

BEFORE AND AFTER

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(29, rue de Rémusat, Paris XVI)

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BEFORE AND AFTER

A comedy of bad manners,
orchestrated in three movements

by
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7

Characters
(in order of appearance)

MONIQUE
DUCHESSNE
MADAME RICAUD
MONSIEUR RICAUD
AGENOR
DAVE SMITH
CHUCK PETERS
STEVE
SUZANNE LAMOLLE
MADAME LAMOLLE
THE FLIC
BETTY SMITH

The action covers from the liberation of Paris (1944) to the end of 1953, and is spread over the "Relais des Resquilleurs", a restaurant on the Left Bank of Paris, facing the Seine; MONIQUE's apartment, which lies on the first floor of the same building; the apartment of DAVE and BETTY SMITH in Great Neck, Long Island, N. Y., and, for a brief glimpse, the Army PX over which CHUCK PETERS reigns in Frankfurt, Germany.

BEFORE AND AFTER

Part I - Prelude and Fugue

About the setting

The following indications should only concern the producer interested in offering as elaborate a presentation as possible. Any ingenious stage designer can suggest a great deal of the required atmosphere by the wise use of a few pieces of furniture and props.

The "Relais des Resquilleurs" is a small Left-Bank restaurant that looks over the Seine from the angle formed by the junction of two narrow streets which precipitate themselves onto the Quai des Grands Augustins.

The restaurant occupies the lower floor of a much-windowed 19th. century white building and has remained as it was over 20 years ago, when Monsieur RICAUD acquired it.

The restaurant's main room contains four tables, covered, as we first see it, with red and white checked tablecloths. There is a small wooden counter upstage L., behind which are three racks of impressive-looking bottles, all empty, all "factice", since this is 1944 and the liberation of Paris is only a few days past.

Only last week Monsieur RICAUD, probably stirred by the wild joys of the times, went on a decorating spree, deliberately forgetting to consult Madame RICAUD first; and there is still much resentment in the air over this. As a tribute to his native habitat - the Haute Savoie - the walls have been painted in fresco style with motives of the land; but the mountain huts, pine-lined landscapes and skiing figures in local costume, reproduced by the painter with pseudo-primitive ferocity, do by no means fit into the turn-of-the-century pattern of the place, with its wall lighting of tortured brass brackets and milky glass globes.

As for MONIQUE PERIER's apartment, although presently a mystery behind its neatly curtained windows, we shall soon peep into this upper floor abode - the only we can see from our position in the middle of the Seine. Here MONIQUE has kept living quarters for the last six years, and in this very living-room-cum-studio she has made hundreds of costume designs for the stage and screen.

The two-window wall that covers this living-room as the curtain rises will in due time reveal most of it, with its two windows R., a small door back R., giving on to a corridor of the building, and another small door back L., leading to a spare bedroom. At L. back another larger door leads to MONIQUE's bedroom. Downstage L. is a quaint majolica fireplace, with a small mantelpiece.

The walls are covered with slightly faded paper, over which MONIQUE has pinned some of her designs, especially a series of historical costumes for a film that will never be made. Although the costumes are colourful and arresting, the drawing of the sketches leaves something to be desired.

Central pieces of the furnishing are a Second Empire chest of drawers and a lovely mirror of the same period, placed against the upstage wall, between the small doors. Also a Madame Recamier divan downstage, covered with fading green plush, and a Directoire table with two stiff chairs of the same period, forming a group around the divan. Backstage L., between doors, is a niche containing an impressive alabaster nude.

The corner between the windows at R. and the door downstage R. is recessed with built-in shelves, over which we can discern, among a couple dozen battered books, three chipped Sevres bottles on a tray; a beautiful and well preserved Meissen mythological group; photographs of several men,

two of them in uniform; a Murano piece; a jar full of fine brushes; an inlaid wooden box and an amusing party favour.

Against the windows R. stands a round table covered with a fringed red skirt, over which we can see more of the painter's tools, and a vase full of carnations. Three Victorian chairs around this table indicate that it probably is used for dining whenever the mistress of the house has guests. Over an easel downstage R. rests an almost finished sketch for a female costume of the 1830's.

SCENE I

As the curtain rises, we only see the façade of the building.

MONIQUE enters L. and simultaneously DUCHESNE does same, R. She sports an ultra-short, ultra-narrow skirt and an ultra-tight sweater; but she also wears cardboard-platformed shoes and large earrings with fancy multi coloured stones. DUCHESNE is in a Prince of Wales check suit whose wide trousers and lapels are typical of the period. Everything in DUCHESNE's demeanour, by the way, is English-inspired, his carriage to begin with - head slightly tossed backwards and a rigid spine - but for all his airs and attire, he is not quite successful in concealing something Mediterranean, and even slightly Semitic, about himself, especially in the look of the heavy-lidded eyes.

There are days in which this look, as well as the melancholy smile perpetually hanging from his lips, make him appear somewhat older than his 45 years.

MONIQUE is a tall, long-legged brunette with a splendid body, a pert nose and a full mouth. In spite of her almost heroic proportions, she - as almost all Parisiennes - looks more than not like a cheerful, chirping bird. MONIQUE, given to impetuous movements, speaks sometimes in a high-pitched voice and her smile is generally meaningless - a purely social grimace - but, only too naturally, one is slow in singling out these slight drawbacks from the solid splendour of her 30 years.

As soon as he sees MONIQUE, DUCHESNE takes off his hat.

DUCHESNE

Bonsoir, madame.

MONIQUE

You dare show yourself in the street only ten days after the Nazis fled? I never saw such impudence!

DUCHESNE

You must mean fortitude. For it takes fortitude to stand the new occupants' crawl, you know. Ten days ago, it was still the martial steps of a real Army and real soldiers; now, with the arrival of the Americans, our streets are on their way to become a kind of Mecca dancing.

MONIQUE

As far as I'm concerned, the Yankees may dance their way to Berlin if

MONIQUE (cont'd)
they like. They've liberated us; and that liberation includes not only the Nazis, but the people who trafficked with them as well.

DUCHESNE
Dear lady, my business with the Kommandatur was as clear as crystal - as newly washed crystal, at any rate. You must know they charged me with the distribution of food in this area - a distinction nobody would have dreamed of refusing. It's not by choice that I was in contact with them!

MONIQUE
But it was with great relish. I know. A phone call twice a week, on Tues days and Fridays. I only had to apply my ear to the wall -

DUCHESNE
(amused) Really! You're not going to tell me you were in the Resistance -

MONIQUE
No. I'm afraid that took a courage I just didn't have. Oh, you may smile all you wish; your day of reckoning has come, and you know it. Be sure that if no one else denounces you, I will!

DUCHESNE
What an enchanting expression your face has when you say something nasty, as now.

MONIQUE
(furious) Oooh!

DUCHESNE
And now let's be serious for a minute. You seem to forget the superstitious respect - or rather the veneration - French people have for titles. Now, to attack publicly a opunt who, on his mother's side, could have been a prince - how do you think a move like that could end here in this country?

MONIQUE
I don't know. But before being judged by the French, you may have to face the Americans.

DUCHESNE
Oh, I don't think they'd have the nerve. But let's assume they do. Have you forgotten the superstitious respect Americans have for several hundred thousand francs strategically distributed - especially when they can call them "loot"?

MONIQUE
You disgust me.

DUCHESNE

And you delight me, my dear lady. Of course, if the only way of looking at you for hours on end (oh, undescrivable thrill!) is to appear in court, you can count on me any time.

MONIQUE

Don't for a moment think these are threats in the air!

DUCHESNE

I hope not, madame. I know your principles. I know you've got what is currently described as "moral courage". I could also apply my ear to the wall, you see. I don't doubt you would go on with your plans, even if it eventually transpired in court that you too had certain contacts with the enemy. (Staring at her with a smile) Or are you naïve enough to imagine such contacts didn't mean anything because, in order to have them, they had first to take off their uniforms?

MONIQUE goes to him and gives him a resounding slap on the cheek, which he covers with his hand while he gives her a pious smile.

Madame. I love women in general and you in particular. At the risk of being taken for a masochist, I must say that you haven't given me a slap; you have given me a kick, if you know what I mean. Thank you, madame!

MONIQUE walks away from him, but after two or three steps she turns back and says, raising her voice:

MONIQUE

You disgust me!

She goes to R. corner of the street and walks into the restaurant. An accordionist shows up at L., plays some bars of the theme waltz - "Paris des dépayés" - and disappears by R. DUCHESNE buttons up his jacket and goes by L. as the lights dim and the gauze curtain representing the building's façade is lifted.

SCENE II

The restaurant. As the drop rises, Madame RICAUD is at the centre of the stage. The patronne will not see forty again, but alas, she looks as though she were on the shadier side of fifty. Practical-minded by nature, she is never quite convincing in her display of commercial good manners; however, there is something solid about her - inwardly as well as outwardly. She favours the absent-minded hairdos of the early twenties, with a mountain of disordered hair covering her forehead and a couple of wavy "bandeaux" hiding her ears. The thin black velvet ribbon tied around her neck belongs in an even remoter decade of French fashion but still proves serviceable, since the lady is concealing such a deep-seated furrow in her neck that it looks like the angry work of a knife.

