

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

Alfred de Vigny—Translated and adapted by Frank J. Morlock

Table of Contents

<u>Nothing Worse Than a Fright</u>	1
<u>Alfred de Vigny—Translated and adapted by Frank J. Morlock</u>	2
<u>SCENE I</u>	3
<u>SCENE II</u>	7
<u>SCENE III</u>	9

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- SCENE I
- SCENE II
- SCENE III

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THE DUKE OF *****, still very young, very brilliant peer,
Ambassador of Louis XVI, cordon blue

DUCHESS DE *****, his wife, naive, childish, gracious, animated

Mr. Tronchin, old and mocking

Rosette, a chamber maid

A Lackey

In the original production, The Duchess was played by Marie Dorval, de Vigny's mistress.

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

SCENE I

PARIS. A sumptuous bedroom of the time of Louis XVI. Very large portraits of the family decorate the walls. It is noon.

DUCHESS: (finishing dressing for the day, looking over her toilette and making a face) Why, Rosette, do you fancy the negligence of these doctors?

ROSETTE: Madame, that's not the word.

DUCHESS: How I am suffering!

ROSETTE: Madame, the Duchess is suffering!

DUCHESS: As for me, I never consented to see any other Doctor than good old Tronchin! The Chevalier waited for me for a long while.

ROSETTE: For more than an hour.

DUCHESS: (excitedly) Meaning he has it in for me, but he hasn't been successful.

ROSETTE: He just sent two bouquets by his courier.

DUCHESS: And so he's not coming himself? Ah, that's nice. I am going to go out riding horseback.

ROSETTE: Doctor Tronchin has forbidden you to ride.

DUCHESS: But I am sick; I need to.

ROSETTE: It's because you are sick that you mustn't.

DUCHESS: Then I am going to write to the Chevalier to scold him.

ROSETTE: Doctor Tronchin has forbidden Madame to work or hold her head in a lowered position.

DUCHESS: Well, I am going to sing. Open the Clavichord, Miss.

ROSETTE: My God! Do I have to tell Madame that Doctor Tronchin has forbidden her to sing?

DUCHESS: (stamping her foot) I'd better go back to bed, since I can do nothing. I am going to read. No, read to me. I am going to lie on the sofa. I am suffocating, I don't know why.

ROSETTE: (taking a book) Here's Mr. Florian's Epistle and the Celebrated Hymns of Bossuet.

DUCHESS: Read what you please, go ahead.

ROSETTE: (reading) "Nemorin went each dawn to pick nosegays for Estelle. Nosegays that Estelle loved to wind in the tresses of her long black hair."

(She places the book down.)

DUCHESS: How capricious the Chevalier is! He no longer wants me to put my body in stays. As if one could go out without it. Keep reading, go on.

ROSETTE (continuing, after having discarded Florian, unsuspectingly takes up Bossuet) "For me, if I am permitted after all the others to pay my last respects to this tomb, O prince, the worthy subject of our praise and our regrets, you will live eternally in my memory."

DUCHESS: I don't see why he hasn't gotten here, since he was here yesterday with his damned epaulettes.

ROSETTE: (continuing) "Happily yes, warned by his white hair of the account I owed of my administration, I intend to give the tribe—" Wait, that's funny, to the tribe. "Tribe that I ought to nourish with divine words, the remainders of a failing voice and—"

DUCHESS: Here's the Commander of Malta now. Without his vows, he would perhaps be married already.

ROSETTE: Oh, Madame. For Heaven's sake!

DUCHESS: Keep on reading, go ahead, I'm listening to you.

ROSETTE: (continuing) "And with an ardor that burns out." Ah, shepherds and tribes. They're not very amusing.

(She hurls the book away.)

DUCHESS: Do you think he can be married?

ROSETTE: Never without the Duchess's permission.

DUCHESS: If he's not more married than the Duke, I would indeed be willing to give her to him. Alas! In the times we live in. Do you understand that a man may be my husband and not come to my home? Will you explain to me how it can be exactly that an unknown master can make himself respected, feared, and loved like a God

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

without being seen, and who cares nothing for me and whom I must honor; from whom I must hide myself and who does not deign to spy on me, who gives me his name to bear from a great distance as one would give an abandoned land.

ROSETTE: Madame, I have a brother who is a farmer, a big farmer in Normandy. And he always says that those who do not cultivate the earth have no right to its flowers and fruits.

