

Le Medecin des Folles, here translated as The Madwoman of Melun, was a play first performed at the Theater of the Ambigu-Comique in Paris in 1891. It is based upon an eponymous feuilleton collected and published in two volumes by E. Dentu in 1879 (Volume 2 was entitled L'Hôtel du Grand Cerf [The Great Stag Hotel]).

THE MADWOMAN OF MELUN
by Xavier de Montépin & Jules Dornay.

CHARACTERS
in order of appearance

MADAME LORIOL, proprietor of the Great Stag Hotel
ROSE, a waitress at the Great Stag Hotel
ELISE, a second waitress
TOINETTE, a third waitress
ETIENNE, the sommelier
SORLIN, a customer
LAMBERT, another customer
MAURICE DELARIVIÈRE, a wealthy banker
JEANNE, Maurice's mistress
EDMÉE DELARIVIÈRE, their daughter
DOCTOR GEORGES VERNIER, a local MD
CLAUDE MARTEAU, a former sailor
SPIGOT, his sidekick, a stutterer
FABRICE LECLERC, Maurice's nephew
RENÉ JANCELYN, Fabrice's secretary
RAOUL DE LANGEAIS, a friend of Fabrice
GABRIEL D'AUTUN, another friend of Fabrice
ADÈLE DE CIVRAC, another friend of Fabrice
MATHILDE LONGJUMEAU, another friend of Fabrice
PAUL MOUGIN, another friend of Fabrice
PAULA BALTUS, Frédéric Baltus' sister
PIERRE, a vagrant convicted of the murder of Frédéric Baltus and about to be executed
THE WARDEN of the Melun Jail
THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR of the Tribunal of Melun
FATHER VINCENT, a priest
THE PUBLIC EXECUTIONER
DOCTOR FRANZ RITTNER, an alienist and the proprietor of the Melun Asylum
DOCTOR HERMAN SCHULTZ, a doctor at the Asylum
MARCEL, the Chief Orderly at the Asylum
LOUISE, the Chief Nurse at the Asylum
JACQUES LEFEBVRE, an investor
PAULINE LEFEBVRE, his wife
M. LEHARDY, a boat builder
LITTLE PIERRE, a 13 year-old boy who assists him
MADAME MARIE TALLANDIER, his mother
MARIETTE, Doctor Vernier's maid
DOCTOR VULPIAN, a distinguished professor of medicine

CUSTOMERS OF THE HOTEL, GUARDS AT THE JAIL, A COURT CLERK, ORDERLIES AT THE ASYLUM, etc.

ACT I
SCENE I

The interior of the Great Stag Hotel located in Melun, just outside Paris. There is a bar on the left, restaurant tables in the middle, doors leading outside, to the kitchens, and to the reception, and a mezzanine accessible through a staircase. It all looks plush and comfortable.

AT RISE, the proprietor, Madame Loriol, is instructing her waitresses to attend the various customers sitting at the tables or at the bar.

MADAME LORIOL: Rib steak to Number 1, rare. Fish to Number 2, with lots of onions. Ribs to Number 4... Come on, ladies! Look sharp!

ROSE: Going! Going!

(she leaves to go to the kitchen)

FIRST CUSTOMER *(at the bar)*: A beer!

ELISE: Coming!

MADAME LORIOL: I don't know where to turn. I'm exhausted!

SORLIN *(at a table)*: It's like complaining that the bride is too beautiful, Madame Loriol. Business is booming!

MADAME LORIOL: Yes, but what a lot of work!

(Maurice Delarivière is visible on the balcony of the mezzanine; he seems impatient.)

(Elise leaves to go to the reception.)

(Rose returns from the kitchen with a plate, which she serves to Sorlin)

ROSE: Here's the fish, Monsieur.

(Etienne the sommelier serves him wine. Elise returns from the reception)

ELISE: Madame, more people are coming asking if there are any windows free?

MADAME LORIOL: All our windows are taken.

ELISE: But they want them. They'll pay whatever price you demand.

MADAME LORIOL: I told you, girl, there aren't any more windows available. All are rented out.

