

THE HORLA  
A One Act Audio Theatre Adaptation of an Inner Sanctum Mystery  
From an original story by Guy de Maupassant

ACT ONE

SFX:           ECHO FOOTSTEPS / SQUEAKING DOOR

000 Claude: Ah, *there* you are ... we've been waiting. Please sit back, relax and turn off the lights ...if you dare. I'm Claude McAllistar welcoming you to the One Act Audio Theatre revival of the classic Inner Sanctum Mystery *The Horla*. Originally written by Guy de Maupassant in 1886, *The Horla* is a haunting tale of possession ... or madness ... or perhaps both. Maupassant himself went mad soon after penning this tale you know. So be warned: If you sense something about you during the show, continue listening at your own risk.

Are you still there? Good. Let us turn to our story: It is a stormy night in March of 1941. In a mansion he shares with his sister on the Mendocino coast, perched above the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean, Martin Barisford Harlowe, world-famous concert pianist, lies abed, restless ...

001 Martin: I can feel him . . . there again . . .

002 Horla: Again . . .

003 Martin: That voice . . .

004 Horla: Voice . . .

005 Martin: (Pause) Am I asleep or awake?

006 Horla: Awake . . .

007 Martin: Why can't I move my arms?

008 Horla: Arms . . .

009 Martin: I want to move them, but I can't.

010 Horla: Can't . . .

011 Martin: Why?

012 Horla: Why?

013 Martin: (Pause) Who are you?

014 Horla: You.

015 Martin: Why don't you leave me alone?

016 Horla: Alone.

017 Martin: Why do you torture me?

018 Horla: Me.

019 Martin: (Pause) He's at my throat now, sucking my blood!

020 Horla: Blood . . .

021 Martin: Making me weak and helpless ...

022 Horla: Helpless

023 Martin: Let me go, I tell you! Let me go! I Must get UP! I must! I must!

SFX: TABLE CRASH

024 Martin: Oh, he's gone now. I must be awake.

SFX: DOOR KNOCK RAPIDLY

025 Helen: Martin! Martin, open the door. It's Helen.

SFX: DOOR OPEN

026 Helen: Martin, are you all right?

027 Martin: Of course, Helen.

028 Helen: Your face is white.

029 Martin: I'm all right, I tell you.

030 Helen: Martin!

031 Martin: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout.

032 Helen: You knocked over your night table.

033 Martin: I tossed in my sleep. The crash startled me ... That's why I cried out.

034 Helen: Martin... You haven't been the same ever since you returned from your South American tour. Why don't you tell me what's wrong?

035 Martin: Please, Helen, Go back to your room. Don't worry about me.

036 Helen: But Martin...

037 Martin: Please do as I ask.

038 Helen: Very well.

039 Martin: Helen... try to understand. I don't mean to be angry with you.

040 Helen: That's not what hurt me, Martin. It's that you don't want to tell me what's troubling you.

041 Martin: There's nothing troubling me. My nerves are on edge. Good night, Helen.

042 Helen: Good night.

SFX: DOOR CLOSE

043 Martin: I wanted to tell her, but how could I? How could I tell anyone about this thing sucking the life blood out of me while I sleep? This Being ruining my talent as a musician, whose voice I hear when I'm dreaming. This Invisible Being possessing me, urging me to destroy instead of create, urging me to kill!

MUSIC: PIANO FADE IN

044 Helen: Good evening, Martin.

045 Martin: Oh, Helen ...

046 Helen: Please continue. You're playing so beautifully this evening.

047 Martin: Am I?

048 Helen: Yes. You're playing as you used to.

MUSIC: DISCORD KEYS

049 Martin: So. You noticed it too!

050 Helen: What do you mean?

051 Martin: You heard how badly I played. You knew I was losing my ability!

052 Helen: Martin. I never said ...

053 Martin: Of course you didn't say it. No one ever says it. But I can tell what they think by the way they look at me.

054 Helen: Martin ...

055 Martin: It's true, isn't it? Isn't it?

056 Helen: No, Martin. I never doubted your ability. Not even for a moment.

057 Martin: Then why did you say I'm playing as I used to?

058 Helen: Well, Martin, you haven't been yourself lately. I didn't mean anything by that remark, except that you appear better this evening.