MADAME R.

Don't talk to me about the Americans. I never saw such strange individuals; all so white and pink. And so clean! My God! It makes me almost sick, to see them so well scrubbed, as if they took a bath every day or something.

MONIQUE

It's precisely what they do, you know.

MADAME R.

Good God! Has nobody told them how bad that is for the skin?

MONIQUE

(smiling) Apparently no one has!

MADAME R.

And if it were only for the skin! To make such extravagant use of soap and water affects the internal organs as well. And they don't know that! Of course, what can you expect of foreigners? But these Americans are the limit. (Confidentially) Can you imagine what one American boy out of three does when he enters the house? He hugs me, kisses me on both cheeks and invariably says I remind him of Aunt Agatha or Cousin Evelyn.

MONIQUE

How very nice of them.

MADAME R.

Nice! When they take you in their arms you can't smell the man in them. If they at least smoked black tobacco! But no, this is the height of summer and they don't even sweat! I can't imagine how they ever came to invent the expression "sex-appeal", can you? (MONIQUE laughs) Oh, laugh your head off, go on; I say there's a limit to everything—especially hygiene!

MONIQUE laughs.

Another thing. Have you noticed what they do when a pretty girl passes by? They howl like a pack of wolves!

MONIQUE

In their slang a wolf is a lady killer, you see. The howl means they would like to get the girl.

MADAME R.

Why don't they tell her so, then? Can't they talk? Where are we, anyway?

MONIQUE

They are a young nation, and they like to act like children, that's all.

MADAME R.

Sometimes I think you know too much about foreign people. What good is that to you?

MONIQUE

(downing the rest of her glass) Well, for one thing it prevents me from making big mistakes.

MADAME R.

Hmm. As far as I am concerned, I'm quite happy knowing I was born a Frenchwoman. (With a wink) To be born among the clever - that's a bit of cleverness to start with, isn't it? (MONIQUE smiles, shaking her head)

Enter, by the back of the stage, Monsieur RICAUD, who installs himself behind the counter. He is a man of fifty, red-cheeked, plump, round-eyed, with a policeman's mustache. He is full of nervous movements. With his customers he generally adopts an alternately cordial and solemn attitude.

MONSIEUR R.

Well, Amélie, have you thought it over? (Madame RICAUD nods) When can we do it?

MADAME R.

Oh, I haven't decided anything yet.

MONSIEUR R.

(annoyed) You haven't? God! One would think a woman is the party really interested in making her liaison with a man a respectable as well as a respected one.

MADAME R.

Nein, nein! Ehestand, wehestand!

MONSIEUR R.

(looking around with a conspirator's air) Shh! After three months of Linguaphone lessons in English, you still stick to German? You crazy?

MADAME R.

Well, I worked hard enough to learn it. Besides, what is this, a restaurant or a Berlitz school?

MONSIEUR R.

A restaurant; only if business goes as bad as this week's, we'd better open a language school. This is the right moment for us to get married, Amélie. We have nothing else to do!

MADAME R.

Please!

MONSIEUR R.

I'm very tired. My liver gives me hell. The moment I cease being your lover to become your husband, I'll be entitled by national tradition to get some support from a younger man - ready to share certain efforts with me. You should see that at least.

MADAME R.

So, along with your hand, you want me to take a boy friend as well?

MONSIEUR R.

(with a shrug of the shoulders) Well, yes. Things must be done well or not at all.

MADAME R.

And since you seem to have thought of everything - have you chosen the candidate?

MONSIEUR R.

Why, yes, I have thought of Agénor.

Madame RICAUD goes off into peals of laughter, only increasing Monsieur RICAUD's irritation.

No need to laugh like a hyena at the simple mention of his name. It's a logical choice, and comfortable for all parties.

MADAME R.

Shhh - Here he is.

AGENOR enters R. with his bicycle. He is a blond Alsatian of 20, pink-skinned, square-headed, heavily built and strong-muscled. His gestures are mechanical and his expression, a permanent deadpan; but there is something young and touching about him.

AGENOR

Bonsoir, patron,

MONSIEUR R.

Good evening, my boy.

MADAME R.

What's made you so late?

AGENOR

Just another job, Madame Ricard - in a night club this time.

MONSIEUR R.

A night club? Come on. To be a waiter at a night club you need a philosophy of life, a style, a je ne sais quoi - No man has all that at your age.

AGENOR

Ah, but I won't be a waiter, patron; I shall make electricity for the establishment.

MADAME R.

You'll make what?

AGENOR

Electricity, madame. As long as Paris lacks coal, as it does now, I'll supply the energy.

MONSIEUR R.

(laughing in a crescendo) Ha ha ha ha ha HA HA! (Turning suddenly serious) And how do you propose to do that?

AGENOR

I'll pedal on my bicycle from eleven to three in the morning.

MADAME R.

Mon pauvre p'tit, you're going to kill yourself!

AGENOR

Oh, no, I'm not such an idiot, Madame Ricaud. (Lifting a leg and bending it) Feel that, will you?

Madame RICAUD feels his thigh and laughs as though tickled.

MADAME R.

Oh, my God! Hard as iron! (Staring at Monsieur RICAUD) Maybe there's something to your idea, after all!

MONSIEUR R.

I'm glad you begin to understand.

CHUCK, followed by DAVE, enters like a thunderbolt by R. Both are PROs in the American Air Force, where as a lieutenant, CHUCK is DAVE's assistant. Both are veteran pilots and good friends. CHUCK is about 23, and his blond head sports a crewcut. He smiles constantly, in spite of his slightly protruding teeth. In his blue eyes one can read an unbelievable innocence. Only the greatest dieting efforts and the most strenuous exercises have saved him thus far from the sin of avoirdupois. DAVE, an Air Force captain, is about 32, tall, thin, dark, smiling and given occasionally to those flights of fancy which are typical of American publicity agents. The lively look in his eye, his enviable teeth and the cut of his uniforms have played havoc with women wherever he has been.

CHUCK
(hugging Madame RICAUD) Bonjour, bonjour, bonsoir, m'amie!

MADAME R.
(to MONIQUE) At least this one smells of whisky, thank God for that.

CHUCK turns to MONIQUE and howls like a wolf.
MONIQUE gives a roaring laugh.

DAVE
(to CHUCK) Listen, nuts. We've landed here to duck the MPs, you're so stinking drunk. We're here to eat, and you're paying for this dinner, don't forget that. You'll see what the check comes to!

CHUCK
So what? Who cares? We're in Paris! The city of l'amour, le can-can, le champagne!

CHUCK waves his hand at MONIQUE.

MADAME R.
(at the Americans' table) Captain. You won't say "No" to one apéritif - on the house, will you?

DAVE
No, that I won't. Thank you very much.

MONIQUE bangs her handbag on the table. DAVE turns to her. She shakes her head rapidly to indicate to him that he should not accept the offer.

MADAME R.
What would you like, then? A Cinzano, a Martini vermouth? Perhaps a Dubonnet?

DAVE
Well, on second thoughts, nothing, thank you.

MADAME R.
Come on! How about a glass of champagne?

DAVE
No, thanks, really. One never knows which is the drop that makes the cup overflow.

MADAME R.
(looking at CHUCK) You've got something there, mon capitaine.

CHUCK
(to MONIQUE) You're beautiful, beautiful!

MONIQUE
Thank you very much, sir. (She raises her glass and drinks)

DAVE

(whispering to CHUCK) Stand up, you lout!

CHUCK

(while he bows to MONIQUE) I can't! I'll upset the table! We'll both fall!

DAVE rises and responds to MONIQUE's gesture; then turning to CHUCK, he twists his mouth at him in a gesture of repressed fury.

MONIQUE

(speaking as low as she can) Captain, whenever you're offered something "on the house" please decline. There is not, and there never was, anything for free here in Paris.

DAVE

(rather solemnly) Thank you.

AGENOR enters by the back and goes to MONIQUE's table.

AGENOR

Bonsoir, madame.

MONIQUE

Bonsoir, Agénor. You look very chirpy this evening.

AGENOR

Oui, madame. They've just engaged me to make electricity, you know.

MONIQUE

Extraordinary. And how are you supposed to make it?

AGENOR

(raising his leg) Touch this, madame.

MONIQUE

Can I?

AGENOR

Oh yes, go ahead, have no fear!

MONIQUE feels the strong muscles of the cyclist.

MONIQUE

God! It's true one just has to touch to feel an electric current run along one's spine.

AGENOR

(laughing and blushing) That's not the kind of electricity I was talking about, ma'am!

CHUCK

(confidentially to DAVE) Did you see the lady there, how she touched the young man's thigh? This is the Paris I always dreamed of! It's a hell of a town!

