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No. CCCLII.

FRENCH'S MINOR DRAMA.

The Acting Edition.

"A SUPERIOR PERSON."

DUOLOGUE.

BY

INA LEON CASSILIS.

Authoress of "Hearts or Diamonds?" "Interviewed," "An Unfinished Story," &c., &c.

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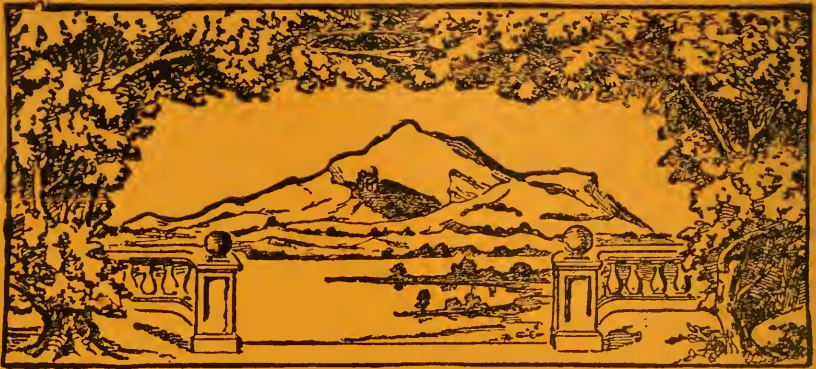
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1891

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CHARACTERS :

MRS. NEWLYN (A Young Wife)

MRS. GRIMSBY (A Housekeeper)



“A SUPERIOR PERSON.”

SCENE : *A sitting-room in MRS. NEWLYN'S house.*

Enter MRS. NEWLYN, an open letter in her hand. She sits.

MRS. N. I wonder if my troubles are coming to an end at last ! I hope so, now that I am to have a really trustworthy person in the house to take charge of things ! I am not fit to do it—so dear Edward says, and so his mother says. I believe they're right. Sometimes I think I ought not to have married at all—I am so ignorant, and so timid and stupid ; but if I say that to Edward he puts his arms round me and calls me his dear little wifey-pifey, and tells me I mustn't say such horrid things, or he shall think I don't love him. Well, it's very nice to be scolded in that way ; but all the same, he gets cross when the meat is underdone and the potatoes like brickbats—he calls them brickbats, and calls me “Mrs. Newlyn” instead of “Betsie.” I can't think why men are so dreadfully particular about what they eat ! I'm sure I've always done my best to please Edward. I roasted the mutton for him myself last Sunday, and made him a pudding with my own hands, and he said the meat was like “eating his boots” and the pudding a “squash.” How was I to know that a joint of four pounds doesn't take five hours' roasting ? I thought he'd like it well done ! And first he guffawed, and then he was cross, because he said I ought to have known a plum pudding must have eggs in it ! I made the pudding out of a cookery book ; but I forgot the eggs. I thought it wouldn't matter. Edward needn't have called my pudding a “squash.” And then he blames me because Susan won't get up in the morning, and is always running out to see her “mother”—she told me her mother lived in Wiltshire—and takes up cold water for him to shave with ; he even scolded me because one of Susan's hairpins

was in the soup last Wednesday. I can't help all those things ; no one ever taught me to keep house. I didn't tell Susan to put her hairpin in the soup, any more than I told her to send up her butter instead of ours at breakfast, and give Edward's favorite meerschaum to her mother. Men are so selfish—the best of them ! They want to have things go like clockwork ! Well, perhaps Edward will be satisfied when Mrs. Grimsby comes. Let me read over again what his mother says :—(*reads*) “ My dear Margaret, —I am indeed grieved to hear of your household difficulties. Dear Edward tells me the house is a great worry to you, and that the dinner is never *properly cooked*, or served *punctually*.” Edward needn't have complained to his mother. I don't think married men ought to have mothers—but she's very kind, though she does underline every second word. (*reads*) “ I thought if you had a nice, steady, respectable, experienced house-keeper, who would take all the trouble off your hands, it would be so much better for you, and things would go more smoothly. You see, my dear daughter-in-law, the *best* of men, and my Edward”—our Edward, mamma-in-law ; he's mine too ! (*reads*) “ My”—*our*—“ Edward *is* the best of men—will get out of temper if the dinner is badly cooked.” I haven't been married six months without finding out *that* ! “ Young wives have their lesson to learn”—and they learn it very quickly ! Um—um—(*reads*) “ Dear Edward didn't *complain*.” Oh, yes he did !—um—um—what a sermon ! Old ladies in the country spend half their time in writing letters. Um—um—ah ! (*reads*) “ I am sending you a Mrs. Grimsby, who will call upon you to-morrow”—that is this—(*reads*) “ morning. She is a *most superior person*. *Most* highly recommended ; she has lived in very *distinguished* families, and has the most unexceptionable references. You will find her quite a *friend*, and all trouble will be taken off your shoulders.” How nice ! (*folding letter*) Then I shall have plenty of time to read and work. Edward wants some new slippers, and there's a new teapot cosy to make, and I haven't been able to get to the third volume of *Lady Gertrude's Lover*. I am *longing* to know whether she really does marry that stupid baronet instead of the duke—he's a darling, that duke ! (*ring heard*) Ah ! Perhaps that is Mrs. Grimsby ! (*sits quickly ; tries to look very matronly and self-possessed, but is really nervous*)