DUCHESS: (proudly) What are you saying, Miss? Find my watch in my jewel box. (after having dreamed a little) You know, what you said doesn't seem to have any common sense to it. But I think it would lead a long way in politics if they wanted to consider it. Give me a flask, I feel a bit weak. Ah, when I was in the convent two years ago, if my good nuns had told me how it is to be married, I would have cried my heart out all night. Then I would have taken a firm resolve either to become an abbess or only to marry a man who loved me. It's true, that it wouldn't have been the Chevalier.

ROSETTE: Still, he's worth more than most of the world in these manners.

DUCHESS: Why, in these manners, Rosette, I don't know how I live. It's very true that I fulfill all my religious duties. Yet, at each confession, I promise to break with the Chevalier—and I never keep it. I think that the Abbe no longer expects it, to tell the truth, and doesn't seriously demand it. But still, it's deceiving the good God. And why this irritated and tormented life, this homage to sacred things as public as the disdain of such things? I don't understand at all, and all that I know how to do is love the one I love. I see no one has it in for me for that, after all.

ROSETTE: Ah, good God! Madame, someone has it in for you. Much to the contrary. I think no one who knows either of you, does anything but love you very much.

DUCHESS: You think so?

ROSETTE: That can be seen in the little smiles of friendship they make you in passing when he gives you his arm. They invite you everywhere together. Your two families receive him with love.

DUCHESS: Yes, but he doesn't live here. And now that's what they call the greatest joy in the world, and such that it is, they wouldn't dare wish it on his daughter. (after a little dreaming) His daughter! That word makes me tremble! Is it a very happy condition to feel you would die of shame to become a mother? That the carefree condition and the kindness of the great world will suddenly end and change into scorn and coldness? That women who pardon the lover will close their doors to the mothers, and those who shun me forget a husband who will not pass me the memory of his name, for it is only a name that must be respected. This name holds you enchained, this name is suspended over your head like a sword. Let what it represents be all or nothing for us. We have this name written on our collar and below: "I belong."

ROSETTE: Why, Madame, would they be so mean to you? Madame is so generally loved!

DUCHESS: If they were not so base, I would do justice on myself. And a very severe justice, believe me. I wouldn't dare raise my eyes to my mother, and, I think, even to myself alone.

ROSETTE: Good God! Madame frightens me.

DUCHESS: Enough! We are speaking too much about this, Miss. and I don't know where we are coming to. I am not the heroine of a novel, I won't kill myself, but for sure I am going to hurl myself into a convent for life.

LACKEY: (entering) Doctor Tronchin asks if the Countess will receive him.

DUCHESS: (to Rosette) Go tell him he can come in.

(Exit Rosette and the Lackey. Doctor Tronchin enters, leaning on a long cane as tall as he is. Old, bent over, wearing a Voltaire style wig.)

DUCHESS: (gaily) Ah! Here's my good old doctor. (rising and running to him) Come, lean on your patient. (taking his arm and escorting him to an armchair) What scandal are you going to tell me, doctor. What's the anecdote of the day?

TRONCHIN: Ah, beautiful lady, beautiful lady! You want to know the anecdote of others, take care not to furnish one yourself. Give me your hand. Let's see your pulse, Madame. But, sit down. Don't always move about so, you are—

DUCHESS: (sitting) Well, let me see; what have you to tell me?

TRONCHIN: (taking the Duchess's pulse) You know the scandal abroad about La Presidente is not true, Madame?

DUCHESS: Eh! My God, no! I am not informed about her.

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

TRONCHIN: And why don't you wish to inform yourself? You live too detached from everything, too— If I dared to give you advice it would be to show some interest in young society women whose opinion could defend you. If you were to have need of it, one day or the other.

DUCHESS: But, I hope to have no need to be defended, sir.

TRONCHIN: Ah, Madame, I am sure that in the depths of your heart you are at peace; but I notice that you call me very often for the last few days.

DUCHESS: Doctor, I don't see what your visits have in common with the world's opinion of me?

TRONCHIN: That's exactly what La Presidente said to me, and she is well aware of the influence of a doctor on public opinion. Indeed, I would like to render you as confident as she. My word, I extricated her from a bad misstep, but I am discreet and I don't tell the scandal—since you are not interested in her. No fever but a little agitation. Stay, stay, don't pull your hand away from me, Madame.

DUCHESS: How old is La Presidente?

TRONCHIN: Exactly the same as you, Madame! Ah, how uneasy she was! Her husband is not tender, you know? My word, he was going to make a great deal to do. Ah, how she wept! But all is finished for the present. You know, beautiful lady, that the Queen will play in a comedy at the Trianon?

DUCHESS: (uneasily) But La Presidente ran a great danger?

TRONCHIN: A danger which young women indeed run. For I have seen many things like that in my life. But in times past it was arranged through devotion more easily than today. Right now, it's the very devil—I think your eyes are swollen.