059 Martin: And my music sounds better?

060 Helen: I never lied to you, Martin. Yes. it does.

061 Martin: Of course. He hasn't come to me for two nights.

062 Helen: He? Who do you mean, Martin?

063 Martin: Nothing. Yes, Helen. You're right. I was playing better. I could hear it myself.

064 Helen: Why don't you go on playing, Martin.

065 Martin: I will ...

MUSIC: PIANO

066 Martin: You hear that, Helen? That's the way Beethoven meant his music to be played . . .

067 Martin: And listen to this. One of the greatest passages in all Beethoven's music. It speaks to the strange terror and mystery of life.

MUSIC: DISCORD KEYS

068 Martin: What's the matter with me? I never had trouble with that passage before!

MUSIC: AGAIN TO DISCORD

069 Martin: (Pause) I . . . I can't play it.

070 Helen: But you've played that passage a thousand times. . .

071 Martin: I know. But now I can't!

MUSIC: BANG PIANO KEYS

072 Martin: I can't! I can't! I can't!

073 Helen: Martin . . .

074 Martin: I was playing so well only a moment ago . . . Then suddenly, I can't play at all . . .

075 Helen: You haven't been practicing lately. You've hardly touched the piano since you returned.

076 Martin: No. That's not why I couldn't play it. He . . . He must be near.

077 Helen: He? That's the second time this evening you spoke of . . .

- 078 Martin: Helen, there's something I must tell you. I . . . I must tell someone or I'll go mad, I don't know. Perhaps I am mad. Sometimes I think I am . . .
- 079 Helen: Martin!
- 080 Martin: Do you remember the cable I sent you from Rio de Janeiro?
- 081 Helen: Yes. You said the concert did not go well.
- 082 Martin: I gave one of the worst performances of my career. It was late that same night that I first noticed it.
- 083 Helen: Noticed what?
- 084 Martin: The presence of an Invisible Being, close to me. It was He who made me play so badly that night. He's been near me ever since.
- 085 Helen: An invisible being . . . ?
- 086 Martin: I know it sounds strange ... but it's real, Helen. This thing seeks to dominate, to possess me. It came first in my sleep, but lately I have begun to feel its presence even in my waking hours. It controls my actions like a hypnotist controls his subject.
- 087 Helen: Go on, Martin.
- 088 Martin: It doesn't speak to me directly, merely echoes my words. But it makes its will felt, and I fight to resist, and I . . . I can't. It hasn't gained complete control of me yet, but I'm afraid it will, and I'll . . . I don't know exactly what I'll do.
- 089 Helen: Martin, were you despondent after that concert in Rio?
- 090 Martin: Despondent? I know what you're thinking, Helen. That my mind became unbalanced by the failure of my concert. Yes, I thought of that too.
- 091 Helen: Did you?
- 092 Martin: I thought of every possible explanation. I don't know. Perhaps it is an hallucination, but I feel sure I can prove it's real. I feel . . .

SFX: NOISE INDICATING APPEARANCE OF HORLA

093 Martin: Wait a moment. I was right. He's near us now!

094 Helen: Near us?

095 Martin: Yes! Can't you feel his presence?

SFX: WIND

096 Martin: Look there! Didn't you see the curtains move? He's in here, Helen.  
In here!

097 Helen: The wind blew those curtains . . .

098 Martin: No. It's him, Helen. The Invisible Being! He came in through the  
window

SFX: NEWSPAPER RUSTLE

099 Martin: Look. He touched the newspaper.

100 Helen: It's nothing but the wind.

101 Martin: No. It's him. Helen . . . I . . . (Gasp)

102 Helen: Martin! What's wrong? What's the matter?

103 Martin: (As though hypnotized) I can feel him close . . . taking possession .  
. .

104 Helen: Martin? (Pause) Why do you look at me like that? Why don't you  
answer me? (Pause) No, Martin! No! Don't touch me! For heaven's  
sake, don't! (scream)