DAVE

Leave her alone, she's a serious girl.

There are three loud knocks on the door. AGENOR runs to the back while Madame RICAUD joins both tables as if her customers were a single party.

MADAME R.

(raising her voice) Agénor! Open the door! That sounds like an M.P.! But we're all right; we have two American officers with us!

DAVE takes his head in his hands. Madame RICAUD takes CHUCK's seat while AGENOR reenters and opens the door. Enter like a tornado the expected American M.P. - a big young broad-shouldered fellow, about two inches taller than DAVE, who looks like a human armoured car.

M. P.

(talking to someone outside) Watch the door, Red; I'll see what's going on here.

He looks around, and what he sees, although it does not surprise him as much as it does DAVE and Madame RICAUD, increases his irritation no end. For after pushing down CHUCK's head, which suddenly lands on her lap, MONIQUE sticks to him in what will soon prove a kiss of marathonic proportions.

This is fine! This is the kind of in fraganti transgression I like best; two officers eating in a black-market restaurant and fraternizing like there were no regulations at all! A real orgy, worthy of Tsarist officers in Old Mother Russia!

He rubs his hands gleefully. AGENOR goes to the back on tiptoe and vanishes.

MADAME R.

I think there's a little mistake here, Monsieur le policier.

M. P.

Oh, yeah? (Glancing at MONIQUE and CHUCK) Don't tell me these two are brother and sister!

MADAME R.

Not exactly, Monsieur le policier, but my friend Madame Périer knows this boy ever since he was this high.

She extends her arm at a distance of two feet from the floor.

M. P.

They've grown up some since then, haven't they?

The kissing goes on at full blast.

DAVE

You can have my word that this is a dinner among friends, an absolutely private affair, Sergeant Mc.Kay.

M. P.

(with knitted eyebrows) How come you know my name?

DAVE

Hell's bells and buckets of blood! Starr Mc.Kay!

M. P.

Hell! Dave Smith! This is a surprise! (Looking at the kissing couple)

You think Sleeping Beauty there will ever come back to life?

CHUCK waves his hand at him.

They must have gown up together. Gee whiz! Only a boy raised in Paris could resist such a clinch.

DAVE

(laughs) Starr, old man, have a drink with us before leaving. At least that.

M. P.

(shaking his head and pointing at his helmet) For crying out loud, Dave, can't you see I'm on duty?

DAVE

Well, when are you free?

M. P.

Friday.

DAVE

Then we have a date on Friday. 7 o'clock at the Ritz. Okay?

M. P.

Fine.

DAVE

Good night, pal.

M. P.

(saluting) Friday it is, Captain Smith. Good night.

He goes out. For some seconds Madame RICAUD and DAVE look at each other in silence. Then, without saying a word, she goes R. to lock the street door. Heaving a sigh of relief, DAVE wipes his forehead. MONIQUE raises CHUCK by the collar of his tunic and, holding him with one hand, gives him a formidable couple of slaps with the other.

Blackout. Followed by a spotlight, the accordion player takes his waltz for a walk from R. to L. Lights go up slowly at MONIQUE's apartment.

SCENE III

Kicking the door in, MONIQUE and DAVE take CHUCK into the room; DAVE holds him by the armpits and MONIQUE by his feet.

CHUCK

(laughing like mad) Take your hands off me, Dave! You tickle me!

DAVE

If I do that, your head will bang on the floor, you stupid!

CHUCK

Well, then, put your hands a little lower! I can't stand being tickled!
I love it!

DAVE takes him by the waist.

MONIQUE

Let's put him to bed. (Nodding in the direction of the curtain) In there.

DAVE

You're going to put this bastard to bed? Listen, lady, don't. He's been too much trouble already.

MONIQUE

(releasing CHUCK's feet) So what? Landing in France and coming over to Paris you've been taking heaps of trouble for me - and you didn't even know me.

DAVE

Oh, I wish I'd known we were doing it for you. Brother, we wouldn't have a single spot left to pin a medal on!

CHUCK

(crying, genuinely alarmed) Dave, don't let me go! I'm sinking! Take me by that leg, please! I'm sinking!

DAVE

(dropping him gently on the floor and taking both his hands, he takes him out of the room by dragging him through the curtain R.) The hell with you! (Offstage) A fine way to end your first night in Paris!

Left alone in the room, MONIQUE quickly goes to mirror over fireplace to retouch her hair-do and make-up.
Three or four seconds later, DAVE reenters.

This is much too kind of you. Overwhelming, really.

MONIQUE

Nothing of the sort. Sheer prudence, sir. On your way to the Ritz you're likely to come across other M.P.s, aren't you? Do you think every one of them's going to be a former employee of your father's?

DAVE

(smiling) You're right. I'm honestly sorry about Chuck.

MONIQUE

Sit down, Captain.

DAVE

Thank you, I'd rather not. It's two o'clock in the morning and I've got quite a bit of a walk ahead. I hope Chuck isn't too much of a nuisance.

MONIQUE

Never mind about him. When he wakes up in the morning, I'll be far away, trying to get some food.

DAVE

There's only one excuse for him: it is the first time he gets plastered.

MONIQUE

Really?

DAVE

Positive. It isn't his only form of virginity, either.

MONIQUE

Girls, too? In free and easy America? How old is he?

DAVE

23.

MONIQUE

Incredible. (Another smile and another pause in the already longish night)
Rather touching, too.

DAVE

Why touching?

MONIQUE

I was educated in London, you see. And the day I found out that, municipal-wise at least, I was a respectable citizen, I fled to Paris, to forget it all - and to sin! Could there be anything more exhilarating than sinning? Or more edifying!

DAVE gives her a sardonic look, as though he meant to say "You're pulling my leg". There is another pause, during which they sigh in unison.

I suppose I ought to offer you some coffee, but I dare not; what we drink here under that name is ground sunflower seeds roasted with chicory.

DAVE

Heavens!

MONIQUE

They say chicory has remarkable purgative values.

DAVE

Thank you, but - I work like a clock, you know.

MONIQUE

(laughs) You're beginning to talk like a Frenchman. Bravo! Out with all

MONIQUE (cont'd)

Puritanical constipation!

DAVE

(laughs) Well, America isn't half as puritanical as you may think. You'll see for yourself one day, I hope. Of course, you mustn't expect to find in the streets of Minneapolis anything like those big, round metal contraptions you have here in the street. (She raises her eyebrows) I mean, those places where men can converse with Nature in a hurry.

MONIQUE

No, I wouldn't expect anything of the sort. Captain, will you have some brandy? That, you can't refuse me!

She gets up and fills two small glasses.

Sit down, please.

DAVE

(sitting) Thanks.

MONIQUE

Tell me, what did you feel the day you got to Paris?

DAVE

I fell in love with the Parisiennes for ever.

He accepts a glass of brandy and raises it.

To the Parisiennes. (He drinks)

MONIQUE

Thank you.

DAVE

I'll never forget it as long as I live. All those lovely creatures running along the Rue de Rivoli in their cardboard platform shoes and the fantastic turbans you girls wear these days. German bullets poured on us from the roofs, and we advanced in our jeeps like cautious turtles under our helmets; but they, oh boy, they walked with a cocky strut, smiling like queens, as if what poured from roofs was merely confetti!

MONIQUE

And each time the rain of bullets came to a halt, there was a rain of kisses. I know. I wasn't there, but I know.

DAVE

Why weren't you there, if I may ask?

MONIQUE

It was the end of four dreadful years. I was sick and tired of everything. I don't know; that way of hailing our liberators looked a bit like opera-bouffe, to me. But I'm sure I was wrong; and now I'm sorry I missed the show.

DAVE

Don't worry, madame; you can still make it. Just imagine that I'm in my jeep, that there are no snipers over the roof of the next three houses and that I'm dying to be given a liberator's welcome - Paris style. (He opens his arms) The Yanks are coming! Here I am!

MONIQUE

(throwing herself in DAVE's arms) My own private liberator! Oh, Captain!

She gives him a kiss of less Olympic proportions than the one she gave CHUCK, but all the same she leaves him out of breath. DAVE closes his eyes and clings to MONIQUE like a man who has touched a live wire.

DAVE

(once it is over) Wow!

MONIQUE

What? Before kissing, you howl like wolves and, immediately after, bark like dogs?

DAVE

(laughs) Yes. We're in love with onomatopoeic sounds. It must be the Indian in us.

He takes her by the arms and licks her lips like a dog welcoming his mistress.

Hmm. I thought so. Your lipstick tastes better than all the other French brands. Yam yam yam. It never was so good at the Rue de Rivoli!

MONIQUE

(laughing) I'm glad.

DAVE

So am I. It's been an unforgettable evening.

MONIQUE

It isn't over yet -

DAVE takes his cap, walks towards the door of the apartment and opens it.

DAVE

It is for me. Sorry, but I must be at Orly at seven o'clock.