DUCHESS: I slept badly last night after your visit.

TRONCHIN: I am not yet bad or frightening to you?

DUCHESS: It's your kindness that is frightening, and your silence that is so bad. That woman you spoke of— Let me see, after all, has she been dishonored?

TRONCHIN: No, but she could be, and moreover, abandoned by all the world.

DUCHESS: And yet all the world knows who she loves.

TRONCHIN: Everybody knows it and no one says it.

DUCHESS: And suddenly, things change on this point?

TRONCHIN: Madame, when a young woman has a public weakness, everyone has her pardon in their heart and her condemnation on their lips.

DUCHESS: (quickly) And the lips judge us.

TRONCHIN: It's not the sin that is punished, but the uproar it makes.

DUCHESS: And sins, doctor, can they always be without uproar?

TRONCHIN: The most burning, Madame, are usually the lightest sins and the worst are the most silent. I've always seen that.

DUCHESS: That's against good sense, for Heaven's sake.

TRONCHIN: As everything that happens in the world, Madame.

DUCHESS: (rising and giving him her hand) Doctor, are you being frank?

TRONCHIN: Always more than people like, Madame.

DUCHESS: That can never be enough for someone whose role is taken in advance.

TRONCHIN: A role taken in advance is often the worst part, Madame.

DUCHESS: (impatiently) What does it matter to you! It's my business. I want to know from you what is the illness.

TRONCHIN: I would have already told my thought to the Duchess if I knew the character of the Duke.

DUCHESS: Well, why not ask me about his character? Although, I don't care to hear him mentioned, as it is not impossible that he won't overlook the result of some event that may be common to us—I—

TRONCHIN: He is furiously whimsical, Madame. I have seen him as high as that. (putting his hand to the head of a child) And always the same; always following his first action with an impetuosity that is irresistible and impossible to foresee. From childhood, this impetuosity has shown itself and has only grown with him. He's always been this way, going from one extreme to the other without hesitating. This has made him do great things and many stupid things, too. But never anything common. That's his character.

DUCHESS: You are not reassuring, doctor. He goes from one extreme to the other. He will love me well, and

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

I won't know what to do with this love.

TRONCHIN: Still, worse things can happen to you today, Madame.

DUCHESS: Ah, My God! What he just said to me! (she stamps her foot)

TRONCHIN: The Duke is a very great lord, Madame. He has the friendship of the King and a vast credit at the court. Whoever angered him would be without resource. And he has much wit and penetration and, more than that, he has an ironic and sharp mind. It's not possible to insinuate a plan of conduct, whatever it may be, without peril—and attempting to control him would be a great imprudence. The surest thing with him would be total frankness.

DUCHESS: (who has turned away several times blushing, rises and goes to the window) Enough, enough; from mercy, I beg you, sir. I feel myself blushing at each word you say to me. And you hurl me into great embarrassment. (speaking to him without looking at him) I admit to you I am trembling like a child. I cannot bear this conversation. The terrible fears it gives birth to in me revolt me and make me indignant against myself. You are very old, Mr. Tronchin, but neither your age nor your profession as savante prevent me from being shamed that a man can speak to me face to face about things I don't know about and that I never speak about. (a tear escapes her) I don't want us to continue to talk anymore. (Tronchin rises) The truth you spoke to me of and that you owe me—write it here and I will dispatch it all soon. Here's a pen. What you write can indeed be blunt, but I will hold no resentment against you. (she shakes his hand; the Doctor kisses hers) Your judgment is the judgment of God. I am indeed unhappy. (she leaves hurriedly)

TRONCHIN: (sitting down, penning a letter, then stopping and reading what he has written) Science is useless to men who can find no way to avoid one misery except by a greater. In the place of uncertainty and insomnia, I am giving you certainty and despair. (tears roll, he dries his eyes) She will suffer because she has a candid soul in its bewilderment; frank in the midst of the falsity of the world, sensible in a society that is cold and polite; passionate in a time of indifference, pious in a century of irreligion. She will doubtless suffer! But in the time and world we live in, nature is used up, weak and painted from childhood, having no more energy for the transports of evil than those of happiness. Chagrin slips from her, and moreover, I am going to find help for her at the very source of her misfortune.

ROSETTE: (entering) Sir, I've come to find you.

TRONCHIN: (giving her a paper) Take this, Miss.

(Rosette leaves.)

TRONCHIN: Her husband ought to be at the Trianon or at Versailles. I can get there in two hours and a half.

(The scream of the Duchess can be heard.)

TRONCHIN: Rosette is coming, all pale.

ROSETTE: Ah, sir, look how the Duchess weeps.

