A PAIR OF LUNATICS

A Dramatic Sketch
by W.R. Walkes

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“A PAIR OF LUNATICS”
As played at Drury Lane and Avenue Theatres, 1889

Characters
He - (otherwise Captain George Fielding),
Me. George Alexander.
She - - (otherwise Clara Manners),
Miss Maude Millet.
Subsequently Produced at the Palace Theatre, 1895.
Scene.—A (back) Drawing-room. Easy chair down l, another chair up e. c.
During the progress of the play a band is from time to time heard in the distance playing a Waltz.
Props — A letter for Clara.
“A PAIR OF LUNATICS”

HE: (looks in) Nobody here! Thank goodness!

(Enters, yawning)

I’ve had about enough of this. (Yawns) I’ve spent many depressing evenings in my time, but a ball at a lunatic asylum beats the lot. Just fancy! Two hundred dancers, and almost every one of them mad! (Sits) What an ass I was to come! Confound Jack Adams! It was all his fault. He said I should find it such splendid fun to listen to the strange delusions of the patients. Fun, indeed! Well, perhaps I’ve no sense of humour, but to me they are just about as funny as a funeral. And they are so depress-ingly monotonous. They’ve got but a poor half-dozen or so of delusions between them; and they copy one another’s words and business like a lot of understudies. Now, let me see! (Counts on his fingers) I have danced with no less than three Empresses of China, each of whom offered to share with me the throne of the Celestial Empire. Four of my partners informed me that they were Queens of the Air, and implored me to go out on the roof, and fly together to the sunny South. (Indicating the attitude of flying) The only one who seemed to have a line of business all to herself was my last partner, who flew into a terrific rage directly I approached her, because I had, she said, borrowed her nose to go to an evening party and had not returned it. As she showed every intention of regaining possession of her lost property by main force, I thought it best to guard my indispensable organ (covers his nose with his hand), leave her for a while, and seek safety here.

(Sits chair x.., slightly turned away towards l)

How refreshing is this quiet after the glare and noise of the rooms below, and the ceaseless babblings of idiocy.

(Yawns)

I feel very tired, quite sleepy, in fact —I’ll close my eyes for a few minutes—just for —a—few—min—.

(Sleeps; slight pause)
(Enter She, carrying a bouquet. She is somewhat agitated)

SHE: Thank goodness, here’s an empty room (throws herself into chair a little up b) where I can rest for a while in quiet. Oh, why did Aunt Maria bring me to this ghastly, gruesome function! My bead’s in a perfect whirl! Dr. Adams assured me that all my partners would be harmless. I suppose he meant by that that they wouldn’t try to murder me—and, of course, that’s some comfort—but their insane ramblings made my very flesh creep, and then their vacant laughter—oh! (shudders) it’s horrible—horrible! (Looks round) I wonder where I am! Oh! (starting up) perhaps it’s a padded room. (Looks round, taps the wall, and hurts her hand) Oh! No, there’s nothing padded but the furniture; but suppose it should be where the violent people are kept in chains—and things. I don’t think I’ll stay. (Going towards door. He snores. She stopping suddenly) Good gracious! What’s that? (He snores again. She frightened) Oh! it’s a groan; some poor creature in a strait-waistcoat which doesn’t fit, and it hurts. Oh! what shall I do?

HE: (gives a great yawn) Ouh!

SHE: (half screams) Oh! (Sinks into a chair a little up a., half fainting)

He (waking up) Jove! just beginning to doze? (Yawns) Fancied I heard voices. (Rises and looks round) Hullo! followed and found out'. Eh! (Puts his hand to his nose in great alarm) It’s all right. It’s another one. How d’ye do? (Nodding) Now I wonder who this distinguished stranger may be! Lady Macbeth, or the Sultana of Zanzibar.

SHE: (coming round) (aside, seeing him) Ah, there he is! He’s taken his waistcoat off. Oh, I hope he isn’t a violent one.

(Creeps down timidly R)

HE: (aside) I suppose I must address her in the usual humouring fashion. (Aloud) I beg your pardon, but do you happen to be looking for anyone, the Editor of the “Times,” or Hamlet, Prince of Denmark? (Above here)
SHE: (aside) I knew it, he’s a lunatic! I must humour him and get away. (Aloud, timidly) Yes, I am engaged to Hamlet for the next dance, have you seen him?

