

TERROR

A Play in One Act

by

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TERROR

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CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Grace Dalrymple Elliott Aged 39

Jeanne Du Barry Aged 50

The play is based on a possible meeting between Madame du Barry and Grace Dalrymple Elliott in St Pelagie Prison in 1793.

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The Scene is a cell in St Pelagie Prison, Paris in the year 1793.
Grace is alone in her cell. Jeanne is thrown into the cell.

Jeanne: Let me out. Let me out. Come back. You can't leave me here. For God's sake, don't you know who I am? Guard, come back here and let me out. I've got friends, I've got good connections. When they hear what you've done, you'll be in trouble, serious trouble. (Shouts) Come back here at once and let me out. Let me out. Please, please let me out. I can't stay here. Look at it... Please for the love of God let me out.

(Grace looks at her)

Grace: Do be quiet. They won't let you out.

Jeanne: They must.

Grace: They won't. I can assure you they won't.

Jeanne: They will when they know who I am.

Grace: Who are you?

Jeanne: Jeanne du Barry.

Grace: Are you really?

Jeanne: Comtesse du Barry.

Grace: You've aged.

Jeanne: I've been appallingly treated.

Grace: I wouldn't have recognised you. Where is the ravishing creature that enchanted a king?

Jeanne: My beloved Louis XV died nineteen years ago and we were brought to this by the inept Louis XVI and the appalling Marie Antoinette.

Grace: Don't speak ill of the dead. I loved them both dearly. I am a royalist to the depth of my soul.

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Jeanne: So am I. I just didn't like the king and queen. Besides you never lived at court. You have no idea of their arrogance. They treated me liked a nobody from the gutter.

Grace: (Sarcastically) Unbelievable.

Jeanne: I am a comtesse. I was the king's mistress.

Grace: They were born to their position.

Jeanne: They must let me go. I've done nothing.

Grace: No-one has done anything except be in France.

Jeanne: They brought me here in a cart.

Grace: They'll take you away in one too.

Jeanne: They won't. I have friends. They'll help me.

Grace: They won't. If they want to keep their heads.

Jeanne: You are determined to make me unhappy. I shall keep positive until I am rescued.

Grace: Excellent.

Jeanne: Perhaps we can escape. Is there any way out?

Grace: Oh yes. There's a way out. It leads straight to the guillotine.

Jeanne: I am not going to believe it. Someone will hear about my plight. They will rescue me. Meanwhile I shall keep up my spirits and my appearance. I feel dirty. Is there water to wash in?

Grace: I asked the gaoler for a little warm water and he told me that as nothing could save me from the executioner's hands and as they were dirty, there was no use in cleaning myself. We get a little water to drink each day but it is filthy. So are the pickled herring which seems to be our main diet. Occasionally we get a peculiar soup with strange meat floating about. Some of the other prisoners say it is human flesh.

Jeanne: Oh no. That can't be true.

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Grace: It think it may be. I found something that looked like a fingernail in mine yesterday. I left it.

Jeanne: That is so dreadful. It can't be true. I shan't have anything while I'm here.

Grace: I thought that at first and then hunger drives you to do the unimaginable – to eat. So welcome to my cell. Short on amenities. Bitterly cold. Rather damp. But I call it home.

Jeanne: And to whom do I have the pleasure of addressing? Are you going to tell me your name?

Grace: Grace Dalrymple Elliott.

Jeanne: Oh! Dally the Tall. That's what they used to call you. I've heard all about you. Is it true that you...

(Grace stands up)

Jeanne: You're not that tall are you? Quite small really. They should have called you Dally the small.

(Grace glares at her)

Jeanne: Oh. Excusez-moi. How impolite of me. You obviously dislike your pet name. Please forgive me.

Grace: (Loftily) I prefer to be called Grace.

Jeanne: And I will. I will call you Grace. Grace Dalrymple Elliott – it's a fine name. A very elegant name. No title though? You're not an aristocrat?

Grace: Fortunately not. My father was highly respectable... a lawyer.

Jeanne: Then why are you here?

Grace: I consorted with an aristocrat.

Jeanne: Oh I'm sorry. Will you die?