(Rosette opens a door with a window.)

TRONCHIN: It's nothing; it's only a little attack of nerves. You will make her take a little ether, and you will burn a feather in her room —this one. Her illness cannot last more than eight months. I am going to Versailles. (he leaves)

ROSETTE: How hard these old doctors are!

(Rosette runs to the Duchess.)

CURTAIN/BLACKOUT

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

SCENE II

VERSAILLES. The Duke's quarters.

(The Duke and Tronchin enter together.)

DUKE: You are quite sure, Doctor?

TRONCHIN: Duke, I answer with my head for what I bring to you at Versailles. Take it for what it is worth.

DUKE: (sitting with a pen) Come, it's always good to know what one is holding. You see her very often. Sit down, please!

TRONCHIN: Almost every day. I go to her for migraines, little things.

DUKE: And how is she, my wife? Is she pretty? Is she agreeable?

TRONCHIN: She's the most gracious person on earth.

DUKE: Truly? I would never have thought so. The day I saw her she wasn't like that at all. She was completely stiff, affected, like a poker. Just coming from the convent she didn't know how to enter or leave; she bowed the same way. Only she was fresh—the devil's own beauty.

TRONCHIN: Oh, at present, sir, she's quite otherwise.

DUKE: Yes, yes, the Chevalier must have formed her. The little chevalier is worldly. I'm irritated that I don't know her.

TRONCHIN: Ah, between ourselves, it must be admitted that you had permission to—

DUKE: (taking some tobacco from a golden snuff box and pouring it in a portrait box) That could really be so! I don't say the contrary, doctor, but my word it was very difficult. The Marquise is indeed the most despotic woman that has ever lived. You know quite well she would never have let me marry if she had not been sufficiently sure of me, and perfectly certain that what would be here, as everywhere else at present, nothing more than a family ceremonial, without importance and without consequences.

TRONCHIN: Without importance, that depends on you, but without consequences, Duke—

DUKE: (seriously) That also depends on me, more than you think, sir. But that's my affair. (rising and walking about) Do you know what I think, my old friend? It's that honor cannot always be understood in the same way. In passion, murder can be sublime, but in indifference, it would be ridiculous; in a statesman or a courtier, it would be madness. Wait, look! I, for example, I left the King's apartment. He had the goodness to speak to me of affairs for a long while. He regrets Mr. D'Orveuillers, but he's abandoned him to his enemies, and allows him to leave the command of the Fleet with which he fought the English. I am a friend of D'Orveuillers and know what he's worth, this all troubles me. I just spoke excitedly and I put myself out for him. The King listened to me willingly and entered into my thoughts. Then he presented me to Franklin, Doctor Franklin, The American printer, the poor man dressed in gray, the wise man, the sage, the envoy from the New World to the Old. Grave as a Danubian peasant, demanding justice for his country and obtaining it from Louis XVI. I had a long conversation with the good Franklin. I saw him this very morning presenting his son-in-law to the aged Voltaire, and demanding a blessing from Voltaire. And Voltaire, not laughing, Voltaire extending his hands as gravely as a sovereign pontiff would have done, shaking his octogenarian head with emotion and saying over the head of the youth "God and Liberty". That was beautiful, that was solemn, that was grand. And on returning, the King spoke to me with the justice of his admirable good sense. He sees the future without fear. But not without sadness. He senses that a revolution dividing France can come. He helps what he cannot prevent: to soften the pain. He sees it growing rapidly and without depth, for he speaks as a legislator, when he's with his friends. But action intimidates him. At the end of the conversation he gave me my share in the present events and those to come. That was my day. It was serious, as you see, and now in truth to concern myself with an affair of—of what shall I say? the household? Oh! No— Something less than that still. An affair of the boudoir. In good truth you must feel this is not possible for me. A smile of pity is all that can be torn from me. I am so much a stranger to this young woman that I have no right to be engaged, but she bears my name, and as for that, whatever there is in this little event that could wound the vanity of the one or the interest of the other depends on me. Not to take vengeance and that, to be in good taste, would perhaps be only more severe. Poor little woman. She must be afraid of hell! (laughing and taking his sword) Are you coming with me to see the Marquise at the Trianon? I found her very pale this morning,

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

which disturbed me. (he rings, to one of his servants) This evening at 11 o'clock, have a carriage ready to take me to Paris. Come, my dear Tronchin.

TRONCHIN: (aside) There's nothing more for me to do than to leave them to themselves at present.

(They leave.)

CURTAIN/BLACKOUT

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

SCENE III

PARIS. The Duchess's Bedchamber. Same as Scene I.

