

15 *

A SILENT WOMAN

A Farce

IN

ONE ACT

BY

THOMAS HAILES LACY

AUTHOR OF

Leila—Marston Moor, &c. &c.

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE REPRESENTATION ONLY.

LONDON:

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

89, STRAND, W.C.,

(Opposite Southampton Street, Covent Garden Market)

913842

A SILENT WOMAN.

First performed August 17, 1835.

CHARACTERS.

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| MARIANNE SANDFORD . . . | Miss LAVINIA MELVILLE. |
| MR. SANDFORD | Mr. CLIFFORD. |
| ARTHUR MERTON | Mr. T. H. LACY. |

TIME OF REPRESENTATION—35 minutes.

COSTUMES.

Miss SANDFORD.—Fashionable walking dress.

SANDFORD.—Blue coat, light waistcoat, and dark trousers.

MERTON.—Travelling dress.

✓ X6360509

[ADAPTED FROM A RECOLLECTION OF MR. BAYLE BERNARD'S
COMEDY OF "THE DUMB BELLE."]

A SILENT WOMAN.



SCENE.—*A Drawing Room in Mr. Sandford's House.*

Enter MR. SANDFORD, R., meeting MARIANNE, L. D.

SAND. So, Marianne, you have returned from your charitable visit to the village?

MAR. Yes, papa—and I've had a most delightful walk.

SAND. And I've delightful news for you. I have, this morning, received by post, a letter from Mr. Arthur Merton.

MAR. Indeed, papa?

SAND. Yes, indeed! He writes me word, that he has brought his continental excursion to rather an abrupt conclusion—has set out on his return, and will probably arrive within a few hours of this letter.

MAR. Is that all, papa? Does he not mention—

SAND. To be sure he does. Do you think he could forget his favourite Marianne—his youthful playmate and companion—his betrothed wife? No, my dear, he is as fervent in his mention of you as ever, and is all anxiety for the hour when, in compliance with my own, and his late esteemed father's last expressed desire, our families are to become allied by your acceptance of his hand.

MAR. Why, papa. I must confess that I have no wish to rebel against your decree, and if I were assured that Arthur still preserved the opinion of me he used to have— Could you not let me look at his letter, papa?

SAND. Certainly—certainly, my dear. (*aside*) I must make some excuse, it will never do to let her see it. Yes, yes, you shall peruse it by and bye, but just now I locked it up, and cannot readily get at it.

MAR. I'm sorry for that, sir!

SAND. I dare say you are—it's quite natural. But although

I cannot give you a very vivid idea of the flames and darts, blisses and kisses, turtle-doves and Cupids, constant hearts, faithful vows, eternal passion, &c., &c., &c., which have, from the first invention of love and writing, composed the epistles of fond absent swains. Yet I can assure you that it is in no respect behind the most approved specimens of that class of composition. Oh, if you had seen it, you would have been in raptures with it.

MAR. Indeed, papa! I was passing from my boudoir just now, and seeing an open letter upon the floor, near the library, I took it up—I recognised the writing. By *accident* my eye fell on a few words, which had not the effect of inspiring me with *raptures*, and if you'll permit me, my dear papa, as you appear to have mistaken Mr. Merton's meaning, I will refresh your recollection of its contents.

SAND. The deuce take it! I've made a bad business of this! Arthur will never forgive my incaution. But Marianne—

MAR. Allow me, sir. (*reads letter*) "My dear and respectful sir—I have resolved to terminate my visit here, and once more procure myself the delight of seeing you and my dear Miss Sandford. I am vain enough to suppose that my determination will not prove unwelcome to either. Although, with regard to Marianne, I must confess, that the intelligence of her only fault, a too great proneness for conversation, an irrepressible love of talking, is rather distressing to me. If I have a predilection in the world, it is for a *Silent Woman*, and to find Marianne the ultra reverse of that, is an affliction that I do not know how I shall get over. My consolation is, that the evil may not be incurable. I am compelled to conclude abruptly—the post is about to depart, but if not detained by adverse weather, I shall arrive nearly as soon as this. With the best wishes, I subscribe myself your friend, Arthur Merton." So, papa, this is your pretty love letter. Who could have originated this atrocious calumny? I fond of talking? "Hearts and darts, blisses and kisses, turtle-doves and cupids," indeed! I "a too great proneness for conversation." I, that sit for hours at my harp, and never open my lips, except to sing—I that—

SAND. My dear Marianne—

MAR. Don't interrupt me, pa—it's a very great shame, and I could cry of vexation. You must have written this yourself, you must have told him—but when he comes, I'll speak to him directly—he shan't say a word until I have convinced him that I hate talking, that I never utter a syllable—unless there is a positive necessity for it.

SAND. But, Marianne—

MAR. "If he has a propensity in the world, it is for a *Silent*

Woman." Silent! I've a great mind to—yes, I will! Papa, if you will promise to be secret, and not betray me, I'll forgive you! I have a little scheme that will make him glad to take me tongue and all, as he left me. Will you give me your word, dear papa?