SFX: HORLA OUT / WIND UP

105 Martin: (Quietly) He's no longer here. He's gone now, Helen.

106 Helen: (Sob) Martin.

107 Martin: Don't draw away from me, Helen. I won't harm you

108 Helen: (fade sob)

109 Martin: Helen. . . come back. . .

SFX: DOOR CLOSE

110 Martin: I should never have told her. That thing, that Invisible Being urged me to kill her and I almost did. That Thing? Is there such a thing or am I mad? But I saw it touch the newspaper --

SFX: NEWSPAPER RUSTLE

111 Martin: Here! What's this? (reads) "Rio de Janeiro, March fifth: An epidemic of madness, similar to the contagious madness which attacked Europe in the Middle Ages, is at this moment raging in the province of San Paulo, Brazil. The terrified inhabitants are leaving their houses, saying that they are pursued, possessed, dominated by invisible beings. They say that these creatures, a species of vampire, feed on their blood while they are asleep."

My dream! That's what always happened in my dream! (reads) "Victims say that these invisible creatures are the cause of failed crops, withered and diseased plant life, the death of livestock, and many other unexplained phenomena." Then it is real! Others have fallen under its spell just as I have! Madness they call it! If they only knew . . . Or could it be? No! There is a way to test the reality of this thing now. And I will make the test tonight!

000 Claude: A test?! I do so enjoy a mental challenge, don't you? But would you be so eager to participate when it is your very sanity that is put to the test? That is Martin's quandary, as the clock strikes the hour, and we must take our leave. I am Claude McAllistar urging you to keep an ear tuned to the miasma of the airwaves for a time when The One Act Players conclude their revival of *The Horla*. Until then, good night ...

SFX: DOOR CREAKS OPEN

... and pleasant. . . dreams . . .

SFX: DOOR CLOSE

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SFX: ECHO FOOTSTEPS / SQUEAKING DOOR

000 Claude: Ah, *there* you are ... we've been waiting. Please sit back, relax and turn the lights off ...if you dare. I'm Claude McAllistar welcoming you to the conclusion of the One Act Audio Theatre production of *The Horla*, our haunting tale of possession ... or madness ... or perhaps both. I remind you now that the author of our tale, Guy de Maupassant, went mad soon after completing this work. So consider yourself warned and continue listening at your own peril.

Now to our story: When last we left him, world famous concert pianist Martin Barisford Harlowe was preparing a test ...and what marks will he receive when the test is at last complete? Well, we shall soon see ...

SFX: CLOCK STRIKES THREE A.M. / WIND

112 Martin: Three o'clock. The door is locked. I left a window open. How that wind howls tonight! And there is a vase of fresh cut roses on the table. Well, we shall see. I dread going to sleep, but I must. He ... it ... Heaven knows what it is, usually comes to me when I sleep. There now, I must close my eyes (sleepy) That's better. Yes. (Very sleepy) Much better. I wonder. (pause)

SFX: HORLA NOISE

113 Martin: I can feel him now . . . close to me. He's come. He's come again.

114 Horla: Again.

115 Martin: Can you hear me?

116 Horla: Me.

117 Martin: Why do you echo my words?

118 Horla: Words . . .

119 Martin: Why do you torment me? Why don't you ever let me sleep?

120 Horla: Sleep.

121 Martin: Or am I sleeping now? Am I dreaming this mad thing? I must wake up! I must open my eyes! I must . . .

SFX: GLASS CRASH

122 Martin: Oh! Where . . . where's the light?

SFX: LIGHT ON

123 Martin: There now, we will see. Oh, the vase is gone! I heard a crash ... I must have knocked it over. Yes, there it is on the floor ... (Pause) Oh, Merciful Heaven! The roses are black and withered! There is no doubt about it now. I must find a way to destroy this thing. I must kill it before —