Enter MRS. GRIMSBY, carrying a handbag; she looks intensely respectable in manner and attire, but utterly self-possessed, and prepared to rule the roast; MRS. NEWLYN is about to speak when MRS. GRIMSBY takes the initiative.

MRS. G. (*advancing*) Mrs. Newlyn, I presume? I am Mrs. Grimsby. Mr. Edward Newlyn's mamma informed me that you required an experienced person to take charge of the house—a thoroughly trustworthy and responsible person—and I may say that Mrs. Newlyn—the elder Mrs. Newlyn—could not have recommended a more competent person than myself.

MRS. N. (*rather taken aback*) Yes—I—certainly did require—

MRS. G. (*with patronizing smile*) Oh, of course, I thoroughly understand what is required. I know how it is with young ladies like yourself, wholly inexperienced. You cannot be expected to understand the care of a house, and gentlemen are so particular! I remember the Duke of Shellabere, Mrs. Newlyn—the elder Mrs. Newlyn—has, of course, told you that I have lived in the very highest families—in fact, all my employers up to the present had titles. Well, the Duke of Shellabere—such an affable gentleman he was—used to talk to me so nice, almost as if I'd been his mother, as one might say, though his mamma—the Duchess, as was always about with her Royal 'Ighness the Princess of Wales—was a most stately lady. The Duke of Shellabere, he says to me, “Grimsby,” he says, “I can't abide,” says his Lordship—his Grace, I *should* say—“I can't abide,” he says, “to 'ave my dinner hunderdone.” Those were his Lordship's—his Grace's, I *should* say—very words, and though he was a duke, and Mr. Newlyn the common sort, as one might say, he don't like *his* meals hunderdone—naturally. You won't mind my sitting, will you, ma'am? (*pulls up chair and sits*) Her Grace the Duchess of Shellabere was always so *very* haffable in that respect. “Grimsby,” her Grace used to say to me, “pray sit down. I know,” she says, “you've been always brought up genteel,” she says, “and 'ave been used to your hown servants,” she says—those were her very words, ma'am, and true it is, ma'am. I never thought to come to this, being, as one might say—

MRS. N. (*who has been fidgeting sometimes during above,*

but is a bit overawed by the ducal family, interrupting desperately) Yes, yes, my husband’s mother told me I should find you a most superior person, and that you had the highest references.

MRS. G. (*looking at MRS. NEWLYN with lofty surprise at the interruption*) Certingly, ma’am, certingly ! I am much obliged, of course, for the elder Mrs. Newlyn’s good opinion of me ; but I don’t stand in no need of any words of hers—with all respect, you understand—having always lived in titled families. There was the Marchioness of Boufanty—you must have heard of her Ladyship, though you wouldn’t know her, perhaps. (*with an expressive glance round the room*)

MRS. N. (*faintly*) No, I don’t think I ever even heard of her.

MRS. G. No ! dear me ! I thought hevery one had heard of her Ladyship. But then, of course, we all ’ave our places in the world—and yours and my speres is different from her Ladyship’s.

MRS. N. Certainly—of course—but—er—Mrs. Grimsby—

MRS. G. I lived with the Hearl and Countess of Banymakillig also. They was very nice, but, being Hirish, not so rich, as one might say ; and they wasn’t *quite* the sort I’d been used to ; still, her Ladyship would have kep me had I been disposed to stay ; but after having lived with the Countess of Noddymore—which I was in that family before I went to the Countess of Banymakillig’s and Lord Noddymore kep his carriages and horses, as a nobleman should—of course I owed it to myself, as you understand, not to be put upon, heven by a countess, especially a poor Hirish one.