(The Duchess is at her toilette in a sleeping gown with her hair half unpowdered, spilling over her breast in long waves called curls, like those of a Magdalene.)

DUCHESS: What time is it?

ROSETTE: (finishing dressing her for the night and taking the court toilette from her) Eleven—thirty, Madame—and the Chevalier—

DUCHESS: He won't come now. He did well not to come today. I prefer not to have seen him. I did much better to weep. Whose home can he have gone to? Now, I am indeed going to be rather jealous. How unhappy I am at present. What books has the Abbe sent me?

ROSETTE: The tales of the Abbe de Voisseneon.

DUCHESS: And the Chevalier?

ROSETTE: The little Careme and the Imitation.

DUCHESS: Ah, how well he knows me. Do you know, Rosette, that his portrait really resembles him? Why, he has this habit, when the Queen was speaking to him for so long, and all that time he watched me for fear I might not be jealous. Everyone noticed it. Oh, he is charming. (sighing) Ah, how unhappy I am. Right, Rosette?

ROSETTE: Oh, yes, Madame.

DUCHESS: There's not a woman more jealous than I am on the entire earth.

ROSETTE: Oh, no, Madame.

DUCHESS: I am going to bed. Leave me alone. I will call you back. (Rosette leaves) I am going to say my prayers.

(She goes to open the curtain of the bed and, seeing the Crucifix, becomes frightened, and shouts.)

DUCHESS: Rosette! Rosette!

ROSETTE: (frightened) Madame?

DUCHESS: What is it?

ROSETTE: Madame, called me.

DUCHESS: Ah, I wanted—my robe.

ROSETTE: The Duchess is wearing it.

DUCHESS: I wanted a different one. No. Stay with me, I'm afraid. Stay on the sofa, I am going to read. (aside) I don't dare make a sign of the cross. What time will the Chevalier come tomorrow morning? Oh! I am the most unhappy woman in the world! (she weeps) Come, put a torch in the space between the bed and the wall and the New Heloise. (taking the book) Jean—Jacques! Ah, Jean—Jacques, you know how many misfortunes hide behind a woman's smile.

(Knocking at the door; a carriage drives up.)

DUCHESS: They are rapping at the door! It's not here, I hope.

ROSETTE: I heard a carriage stop at the door of the hotel.

DUCHESS: Are you quite sure, Rosette? A moment!

(Rosette looks out the window.)

ROSETTE: It's indeed at the door of the Duchess. A carriage with two lackeys bearing torches. It's your livery, Madame.

DUCHESS: Eh! Good God! Could something have happened at Mathias's. I'm in a fright.

ROSETTE: I hear steps. They are coming to Madame.

DUCHESS: But what is it? (a knocking) Ask before opening.

ROSETTE: Who is there?

A LACKEY: The Duke, arriving from Versailles.

ROSETTE: The Duke, coming from Versailles.

DUCHESS: (falling on a sofa) The Duke. For the last two years! Him! For the last two years! Never! And today! At this hour! Ah, what's he come for, Rosette? He's coming to kill me! That is certain! Hug me, my child,

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

and take this necklace and this bracelet in memory of me.

ROSETTE: I don't want all that! I will not leave Madame. (more knocking) Well, what? The Duchess is in bed!

LACKEY: (always behind the door) The Duke asks if Madame the Duchess will receive him.

DUCHESS: (quickly, on the sofa) No!

ROSETTE: (quickly, at the door) No!

DUCHESS: More politely, Rosette. "Madame is sleeping."

ROSETTE: (having lost her head a little, shouting) Madame is sleeping!

LACKEY: The Duke says you must wake her. And that he will wait until Madame the Duchess can receive him. He must speak with her.

ROSETTE: (to Duchess) The Duke wishes Madame to rise.

DUCHESS: Ah, my God! He knows everything. He's come to murder me.

ROSETTE: (seriously) Madame. (she stops)

DUCHESS: Well?

ROSETTE: Madame, I don't think so.

DUCHESS: And, why don't you think so?

ROSETTE: (tragically) Because his servants have a gay air.

DUCHESS: (frightened) They have a gay air. But that's even worse. Oh, my poor Chevalier! (she takes his portrait)

ROSETTE: Ah, Madame. What misery to be the wife of the Duke.

DUCHESS: (desolated) What horror! What insolence!

ROSETTE: If he comes because he is jealous!

DUCHESS: What a strange love! How odious it is! Listen, he cannot be coming in fury or passion, but in whatever way, it's to kill me. Rosette, you kill me, I beg you.

ROSETTE: No, Madame! Me, kill Madame! That cannot be.