SFX: HORLA NOISE

124 Martin: He is still near!

125 Horla: Near ...

126 Martin: So..... you came back again.

127 Horla: Again.....

128 Martin: I never heard your voice before while I was awake.

129 Horla: Awake . . .

130 Martin: Who are you?

131 Horla: You . . .

132 Martin: Tell me your name. (Pause) What is your name?

133 Horla: Horla.

134 Martin: Horla.

135 Horla: Horla.

136 Martin: Then you do understand when I speak to you.

137 Horla: Yes.

138 Martin: Why have you never spoken to me before? What do you want with me? ...What do you want with me?

139 Horla: You will resist.

140 Martin: What do you mean?

141 Martin: Answer me!

142 Horla: Soon you will be my slave.

143 Martin: Your slave ...

144 Horla: Slave.

145 Martin: When will that be?

146 Horla: Dawn.

147 Martin: So I have only one more night.

148 Horla: One more.

149 Martin: (Fumbling) Where ... where are my matches.

150 Horla: No!

151 Martin: (Quietly) Why not?

SFX: MATCH STRIKE

152 Horla: No!

153 Martin: You are afraid of the flame!

154 Horla: Flame!

155 Martin: I have found your weakness now! You fear fire!

156 Horla: Fire!

157 Martin: These curtains. I put a match to them and they go up in flames!

SFX: FLAMES

158 Martin: Ha! See the fire! You cannot escape through the window now! And the door is locked. I have you trapped, you hear? Trapped!

159 Horla: Trapped!

SFX: NEWSPAPER RUSTLE – PAPER IGNITES

160 Martin: I light this newspaper and now I have a torch, a weapon against you who have so much power, but fear the flames.

161 Horla: Flames!

162 Martin: YOU ... you, somewhere in this room! You ... whom I cannot see! You ... who attack men in their sleep and command them to do your horrible bidding! You ... are the living spirit of evil!

163 How many men in centuries gone by must have pleaded for mercy from you? Do you think I will show you the slightest mercy now? You, who would destroy and replace man, shall be destroyed here!

SFX: DOOR OPEN AND CLOSE ... LOCK

164 Martin: Holding a blazing piece of newspaper before me, I back out the door and lock it. He was trapped! But I must take no chances. Quickly I find some old clothes, soak them in kerosene, drop them in front of the door to my room, and put a match to them! I rush to my sister's room. Her door is locked.

SFX: DOOR BANGING

165 Martin: Helen! Helen, open the door!

166 Helen: What do you want, Martin?

167 Martin: Open the door! The house is on fire!

SFX: DOOR OPEN

168 Helen: Martin!

169 Martin: Hurry, will you? The house is filling with smoke. The flames are spreading rapidly.

SFX: FIRE / FOOTSTEPS

170 Martin: At last we're in the garden. It's safe there ...Helen and I stop to rest.

SFX: LARGE FIRE

171 Helen: Martin.

172 Martin: Yes, Helen.

173 Helen: Are the servants out?

174 Martin: I ...I don't know.

175 Helen: Martin, where ...where did the fire start?

176 Martin: In my room.

177 Helen: ... did you? ...

178 Martin: Yes. I had to, Helen.

179 Helen: Had to?

180 Martin: Yes. He was in there. The Invisible Being. The Horla!

181 Helen: (Sob) Martin. (Fade) Oh, Martin ...

182 Martin: Helen, try to understand. Helen, come back here. Helen!

SFX: FIRE / SIRENS/BUILDING COLLAPSE

183 Martin: Fanned by the winds, the flames dance madly about the house. By this time, it is a blazing furnace, with tongues of fire: red, yellow, orange, blue . . . flames leaping high into the air, lighting the dark night like a huge magnificent torch! Already parts of the roof begin to crumble in between the walls! A fountain of flames roars toward the sky! Suddenly the whole structure begins to topple, and in a

moment it comes crashing to the ground. The flames soar upward, leaping toward the sky, and light up the whole countryside! It's a funeral pyre, a monstrous, magnificent, funeral pyre, and in it, He who hated and feared the flame, is burning! He! My prisoner, the Invisible Being, the Horla.