(Maurice disappears from the balcony)

SORLIN: Hey, I understand! It's not everyday that one has an opportunity to see a public execution in Melun. Today, June 19, 1872, will go down in the annals of the city.

LAMBERT *(from another table)*: The head of the condemned will fall tomorrow morning. I understand why they are fighting over your windows.

SORLIN: For sure!

(René Jancelyn, sitting at yet another table, listens without saying a word. From time to time, he looks at his watch on the sly, and appears uneasy)

FIRST CUSTOMER: Another beer!

SECOND CUSTOMER: A soda!

THIRD CUSTOMER: A pint!

MADAME LORIOL: Elise, Rose, Etienne! Serve, will you?

ELISE, ETIENNE, ROSE: Coming!

MADAME LORIOL: The loafers! And where is Toinette? I sent her to find Doctor Vernier. She's loafing too, for sure, instead of coming back.

SORLIN: You've got somebody sick here?

MADAME LORIOL: Yes, a lady traveling with her husband who took ill on the train, and couldn't go on to Paris.

(Toinette enters, followed by Doctor Vernier)

TOINETTE: Madame, here's Doctor Vernier.

VERNIER: Bonjour, Madame Loriol!

MADAME LORIOL: Bonjour, doctor.

VERNIER: Toinette told me it's about a lady?

MADAME LORIOL: Yes. She's very ill. Her husband seems quite worried.

VERNIER: What floor?

MADAME LORIOL: On the mezzanine. Toinette will show you.

FOURTH CUSTOMER: Where's my dessert?

SORLIN: Rose, my coffee!

ROSE: Coming!

(Customers come and go. Claude Marteau, dressed as a sailor with a beret, and Spigot, enter)

CLAUDE *(military bow)*: Madame Loriol and everyone, hello

MADAME LORIOL: Ah, it's you Claude.

CLAUDE: Claude Marteau, for the ladies!

MADAME LORIOL: With your inseparable sidekick.

SPIGOT *(stuttering)*: Sp-sp-spigot at your service!

CLAUDE: Yes, Spigot. His only fault is that he murders the language.

SPIGOT: It's not-not-not my-my...

CLAUDE: It's not your Daddy's fault! It's you!

SPIGOT: ...fault!

CLAUDE: Do you need some fish, Boss-Lady?

MADAME LORIOL: Yes. I was waiting for you. What have you got?

CLAUDE: Lots. Good soles.

MADAME LORIOL: Well, take it all to the kitchen.

(They leave through the kitchen door.)

(A group of young men and women led by Fabrice Leclerc and Raoul de Langeais come in from the garden and everyone looks at them with curiosity; the party includes Gabriel d'Autun, Paul Mougin, Adèle de Civrac and Mathilde Longjumeau)

MADAME LORIOL *(going to Fabrice)*: Bonjour, Monsieur Leclerc. I received your telegram. I was expecting you.

FABRICE: Here I am, Madame Loriol. And as you can see, I'm not alone!

RAOUL: We're the Company of Fools!

MADAME LORIOL: Welcome all.

(she arranges chairs at a round table so the women can sit)

SORLIN: Flabbergasting!

LAMBERT: But sexy.

GABRIEL *(looking around)*: Why, this is a nice place.

ADELE: It's filthy.

(the women sit down)

MADAME LORIOL: It's been a long while since we've seen you, Monsieur Fabrice. Forty-five days!

FABRICE: What a memory!

MADAME LORIOL: You stayed here the very same day they condemned the murderer or Monsieur Baltus.

FABRICE: My word, you're right.

MADAME LORIOL: And you can boast of having followed that trial everyday at the court house.

RENÉ *(aside)*: That was the wrong verdict.

FABRICE: That trial interested me. That's why I've rented windows on the second floor. To be present at the end of that drama.

MADAME LORIOL: Those rooms have a great view.

FABRICE: Thank you, Madame Loriol.

ADELE: When will the execution will take place?

MADAME LORIOL: Tomorrow morning, at daybreak.

GABRIEL: So we can be present for this little party?

FABRICE: You'd do just as well to skip it.

