAREX. The ten-forty express. I shall be in Paris at five-fifteen to-morrow morning. If you want to reach me before that, you can telephone me at Rivoire's this evening up till nine o'clock.

MAREX (*stopping and listening*). Is that the carriage?

MARTHA (*going to window*). Eh! No, it isn't.

MAREX. Isn't he late?

MARTHA. He's punctual enough as a rule.

MAREX. Where did you order the carriage?

MARTHA. From Perrin's as usual. (*Coming back to table.*) Nanette ordered it.

NANETTE. I went there myself. I saw the order written down.

MARTHA (*looks at watch*). You have plenty of time.

MAREX (*looks at clock*). I shall only just make it.

MARTHA. It's only twenty minutes' drive to the station.

MAREX. I had better start on foot. (*Going up to window.*)

NANETTE. Oh, no, Monsieur, there's plenty of time. It's a fast horse.

MAREX. If it's not here in a minute or two I had better give up all thoughts of going ——

MARTHA. It's sure to come.

MAREX. If I miss the train I shall be in a pretty fix. If I am not in Paris to-morrow to meet Muller, the business will fall through — a dead loss — ten thousand francs ——

MARTHA. Does this business mean as much as that?

MAREX. Yes, and a bit more, I hope.

MARTHA. It is important. Ah! (*Looking out of window.*) I thought that was the fly. (*Anxiously.*) If they had a telephone at the stable, we could find out whether they had started.

MAREX. If it has not started now, it will be too late; and besides, they have no telephone; no one else has one at Servon — God-forsaken hole. A telephone! they don't even know what such a thing is.

MARTHA (*looking at clock on mantelpiece*). Six o'clock.

MAREX. Ah! if I only had that driver here! Listen. I am going to start on foot. Blaise can carry my bag — I shall be there before the fly gets here. (*The rain and wind increase.*)

At the Telephone

from *One-act plays for stage and study*, second series (1925) edited by Walter Prichard Eaton

ANDRÉ DE LORDE

André de Lorde, born in France in 1871, is the most conspicuous exponent of the Grand Guignol "Thriller" School of dramatists. He has, in more than a hundred plays, devoted himself almost exclusively to the exploitation of the theme of terror.

Of these the most famous is *Au Téléphone*, here translated for the first time into English.

Published plays (only English translations noted): *The Woman Who Was Acquitted*; *At the Telephone*.

CHARACTERS

ANDRÉ MAREX, *aged forty-five.*
MARTHA MAREX, *his wife, aged thirty*
BLAISE, *an old manservant, aged sixty*
NANETTE, *an old servant, aged sixty*
LITTLE PIERRE MAREX, *aged six*
A TRAMP, *under twenty*
RIVOIRE, *a friend of Marex, aged fifty*
JUSTIN, *a manservant, aged thirty*
LUCIENNE RIVOIRE, *Rivoire's wife, aged thirty*

SCENE: at the Château de la Chesnaye, and at Rivoire's home.

TIME: The 1890s.

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SCENE 1

A country house. A large sitting-room on the ground floor, French window at back opening on to the park. A smaller window on each side of the French window; doors Right and Left. At Left a fireplace with lighted fire. Between the fireplace and the footlights, a telephone apparatus is fastened to the wall. At Right, table, arm-chairs, chairs, a writing table in the corner.

As the curtain rises the old servant NANETTE is discovered sitting by the fire with little PIERRE on her lap. He is turning over the pages of a picture book. MAREX, in traveling costume, is just putting away some papers into the open writing table. MARTHA, his wife, is wrapping up some small objects and putting them into a bag which is on the table.