MONIQUE

Dave -

DAVE

I hope to see you soon, Madame Périer.

MONIQUE

Monique to you. After that kiss, the least you could do is call me Monique.

DAVE

All right, Monique.

MONIQUE

Dave -

MONIQUE

Again, thanks a million.

MONIQUE

To you, for the dinner.

DAVE

No, no. To you - for what you're doing for Chuck.

MONIQUE

He must be snoring it out. That's the great American talent, to be sure; to have one's beauty sleep no matter what happens. With so much sleep and the fruit juice you drink all the time, it's no wonder you men have such beautiful complexions.

DAVE

(laughs) Thank you!

He puts on his cap, salutes, opens the door and goes.

MONIQUE

(in a low voice, when he is out) Conceited ass! He couldn't even see I said it sarcastically!

A pause. She goes to door, opens it and says aloud:

Stupid! Yes, that's what you are: a stupid, conceited ass!

She shuts the door furiously.

But so God-damn handsome! Merde!

Blackout. The accordion plays another part of the waltz. A spotlight picks up the accordion player, standing at R. Lights come up again, but very slowly, on MONIQUE's room.

SCENE IV

It is near mid-day of the next day. The stage is empty. Someone knocks three times at the door.

SUZANNE

(off) Monique!

She opens the door and enters.

Are you in? Monique!

Offstage, a yawn like the roar of a lion in the distance.

Can that be her? Mon Dieu! And she looks so refined when she enters!

(Raising her voice) Monique!!

SUZANNE is a memorable blonde of Diana-like proportions, but the gold of her hair gives her a touch of fragility. Apart from that, her own grace and radiant smile make her appear defenceless and at the same time irresistible. She is in the full bloom of her 20 years, and one should like to pour some balsam on her to keep her like that for ever.

Raising the curtain at the back, CHUCK enters, offering SUZANNE a disgruntled sight; hair uncombed, necktie half undone hanging from the collar of his wrinkled shirt, one bare foot and the other covered with a green woollen Army sock.

CHUCK

Hi there, morning. (He gives her a closer look and instantly his tone gets brighter) Hello!! (He smiles) Name's Chuck, Chuck Peters. I'm with the American Air Force, and you?

SUZANNE

Pardon, monsieur.

CHUCK

Pardonnez-moi, mademoiselle. I speak rotten French.

SUZANNE

I'm sure it's no worse than my accent in English!

CHUCK

Oh, but you don't need words to make yourself understood.

SUZANNE

Yes I do. In Paris I do. A good vocabulary is indispensable in this city. A girl of my age who has no culture - what can she do?

CHUCK

(chuckling) What can she do? You'd be surprised.

SUZANNE

(slightly annoyed; a change of tone) Where is Monique?

CHUCK

Who?

SUZANNE

Monique, Monique Périer, the owner of this apartment.

CHUCK

I don't know where I am!

SUZANNE laughs.

Well, you see, last night was my first night in Paris. Dave and I started drinking - and we went on and on - and suddenly (tapping his head) there was complete blackout up here. (Another laugh from SUZANNE) Don't laugh. I'm very confused. Have you any idea how I got to this place?

SUZANNE

No, but that's not hard to guess.

CHUCK

(laughing but blushing at the same time) Come on, don't kid around. Give me details.

SUZANNE

(going on with her prank) Details are always superfluous, monsieur. But perhaps you think, like Voltaire, that the superfluous is the most necessary?

CHUCK

Hee! You quote Voltaire - with those eyes, that hair, and those - ? (He swallows) My God!

SUZANNE

I think you're fishing for compliments yourself. (Sententiously) "Usually we praise to be praised", as La Rochefoucauld said.

CHUCK

And who was she?

SUZANNE

(smiling) It was a he, and quite a he.

CHUCK

No kidding! La Rochefoucauld was a man? What a funny habit you have here of getting your sexes screwed up.

SUZANNE

(still smiling) We do? But how can you tell? In English, apart from machines - a locomotive or a ship, which are feminine - I understand that everything is neuter.

CHUCK

Yes, but not in Spanish. No, siree! I did three years of Spanish at the University of Arizona. Then we landed in Piccadilly, and listening to the

CHUCK (cont'd)

girls there I found out that in France things have a different sex from the one they have in Spain. One would think that either one country or the other is queer. Why is milk masculine to you, for instance? Why is ice-cream a female? Why haven't you made up your mind about Coca-Cola? So far, it is a hermaphrodite: le Coca-Cola, la Coca-Cola. But this La Rochefoucauld business is really the limit. (A pause) Say- you haven't told me your name yet.

SUZANNE

My name's Suzanne. Suzanne Lamolle, monsieur.

While CHUCK hurriedly combs his hair at mirror, he repeats every syllable with as much reverence as if it were a Cole Porter verse.

CHUCK

Suzanne Lamolle. La-molle. The soft one. Is that true? Really?

She smiles mischievously, then she sees a letter standing against table lighter on Directoire table downstage and takes it.

SUZANNE

(reading) "To the gentleman who has spent the night in the guest room". It must be for you.

She hands him the letter.

CHUCK

Do you mind? (Looking at envelope) Looks like a man's writing, but the perfume is a lady's. Just the sort of thing you expect when you're in Paris. (SUZANNE laughs. CHUCK opens envelope and looks at letter) Oh, it's in English. (With a cry) Of course! I know, I know! It's the beauty at the restaurant last night. (Reading through at a glance) Hmm. What does this mean: "And if you have nerves of steel, you can take a shower"?

SUZANNE

It means we've had no hot water in Paris for two months. Oh, what I wouldn't do for a hot bath!

CHUCK

What would you do? Tell me. Would you ride in a jeep to Versailles with me?

SUZANNE

Versailles?

CHUCK

Yes, to Allied headquarters; wherever it is, there's plenty of hot water.

SUZANNE

(cooly) Oh, no, no, thank you, monsieur. I wouldn't think of it.

CHUCK

(annoyed) All right. Pardon me if I offended you!

SUZANNE

(shakes her head, smiling) Go on, monsieur. I'm listening.

CHUCK

I have nothing to add to that.

SUZANNE

And you call that an invitation? (A silence) Frankly, I expected better manners from a young American lieutenant. A girl in France is not supposed to accept an invitation the very first time she's asked. Neither the first, nor the second, nor the third, nor the fourth.

CHUCK

What is this? China in the 12th. century?

MONIQUE

(opening door upstage L.) Bonjour, mes enfants! Bonjour, la petite Suzanne!
It's a pleasure to look you so well.

The girls kiss.

SUZANNE

What about you? I think chastity is proving very becoming to you, Monique.
(To CHUCK) This is Madame Périer.

MONIQUE

(to CHUCK) What was your name, now? Ah, Churchill! Did you have a good night's rest?

CHUCK looks at her attire with justifiable astonishment. For an excursion into the country - on a bicycle, too - the enormous silk turban on MONIQUE's head, exaggeratedly short skirt covered by a long balloon-like overskirt which right now is lifted and tied to MONIQUE's waist; above all, her shoes, mounted on incredibly high cardboard platforms which replace the unavailable soles - all verge on the caricature.

CHUCK

(never a master of subtlety) I see you've been to the country.

MONIQUE

Yes, I went a-hunting. Some hunt!

She winks at him, then moves a front fold of her turban to one side, unfastens a zip, and takes off her head a tiny straw basket full of newly laid eggs.

SUZANNE

Fresh eggs! How wonderful!

MONIQUE

Wait; there's something else.

She unhooks her overskirt and lets it fall to the floor to reveal four salamis and two strings of onions.

CHUCK

How do you like that!

MONIQUE

(literal-minded this time) Oh, I love it. I'd ride all the way to Marseilles on my bicycle to get a couple of these sausages!

She takes off her shoes, opens the zipper around each heel and extracts three small cans out of each shoe.

And there's this, too; foie-gras from Périgord, the best in the world!

SUZANNE

Clever girl!

MONIQUE

Thank you.

There are two knocks on the door.

Entrez!

DAVE

(opening door with his knee and entering with a broad grin and one parcel in each arm) Bonjour madame, bonjour, mademoiselle? bonjour -
(To CHUCK) You can't be called monsieur after your performance last night.

MONIQUE

(to DAVE) Did you come all the way from Orly?

DAVE

(nods) Fighting wave after wave of bicycles. Hope I'm on time to contribute something to your lunch. Here. This is all I could get, not very good I know. Four packs of K rations and two bottles of Mumm's 1942 - requisitioned by the Wehrmacht.

CHUCK

Our daily menu at the Ritz! K-rations and champagne! The marriage of the sublime and the ridiculous! For Christ's sake, couldn't you do better than that?

SUZANNE

K-rations? What's that?

MONIQUE

(the correct hostess at last) Oh, I'm sorry. Captain Smith, this is Mademoiselle Lamolle.

CHUCK

(looking ecstatically at SUZANNE) La-molle. The soft one. Get that!