ADELE *(drawling)*: Why's that, darling?

MATHILDE: Haven't we the right to be curious?

FABRICE: When it's a matter of a bloody spectacle, curiosity is really cruelty.

GABRIEL: You are only a poseur, old boy. Why should women be forbidden what men allow themselves?

RAOUL: Because women are weak and sensitive things.

PAUL: While we are made of sterner stuff, my sweet.

RAOUL: And we have nerves of steel.

GABRIEL: Are you finished? If they said that you'd be the star of that party tomorrow, maybe I'd come to watch it. Just to see your nerves of steel.

RAOUL: I feel bad about it.

ADELE: Raoul's got no head.

GABRIEL: Only to tie his tie.

FABRICE: Anyway, the ladies are here now.

ADELE: It would have been stupid to miss such an opportunity.

SORLIN *(having finished his meal)*: Ah, these women disgust me!

LAMBERT: Me, too.

GABRIEL: Say, is this all there is to drink? No aperitifs?

FABRICE: Waiter! Serve these ladies absinthes.

ADELE: Yes, I'll have an absinthe!

MADAME LORIOL: Etienne, serve the ladies!

(Meanwhile, Fabrice glances around and notices René Jancelyn, who gestures, Fabrice approaches him)

RENÉ: Hum! Hum!

FABRICE: Jancelyn.

RENÉ: I'm here.

FABRICE: Fine.

MADAME LORIOL *(to the company)*: Are you ready to order?

ADELE *(to Fabrice)*: How is the food here?

FABRICE: Excellent. Please serve us your specials, Madame Loriol.

MADAME LORIOL: I'll tell the chef.

ADELE: Before that, Madame, can you tell us exactly who is going to be executed tomorrow?

ALL: Ah yes! Please do.

(Etienne serves the aperitifs)

MADAME LORIOL: You really should ask Monsieur Fabrice. He knows the case much better than I.

(she leaves to go to the kitchen; they all drink the absinthe as they speak)

GABRIEL: So, Fabrice, we're waiting!

MATHILDE: Yes! Give us details about the condemned man!

ADELE: His story, darling.

FABRICE *(moodily)*: It's a tragic tale that I don't like to tell.

ADELE: But we want to hear it!

GABRIEL: Gives us a good fright!

RAOUL: You're going to laugh.

ALL: The story!

RAOUL *(to Fabrice)*: You've got to give in, old boy.

FABRICE *(nervously)*: OK! You asked for it! So on the banks of the Seine by the highway going from Melun to Seine-Port, there was the Villa Baltus, inhabited eight months a year by Frédéric Baltus and his sister Paula...

GABRIEL *(sipping her absinth)*: Old folks?

FABRICE: No, quite young. Frédéric was rich, and a bit of a rake, always going to Paris to part. On December 3, the gardener found a body near the Villa, half buried in snow...

GABRIEL: His master's body?

FABRICE: Yes. He'd been shot three times.

ADELE: What was the motive for the crime?

FABRICE: Theft. His wallet was missing.

GABRIEL: And the murderer?

FABRICE: He was nowhere to be found, naturally. But two days later, a vagabond, a sort of beggar with a paralyzed right arm, was stupid enough to give a bartender a fifty-franc note pulled from a wallet pierced by a bullet and stained with blood.

GABRIEL: Now there's an idiot!

FABRICE: The man was arrested and searched. In his pocket, they found Frédéric Baltus' wallet.

ADELE: All that remained for him to do was confess.

FABRICE: That's what he didn't do. He has insisted up to this moment that he is innocent.

ADÈLE: How does he explain being in possession of that wallet?

(Madame Loriol returns and listens)

FABRICE: Rather stupidly. He claimed it was given to him by a stranger whom he'd met in the woods when he asked him for charity.

MADAME LORIOL: A gift of 15,000 francs! Because that's what Monsieur Baltus had in his wallet! That was proven.

(Claude and Spigot come out of the kitchen and start listening too)

FABRICE: They tried to make him understand that his explanation was absurd. Compromising him even. But that was a waste of time. He obstinately persisted with it. "It was charity," he said. "I am not guilty of any murder."