MRS. N. Yes, Mrs. Grimsby, I am *quite* satisfied with your references—but don’t you think—

MRS. G. Yes, ma’am—you couldn’t very well be hun-satisfied, could you ?—seeing as I have given satisfaction to so many of the nobility, and *might* have ’ad a position in the ’ousehold of her Royal ’Ighness the Princess of Wales—only for having the hinfluenza just at that time, and so another pusson was appointed ; but her Royal ’Ighness, as I’ve heard say, was that disappointed—

MRS. N. Yes, no doubt, she would be ; but—but—about wages, Mrs. Grimsby—

MRS. G. (*with a lofty smile*) Excuse me, ma’am—salary—my salary. Wages is for ’ousemaids and cooks and such

like—we never says “ wages” to a pusson of my position in ’igh families, the haristocracy is very pertikler on that pint. (MRS. NEWLYN *looks sat upon*) Yes, ma’am ; well, as to salary, ma’am. Well, of course, I’ve ’ad very ’igh salaries—and to oblige you, ma’am, and seeing as you’re so much put to it, being, as one may say, without *hany one*, I’ll say £25 a year, and all found.

Mrs. N. (*timidly*) It is rather more than I wished to give ; but for a person with your credentials—

Mrs. G. (*interrupting*) Very well, ma’am. Then we’ll say £25, and all found ; and I should require an ’oliday once a fortnight, and to go to church twice of a Sunday. I’m most pertikler on that pint, ma’am. Then I has my breakfast at nine o’clock, with a relish, of course.

Mrs. N. A relish ! Oh ! I hope so. I trust you have a healthy appetite ?

Mrs. G. Yes, ma’am. I may say I ’ave a very ’ealthy appetite, though a relish isn’t a happetite, if you’ll excuse *me*, ma’am. Still, I’m reasonable. A couple of rashers of bacon—nice streaky ones—I always ’ad the best of heverythink when I lived with her Grace the Duchess of Shellabere ; or a few poached heggs—noo laid heggs—or a kidney, or a bit o’ salmon sometimes—I’m not ’ard to please, ma’am. Then my luncheon at twelve, and my dinner at two o’clock, and my tea when I feel inclined—about four—and at height o’clock my supper.

Mrs. N. But my husband and I dine at half-past seven.

Mrs. G. Indeed, ma’am ! Well, that’s rather ill-convenient ! You see, it comes across my supper time.

Mrs. N. (*with some spirit*) I could not alter the dinner hour ; it suits my husband and myself !

Mrs. G. Well, that might be arranged. What servants do you keep, ma’am ?

Mrs. N. (*feeling small*) I have hitherto kept only one servant ; you see, I attend to some things myself.

Mrs. G. (*in a tone implying, and preciously you did it !*) Exactly, ma’am. The servant is of good character, I presume ?

Mrs. N. Most excellent. She is a little heedless sometimes !

Mrs. G. We can see how she goes on ; it may be necessary to discharge her ; but we’ll ’ope not. Where is the kitchen situated ?

MRS. N. In the front—it is of good size and cheerful.

MRS. G. I will see it presently. I shall want room for some things of my own. I suppose there's no heasy chair ?

MRS. N. N—no——

MRS. G. I shall require that—of course at his Grace the Duke of Shellabere's I had my hown private sittin'-room ; but I couldn't do without a heasy chair ; then, as to my bedroom, it must be large and hairy--and with a cheerful look out. I prefer a northern haspec'—it's more 'ealthy !

MRS. N. Really. I hadn't thought of the aspect. The room you would occupy faces the west.

MRS. G. That won't do, ma'am—not at all—it makes the room too 'ot at night, having the sun on all day. We'll put that down, ma'am, as well as your dinner hour, to be arranged. (*pulls paper and pencil out of bag and proceeds to note down*)

MRS. N. But I should like to know, Mrs. Grimsby, a few particulars about——

MRS. G. (*folding up paper, paying no heed to MRS. NEWLYN*) I suppose you don't keep much company, ma'am—you see that would not suit me.

MRS. N. We have a few friends, now and then.