DUCHESS: Well! At least go in my cabinet. You will hear everything, and if I ring, you will enter. I don't want him to remain more than a quarter of an hour here. He wants to tell me something. Alas, if the Chevalier knew it.

ROSETTE: Oh, Madame! He would die of it first.

DUCHESS: Poor friend! If he gets enraged, you will shout "Fire!" In the last analysis I don't know my husband.

ROSETTE: Certainly! Madame has only seen him once.

DUCHESS: Oh, my God! Have pity on me!

ROSETTE: They're returning, Madame.

DUCHESS: Come, some courage. Miss, say that I am visible.

ROSETTE: Madame the Duchess is visible.

DUCHESS: (on her knees crossing herself) My God! Have pity on me!

(She lies down on the sofa.)

LACKEY: (opening the double doors) Monsieur the Duke.

(The Duchess rises makes a grand curtsy and sits at the right without daring to speak.)

(The Duke bows to her then goes to the right of the chimney, keeping his sword at his side and his hat under his arm, calmly warming his feet. After a long silence he greets her coldly.)

DUKE: Well, Madame, how are you?

DUCHESS: Why, sir, a little surprised to see you, and confused not to have had the time to dress myself for you.

DUKE: Oh, no matter, no matter. I don't stand on ceremony. Besides, one can appear in a negligee before her husband.

DUCHESS: (aside) Her husband! Alas! (aloud) Yes, certainly, her husband. But that title, I confess to you—

DUKE: (ironically) Yes, yes, I understand. You are not used to my person. (smiling) It's my fault. (tenderly) It's my very great fault, or rather it's everybody's fault. (seriously) Who can say in this world and especially in society that he does not add by his own conduct to the faults of others? Tell me, Madame.

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

DUCHESS: Ah! Indeed, I think you are right, sir. You know the world better than I.

DUKE: (with fire) Better than you! Better than you, Madame! It is not easy, by God! At Versailles, I hear only of your grace in society; you cause a sensation! Your name is on everyone's lips. You are the rage. (in an ambiguous tone) I, I admit it, that piques my honor.

DUCHESS: (aside) O Heavens! Piques his honor! What's he mean?

DUKE: (approaching her gallantly) Here. Look at me carefully! Do you recognize me?

DUCHESS: Doubtless, sir. I should have a bad grace not to.

DUKE: (tenderly) You are telling me, yes, right? It's not docility I need, it's frankness.

DUCHESS: You need?

DUKE: (severely) Frankness, Madame.

(He leaves his armchair and returns briskly to the chimney.)

DUKE: I have much to tell you tonight, and very serious matters.

DUCHESS: What! Tonight, sir! What are you thinking of?

DUKE: (coldly) I thought of it, Madame, all the way from Versailles, and a little before, too.

DUCHESS: (aside) He knows my sin! He knows it! Everything is finished!

DUKE: Yes, I have the plan of not leaving until morning. And your servants and mine must already be asleep.

DUCHESS: (rising quickly) But I didn't order that.

DUKE: (with cold blood and a smile on his lips) Then, Madame, if it wasn't you, it must have been me.

DUCHESS: (aside) He'll stay here!

DUKE: (looking at the clock) Tomorrow, I will arrive in time for the petit lever of the King. This is a clock by Julien Le Ray that you have there? (putting his sword and hat on the sideboard)

DUCHESS: An incomprehensible coolness! What uneasiness he gives me.

DUKE: (sitting down) Ah! Ah! Here are some books! It's just as they told me. You love wit. And you have some. Oh! I know you have a lot, and good, true, quality wit. This is Monsieur Voltaire. Oh! Zaire! Zaire! You weep. Lukain, says it that way, right?

DUCHESS: I've never seen him, sir.

DUKE: Ah, that's true. I know that you are a bit religious; you don't go to the Comedy. But you read it. You read comedy. But never play it. (with comic horror) Oh! Never.

DUCHESS: I wasn't well brought up, very happily for me, sir.

DUKE: And for those nearest you, Madame; but I am sure that with your wit you will play perfectly. Wait, we have time. If you were the beautiful Zaire, suspected of infidelity by Orosman—

DUCHESS: (aside, low voice to closet) Ah, he's resolved on my death! Rosette, watch out! Pay attention!

DUKE: Truly, Madame, this Sultan Orosman was the most generous of mortals. Have no fear of him. If, for instance, he came here, speaking with tenderness, which Lukain puts into the scene: Alas, the ancient crime and its horror suits me The guilty excess has its boldness You don't know my heart or its tenderness How I adore you, what fires!

DUCHESS: (rising and going to him) Sir, have you something to reproach me with?

DUKE: (laughing) Ah, what a bad ruse that is! Eh. Good God, what are you saying? It's not in the play.

