

THE MASSACRE

by Elizabeth Inchbald in a new version by Daniel O'Brien
TAKEN FROM THE FRENCH.
A TRAGEDY OF THREE ACTS.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE writer of the following pages, in laying them before the public, imagines that no further reason requires to be alleged for their not having first been produced at one of our theatres, than the reason assigned by Mr. Horace Walpole (now Lord Orford) in the postscript to his much-admired tragedy, 'The Mysterious Mother,' which was never intended for representation:—From the time that I first undertook the foregoing scenes, I never flattered myself that they would be proper to appear on the stage. The subject is so horrid, that I thought it would shock, rather than give satisfaction, to an audience. Still, I found it so truly tragic in the essential springs of *terror* and *pity*, that I could not resist the impulse of adapting it to the scene, though it never could be practicable to produce it there. -*Postscript to 'The Mysterious Mother.'*

Having applied a paragraph of the noble author's above mentioned, to the present piece, the writer also avers, that the story of this play (as well as that of 'The Mysterious Mother') is founded upon circumstances which have been related as *facts*, and which the unhappy state of a neighbouring nation does but too powerfully give reason to credit.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

The Father
The Husband
The Judge
The Friend.
The Mob Leader
The Captain
The Wife
The Confidante
A Domestic.
First Follower.
Second Follower.
Third Follower.
The Mob

A town, sixty miles distant from the capital city.

Time of representation, one day

Prologue

The Friend enters and sings. The music is by Hanns Eisler and the words are adapted from those of Bertolt Brecht.

The Friend

Once upon a time, our leaders gave us orders
To go out and alter the creed of their enemies.
So we began by asking
They change their opinions
But we had to ask more firmly when they said 'No'.

Once upon a time our leaders gave us orders
To go out and annex the land of their enemies
So we invaded quickly
And with our knives and daggers
We conquered all their lands in a few days.

At a later date our leaders gave us orders
To conquer the moon and the floor of the ocean
But the blood it flows from our poor endeavours
And its scent is strong and we're far from home.

God preserve us and lead us back again
Home, lead us back again, home.

Act I

Enter THE WIFE. In the distance there is the merest suggestion of the growl of an angry mob and a red sky. She addresses the audience directly.

The Wife

What misers are we all of our real pleasures! I condemn avarice; and yet, was gold half so precious to me as the society of my dear husband, I should be most avaricious! Even now I grudge, to a degree of rancour, my nearest, dearest relations the pleasure of his company; and think the loss of him, for one day only, beyond the appointed time of his return, a robbery on my happiness not to be forgiven.

The door opens, and she goes hastily to meet the person entering: but, on perceiving it is THE FATHER, she turns away with chagrin.

The Father

What, daughter, sorry to see me! This is the first time, since I have had the joy to use that name, that you have ever met me with coolness—nay, this is something more—'tis with repugnance.

The Wife

Nor ought you to be offended if it is; for I was vexed at seeing you, because I hoped, as the door opened, it was your son.

The Father

Ay, I imagined as much—uneasy, because he has exceeded his promise a few hours.

The Wife

A few hours! half a day, and a whole night; he promised to be at home by noon yesterday.

The Father

And now pray tell me—is this the first promise he has ever broken with you?

The Wife

The first, either as a lover or a husband.

The Father

He is then a more faithful lover and husband than ever his father was.

The Wife

And you cannot be surprised, Sir, if I feel, on this occasion, such an alarm—such a despondency—

The Father

For shame!—you have nothing to apprehend. We have done nothing wrong, lest existence itself be a crime. Therefore -

The Wife

But the times are dangerous. And he is a man, amongst other men. And men, e'en the best of them, are apt to rise to choler and broil at the least instigation.

The Father

Consider, my dear, he is with your mother, your aunts, your nieces and cousins; and, as he does not go from this town to the city above once in a year—

The Wife

It is still cruel of him to remain there without accounting to me for it—it is cruel of him to find delight in the society of others, while he knows what must be the inquietude of my mind at his stay.

The Father

Cruel! And now do you suppose that my son, and your husband—he, who loved you for five years before marriage, and has *adored* you for ten years since—do you suppose that he could be cruel to you?

The Wife

I firmly suppose he could not; and, therefore, I suffer the greatest alarm lest some accident—

The Father

That alarm gavest me last night the greatest uneasiness. On leaving me, you wished me a good night in such a tone that, remembering, it broke in on my slumbers. She trembles for my son it is for him she watches and weeps, said I every moment. You will not be ruled by me nor heed my exhortation to remain calm; thy apprehensions have troubled me.

The Wife

Then let us pray that both our troubles may soon be dissipated.

The Father

Come, be calm, my daughter. In order to love one another, is it necessary to be tormented with a thousand chimerical fears, and for a few hours delay to create imaginary misfortunes?

The Wife

Imaginary, say you ...

The sound of the mob is heard again, still very distant.

The Father

Here comes his friend, and yours: I met them, about two hours ago, taking a ride

on the city road; and they told me they should go as far as the hill, in hopes to see his carriage at a distance, and be the first to bring the news to you. Here are they returned so be assured, my son will have embraced us all before night.