SUZANNE

(with a pouting lip) But what are K-rations?

DAVE

(opens container) Voilà. Paté, cookies, chocolate, cheese, dry lemonade-
all supervitaminized and super-mineralized to put you in a mood to eat
three Krauts in a row.

MONIQUE

A little apéritif for cannibals. I see. And you seriously suggest we
have this for lunch!

DAVE

When there's no bread -

MONIQUE

Oh, no, no. We shall have it some other time, when we're better ac-
quainted. (Taking small flat pack out of carton) And this? What is
this?

CHUCK

(gaily, almost enthusiastically) That is toilet paper!

MONIQUE

Oh, how marvellous! You think of everything, don't you? How could the
Nazis ever hope to win the war - having such adversaries?

The four laugh in unison, with perfect abandon.

DAVE

Gee, I feel grand. All we lack now short of paradise is a cocktail.

SUZANNE

What for? We have champagne, haven't we? Remember, "A cocktail is to
a glass of wine what rape is to love", as Claudel said.

DAVE

(to CHUCK) And who's this Claudel?

CHUCK

(scratching his head) I think he's a man, though over here, you know,
you never can tell.

Blackout. The gauze drop falls and, followed by
a spot, the accordionist quickly plays his way
from L. to R.

SCENE V

The restaurant. Madame RICAUD enters from the street in an old grey

tailored suit and one of those classical hats middle-class women have been wearing in Paris for half a century; a sort of flat cake with feathers on the side. AGENOR reads the newspaper over the counter. She takes off her hat with a sigh.

AGENOR

(putting down automatically the newspaper which covers his face) Good evening, Madame Ricaud.

MADAME R.

Bonsoir, mon p'tit.

AGENOR

How did it go with your attorney?

MADAME R.

Better not talk about it; it was a disaster. As a spinster, I am somebody, a person whose existence is recognized by the law; but as a married woman, I just don't exist.

AGENOR

(alarmed) How do you mean?

MADAME R.

I mean, here in France men have all the rights, all! If they give you enough to eat and something to cover yourself with, you have no grounds for complaint. And they can do as they please with their money - hide it under a tile or in the mattress, anything! Just as Monsieur Ricaud does all the time, since he never deposits a cent in the bank!

AGENOR

So - no freedom, no marriage -

MADAME R.

(taking off her hat) Certainly not. A man who hides his money from his girl friend, can you imagine what he'd do to his wife?

Enter MONIQUE and DAVE, right.

Ah! Bonsoir, mon capitaine. We have missed you these 17 and a half days.

DAVE

(laughing) Thank you.

DAVE takes off his cap and shakes hands with Madame RICAUD as Monsieur RICAUD enters by the back., R., while AGENOR leaves them to go inside.

MONSIEUR R.

Mon Capitaine! Quel plaisir! And what a pleasure, too, to see Madame Périer with an escort!

DAVE

(staring at MONIQUE) Does she always come alone?

MADAME R.

Always.

DAVE

(to MONIQUE) Is that right?

Monsieur RICAUD goes to counter to serve "apéritifs" to the couple, brings two more for Madame RICAUD and himself.

MONIQUE

Since you have not one spare evening for me -

MADAME R.

How can he? All those countesses and duchesses. All those cocktail parties. But he hasn't gained an extra ounce. Lucky man.

DAVE

(smiling conceitedly) It's very simple; I never attend those parties.

MONIQUE

What an inverted snob.

DAVE

(laughs) The first days I took in some of them. There were islands of caviar and rivers of champagne, kilos of "mercis" and miles of smiles. And then came the questions and answers game: "Couldn't you get us some nylons from the States - or a little gas for our cars - or some American nail polish? We're sure that being in the Air Force - They announce a hard winter in Paris, and we're practically naked. You wouldn't like to see us naked, would you?" I almost answered yes, with great pleasure!

MONSIEUR R.

(distributing glasses) And you dare complain!

DAVE

I do. It's a tremendous problem of logistics. I would have to spend three or four times my salary in satisfying the ladies' requests, and then spend my nights jumping from bed to bed to get my payment.

MONIQUE

(in a mocking tone) You poor, poor man!

MADAME R.

I had something to ask you, mon capitaine, but if the countesses and duchesses fare so badly with you, how can I expect - ?

DAVE

What is it you want?

MADAME R.

Something I'm sure you, with your wonderful smile, could get us easily;

MADAME R. (cont'd)

a hundred kilos of real coffee. Even if you Americans don't know how to roast it, it is the real McCoy, and it smells like heaven. We haven't tasted anything like it for years! With real coffee like that, the house would take quite a step forward.

MONSIEUR R.

Stop it, Amélie. What's the good of dreaming?

MADAME R.

Of course, we'd substantially reward the fellows who brought it over. As for you, we don't presume to insult you by proposing -

MONSIEUR R.

(interrupting her) But we'd always have ready a table for two - hoping you'd come as our permanent guest.

MONIQUE

Permanent guest! (She looks at the RICAUDs in astonishment) Whew! I can already smell the coffee in the basement.

DAVE

(who, as the proposition was taking shape, has been frowning more and more alarmingly) Oh, can you? So who do you take me for? One of those Americans who proudly show their visitors a collection of towels where the printed inscriptions read: "Stolen at the Savoy-Hilton", "Stolen at the Ritz-Carlton", "Stolen at the Ambassador"? Or one of those war correspondents who can have a kick losing 5,000 dollars a night at a poker game while people starve to death in Europe and the Far East? Do I look like a crook, a murderer, a senator? Or like an innocent abroad, like Chuck, for instance? Chuck would do it for you - anyone can corrupt the likes of him!

Unnoticed by DAVE, the RICAUDs exchange a quick glance of complicity and simultaneously pull down their lower eyelids with their forefingers to indicate that CHUCK is their man.

How dare you propose anything like that - to ME? WHO DO YOU TAKE ME FOR?

DAVE is shouting, and the RICAUDs run away in consternation, hands fluttering in the air as if they wanted to chase the bite out of DAVE's words.

MONIQUE

(imitating a panting motor) Pah - pah - pah - pah. Look what was hiding behind that nice Pepsodent smile.

They go to a table downstage. Lights dim and two spots pick them up as they sit.

DAVE

I hate the black market. The cheek and the greed of people! It's revolting.

MONIQUE

Exactly what I was thinking the other day, when Chuck told me American women are complaining like mad of the shoe rationing in the States. Knowing they have a right to only five pairs a year, I sympathize with them. (With a sarcastic laugh) Only five pairs of shoes! Poor things!

DAVE

Forgive my outburst, Monique - and forgive my not coming to see you in two weeks.

An arm - Madame RICAUD's - enters the circle of light and leaves a bottle on the table. DAVE serves the wine.

MONIQUE

I could forgive you if I knew you had got yourself that girl-friend at last!

DAVE

I haven't. You see, there's already someone - over there. My wife.

MONIQUE

So you're one of those practical married men who never wear a wedding ring!

DAVE

It isn't that. There's been a divorce, but -

MONIQUE

A faithful divorcé, then. (More ironically than ever) No wonder ten years ago a gipsy told me I would end having unconfessable tastes!

DAVE

(laughs) I warn you, Monique - to attack all the time someone you want for a lover is not always a sure-fire device.

MONIQUE

I'm out of devices, Dave. They're all right for run-of-the-mill people - but you're quite another case altogether.

DAVE

I'm afraid so. Now, when Betty and I are about to stop divorce proceedings, I realize I like you a hell of a lot. How do you like that.

MONIQUE

I like it. Then what's your problem?

DAVE

Can't you guess?

MONIQUE

No. Apparently we don't speak the same language. You in America talk of your "sex life" when you mean love; we in France talk of "love" when we mean strictly sex. Let's try to understand each other, shall we? This wouldn't be a case of love in the American way - but in the French, in the French way!

DAVE

You mean - something sexual?

MONIQUE

(laughing rather ominously) Bright boy.

DAVE

Hmm. Suppose we start that game - I don't think I could help falling in love with you!

MONIQUE

Oh, there's no danger of that. To be in love with two women at the same time is a European refinement a man like you couldn't possibly indulge in.

DAVE

Then, there would be no reproaches - nothing - the day the Forces left Europe?

MONIQUE

None whatsoever. I know how terribly important pleasure is for the health of the soul. At least when one's alive -

DAVE

(laughing) Ah, Monique! I'll never find a girl like you!

MONIQUE

Is that right? Than do something about it! Time's running out, you know!

DAVE

Monique! Monique rhymes with unique. I know I don't deserve this chance (he raises his glass again) but "vive l'amour". (Clears his throat) I mean, long live sex.

They both laugh as lights go out, all of a sudden, to go up again on the façade of the building. Some three hours have passed by then.

SCENE VI

CHUCK and SUZANNE enter R. and stop before the restaurant. She is wrapped in a white lambskin coat. The accordion and its waltz are heard in the distance.