DUCHESS: (sulkily) Eh, sir. I do not speak in verse. I am talking. You don't come to a woman at midnight to speak verse to her.

DUKE: (tossing away his book) (with tenderness and melancholy) Then you think that what may be there is what brings me? Let's have a discussion like friends. (sitting on the sofa near her) So! Does it sometimes happen to you, one fine morning when you wake up you sometimes think of your husband for some queer reason?

DUCHESS: Eh! Sir, my husband thinks so little of his wife that he really has no right to exact the least reciprocity.

DUKE: Eh! Who told you, ingrate, that he doesn't think of you? Was he by way of writing to you? That would have been ridiculous for him. You told him through some one he was very cold. But to come to your home to swear it and prove it to you: that was his duty.

DUCHESS: (aside) Swear it to me! Ah, poor chevalier! (kissing his portrait) Swear it to me, sir! And swear what, if you please? Have you ever felt obliged to do anything towards me? Who am I to you, sir, but a stranger

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

who bears your name?

DUKE: And can give it, Madame.

DUCHESS: (rising) Ah, Duke, do me grace.

DUKE: (rising and laughing) Grace, Madame, and by what— Good God? Ah, I understand; you want me to grace you with my compliments, my tenderness, and my persiflage. Eh! I really want to. Whatever amount pleases you. Let's talk of something else.

DUCHESS: What torture.

DUKE: Do you know whose portraits these pictures represent? I am sure that you never look at them. These brave, armored gentlemen are my ancestors. They are ancients, we are, my word, very old. As old as the Bourbons. My name is that of a constable, of five Marshalls of France, all peers of kings, and relatives and allies of kings, raised with them from childhood, comrades of their youth, brothers in arms of their manly years, councillors and supporters of their old age. It's grand! It's grand enough to be remembered for it, and when it is remembered, it's not possible to avoid thinking what a terrible misfortune it would be, a true desolation in a family tree that has no one to transmit this name to. Without speaking of the inheritance it bequeaths, and it is considerable. Doesn't this sometimes afflict you?

DUCHESS: Eh! Sir. I don't see why I should be afflicted when you never think of it. After all, it's your name they bear and not mine.

DUKE: What! Elizabeth!

DUCHESS: Elizabeth? You imagine you are somewhere else, I think.

DUKE: Eh! Aren't you named Elizabeth? What's your baptismal name then?

DUCHESS: (sadly) Baptism! Baptismal name! You ask the name they gave me! Indeed, I should like to know now what my poor father would have said, who put so much in that name. (quickly) And you, I won't tell it to you! If someone had said to him "Well, this name is so sweet, her husband won't deign to know it." As for the rest, that's true! (with agitation) Baptismal names are made to be spoken by those who love them, and to be unknown to those who don't. (childishly) It's very just that you don't know mine. And it's well done, and I won't tell you what it is.

DUKE: (aside, charmed, smiling) Ah, why how sweet she is! I am mad to be caught in my own trap. How truly charming she is! (aloud and serious) And, why would I know the name of a child, Madame? What is it to me, I beg you, that that the young girl shut up in a convent until she was given to me, without my knowing her age? It's the young woman known under the same name who belongs to me. She alone is mine, Madame, since to name her, I must name myself.

DUCHESS: (rising abruptly with rage) Duke, do you wish to drive me mad? I do not understand anything of your ideas, nor your feelings, nor of my existence, nor of your rights, nor of mine. Perhaps I am only a child. Perhaps I have always been deceived. Tell me what you know of the real life of society. Tell me why customs are against religion and the world against God! Tell me if our life is wrong or right; if marriage exists or not. I am your wife. Why have you never seen me, and why does no one blame you for it? If oaths are serious, why aren't they for you? If you have, and if I have, the right to be jealous? Tell me what all this signifies. What is this marriage of name and fortune where the parties are absent and why our business agents are made to appear in this market? Tell me if the right they have given you was only that of coming to trouble me, to pursue me in my home whenever you please, to fall on it like thunder when it's least expected, at all hazards, at the risk of causing me the greatest terror, without consideration, without scruples, right in my hotel, in my room, in my alcove, there!