Grace: Eventually, but not yet.

Jeanne: Are you afraid to die?

Grace: No not at all.

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Jeanne: They're coming to cut off my hair tomorrow.

Grace: That's you for the chop.

Jeanne: But my hair. My beautiful hair. I've always been so proud of my hair. I want to keep my hair.

Grace: Don't be ridiculous. You won't need your hair. You won't have a head.

Jeanne: I might get a reprieve.

Grace: Why would you? You weren't just a royalist. You slept with a king.

Jeanne: I did more than that. I was Maitresse en Titre. The most important woman in France. In Europe. In the world. He loved me. He showered gifts on me. He thought me the most beautiful woman who had ever lived.

Grace: He was rather old at the time. He may have had cataracts.

Jeanne: No he didn't. He could see me perfectly well. It's not everyone who can attract a king. I did. He adored me. As soon as he saw me, he wanted me. I waited to see him as he walked by on his way to mass. He saw me and sent one of his men to find out who I was. When I entered his presence I didn't curtsy or behave like anyone else. I went to him and kissed him on the mouth. He was surprised, shocked even but he couldn't resist me after that. He was the king and he was enchanted by me.

Grace: I had a future king.

Jeanne: Yes, but he was English.

Grace: More German than English.

Jeanne: That's better. I hate the English.

Grace: I am English.

Jeanne: I thought you were Scottish. The Scots are the friends of France.

Grace: I may be Scottish but I am prouder of being an Englishwoman

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than of anything.

Jeanne: But you're not. How can you be proud of being something you're not.

Grace: Everything I love is in England. My soul is English.

Jeanne: That's nothing to be proud of. The English are scum. I'm here because of an Englishman. George Grieve.

Grace: (Puzzles over name) George Grieve.

Jeanne: Yes. He took lodgings near my chateau. He had a hatred of the ancient regime and saw me as the personification of all the depravity of the past.

Grace: A little harsh. I'm sure you can't be blamed for all of it.

Jeanne: He demanded my arrest and broke into my chateau. He pinned me down on the bed and assaulted me physically and abused me in the filthiest language of the gutter. I was arrested and I wasn't even allowed to dress. He revelled in treating me as a common prostitute.

Grace: Oh so he'd heard about your past.

Jeanne: Me who had had been loved by a king, had dresses worth thousands. The dress I was presented in at court was of the finest silver and gold cloth. It was covered in diamonds and had a long, long train. Later that night Louis gave me jewels worth one hundred thousand gold coins. He said, 'here are the most beautiful jewels to adorn the most beautiful women in the world' – Louis

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always said that to me. The most beautiful woman in the world. I've lost so much. Damn Grieve to hell.

Grace: George Grieve – I know of him. A madman who went to Eton.

Jeanne: What is Eton?

Grace: A school in England that produces an enormous number of politicians.

Jeanne: And madmen?

Grace: Is there a difference?

Jeanne: My misfortune to be destroyed by a madman.

Grace: But if you hadn't been mistress to the king – he couldn't have destroyed you.

Jeanne: I wouldn't missed out on all the luxury, the position, the attention. I loved it all. Ambassadors showered me with gifts to put in a good word with the king. People beseeched my help and made it well worth my while. I was all powerful, the centre of the court, the centre of the world. Everyone wanted to know me and to be my friend.

Grace: Do you don't seem to have many friends now.

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Jeanne: I was the Queen Bee surrounded by a thousand admirers.
My staircase was always thronged with people who
wanted my help. I had fifty eight servants ready to wait
on me day and night. I loved being the king's mistress.

Grace: Then you must accept your fate.

Jeanne: I am so sorry for you. It must be very hard. You have the
same fate as me and you didn't have a king.

Grace: Don't be sorry for me. I had a prince who will become
George IV. So I have had a king... a future king. George
was great fun. Very generous and a good lover.

Jeanne: But not a king.

Grace: He is a future king.

Jeanne: That's not the same as a king.

Grace: And I had his daughter.

Jeanne: How careless of you.

Grace: Oh no, never that.

Jeanne: Was there a shortage of vinegar?

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