HE: (aside) Poor thing! mad as a hatter. (Aloud) Hamlet? Oh, yes, just this moment left him. We have been sitting for the last six months on the top of the North Pole tossing for chocolate drops and making railway station sandwiches.

SHE: Really!

HE: (sinking his voice and looking round) Do you know what railway station sandwiches are made of?

SHE: Oh, no. I mean yes, yes! No, I don’t, I mean no.

HE: Then I’ll tell you (takes her by the wrist and brings her dozen in the approved fashion of the melodrama), but it’s a dark and gruesome mystery. They are made of Banbury cakes, blacking, bull’s eyes, and the declining rays of the sun. (Aside) I am quite an accomplished lunatic (laughs and goes l).

SHE: (aside) That dreadful insane laughter! How shall I get away! (Aloud) Would you mind accompanying me in search of my partner?

HE: (aside) Wants to get me down to dance, not if I know it. (Aloud) Pray, excuse me; the fact is—I am expecting a visit from the Queen of Sheba and the Archbishop of Canterbury; they are coming to offer me a tomb in Westminster Abbey (earnestly, kneeling to her). Stay with me, and you shall share it. (Aside) I’m getting on splendidly.

SHE: (aside) Oh, dear, oh, dear! what ravings! (Aloud, positively but timidly) Thank you very much; it’s awfully kind of you, but I don’t want a tomb, I don’t, indeed, I’m not dead yet.

HE: But it’s such a useful thing to have in the house; and if you grow tired of it you can turn it into a goose club, or better still, raffle it. (Confidentially. ) I know for a positive fact that the Beadle at the Bank of England will take fifty chances. (Goes up Center)
SHE: You don’t say so. (Aside) He doesn’t seem so very violent, but how piteous are his wanderings. Such a pleasant-looking fellow, too!

HE: (aside, up a little) This is an interesting case, decidedly, for she has not said a word about her own line of business. Perhaps she’s got a novelty. I’ll find out. (Aloud) But, tell me, what is your particular weakness? You don’t fly through the air (imitating action of flying) or anything of that sort, do you?

SHE: (smiling) Oh, no, I’m not mad—oh, I beg your pardon—(aside) How stupid of me. (Aloud)—I mean I am only here on a visit to Dr. Adams—his guest, you know.

HE: (aside) A guest! poor creature. They all say that.

SHE: (sweetly) So pleased to have met you, but I’m afraid I must be going. Good-bye (going towards door).

HE: Not just yet. (Stopping her) Tell me all about yourself. (Aside) This is the most charming lunatic I have seen this evening.

SHE: (aside) I must pretend to be mad, or he’ll resent it and become violent; what shall I say? Ah, I know. (Aloud) I am afraid I must be off, my balloon is waiting for me at the attic window, my swan balloon, you know—and Auntie doesn’t like the birds to be kept waiting at night.

HE: (aside, in a tone of pity) Poor creature! But it’s distinctly a new idea, and a pretty one. (Aloud) Never mind Auntie. Bother the birds. I’ll blow you home through my peashooter. (Sits L)

SHE: (timidly) Thank you, that’s very kind of you, but I couldn’t think of troubling you. (Aside) He won’t let me go. I must go on humouring him till somebody comes. (Sits)

HE: Come, tell me all about it. (Genially) So you drive about in a balloon, eh? That must be ripping. Is it your own, or hired for the evening?
SHE: (as though inventing with an effort) Eh, Oh! our own, but it’s not a very grand turn out - the old family balloon, you know; and the swans are an awful pair of crocks, quite past work.

HE: How sad! And the coachman—is he anything unusual?

SHE: (with an effort) The coachman? Oh, yes, he’s a copper-coloured cockatoo with a cold in the head. (Aside) How awfully natural it is to be mad!

HE: (aside) I like this. Humouring a ladylike lunatic is distinctly entertaining.

SHE: (rises, timidly) Can—can I drop you anywhere this evening?

HE: No, thanks. I prefer the old-fashioned peashooter. So simple!

SHE: Indeed!

HE: Yes, you put yourself in at one end, and blow through the other, and puff!—there you are.

SHE: How very convenient! (Aside) Oh, he’s dreadfully mad, poor thing! I must get away. (Aloud, edging towards the door, in terror) Goodbye, thank you so much for this nice chat. Such a pleasant evening.