DUKE: Ah, Madame, what beautiful eyes; as eloquent as your mouth when a little agitation makes them sleep. Well, what! Do you want me to explain something inexplicable? Do you want me to be pedantic with you? Must I embark with you in phrases? Do you demand that I speak to you of society and that I recount to you the story of a marriage? To tell you how marriage, at first sacred, became profane at court and so especially profane to speak to you like our old and saintly families have become so frivolous and so worldly, how and by whom we were lured from our chateaux and our lands to come stand in echelloned ranks in a royal antechamber, how our gorgeous ruin has necessitated our calculated alliances and how they are regulated in the family, in the future and in the cradle, as ours was, for instance, tell you how religion, an implacable misfortune perhaps, has wandered off in pleasantries, melted with attic salt in the philosophers' crucible. To decry to you in what ways love has come to throw itself in every direction, to raise its secret temple on so many ruins, and how it has itself become something

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

sacred and respected, so to speak, according to choice and its duration, to tell you, to explain to you, to analyse everything for you about all this? That would take too long and be too tedious. I'd wager you know as much as I do about such things.

DUCHESS: (taking his hand with more confidence) Alas! To tell you the truth, sir, if I knew it a little as you know it so much, it seems to me I would suffer more; that I am happier if I do not divine what end a world like ours can have.

DUKE: Eh, good God, Madame, who is as uneasy at this later hour as you? No one, I swear to you, not even in the homes of those this touches more closely. Let's breathe in peace, believe me! Let's breathe, such as it is, this impassioned air, if one wishes, but fragrant enough, according to my taste, from the atmosphere where we were born, and let's direct ourselves only, when we must, according to this law, that, my word, I've never seen written anywhere, but that I always feel living in me. The law of honor.

DUCHESS: (a little frightened and recoiling) Honor! Yes! But in what does this honor consist, Duke?

DUKE: (very gravely) It lives in the moments of the life of a gallant man, Madame, but it must especially consist in the case of maintaining the dignity of his name, and—

DUCHESS: That idea again! Oh, my God! My God!

DUKE: And in supposing that it had born some stain on the purity of this name, he must not hesitate before any sacrifice to repair the injury or to hide it eternally.

DUCHESS: Any sacrifice? No matter what it cost, sir?

DUKE: Any, Madame, truly.

DUCHESS: Truly?

DUKE: (carried away) On my honor! None! Even if it meant murder!

DUCHESS: (aside) Ah! I am lost! Ah! My God!

(She looks on her cross.)

DUKE: (in a passionate tone) Even if I must throw myself at your feet and cover them with kisses, and humiliate myself to regain your grace? (on his knees kissing her hand)

DUCHESS: (aside) Ah, poor Chevalier, we are lost. I will never dare to see you again. (kissing the Chevalier's portrait)

DUKE: (abruptly, manfully, as if throwing off a mask) Ah! There! Let's see my child. Shake.

DUCHESS: (astonished) What?

DUKE: Shake, I tell you. One time only, give me your hand. That's all that I ask of you.

DUCHESS: (weeping already) What! Sir!

DUKE: Yes, truly, hold it in good frankness, in good and sincere friendship. I don't intend to do you any harm, and all the vengeance I will exact from you, if you have offended me, would be this fright I just gave you. Sit down. I am going to leave. (taking his hat and his sword) Dawn's coming. I have to get to Versailles in time. (standing, he shakes her hand; she is seated) Listen carefully. There's nothing that I don't know. To tell the truth, I had no anger and no hate for you. (with gravity and emotion) Having none, I beg you, don't feel any hate against me. We each have our little secrets. You are doing well, and I am not doing badly on my side. Let's stay this way. I don't know if all this will change but we are both young and we will see. Always be sure of my unchanging friendship for you. I ask yours and— (laughing) Have no fear, I won't return unless you write me to come.

DUCHESS: Are you so good, sir? And I didn't know you?

DUKE: Forgive me for this bad night I made you endure. In a society which corrupts us, and dissolves each day like ours, all that still remains possible is respect for the conventions. There are situations where dissimulation is sanctified and may not even lack grandeur. I told you how I hold our name. And here is the proof. Your servants and mine saw me enter, and they will see me leave. And, as far as the world's concerned, that's all that matters.

DUCHESS: (on her knees kissing his hand, weeping while hiding her face) Ah, Duke, what kindness, and what shame for me! Your generosity destroys me! Where can I hide, sir? I am going to a convent.

DUKE: (smiling) That's too much! That's too much! I don't believe it, and, I don't wish it. For the rest, do as you please. Goodbye. By saving appearances, I've saved you.

(He rings. They open the doors; he leaves.)

ROSETTE: (entering on tip-toe, frightened) Ah, Madame, the enemy is gone.

Nothing Worse Than a Fright

DUCHESS: The enemy? Ah! Be silent! The enemy! Ah! I have no better friend. Never speak lightly of him. He has saved me. But he treated me like a child, with disdainful pity which annihilated me and punished me more than the severity of another would.

ROSETTE: So we are come off with nothing worse than a fright.

CURTAIN