ADÈLE: And who was this wretch?

FABRICE: To all questions, he replied, "I am without family. My name is Pierre. I have no other name."

GABRIEL: Now there's a bull-headed man!

MATHILDE: And what's more, pretending to be innocent!

ADÈLE: But what if he isn't guilty?

CLAUDE *(a bit drunk)*: as far as I'm concerned, I'd swear he's not.

(General reaction of surprise. René Jancelyn shivers and rises)

ALL: Who are you?

CLAUDE: I'm Claude Marteau!

GABRIEL: Well, what's this you're telling us, Claude Marteau? According to you, the murderer whose head is to be chopped off tomorrow morning would be innocent?

CLAUDE: Yes!

(René and Fabrice exchange a look)

GABRIEL: How do you know?

CLAUDE: I don't, but I sincerely believe it.

GABRIEL: You must have some reasons to do so?

CLAUDE: Yes. Good ones, too.

GABRIEL: Well, then, tell them to us.

FABRICE: Come on! There's no need to weary these ladies with these absurd tales.

ADÈLE: Not at all! We want to hear these tales.

MATHILDE: Yes, yes!

GABRIEL: Tell us, Monsieur Marteau!

CLAUDE: First of all, I must tell you that my nose is often red enough...

SPIGOT: F-from white wine.

GABRIEL: Nothing wrong with that!

CLAUDE: Eight months ago, I was a sailor and watching the comings and goings of a character who owned property on the banks of the Seine. The night of the crime, I met some friends, Spigot here was one of them...

SPIGOT: T-that's...

GABRIEL: Hush! Don't interrupt him!

CLAUDE: The cold was getting to me, so I went back to my cabin, and wrapped myself in my hammock, I snored so loud that I could hear myself.

GABRIEL *(looking at Raoul)*: I know someone who snores like that.

RAOUL: Shut up! Please continue, Monsieur!

CLAUDE: If I hadn't been snoring, I'm sure I'd have heard the shots.

ADELE: Well, if you saw nothing and heard nothing, why are you telling us this?

CLAUDE: Patience, will you, lady? When I woke up, I went to inspect my boat. I hadn't chained it up, just tied it up with a bit of rope.

GABRIEL: So?

CLAUDE: So, I noticed it wasn't tied the way I tie it.

ADELE: Hardly surprising since you were drunk from dawn to dusk.

CLAUDE: Yes, but no matter how drunk I am, my knot is always the same. I can tie it in my sleep.

FABRICE: What does that prove?

CLAUDE: That someone used my boat to cross the Seine while I slept.

FABRICE: A fisherman, no doubt.

CLAUDE: No, it wasn't a fisherman. It snowed that night and when I looked on the banks, there there were the imprints of boots, such as that poor devil who's going to get his head chopped off tomorrow could never afford. Boots like yours.

(points at Fabrice's boots)

FABRICE: And you conclude?

CLAUDE: I conclude that the real murderer was well-to-do man, and the poor devil whom they arrested and convicted was only his accomplice—his tool—at best. Tomorrow, perhaps, the former will come and see the latter being guillotined, to be quite sure he won't speak.

WOMEN: Brr!

FABRICE: That's all?

CLAUDE: No.

FABRICE: There's more?

CLAUDE: Yes. I found something.

FABRICE *(nervous)*: What was it?

CLAUDE *(looking at him)*: Something which might actually be evidence.

FABRICE *(nervous)*: Evidence?

(René comes closer)

CLAUDE: But I've said enough.

FABRICE: Not at all! Speak, will you!

(Claude remains silent)

FABRICE: Meaning, you found nothing! You're lying! You started a story you don't know how to finish.

CLAUDE: If you say so.

FABRICE: If you'd discovered something, regardless of how important it was, you would have reported it to the police.

CLAUDE: Reported it? You must be joking! Am I a policeman? Is it my job to go and report my finds to the police? If they'd asked me, for sure, I'd have told them. But go to them on my own, no.

ADELE: What about the condemned man?

CLAUDE: So much the worse for him. It's his job to defend himself.