SFX: DOOR KNOCK AND REPEAT

184 Martin: Who is it? Who's there?

185 Helen: Open the door, Martin! It's Helen.

186 Martin: Helen.

SFX: DOOR OPEN AND CLOSE

187 Martin: (Sob) Helen, I knew you'd come.

188 Helen: Martin, why didn't you get in touch with me sooner?

189 Martin: I was afraid to. The police are searching for me, Helen.

190 Helen: Martin.

191 Martin: Yes?

192 Helen: I want you to give yourself up.

193 Martin: Give myself up?

194 Helen: That's the only way you can be helped,

195 Martin: But you saw the papers, Helen. Three people are dead and its my fault ...mine! But I had to, I HAD to do it. You know what will happen to me if I surrender.

196 Helen: It's not as bad as you seem to think. You'll receive medical attention and --

197 Martin: Medical attention! Then you believe them! You think I'm insane, don't you? (Pause) Don't you?

198 Helen: Martin, you're my brother, I love you. Believe me, I wouldn't ask you to give yourself up if I didn't think it best for you.

199 Martin: I see --

200 Helen: Won't you come with me, Martin?

201 Martin: There was a time when I thought I was insane, Helen, but now I'm certain I'm not. It's a week, a full seven days, since our house burned down, and I haven't felt the Horla near me once. I tell you he was real, Helen. This invisible being was as real as you or I.

202 Helen: Perhaps. But if that's the case, then you have nothing to fear. The doctors will examine you and find you normal. Don't YOU see, Martin, you have everything to gain by surrendering?

203 Martin: Perhaps you're right. What difference does it make? The only thing that really matters is that the Horla is dead.

SFX: HORLA APPEARS

204 Martin: Helen.

205 Helen: Yes, Martin.

206 Martin: Do you feel . . .

207 Helen: What is it, Martin?

208 Martin: Helen, I'll do as you ask. I'll give myself up. Will you go down to the lobby and wait for me? I'll only be a moment.

209 Helen: All right, Martin.

SFX: DOOR OPEN AND CLOSE

201 Martin: Is . . . is it you?

211 Horla: Yes.

212 Martin: Then you are not dead?

213 Horla: Not dead.

214 Martin: It was all in vain!

215 Horla: Vain. (Pause) Give up.

216 Martin: That's what you want me to do, isn't it? (Pause) Well, there is one other alternative! I made up my mind about what I'd do if you lived through that fire.

217 Horla: Destroy yourself?

218 Martin: Yes! I will not be what you are trying to make me become! I will not be your slave! I'd rather die!

219 Horla: Die ...

SFX: DOOR OPEN

220 Helen: (Fade in) Martin, there's something I need to ... Martin, put that gun away!

221 Martin: (Fade) Don't try to stop me!

SFX: GUN SHOT

222 Helen: Martin!

223 Martin: Helen ...

224 Helen: ... Martin.

225 Martin: ... The Horla ... (Dies)

226 Horla: ...Horla ...

000 Claude: My, what a dissonant NOTE to end on for such a fine musician. I am sorry to say he will tinkle the ivories no more, but at least he is at REST. I am Claude McAllistar urging you to keep an ear tuned to the miasma of the airwaves for a time when The One Act Players CONDUCT another recitation from the *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*.

Until then, good night ...

SFX: DOOR CREAKS OPEN  
... and pleasant. . . dreams . . .

SFX: DOOR CLOSE