SAND. Well, as I have been the cause of this discovery, I suppose I must let you have your own way. But what is your plan?

MAR. I hear a chaise driving up the avenue—it must be Arthur. We have not a moment to lose—this way, pa, and you shall know what I wish you to do.

Exit MR. SANDFORD and MARIANNE, R. 1 E.

ARTHUR MERTON. (*speaks without, L. 1 E.*) See the luggage safely taken out, and give the man whatever change you have.

ARTHUR MERTON *enters, L.*

So, I am once more within these hospitable walls, the home of my childhood. But since my departure for Cambridge, a few days occasional visit is all that I have been enabled to bestow on it. Everything remains as when I last left it—all is still the same—*still!* No, not exactly—Marianne's tongue, by her father's account, appears to be anything but still. Unhappy dog that I am! I have made the round of Europe and half Asia, but cannot find one female who can or will be silent. And so, in despair, I return to my native land—and since I cannot please myself in my choice, I will gratify my father's friend. Not but Marianne is all I could wish, if it were not for that Perpetual Motion. Oh, for a woman who will not talk! I'd buy her with my whole estate, then become richer than before, by exhibiting the eighth and most wonderful wonder of the world, a *Silent Woman*.

Enter MR. SANDFORD, R.

SAND. Welcome—welcome, my dear boy. (*shakes hands*)

MERTON. Sir, I thank you. How is your health?

SAND. Never better, Arthur.

MERTON. And Marianne, too, sir—is she—

SAND. Oh, yes, her health is excellent, but—

MERTON. Ah, sir, I know very well what you are going to say—her infirmity! Alas! we cannot expect to find perfection.

SAND. No, indeed; and I am rejoiced to perceive you view the case with such philosophy. Everything has been tried to cure the evil.

MERTON. Upon my word, sir, you're very kind, but it is of no avail—nature has placed an insurmountable bar to its removal—they can't help it!

SAND. The most celebrated professors of theoretical and practical surgery have been called in.

MERTON. (*aside*) Well, that is excessively kind, to call in surgeons to endeavour to make my wife hold her tongue. (*aloud*) Did they give any hopes of success?

SAND. Not the most distant. Poor thing! it has almost broken my heart.

MERTON. Zounds, sir, it's not quite so bad as that, either!

SAND. It will be the death of me.

MERTON. The devil it will! (*calls*) Peter, don't send away the chaise.

SAND. Poor, unhappy girl!

MERTON. I think *I* ought to be pitied a little, sir.

SAND. Ah, I see how it is—you repent of your promise. Well, my young friend, I cannot blame you—and may you be happy elsewhere.

MERTON. Why, sir, I don't exactly say that—and yet—

SAND. Be it so. But perhaps you would like to see her, and take a last farewell of the unfortunate creature?

MERTON. I should be most happy to *see* her, but I must confess I am rather afraid of *hearing* her.

SAND. Hearing her? What, then, you have not heard of her misfortune?

MERTON. Misfortune? What misfortune?

SAND. Terrible!

MERTON. No!

SAND. Horrible!

MERTON. No!

SAND. She's ruined!

MERTON. Impossible!

SAND. Her prospect's blighted!

MERTON. Name the wretch?

SAND. Old Timkins.

MERTON. What, the one-legged boatman?

SAND. The same.

MERTON. What a taste?

SAND. He upset the boat!

MERTON. Go on!

SAND. She fell into the water!

MERTON. Why, she's not dead?

SAND. Worse!

MERTON. Worse?

SAND. She caught a cold!

MERTON. Is that all?

SAND. It settled in her head!

MERTON. Well?

SAND. Since that time she has never been able to articulate a single syllable.

MEREON. What, can't she speak?

SAND. Not a word—the poor girl is dumb?

MERTON. Tol, lol, &c., &c. (*sings and dances*)

SAND. Why, Arthur—poor fellow, he's mad! the grief has taken away his senses.

MERTON. The "eighth wonder" is found at last! When am I to be married? This day—this hour—this minute. (*calling*) Peter, send away the chaise.

SAND. What do you mean? will you marry my daughter?

MERTON. Certainly! hasn't the marriage been resolved on from infancy—haven't we wandered together in childhood like "Paul and Virginia"—haven't we slept in each other's innocent arms like the "Babes in the Wood"—and we will now be united—never—never to part.

SAND. With all my heart—come along, Arthur! (*going R.*)

MERTON. Happy fellow! I can sit and talk to her all day long—she won't interrupt me. I can whisper in her ear—

SAND. That will be of no avail. What will be the use of whispering, when she can't hear you?

MERTON. Why not?

SAND. She's deaf!

MERTON. Deaf?

SAND. Yes, deaf!

MERTON. You don't say so!

SAND. The same cause that prevents her speaking, prevents her hearing.

MERTON. That's very awkward. Dumb—dumb—dumb!--that's all very well, but deaf—deaf—deaf! Can she not hear at all?

SAND. Yes, if you speak *very* loud she can make out a portion of what you say!