HE: (intercepting her) No, no. Pray, stop a little longer. I’ve got a lot of things to talk about before you go. (Aside) I am enjoying this.

SHE: What things?

HE: Heaps of ’em. Solar Myths, empty sardine tins; lemonade, bottled ale and stout, programmes, books of the words of the burlesque; good-morning, have you used any soap? and say, Oh, say, I implore you, that you won’t, be happy till you get it.

SHE: (aside) How awful! (Aloud) But I must go. I must, indeed, Aunt Maria and Dr. Adams will be getting so anxious about me.
HE: (confidentially) Don’t bother about them; they’re all right. (Mysteriously) Aunt Maria’s done it at last. Haven’t you heard about it?

SHE: No. I mean yes, yes. No. I mean no.

HE: Then I’ll tell you. She has laid Dr. Adams three acres to a cow that she will beat him in a go-as-you-please race round the Dome of St. Paul’s on mowing machines; they are just doing the last lap now, and if you were to interrupt them, do you know what would happen? Consternation, annihilation and a bad attack of the measles. They would clothe you in a costume of custard-coloured calico, trimmed with ruches of fried fish, and marry you to the Lord Mayor. So let me entreat—implore you to remain with me and be safe; snuff-coloured, and solidified. (Aside, as he walks away) This is awfully good fun; but it’s a terrible tax on the imagination.

SHE: (aside) What awful madness! If I could only calm him. (Suddenly) An idea! I’ve heard that they often soothe these poor creatures with amateur acting. It sounds impossible, but I’ll try it. I’ll give him as much as I can remember of “Ophelia.”

(Goes up a little and proceeds to let down her hair)

HE: (turns and catches sight of her) (Aside) Hullo! What’s she up to now! I’ll be hanged if she isn’t undressing. (Aloud, in a tone of alarm) Here, I say, Sultana of Zanzibar, or whoever you are, it isn’t bedtime yet. Decency forbids, you know. Hang it all, I’m a single man.

SHE: (ignores his outburst, places some grasses from her bouquet in her hair, and takes some flowers from the same, and carries them in her hand; and speaks in the moonstruck manner of “Ophelia.”) Single, are you? “The owl was the baker’s daughter. We know what we are, but we know not what we may be.”

(Sings) “How should I your true love know From another one?”

HE: I’m sure I don’t know.

SHE: (sings) “By his cockle hat and staff And his sandal shoon”
HE: (waves her off) Go away. I’ve nothing for you.
SHE: There’s Rosemary: that’s for remembrance. (Gives him a flower)
HE: Thank you. I’m not taking any.
She: “O, woe is me,
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see.”
(She sings softly through the early part of the next speech and throws the flowers about)
HE: (aside, puzzled) What is her little game? (Suddenly) By Jove. It’s play acting. She’s doing Shakespeare — Ophelia! Well, I don’t know much about the bard myself, but I’ll do my best to keep it up: so here goes. (Aloud, ranting)
To be or not to be: Alas, poor Yorick!
Whether ’twere better in this world to call A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!
Or take a cab, or else a Putney ’bus.
So get thee to a Nunnery, and when thou’rt there Off with his head, and tell him straight from me My name is Norval on the Grampian Hills My father feeds his flock on threes of Scotch And so whene’er they take their walks abroad
Oh yes, there’s something rotten in the state of Denmark.
And so, Farewell!
No. No. I will not say “”farewell,” but au revoir.
SHE: (during the foregoing has quailed, and sunk into a chair)
HE: (aside) I’ve dried up. That’s all I can remember, but it’s done the trick, shut her up completely.
SHE: (aside, despairingly) It’s a failure! He’s acting, too. Oh! will no one come!
HE: (aside) Well, what’s the next move, I wonder. Really, this is most interesting!
SHE: (aside) I know. Dr. Adams said the other day that with these poor people the commanding power of the human eye was most wonderful. I'll try it. It's my last chance. (Rises, turns towards him, folds her arms, and gazes at him steadily)

HE: (aside) Hullo! a new development. I believe she fancies she's a wax-work, and will want me to wind her up. (Aloud) I say, you know, this isn't the “Chamber of Horrors.”

