

**THE BLACK PEARL:
A COMEDY IN
THREE ACTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649304806

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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VICTORIEN SARDOU & BARRETT H. CLARK

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THREE ACTS**

The Black Pearl: a Comedy in Three Acts: by Victorien Sardou: Translated by Barrett H. Clark

THE
UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

Samuel French: Publisher
28-30 West Thirty-eighth St. : New York

LONDON

Samuel French, Ltd.

26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND

VICTORIEN SARDOU

Victorien Sardou (1831-1908) was one of the most ingenious dramatists of modern times. For more than thirty years he was a commanding figure in the French theater, to which he contributed over a hundred comedies, melodramas, and librettos. The wide range and extraordinary fertility of his talent may be estimated by comparing such works as "Patrie!" "La Perle noire," ("The Black Pearl"), "La Tosca," and "Les Pattes de mouche" ("A Scrap of Paper"). While Sardou was not a great thinker, his exhaustive knowledge of stage technic entitles him to a position among the most important of nineteenth century playwrights.

"The Black Pearl," requires no very difficult acting. The costumes, which ought to be early nineteenth century, might (except for one important anachronism) be modern. The stage-directions in the text are adequate.

THE BLACK PEARL

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

M. TRICAMP
CORNÉLIUS
BALTHAZAR
VANDERVEN
PETERSEN
FIRST POLICE OFFICER
SECOND POLICE OFFICER
CHRISTIANE
SARA
GUDULE
MERCHANTS AND THEIR WIVES.

The scene is Amsterdam, 1825.

THE BLACK PEARL

ACT I

SCENE: *A large room on the ground-floor of the home of a rich Dutch merchant. At the back, to the spectator's left, is the principal entrance; to the right of this is a window, protected by iron bars, opening upon the street. Between the door and the window is a cupboard. Down-stage to the left, a large fireplace. Half-way up-stage on the same side, a passage-way opens upon another room; next to it is a wooden stairway leading to the upper floor. Down-stage to the left is the door of CHRISTIANE'S room. Half-way up-stage on the same side is the door of BALTHAZAR'S office. To the left is a large table; here and there are sofas, chairs, a copper lamp, etc.*

Just before the curtain rises, the sound of a gathering thunderstorm is heard. As the curtain rises, GUDULE is seen at the left, kneeling. CHRISTIANE comes from her room, a small packet in her hand; she goes to the window. As she is about to open it a bright flash of lightning momentarily blinds her, and almost at the same time the crash of thunder breaks over the house. CHRISTIANE shrieks and falls into a chair.

GUDULE. Ah, Mademoiselle Christiane—right over the house!

CHRISTIANE. I was so frightened!

GUDULE. I heard that, and no mistake! And I'm deaf. Heavens, my child, I can't get up, now! This is the end of the world!

CHRISTIANE. (*Helping her to her feet*) Not yet—good old Gudule! Sit there!

GUDULE. You are pale yourself—poor little dear!

CHRISTIANE. My heart's beating at a terrific rate! (*She goes to the window-sill where she takes the packet she had left there*)

GUDULE. Don't open the window, Mademoiselle Christiane, you'll attract the lightning! (*She stops her ears with her apron. The thunder is heard rolling farther off now; the rainfall is not so constant as before. The lightning-flashes continue*)

CHRISTIANE. The storm's passing over—and the rain-fall is not so heavy. (*To herself, after glancing at the street outside*) He won't come in this weather.—What shall I do? (*A knock is heard at the outer door*)

GUDULE. Someone's knocking.

CHRISTIANE. (*Disturbed*) Yes, it's Monsieur Balthazar! (*She tries to hide the packet. The knocking continues without interruption*)

GUDULE. Mademoiselle Christiane, I can't move a finger! You please open the door!

BALTHAZAR. (*Outside*) Christiane! Gudule!

CHRISTIANE. (*Hiding the packet in the cupboard*) Very well, I'm coming. (*She opens the door*)

(*Enter BALTHAZAR and CORNELIUS. Both come in hurriedly, shaking the water from their clothes. On CORNELIUS' shoulder is a large*

kite, the tail of which is composed of paper sunflowers.)

BALTHAZAR. The idea! To keep us waiting outside in such weather!

CORNÉLIUS. Brrr! Quick, quick! Some fire, Gudule!

BALTHAZAR. Towels—dry clothes—slippers!

(CHRISTIANE runs back and forth, carrying the wet coats and hats into the room to the right.)

CORNÉLIUS. We're running streams!

BALTHAZAR. Here, wipe off the water—quick!

GUDULE. (*Wiping the floor*) Oh, Lord save us—my poor floor!

CORNÉLIUS. Not the floor: us!

BALTHAZAR. (*Putting on a dry coat*) Of course—she's so Dutch—and then she doesn't hear.

CHRISTIANE. (*Going to CORNÉLIUS to relieve him of his cape*) Will you allow me, Monsieur CORNÉLIUS—?

CORNÉLIUS. My dear child! And I never even shook hands with you! Why, you're frozen! What's the trouble?

BALTHAZAR. You're red as a beet!

CHRISTIANE. That terrible crash a moment ago—I'm still trembling!

BALTHAZAR. Did you hear it, too?

CORNÉLIUS. (*Rubbing CHRISTIANE'S hands*) Poor child!

BALTHAZAR. Every window in Amsterdam looked like a burning flame.

CHRISTIANE. Were you in the street?

BALTHAZAR. (*Warming himself by the fire*) I was on the Amstel Quay—under a projecting roof—with him.

CHRISTIANE. Under a roof! And how wet you are! Soaked to the skin!

(CORNÉLIUS *puts the kite against the table, left.*)

BALTHAZAR. Do you know, *he was there*, had

been for an hour, sitting on a chair. You'd never imagine what he was doing! Trying to fly his kite over the Amstel!

CHRISTIANE. His kite?

BALTHAZAR. Yes. The idea—flying a kite in this weather! And he's a sane-minded man, a scholar, even—the most renowned chemist in Amsterdam.

CORNÉLIUS. Don't listen to him, my dear. He doesn't know what he is saying, the ignoramus! I don't fly my kite for amusement; I was trying to prove (*He takes the kite*) the presence of nitric acid in electricity-charged clouds. See, the papers on the tail of my kite have turned pink.

BALTHAZAR. Is that why you were standing there?

CORNÉLIUS. (*Goes to the back and lays the kite against the wall, next to the window*) Of course. You see, the houses were separated—clear horizon, ten lightning-rods in sight—and all on fire! It was perfectly arranged for me. I've been on the lookout long enough for this storm. I wanted to study it at close range. (*Thunder is heard in the distance.—*CORNÉLIUS *rubs his hands*) Rumble, I know what you do now, and I'll tell you whenever you like! (*The women lay the table-cloth*)

BALTHAZAR. (*Going to the window*) What the devil do you find so interesting in thunder and lightning?

CORNÉLIUS. Poor fellow! Interesting? (*A flash of lightning*) What is that, now?

BALTHAZAR. (*Startled*) Oh! A streak of lightning! (*He comes down-stage*)

CORNÉLIUS. (*Also coming down-stage*) Yes, but what kind?