SUZANNE

(out of breath, stopping) Don't walk so fast, Chuck, I can't follow you!

CHUCK

Sorry. I keep forgetting.

They stare at each other in silence. Then they kiss
- a long, tender kiss.

Did you have the results of the X-rays, baby?

SUZANNE

Yes, always the same - no improvement.

CHUCK

Then you must go to the mountains.

SUZANNE

No, no, not in this bitter winter, without coal. It would only make it worse. I shall wait for the spring, Chuck.

CHUCK

Baby-baby, for Heaven's sake take care of yourself, please. (Kis-
sing her again) I love you. I know that the day you feel better,
you'll be more responsive, warmer to me.

SUZANNE

Do you? You're affectionate when you love somebody, not when you let
yourself be loved. It isn't easy, Chuck. To me, love is a kind of
miracle.

CHUCK

Not at all, it's a habit!

SUZANNE

And if it is? You need time to form a habit. But the war will be
over soon and you'll go back to America. This is a to-day without
a to-morrow.

CHUCK

There will be a to-morrow! You must take care of yourself!

SUZANNE

Oh, I want to live, more than you do! Don't think the contrary.

CHUCK

Baby-baby. My baby. There will be a new world. We'll make it -
people like you and me. (Going suddenly from dream to reality) Oh,
before we go in there and I forget - Bill will bring you a can of
fuel for your stove from time to time.

SUZANNE

Clandestinely?

CHUCK

What other way is there? You don't think our Army has organized the Red Ball system to warm up the Parisiennes this winter, do you?

SUZANNE

How can I know? Every day your Army seems more and more extraordinary to me. To bring all that Coca-Cola, plus Marlene's legs and Bob Hope's jokes, 'cause without that no one would want to fight -

CHUCK

What man in his right mind ever wants to fight?

SUZANNE

(slightly roused) And what man is in his right mind? (CHUCK laughs) No, thank you, dear Chuck, but clandestinely - I want nothing.

CHUCK

Don't be silly! You have to live! Oh. Another thing. (He gives her an envelope) Here you are; this is for your medicines. The boys in my unit made a collection yesterday. All for a selfish purpose; they're plumb fed up with me, and say they won't put up with me when we return if I don't cheer up.

SUZANNE laughs again, but now there are tears in her eyes.

Promise me you will take all your meals at the Ritz. Bill or Ed will always have a guest ticket ready for you.

SUZANNE

But I'll have to eat with them! Aren't you jealous?

CHUCK

Sure, only I'll never show it to you; not until I know you love me a little.

SUZANNE

(looking at R.) My God! There comes mother. She's been wanting to talk with you for three days.

CHUCK

The nerve! Coming out after us at this hour of the night -

SUZANNE

Pay no attention to what she says, Chuck dear. I beg of you, for Heaven's sake don't answer her. Or at least count a hundred before you speak, will you?

Madame LAMOLLE enters R. She is a small woman of 55, who because of wartime privations has lost much of her roundness, though none of her critical energy.

Her hair, coat and dress are all gunmetal grey, and her skin, without benefit of make-up, is a lighter shade of the same colour. She has a high-pitched voice, and when she is quiet - which is not often - her thin-lipped mouth has a sardonic grin.

MME. LAMOLLE

(to SUZANNE, in a loud voice) I'm glad to see you stop sometimes to catch your breath. Your admirer wouldn't think of it. He showers you with presents all right, but then, he makes you trot along all the time! The hypocrite!

SUZANNE

Chuck's no hypocrite, mother. Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue.

CHUCK

Please don't bring any strangers into this.

MME. LAMOLLE

What strangers? Are you crazy?

CHUCK

I know very well by now when the Duke of La Rochefoucauld butts in!

MME. LAMOLLE

Ah bon! La Rochefoucauld! (With a little cackle) You have a funny way of talking.

SUZANNE

Mother. I only wanted to say Chuck is virtue itself, and that virtue is never hypocritical, you hear me?

MME. LAMOLLE

(with a cry of triumph) Virtue! That's just what I wanted to talk about; virtue, the suspect side of your relationship!

SUZANNE

Not so loud, please; we're in the street!

MME. LAMOLLE

Exactly. God only knows the sacrifices I've made not to push you out into the street, and now this - this kind of American - practically lives in it with you! Not only your health is in danger, but your reputation as well!

CHUCK

And you blame me for that?

SUZANNE

Don't shout, Chuck! Count, count as I told you!

MME. LAMOLLE

Yes, count, sir, count! I've also counted, among other things, all the nights you've left my daughter at the door just with a friendly kiss on the cheek. To do that, after bringing her a whole trousseau from America, is a disgrace.

CHUCK

A disgrace?

MME. LAMOLLE

Yes! If you only knew what the harpies of the neighbourhood say about you two!

CHUCK

So a friendly kiss on the cheek ruins the reputation of your daughter. And it makes the harpies of the neighbourhood gossip, does it?

MME. LAMOLLE

Of course!

CHUCK

(furious) Why of course?

MME. LAMOLLE

Of course, yes, of course! A mother who has a daughter in the theatre and the cinema could not possibly tolerate her to be treated with such cool deference! You realize the kind of gossip your attitude is bound to evoke? That Suzanne is frigid, that she is psychologically incapable of responding to the advances of a man, that she is malformed or has some secret disease - God knows!

SUZANNE

(with tears in her voice) Mother, for Heaven's sake!

MME. LAMOLLE

(to CHUCK) I don't mean that you should come in with any preconceived ideas, no; Heaven forbid I ever insinuate any such thing! I only mean that instead of leaving at our door you should come in and stay in for a little while, to save appearances.

CHUCK

(blowing up with indignation) WHAT appearances?

MME. LAMOLLE

Really! Must I be still more precise? What have you got under that brush of hair?

CHUCK

Some sense of decency, that's what I've got! And if I have a mind

CHUCK (cont'd)
to keep myself pure for Suzanne, and she for me -

MME. LAMOLLE
(interrupting him with a sarcastic laugh) Pure! This is really the limit!

CHUCK
Yes, pure, pure for the wedding night!

MME. LAMOLLE
You won't be making Suzanne the dubious gift of your... purity, because I'll never let her go! Even if they promise me the millenium in America, I won't budge from Paris while I live!

CHUCK
All right. Don't think this is the last word on the subject. To a corrupt world that wants us to lose our purity, I do this!

He lifts his arm and makes the V sign.

MME. LAMOLLE
Ha! Ha! The victory of purity! You can write a pamphlet with that title; you'll see what bestseller it becomes!

CHUCK
That sign may mean victory to you; to the London cockneys it has always meant something else. (He laughs) My namesake Churchill was so clever adopting that gesture; every time he talks of the enemy, he can do this!

Same gesture again; this time he moves his hand upwards.

And I do it, too; to the twisted, the fools, the mean, who think they're so clever and know life so well (he repeats the same V gesture) I do this! So there!

He rushes out by the back, L.

We'll see who has the last laugh!

Blackout.

SCENE VII

The restaurant, some time in the late autumn. The curtain rises on an empty stage. A phone rings twice at the counter. DUCHESNE, in his classical tenué of clerical grey and white piqué waistcoat, with a pearl-grey necktie and a red carnation in his buttonhole, rushes in by the back and picks up the receiver.

Except in the rare moments when he forgets himself, he shall speak in a hushed voice, casting cursory glances at the entrance R.

DUCHESNE

(on the phone) Allô. Qui est à l'appareil? (A little pause) Bomba! Don't be idiotic; you may fool your pals at the Foreign Office, but not me. Of course you can't imitate a foreign accent! To imitate a foreign accent you have to recognize that foreign people actually exist and mean something, and you're too French for that. (A pause) Bomba! Are you there? I was only joking. (A pause) The Ricauds are due back from the Town Hall any minute. (Another little pause) There was a delay at the eleventh hour, so I'm receiving all the guests that couldn't be warned in time. (Laughing) Yes, a sort of maître d'hôtel if you wish. Great fun, believe me. Well, what about it? (A pause) It is requisitioned. A stone's throw from the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré? And how many rooms? (A little pause) That's fine. (Another pause) How do you go about it? You just go and occupy the house on an order from the tribunal until the trial is over. Very good. Then, by all means take the necessary steps, old boy; if we get away with it, you'll receive a commission of one million francs. What? Not enough? A million, not enough? (A longer pause) Well, Bomba, I don't think you're very reasonable there. If you get half the apartment, we'll be living in the same house. You're old enough to know that adults cannot stand for long the presence of other human animals beside them - be it wives, mothers or friends. Can't you see it would break our profitable relationship for ever? (A pause) Well, what do you suggest? (Another - longer - pause) No. No, no, it's absolutely out of the question. Because it's a swindle, that's why! Try that and I'll have you denounced to the police! (Raising his voice) The police, yes, the police!

