

The Pen Of My Aunt

A wartime drama in one act

By Gordon Daviot

SPOTLIGHT PUBLICATIONS

COPYRIGHT © SAMUEL FRENCH 2008
Published by Spotlight Publications

Please note that the copyright for this play is held by Samuel French Ltd, and applications for permission to perform it should be addressed to:

Samuel French Ltd.
52 Fitzroy Street
London
W1T 5JR.
Tel. 020 7387 9373
Email: theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk

PRINTED BY SPOTLIGHT PUBLICATIONS
259 THE MOORINGS
DALGETY BAY
FIFE
KY11 9GX.
TEL. 01383 825737

www.spotlightpublications.com

Email: enquiries@spotlightpublications.com

ISBN 978-0-9560209-2-5

The Pen Of My Aunt **BY GORDON DAVIOT**

CAST

Madame, the owner of a country house

Simone, her young servant

Stranger, a French soldier on the run

Corporal, a German soldier

Setting - A French country house, inside and outside

Time - German-occupied France, summer 1944

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1 - The grounds of the country house

Scene 2 - The drawing room of the country house

Scene 1

Front of tabs. The grounds of a French country estate, in daytime. A young French civilian walks across from R to L

Voice Halt!

The man stops immediately without turning around

A German soldier in uniform appears Right, holding a pistol

Corporal Hände hoch!

The man raises his hands slowly

Hände hoch, oder Ich schiess!

The man raises his hands high. The Corporal walks swiftly over

Papieren!

The man shrugs his shoulders

Verstehen Sie? Papieren. *(Slowly)* Your papers!

Stranger Sorry I don't have any.

Corporal So. Come with me! Quickly! Keep your hands high! You first! Schnell!

The two walk out L

Scene 2

The drawing room of a French country house during the Occupation. There is a French window UC with views of a large garden. CL is a writing desk with a chair, and R are a couple of easy chairs and a table with a vase on it. Behind the table is a cocktail cabinet. The other main entrance is U L

As the curtain rises, Madame, a woman in her 50s, enters from the garden with a bunch of flowers in her hand and proceeds to arrange them in the vase. She is admiring them when suddenly her servant Simone, a young girl in her early 20s, bursts in from U L

Simone *(approaching)* Madame! Oh, Madame! Madame, have you -

Madame Simone.

Simone Madame, have you seen what -

Madame Simone!

Simone But Madame -

Madame Simone, this may be an age of barbarism, but I will have none of it inside the walls of this house.

Simone But Madame, there is a - there is a -

Madame *(silencing her)* Simone. France may be an occupied country, a ruined nation, and a conquered race, but we will keep, if you please, the usages of civilization.

Simone Yes, Madame.

Madame One thing we still possess, thank God; and that is good manners. The enemy never had it; and it is not something they can take from us.

Simone No, Madame.

Madame Go out of the room again. Open the door -

Simone Oh, Madame! I wanted to tell you -

Madame - open the door, shut it behind you - quietly - take four paces into the room, and say what you

came to say.

Simone goes hastily out, shutting the door. She reappears, shuts the door behind her, takes four paces into the room, and waits

Yes, Simone?

Simone I expect it is too late; they will be here.

Madame Who will?

Simone The soldiers who were coming up the avenue.

Madame After the last few months I should not have thought that soldiers coming up the avenue was a remarkable fact. It is no doubt a party with a billeting order.

Simone (*crossing to the window*) No, Madame, it is two soldiers in one of their little cars, with a civilian between them.

Madame Which civilian?

Simone A stranger, Madame.

Madame A stranger? Are the soldiers from the Combatant branch?

Simone No, they are those beasts of the Administration. Look, they have stopped. They are getting out.

Madame walks over to the window and looks out

Madame Yes, it is a stranger. Do you know him, Simone?

Simone I have never set eyes on him before, Madame.

Madame You would know if he belonged to the district?

Simone Oh, Madame, I know every man between here and St Estèphe.

Madame (*dryly*) No doubt.

Simone Oh, merciful God, they are coming up the steps.

Madame My good Simone, that is what the steps were put there for.

Simone But they will ring the bell and I shall have to -

Madame And you will answer it and behave as if you had been trained by a butler and ten upper servants instead of being the charcoal-burner's daughter from over at Les Chênes. (*This is said encouragingly, not in unkindness*) You will be very calm and correct -

Simone Calm! Madame! With my inside turning over and over like a wheel at a fair!

Madame A good servant does not have an inside, merely an exterior. (*Comforting*) Be assured, my child. You have your place here; that is more than those creatures on our doorstep have. Let that hearten you -

Simone Madame! They are not going to ring. They are coming straight in.

Madame (*bitterly*) Yes. They have forgotten long ago what bells are for.

Enter from UL a young man in his thirties, dressed in civilian clothes, closely followed by a German corporal

Stranger (*in a bright, confident, casual tone*) Ah, there you are, my dear aunt. I am so glad. Come in, my friend, come in. My dear aunt, this gentleman wants you to identify me.

Madame Identify you?

Corporal We found this man wandering in the woods -

Stranger The corporal found it inexplicable that anyone should wander in a wood.

Corporal And he had no papers on him -

Stranger And I rightly pointed out that if I carry all the papers one is supposed to these days, I am no good to God or man. If I put them in a hip pocket, I can't bend forward; if I put them in a front pocket, I can't bend at all.

Corporal He said that he was your nephew, Madame, but that did not seem to us very likely, so we brought him here.

There is the slightest pause; just one moment of silence

Madame But of course this is my nephew.

Corporal He is?

Madame Certainly.

Corporal He lives here?

Madame (*assenting*) My nephew lives here.

Corporal So! (*Recovering*) My apologies, Madame. But you will admit that appearances were against the young gentleman.

Madame Alas, Corporal, my nephew belongs to a generation who delight in flouting appearances. It is what they call “expressing their personality”, I understand.

Corporal (*with contempt*) No doubt, Madame.

Madame Convention is anathema to them, and there is no sin like conformity. Even a collar is an offence against their liberty, and a discipline not to be borne by free necks.

Corporal Ah yes, Madame. A little more discipline among your nephew’s generation, and we might not be occupying your country today.

Stranger You think it was that collar of yours that conquered my country? You flatter yourself, Corporal. The only result of wearing a collar like that is varicose veins in the head.

Madame (*repressive*) Please! My dear boy. Let us not descend to personalities.

Stranger The matter is not personal, my good aunt, but scientific. Wearing a collar like that retards the flow of fresh blood to the head, with the most disastrous consequences to the grey matter of the brain. The hypothetical grey matter. In fact, I have a theory -

Corporal Monsieur, your theories do not interest me.

Stranger No? You do not find speculation interesting?

Corporal In this world one judges by results.

Stranger (*after a slight pause of reflection*) I see. The collared conqueror sits in the high places, while the collarless conquered lies about in the woods. And who comes best out of that, would you say? Tell me, Corporal, as man to man, do you never have a mad, secret desire to lie unbuttoned in a wood?

Corporal I have only one desire, Monsieur, and that is to see your papers.

The Pen Of My Aunt

The action takes place in German-occupied France, in the summer of 1944. A young French soldier on the run is arrested in the grounds of a country estate. Having no papers, he claims to be the nephew of the estate owner. A German corporal immediately takes him up to the house and confronts him with the owner, who turns out to be a collaborator ...

This well-written and suspenseful drama is the work of Elizabeth Mackintosh, writing under the pen name of Gordon Daviot. She was born in Inverness in 1896, and enjoyed a successful career writing plays and novels of the mystery and thriller genre.

Running time 30 minutes.