The Wife

Did they then know of my anxiety? I did not tell them.

The Father

Tell!—is there cause for telling when a woman of sensibility loves or hates? when she feels hopes or fears, joy or sorrow? No—the passions dwell upon her every feature—none but the female hypocrite need fly to the tongue to express them.

Enter THE FRIEND and THE CONFIDANTE

The Father

Well, have you had the good fortune to meet my son?

THE CONFIDANTE turns away, nearly fainting— THE FRIEND shows in his manner marks of confusion and concern.

The Father

What, have not you happened of him?

The Wife

But they seem to have met with something [*Going to THE FRIEND*] Oh! do not distract me, but tell me what it is?

The Friend

Nothing—I hope, nothing.

The Wife

Hope!—if you hope, then you also fear.

The Father [*Going to her.*]

Don't, my dear daughter, suffer yourself to be thus terrified. Do you think, if there was any cause to fear for your husband's safety, I should not be equally concerned with yourself? Why, I have known him longer than you have done, and (I could almost say) love him something better than even you do. You have other comforts; your youth, your beauty, and your many near relations: I can boast none of these—he is the only comfort I have on earth.

The Wife

But, Sir, you have so much fortitude!

The Father

I grant you I showed fortitude when my wife died—most men are philosophers on such an occasion; but should any accident befall my son, you would see me weak as yourself.

The Wife [*Going to THE CONFIDANTE.*]

Whatever makes you look thus pale, do not be afraid to tell it me.

The Confidante

I cannot tell. I have sworn.

The Friend [*In a low voice to THE FATHER.*]

Permit me to speak a word to you alone.

The Father

Alone?—Why? Wherefore? [*Trembling.*] I protest you alarm me, almost as much

as my daughter is alarmed!

The Friend [*Still in a low voice.*]

Follow me into another room.

The Father

But, if I do, her friend will tell. Her mind is so troubled, her senses so alarmed that -

The Friend

She has promised me she will not.

The Father

Don't mind her promise; she can't help it. However, your intensity bids I go with you. [*Going.*]

The Wife

Sir! Husband's father and friend both! Whither are you going? Oh! whatever has befallen my husband, do not conceal it from me.

The Friend

I do not know that any thing has befallen him—upon my word of honour I speak the truth.

The Wife

Then why these terrifying looks? Why—

The Confidante [*to THE FATHER*]

Is your son returned from the city?

The Wife

Why –

The Friend

Be still.

The Confidante

All his friends are trembling for his safety.

The Wife

I will know. Speak - for fear magnifies evil.

The Father

Her imagination, apt to be inflamed, always represents to her the extremes of ill fortune. It must be less in reality. Speak.

The Confidante

Then is your son returned?

The Father

We wait on him still.

The Friend

Then 'tis in vain to conceal any longer the fatal news that was told us, as we went on the road to meet him—the same accounts have now reached the town, and, I suppose, are made public.

[THE WIFE throws herself on THE CONFIDANTE's shoulder as the growl of the mob is heard once more. This time it is nearer.]

The Father

You distract me with suspense! Tell me the worst.

The Confidante

We are told that horrid disasters have fallen upon the capital—such—*[Faltering]*
as I cannot repeat...

The Friend

Infernal massacre has been dealt to all our hapless party—bonds, vows, oaths,
have been violated; nor even the prison-walls been a sanctuary for the ill-fated
objects of suspicion. The report that's brought speaks of children torn from the
breast of their mothers, husbands from the arms of their wives, and aged parents
from their agonizing families.

The Wife

God preserve us. Who did this, on whose behalf and why?

The Friend

By order of our leaders, it was the mob who ... citizen turned on citizen.

The Father

Don't believe it. Do not believe it. Who can invent such blasphemies and delight
in spreading them? Has your heart believed them and dares your tongue repeat
them? There exist no such monsters on the face of this earth.

The Friend

I have seen it.

The Wife

Some malicious child of darkness, sure, who finds sway in terrifying the minds of his fellow citizens by such bloody and fantastic acts, by which the multitude is imposed upon. Such leaders we have.

The Friend

This have I witnessed. We have here one at least of those fanatic chiefs, who have changed man into a wild monster. Smiling he bids them commit massacre for the greater good. They fear him so they follow him.

The Wife

Is it really possible? What will remain to mankind, if we rob them of the liberty of thinking? Oh my sad presages. Are ye then forerunners of the misfortune of my life?

The Father [*Stifling his grief.*]

My child—we will still hope—that in pity to us all—in pity to the pangs which are else preparing for you and me—he has been spared.—Perhaps he had left the place before—who knows—[*Weeping.*] who knows, but we may see him again.

The Wife [*Kneeling.*]

Oh, grant it Heaven! Grant that I may see him once again—and living. Though wounded, mangled, dying, yet once more, let me behold him living—Let me hang over his death-bed, and, while his sense is undisturbed, tell him how much I love him, and will continue to love his memory—how I will be a tender mother to his children—and all, all, that my poor heart swells to have him know!