MERTON. Well, there is some consolation in that. There's nothing else the matter, is there?

SAND. Nothing!

MERTON. She's not blind?

SAND. No.

MERTON. Nor lame?

SAND. No!

MERTON. Then I'm determined—now that I have found a silent woman—shall I hesitate? No, not for an instant. Let her be deaf—she's dumb! Now, sir, if you please!

SAND. This way! (*going*)

MERTON. One moment, sir—a difficulty strikes me—now

BINDING FREE
LIBRARIES

the deuce shall we contrive to get married if she can't say "Love, honour, and obey?"

SAND. Oh, the clergyman will settle that.

MERTON. I shall be the envy of the world, in having a wife who won't contradict me. Ha, ha, ha! because she can't!

Exeunt, R.

'Enter MARIANNE, C. with her tablets and ear trumpet.

MAR. I have overheard it all—a wife that will not contradict him, indeed! I'll tease the wretch. Here are my tablets—here is my vehicle of communication with him. They come—now for an unconscious look, and a serious countenance. (*sits R.*)

Enter SANDFORD and MERTON, C.

MERTON. There she sits—poor Marianne—how melancholy she looks! She is more handsome than ever. Sir, apprise her of my presence. Upon my word, she don't look any the worse for being dumb. (*SANDEORD goes to MARIANNE—taps her on shoulder—she turns—he points to MERTON—she starts up, runs to him, shakes his hand, and appears delighted to see him*) Sweet creature—how delighted she is—charming Marianne, I assure you that my sorrow.

SAND. Must be considerably louder, or she will not be the wiser for it.

MERTON. I beg your pardon, I quite forgot. (*louder*) My dear Marianne—

SAND. That will not do. I am sorry to say that you must exert your lungs—she can't hear a word—speak as loudly as you can. I'll leave you to give directions for dinner, and return in a few minutes. *Exit C.*

MERTON. (*brings chairs, they sit**) Now, then, for a desperate effort. (*very loud*) How do you do, Marianne? (*she gets up, goes to table, brings handkerchief with ear trumpet, sits and puts it to her ear very deliberately*) Hang it, this is too bad! to make love through that Infernal Machine is utterly impossible! but as it is the forlorn hope, here goes—how do you do? (*very loud*) Do you hear that, Marianne? (*she nods*) Ay, now we shall get on. (*shouting*) My dear Marianne, I am delighted—(*coughs*)—that is, I am sorry to see you under such a misfortune—(*coughs*)—but I am sorry—that is, I am glad to have an opportunity of consoling (*coughs*)—I can't stand it, it's impossible. I'm as hoarse as a raven already. (*she goes to table, brings tablets, and writes—he reads*) "I am happy to find that you still think me worthy of your regard." Charming! I have always regarded you. (*she puts trumpet to ear*) Curse the trum-

* This scene occupies considerably longer in performance than in detail, and will be found exceedingly effective if not hurried either in action or speech.

pét! (*shouting*) I have always regarded you with admiration, which is but increased by the knowledge of your misfortune! (*she writes—he reads*) “You wish to know the extent of my fortune?” (*business as before*) No, Marianne, my sentiments to you are distinct from any consideration of pounds, shilling, and pence! (*she writes—her eads*) “You imagine that a wife will be a considerable expense?” I foresee that it will, in breath, at any rate. I must engage the Town Crier, and woo her by proxy. I tell you, madam—(*she writes—he reads*) “Sir, if you swear in my presence, I must retire.” D—n it, madam, I never swear! It’s all over with me. I’m a miserable man—she can’t understand a word. (*large bell rings, L.*) What the devil’s that? (*stopping his ears—she puts up trumpet, then writes—he reads*) “Did you hear a bell, Mr. Merton?” Did I hear a bell! I think I did! (*loudly*) What does it mean? Is the house on fire? (*she writes—he reads*) “It is the alarm bell which they ring when I am wanted for any household affairs.” A very pretty article of furniture for our sleeping room!

Enter SANDFORD, C.

SAND. Well, have you contrived to establish a reciprocity of communication? Do you understand each other?

MERTON. Not a word—not a syllable! She can’t make me a single answer to the purpose. Oh, that she had the use of her tongue. Were it *ever in motion* I should be content, so that she but hear and speak to me.

MAR. I take you at your word—I *can use my tongue*, although I trust you will never have occasion to reproach me with its *abuse*.

MERTON. Astonishing! can I believe my senses?

MAR. I can use my ears, too, and their first employment must be to listen to your apologies for your impeachment of my sex’s prerogative.

SAND. Yes, yes, Arthur, it was merely an innocent artifice to revenge the expressions contained in your letter, which fell by accident into her hands.

ARTHUR. I am overjoyed—and could but all around feel as well satisfied as I do—

MAR. That question remains to be asked. Let me hope that they will not be *deaf* to our efforts, nor *dumb* when called on for their approbation of A SILENT WOMAN!

SANDFORD.

MARIANNE.

MERTON.

R.

CURTAIN.

L.