SHE: (advances towards him slowly and melodramatically with her features contorted into an expression of anger and malignity)

HE: (retreats before her in alarm—aside) By jove! She's getting violent. This is too much of a good thing! There's murder in her eye. She's stark, staring, raving mad. (Sinks on the floor at her feet) Take my life, but spare, oh, spare my child!

SHE: (aside) How lovely! He's quite subdued, but I must keep it up. (Continues to gaze at him as before)

HE: (aside) What on earth is to be done. I wonder if I could hypnotize her? I don't know how to do it, but I'll try. (Rises and advances towards her, a stern expression on his face, and makes passes with his hands)

SHE: (aside) Oh, dear! the effect has gone off and now he is becoming infuriated. Oh, why did I do it! (She turns away)

He (follows her, and makes passes in every position in which he finds himself)

SHE: (faintly swinging to and fro) Oh! oh! I'm going! (She falls)

HE: (catches her, business of passing her from one arm to the other, and finally he deposits her in a chair) She's gone right off. Then (complacently) by Jove! I'm a genuine hypnotist, and I never knew it.

(Suddenly and alarmed)
But how am I going to bring her round again? I’ll be hanged if I know. Oh, confound it, this is serious.

(Shakes her by the arm)

Here, I say, gentle stranger. Your Majesty, fair Ophelia, wake up!

(Business of bringing her round—slaps her hand— and so on; finally he picks up a piece of grass and tickles her nose with it)

SHE: (sneezes)

HE: (joyfully) Hurray! she’s coming round.

SHE: (opens her eyes) Where am I?

HE: (aside, joyfully) Ah! she has said, “Where am I?” Then all is well.

SHE: (rises, and looks around) Oh! alone, alone with him still! Oh! (in an agony) What shall I do? What shall I do? (rushes to the other side of the room, falls into chair, and bursts into tears)

She takes out her handkerchief - a letter falls)

HE: (aside, alarmed) Confound it; she’s getting hysterical. This won’t do. (Aloud) I say, your Majesty, don’t cry. You’re not well. Let me call Dr. Adams.

SHE: (eagerly, brightening.) Will you, will you?

HE: Certainly. (Going, catches sight of letter) But what’s this (reads address): Miss Clara Manners, Halbury House. (Aside) That’s Jack’s favourite sister he is always talking about. How strange! (Aloud, pointing to letter) Then she must be at the ball to-night.

SHE: Who?

HE: Miss Manners.

SHE: She is. I am Clara Manners.
HE: You! (aside, laughs) Oh, that’s awfully good. (Aloud, soothingly) No, no, you’re the Sultana of Zanzibar. I recognised you at once by your regal bearing; and I am your most devoted subject, General Booth, the oldest and dearest friend of William the Conqueror (kneels) although the people outside (confidentially) who are all mad, you know, call me Captain George Fielding of the 45th Lancers.

SHE: (aside). 45th! Captain Fielding! That’s Jack’s great friend. What a strange fancy! (Aloud) But I assure you my name is Clara Manners.

HE: Eh? (Aside) Now I look at her, she’s uncommonly like Jack.

SHE: (aside) His face bears a wonderful resemblance to Mr. Fielding’s portrait in Jack’s album.

(They look at each other for a few seconds, and then turn away)

HE: But surely Miss Manners is not ...

(Touching his head)

SHE: Certainly Captain Fielding isn’t ...

(They again stare for a second into each other's faces)

HE: (aside) She doesn’t look so very mad, after all.

SHE: (aside) I believe he’s perfectly sane.

HE: I say now, between ourselves, you don’t really propose to go home in a balloon, do you?

SHE: (laughing) Oh, dear no; and you—you are not a very dear friend of William the Conqueror, I suppose?

HE: (laughing) Oh, no, he’s dead; my great friend is Jack Manners.

SHE: My brother. (They shake hands)

HE: What a lucky chance! I am so awfully glad to make your acquaintance. And you ...
SHE: (rather coyly) I’m always pleased to meet any friend of Jack’s (with more effusion) especially a dear friend. (They shake hands again with much effusion)

HE: But what lunatics we’ve been.

SHE: Yes, hopelessly insane!

HE: But as we’re quite harmless, suppose we go downstairs to supper, and look for your partner, Hamlet?

SHE: Yes, and when we’ve found him, we’ll ask him to write an epitaph for your tomb in Westminster Abbey

(They both laugh)

Exeunt or Curtain