As if conjured out of thin air by DUCHESNE's shout, The FLIC appears at the back in uniform, but without his cap. By a series of simultaneous gestures - a raising of the eyebrows, a pursing of the lips and a jabbing of the chest with his forefinger, The FLIC manages very plainly to ask DUCHESNE if his services are required.

DUCHESNE, all presence of mind, shakes his head and gaily waves his hand at the FLIC. The FLIC raises the chicken leg he carries in one hand and the glass of champagne in the other to signify that he has a duty to attend to. DUCHESNE nods with a smile and the FLIC goes out.

Please don't be so impatient. A policeman walked in for a minute - the local boy from our arrondissement - a man of good character, but not very good taste. Imagine he's come to the wedding in his uniform! People are

DUCHESNE (cont'd)

terribly intimidated, thinking no doubt of the recent past. There's a huge spread and they're eating it up only with their eyes; a uniform at arm's length is enough for them to refrain from taking a step towards the table. (A pause) Oh, he's a pig; he's making up for four years of rationing in one single "séance". (He gives a hearty laugh) No, just a change of subject. Yes, I was carried away by my temper. I'm sorry. Of course, old boy. Then the deal is definitely out. Yes, you're right. If after investigating the Marquise they have to investigate you and me - (A pause) You really believe that? The whole nonsense over in six months? (A little pause) Hmm. Not in six months. They'll do it eventually; it'll be all buried and forgotten in twenty years, and in thirty five Pétain will have become a national hero, just like Napoleon. But who has twenty spare years to sit it out, with some dozens of idle millions in his hands? After all, we only have one life. (He sighs) Well, keep me informed, Bomba. Something must crop up somewhere. (A pause) Yes, I am patient. But to hang like this from a thread in the middle of space - while the days go on and on - is enough to drive anyone to despair. (He interrupts himself) Shh. Someone's coming.

DUCHESNE hangs up the receiver and goes to R. to receive MONIQUE.

MONIQUE

Ah! Just the man I wanted to see. Have you seen the bills?

DUCHESNE

Yes. I was appalled. For people who know the conditions of pipes in this city, to cover the walls of a bedroom with Chinese silk is a gesture which verges on insanity.

MONIQUE

And how about your own insanity? I bet you fall asleep in your bathtub while the water runs, and so you spend hours in it at a time.

DUCHESNE

(nodding in a sudden fit of laughter) An old Roumanian custom I've taken from my mother.

MONIQUE

Very nice. But since the result is that you have ruined my walls, your old Roumanian custom is going to cost you a pretty penny.

DUCHESNE

I know. 1.700 dollars.

DUCHESNE (cont'd)

heart. And so, whenever she mewed - and what a splendid mewung it was, worthy of an Isolde! - I couldn't help answering her.

MONIQUE

You? The riotous tomcat next door - that was you?

DUCHESNE

(nodding) I'm not lacking in tender feelings, dear neighbour.

MONIQUE

(laughing) You! The Tristan of the rooftops, the Jean Gabin of the gutter! That really is the last straw! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Laughing wildly, she goes out R., back. DUCHESNE remains in his place, as perplexed as he is outraged.

Enter Monsieur and Madame RICAUD, followed by AGENOR. Monsieur RICAUD, all in black, looks downcast and spent, as someone coming back from a funeral. Madame RICAUD offers a more cheerful sight in her white straw hat with a bird's wing on the side - almost identical to the one she wore in Scene V - and with the romantic bouquet of pink and white flowers she carries to counteract the severity of her pin-striped suit. AGENOR, very solemn in a dark blue suit with yellow boots, his hair flat and thick with brillantine, takes Madame RICAUD's big black handbag.

MADAME R.

(to DUCHESNE) Dear Count! What an honour for us, to have you do the honours!

DUCHESNE

(who has left the counter, kissing her hand) The honour is entirely mine, Madame Ricaud. Congratulations.

Madame RICAUD thrusts her elbow into Monsieur RICAUD's ribs, to make him realize he must shake DUCHESNE's hand.

MONSIEUR R.

Thank you very much, Monsieur le Comte.

DUCHESNE

(laughing) For God's sake drop that expression, Ricaud. One feels like extending you one's deepest sympathy!

RICAUD

(looking up) Thank you. You have been to-day so generous of your time, such a good friend -

DUCHESNE

(with a brazen smile) The solid ties of friendship business binds, my dear Ricaud.

MONIQUE

The price is in francs, Monsieur le Comte.

DUCHESNE

I know. Only I'm used to calculating in dollars or pounds. One of the curses of these unsteady times; a corner of a decent man's brain has become a computer.

MONIQUE

(contemptuously) To think that nearly forty million people have died in this war already so that what's left of Europe may be represented by characters like you!

DUCHESNE

Bah! There were far too many people on this earth.

MONIQUE

Send those bills back to me! We'll see each other in court.

DUCHESNE

You do have a mania for courts and tribunals, haven't you?

MONIQUE

Send me the bills, please.

DUCHESNE

I'll send them back to you - but with a cheque. And please don't say one more word. You might regret it, my dear lady.

MONIQUE

So there are courts that impress you more than others.

DUCHESNE

(incensed) Enough! Not one word more! You're the only person in the world who can make me forget myself - the only one I think of oftener than I should like to - (Pulling himself together) There, it's over. (In his usual sociable tone) And by the way, what have you done with your cat? It's a long time since I have heard her.

MONIQUE

I've left her with friends in the country. Why?

DUCHESNE

I miss her, poor thing. She sounds so sensual!

MONIQUE

Not more sensual than she-cats in general -

DUCHESNE

But this one, I only heard her when you had a gentleman caller. A cat so sensitive to the presence of a man touched the most secret strings of my

MONSIEUR R.

(clearing his throat) - that I'll permit myself to direct you to the salon, while we discuss a little private matter here.

DUCHESNE

Of course, of course. Excuse me, my friends. (He goes out, back)

MONSIEUR R.

You too, Agénor. Go on, stuff them with food and drink; they won't miss us.

MADAME R.

(whispering into AGENOR's ears) I can hardly wait for my wedding night - with you, my boy.

AGENOR raises his eyebrows and goes.

Henri, you must be crazy. To make such a fuss about poor Madame Lamolle's coming; to forbid me to invite her to the party and then - then - to spend the whole ceremony eating her up with your eyes! I've seen her, following us at a distance. She's coming here, isn't she?

MONSIEUR R.

Yes. I asked her to.

MADAME R.

Whaat? (A silence) Well, explain yourself!

MONSIEUR R.

I don't have to explain a thing; you do. Why did you give that bitch your old hat, of all the things in the world?

MADAME R.

So that was it! What a miser! It was my own hat, you know; bought with my money, twenty five years ago, before I ever had the misfortune of setting eyes on you!

MONSIEUR R.

That's precisely the point. You get a new hat just like the old one, and coldly discard a friend who was with you ever since the end of World War I. If you do that with hats, what can people expect?

MADAME R.

When did you ever see a woman keep a hat for more than twenty five years? And if you consider Madame Lamolle a bitch, why do you want her to come over now?

MONSIEUR R.

I want her here so that she can give you back the hat, that's all.

MADAME R.

You must be all set for an electro-shock! On what grounds do you expect me to do a thing like that? Why?

MONSIEUR R.

That hat's the thing I love best in the world.

MADAME R.

Dirty fetishist! To reach a ripe age after a normal life only to indulge in such sexual aberrations!

Monsieur RICAUD laughs sarcastically. Enter Madame LAMOLLE R.

MONSIEUR R.

Amélie, please help Agénor to look after our guests at the salon; we'll join you in a minute.

Madame RICAUD goes out, but not without turning her head twice to look at her husband with obvious fury.

Dear Madame Lamolle, coming back from the mairie a little while ago, I thought the party would be incomplete without you. I hope you didn't mind my sending a word like that, at the last minute. It's true that we've only had the pleasure of seeing you here twice, with your little daughter, but the few words I exchanged with you then inspired in me a feeling of great empathy.

MME. LAMOLLE

And what's that?

MONSIEUR R.

Well, it's a little difficult to explain - I know for sure it's not sympathy, but something stronger perhaps.

MME. LAMOLLE

(suspicious) Monsieur Ricaud, I don't know what you're driving at, but I should like to remind you that you've just got married.

MONSIEUR R.

Since the God-damned moment when I paid those God-damned fifty centimes for the certificate, I've been thinking of it all the time. You don't have to remind me! Besides, I'm long past all ideas of love and loving.

MME. LAMOLLE

(with a touch of coquetry) I don't believe you. You're still a fine figure of a man; even if you weren't, a man always has a chance. For women it's different, alas! I haven't been in that race for years. The flesh may have its weaknesses, of course, but fortunately the head - THE great quality of the French - always points at reality.

MONSIEUR R.

I don't know about that. The only reality I know at this moment is that you look very elegant and could go anywhere like that, even to a party

MONSIEUR R. (cont'd)
of the beau monde! (Extending both arms as if he were to fix the hat on Madame LAMOLLE's head) Allow me. I think that tilting is just a teeny weeny little bit to the left, it would be just perfect.