The Confidante. [*Raising her.*]

Oh, give place to hope—you will see him again.

[*Enter THE HUSBAND pale, his hair dishevelled, his clothes stained with blood.*]

The Wife

I do. I do see him again.

[She rushes into his arms, and he embraces her repeatedly.]

The Husband

My wife! my wife! do I hold you in my arms!—My father!

[Throws himself on THE FATHER's neck.]

Oh, I did not think we should ever meet more!— My dear — my friends—

[Turning to them, then to his father again.]

Oh, my father, I thought of you, and of my wife, in the midst of all the dangers!

The Father

How have you escaped? I here devote my future days to that blest Providence, who, in protecting you, has rendered those days worth preserving.

The Friend

Relate, my friend, the particulars of what has passed.

The Husband *[Shrinking.]*

Oh, that I could forget them all—banish the whole for ever from my memory!— That all who were spectators could do the same, and human nature never be scandalized by the report!—But that's impossible—nations remote will hear it, and states of savages enroll us Fellow Citizens.

The Wife

Oh, Heaven! he is wounded—behold his clothes!—

The Husband

No, I am not wounded—these stains came from the veins—of thy mother—thy aunts—thy sisters—and all of those, who clung fast round me, and I tried in vain to defend.

The Wife

Oh, horror!—yet, while *you* live to tell the tale, I will bear it.

The Father

Every moment brings us horrors unforeseen. Where are we, unhappy wretches? Has some invisible hand cast us into the abode of demons?

The Husband

This abominable leader, this everlasting plague of the nation, whose good is his said concern, has projected the crime. The city swims in the blood of its own citizens.

The Friend

But how preserve yourself?

The Husband

By miracle—I fought with the assassins, and fell amongst my brethren—at that moment my senses left me.—When they returned, and I put out my arms to embrace my fellow sufferers, I found I clasped nothing but dead bodies.—I rose from the horrid pile, and by a lamp discerned (all gashed with wounds) faces, that but a few hours before I had seen shine with health and benevolence.—Rushing from the ghastly scene, I fled. I knew not where, about the town—my sword in my hand, reeking with blood, my hair dishevelled, and my frantic features caused me to be taken for one of the murderers, so I passed unmolested, once more to see the dearer part of my family.—But am I with them? really with them? My ideas are confused.—Poor helpless victims of ferocious vengeance, pale, convulsed with terror, and writhing under the ruffian's

knife, pursue and surround me.—Am I, am I with my living family?

The Wife

Thou art with me—and now the only relation I have on earth—for my sake, therefore, re-collect your scattered thoughts.

The Husband

No, I still hear the shrieks of my expiring friends, mingled with the furious shouts of their triumphant foes. I saw poor females, youths, and helpless infants try to ward off the last fatal blow, then sink beneath it—I saw aged men dragged by their white hairs; a train of children following to prevent their fate, and only rush upon their own. I saw infants encouraged by the fury of their tutors, stab other infants sleeping in their cradles.

The Wife

Oh, Heavens!—

The Husband

I crossed the river—its water blushed with blood, and bore upon its bosom disfigured bodies, still warm with life.—At the sight, single as I was, I would have attempted vengeance;—but you, my dear relations—the thought of leaving you behind, restrained the mad design.

The Father

O my countrymen! To what purpose is tearing each other to pieces?

The Friend

Revenge is not now too late.

The Husband [*Taking hold of his hand.*]

And here let us swear—

The Father

Hold—vengeance is for Heaven—by pursuing retaliation, we shall assume the power of God, and forfeit the rights of Man.

The Wife

Rather let us fly the danger which threatens us; we know the tendency of the people even of this place—the infection of the metropolis still spreads—let us leave this town—nay, the land: nor breathe its air till the sweet breeze of peace restore its lost tranquillity.

The Father

My son, if your father's voice has any power; if you are not bewildered by the direful frenzy which has seized your enemies; if you have been preserved to me my child still to obey my commands, fly with your wife to a neighbouring nation, where (without coldly inquiring who is right or wrong) those in distress are sure to meet with succour.

The Husband

How! fly from danger !

The Father

Imprudent courage has worse effects than cowardice. Would you risk the life of your wife?

The Husband

That's dearer than my own.

The Father

Fly with her then, and with your children instantly. I, with these friends, will take a different route and meet you at the appointed place.

The Husband

But –

The Wife [*Kneeling.*]

My husband! Oh! if I kneel in vain to you, how can you hope my prayers will soften the murderer?

The Husband

Murder!—your murderer!—protect me from the thought. I'll go with you to exile.

The Wife

Let us retire then, and consult the means of our departure.

[*Exit with The Confidante.*]

The Husband [To his father.]

You shall go with me, Sir:—I cannot, will not part company with you. No, we will go together, and console each other even under the assassin's dagger.

The Father

The dagger has no terrors for me, unless 'tis pointed at your breast, my son. Call your domestics, and instantly give the necessary orders for your flight; and if, on consultation, we find it practicable, not *one* of us will separate from the other.

The sound of the mob can be heard once more, ever nearer. Exeunt.

END OF ACT I