MRS. G. Now and then—yes, ma'am. Well, that is no objection. And of course you don't come into the kitchen. Her Grace the Duchess of Shellabere never did—even the Hirish Countess didn't demean herself so far—I couldn't put hup with it. And after the dinner is served, I am at liberty. You can go to bed when you please, ma'am—there'll be no need to sit hup, as I can use the latch-key—I couldn't demean myself to come in by the hairey.

MRS. N. I don't think my husband will agree to——

MRS. G. I've always been accustomed to my hown latch-key, ma'am. Mr. Newlyn has 'is—I presoom. *Certainly* I couldn't sit hup to the small hours to let 'im in !

MRS. N. Mrs. Grimsby, you forget yourself ! Mr. Newlyn is not in the habit of staying out until the small hours !

MRS. G. (*unmoved*) Well, ma'am—different people, different ways. I've been used to the haristocracy, and I couldn't suppose a *gentleman* would be coming 'ome to tea every night, as the sayin' is. But you 'aven't been long married, ma'am, as I understood from the elder Mrs. Newlyn.

MRS. N. It can be no concern of yours, Mrs. Grimsby, how long I have been married.

MRS. G. Oh no, ma'am—of course not. Only gentlemen is so different hafterwards to what they is at first. I remember when the Marquis of Camelshair was first married he was that attentive to my lady.

MRS. N. The Marquis of Camelshair is nothing to me. I wish to ask you, Mrs. Grimsby—

MRS. G. Yes, ma'am. I couldn't come before next week—next Thursday, shall we say? But there's a good many more questions to hask you, ma'am; also to arrange about the courses at dinner, and your luncheon time; you see mine is at twelve, and my dinner at two—so you could lunch at one. Very well—a cold luncheon, of course. I don't undertake 'ot luncheons for so low a salary. (*pauses for breath.*)

MRS. N. (*who is fuming, aside*) This is intolerable! I am to be a complete cypher!

MRS. G. And then, ma'am?

MRS. N. (*rising*) We will stop there, Mrs. Grimsby. You seem to have entirely misunderstood our relative positions. You have asked questions and dictated terms as if you were engaging me and arranging your own establishment instead of my engaging you!

MRS. G. (*indignant*) Reely, ma'am!

MRS. N. Silence! I choose to be mistress of my own house. You will not suit me at all! You may have lived with duchesses and countesses, or you may not—I very much doubt if you have—(MRS. GRIMSBY *gasps with rage*)—but you will not do for me. You can retire!

MRS. G. (*sarcastic*) Retire. Oh, very well, ma'am, *very* well! Suit yourself, *pray*, I 'ope you'll find somebody to put up with your mean, prying, poky ways! You won't suit me, ma'am, not at all! I haven't lived with dukes, and hearls, and marcuses! Oh no, of *course* not! *I've* been used to *ladies*, I'll let you know—*real* ladies of title—who kep their carriages and footmen and went to Court! I was de-meaning of myself to come to a shabby little willa where you couldn't swing a cat round. *You're* no lady, or you'd know your place better.

MRS. N. (*advancing; MRS. GRIMSBY backs towards door*) Leave the room at once!

MRS. G. Oh yes, ma'am, I'm going, I don't want to stay. I *wouldn't* stay, if you was to offer me two 'undered a year. It ain't a fit 'ouse for a respectable pussion to be hin! I certingly shouldn't 'ave spent 'arf a crown to come here if

I'd have known the sort of people I was coming to, and not even my fare hofferred me ! Good-bye, ma'am, *good-bye*. I shake the dust off of my boots on your shabby carpet. (*opens door ; turns on threshold*) Nasty, mean, *scrubby* place ! It ain't fit to 'ang out clothes in ! (*bangs out of the room*)

Mrs. N. Well ! of all the impudent, abominable creatures ! How *could* Edward's mother recommend *her* ! I don't believe there are such people as the Duke and Duchess of Shellabere and the Earl and Countess of Banyma—what d'you call it ? I'll look in the *Peerage*, and I shall just tell Mrs. Newlyn what sort of a woman her paragon is ! If she's an average specimen of a “superior person”—give me an inferior one ! But she has given me a lesson ! I'll put my shoulder to the wheel, and teach myself how to rule my own house. No more housekeepers for me ! Edward shall not have to complain again of hairpins in the soup and puddings without eggs. In future things *shall* go like clockwork. (*at door*) I mean to be—though not quite in the style of Mrs. Grimsby—“a superior person.”



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