MME. LAMOLLE
(truculently flinching) Paws down, Monsieur Ricaud!

MONSIEUR R.
Paws down? Whom do you take me for?

MME. LAMOLLE
I know very well how to put on the hat in the way most becoming to me, thank you.

MONSIEUR R.
But a little tilt... ever so little... would make you irresistible. By the way, don't you find it heavy on your head?

MME. LAMOLLE
No, why?

MONSIEUR R.
All that cotton inside to keep it in shape. Much too much, maybe. Amélie complained of slight migraines every time she wore it.

MME. LAMOLLE
Nonsense. Every woman has a little hysterical reaction of that sort.
(A pause) Well, Monsieur Ricaud, shall we proceed inside?

MONSIEUR R.
Of course, my dear Madame Lamolle. Forgive me.

She turns to go to the back, but she has not taken a couple of steps when Monsieur RICAUD, quite by storm, takes the hat off her head.

Ha ha ha, it was heavy, and how! I was right, and so was Amélie with her migraines!

This thoroughly unexpected gesture leaves Madame LAMOLLE so flabbergasted that she does not even utter an exclamation of surprise. She remains open-mouthed and panting for some seconds, a pause Monsieur RICAUD profits by to put the hat on his head and look at himself in the counter mirror, a sight which produces uncontrollable mirth in him.

I don't know how you could stand it on your head the whole afternoon!

MME. LAMOLLE
(who cannot quite succeed in pulling herself together) But... but...

MONSIEUR R.
So funny! Makes me look like the wife of one of those Vichy ministers, doesn't it?

MME. LAMOLLE

But... but this is intolerable!

MONSIEUR R.

I know. But I'll take off the extra weight, so that you can tolerate it while you dispose of the canapés in there.

MME. LAMOLLE

(as he passes her on the way to the back) You're completely insane! Give me back that hat at once!

MONSIEUR R.

In two minutes, it'll be yours for life!

Laughing and shaking his finger in the air, Monsieur RICAUD is indeed the image of madness.

Two minutes, that's all!

As he goes out rushing in triumph, he collides with Madame RICAUD, who reenters by the back. For a second he is taken aback; then he is again all laughter and warning finger in the air, and exits leaving Madame RICAUD as astonished as was Madame LAMOLLE.

MME. LAMOLLE

Well, I never! Such a serious man, too! You know he had the nerve to tear that hat off my head? It must be the change of life, poor devil; he must have become one of those queer fish who dress as women at night while they force their wives to dress as men!

MADAME R.

Henri? Never. Don't expect any exciting fancy of that kind from him. The change of life seems to have killed his sexual imagination altogether.

MME. LAMOLLE

My poor friend. (Taking a step towards Madame RICAUD) Oh, that madman left me in such a state, I don't know what I'm doing. I know I should be congratulating you, but in the circumstances -

MADAME R.

I realize you must have had a shock. I've had one, too, believe me. I just can't understand it.

MME. LAMOLLE

Neither do I, but I'm staying all the same. Your husband won't get rid of me as easily as that!

MONSIEUR R.

(coming in by the back, hat in hand) Dear Madame Lamolle, here we are. You can wear it now in all tranquillity till Kingdom Come.

She snatches it from his hand and puts it on, looking at herself from a distance in the faded counter mirror,

MME. LAMOLLE

Madame Ricaud, I'm staying for your sake, to wish you luck; for luck you're going to need, and very badly too!

MONSIEUR R.

You stay for her sake - and the sake of the turkey, and the cold cuts, and the Savarin and the champagne.

MME. LAMOLLE

Of course. You've made my stomach turn with your little "travesti"; now it must have a little comfort and sustenance.

With a furious glance at Monsieur RICAUD, Madame LAMOLLE goes out R., back.

MADAME R.

Henri, you have one minute to explain everything. But you must stand warned; if you fail to convince me, I'll leave you for ever.

MONSIEUR R.

Poor women! What appalling lack of imagination! Haven't you realized yet that all we have in the world was concealed in that hat, in old hundred thousand franc bills?

MADAME R. me

What? You have the check of making^{me} that trifle of a grant to lure me into marriage - while you keep practically all your fortune in a hat? What if your heart ailment is true? Who could ever have guessed where the money was?

MONSIEUR R.

Precisely. Don't I always ask you to treat me like a man in a delicate condition?

MADAME R.

(taking her hand to her throat) I still can't believe it. All we have in the world - Oh, my God! I can't breathe!

MONSIEUR R.

Yes you can, you harebrain, you spendthrift! To throw like that to the winds the earnings of 25 years!

MADAME R.

How dare you accuse me? Did I know of it? (She takes her hands to her temples) Holy Virgin! I feel giddy, about to pass out - Give me something, quick!

MONSIEUR R.

(rushing to counter) There's brandy served here; okay?

MADAME R.

(faintly) I'd rather have a Scotch - please-

MONSIEUR R.

We have recovered the money; but that's no reason for throwing it away. You'll have the brandy - and like it!

He walks cautiously from counter, glass in hand. And let this be a lesson to last all your married life!

Blackout.

SCENE VIII

MONIQUE's apartment. Lights go up slowly as DAVE and MONIQUE enter.

DAVE

(leaving his cap on divan, kisses MONIQUE) This is heaven. I've been missing the flavour of that lipstick, you know.

MONIQUE

(laughing) What vile times we're living in! Twenty years ago a man would've had the grace of saying at least "the honey from your mouth"!

DAVE, laughing, kisses her again, and she purrs like a cat. Surprised, DAVE holds her away from him and looks at her, with a shy laugh.

You're ashamed of my - purr.

DAVE

No, why?

MONIQUE

Yes you are. It's better for you to know at once my reactions, though - even the queerest.

DAVE

What are you talking about?

MONIQUE

I don't think I ever made a secret of how pleased I was being with a man. Now. This pleasure, you see, I always feel an urge to express vocally - and as noisily as possible.

DAVE

(shocked) Oh, do you?

MONIQUE

Yes. The problem is, how to do it without scandalizing the neighbourhood.

MONIQUE (cont'd)

If I screeched as I feel in certain situations, to be sure I'd be expelled from Paris - very possibly deported!

DAVE

Oh la la!

MONIQUE

And so I imitate a she-cat.

DAVE

And that, thank God, doesn't shock anybody.

MONIQUE

Oh yes it does; but for me, it's the only way out.

DAVE

(laughing, then kissing her again) I understand. Only - the fact of the matter is, when I'm about to make love any noise makes me nervous.

MONIQUE

You'll get used to this one, you'll see.

DAVE

And - and there's something else I'd like to confess.

MONIQUE

Oh, a confession. Then we'd better sit comfortably. (She leads him to divan) First give me another kiss. No purring this time, I promise.

They embrace with more passion than before. It is not long before she mews like a female cat in heat.
DAVE jumps.

I didn't mean it! Sorry! (A little pause; then, a mischievous smile)
Dave - Who taught you to kiss so well?

DAVE

Look here. Practically every time - no, no, let's be downright honest - every time I start something with a woman - I mean, the very first time, nothing happens. (With a dejected air) Isn't that terrible?

MONIQUE

(repeating the word in French, not without a bit of a tease) Terrible.
I hope it's only the first time!

DAVE

Of course it is. I've never told anybody about it. With you, I don't know - I think cards on the table will always be the best policy.

MONIQUE

Cards on the table and the dots on the j's. I get it. (Taking his chin

MONIQUE (cont'd)
and staring at him) Let me look you in the eye, my baby.

DAVE
Baby?

MONIQUE
Baby, yes. A big baby. Why, don't you know that the same terrible, terrible thing that happens to you happens also to any sensitive decent man - since the days of Ramses II? If I ever meet a man who doesn't have that first time reaction, be sure I'll show him the door!

DAVE
(laughing with a sigh of relief) Oh, Monique! Monique the unique!
(Caressing her hair) There is no more love-wisdom in the whole of the Kamasutra than in this adorable little head.

DAVE pushes her on the divan, holding her head with one hand; in such a position he, delicately but persistently, kisses her on the neck, near her left ear. MONIQUE gives two long, sonorous mewings. Immediately a tomoat answers her offstage. MONIQUE sits up suddenly.

MONIQUE
Hell, the Count!

DAVE
Some cat from the neighbourhood?

MONIQUE
No, no, a real Count, Duchesne. I've told you about him!

DAVE
Gosh, he mews as well as you!

The cry of the offstage cat becomes inquisitive, almost anxious. MONIQUE replies with zest, and the male sounds are shy and happy.

MONIQUE
Excuse me, Dave. I couldn't leave him without an answer!

DAVE
This is a hell of a game.

MONIQUE
Not for him! He actually believes I am a she-cat.

DAVE
(looking at her with a smile) And they pitied me so much in New York for the highfaluting intellectual trash I would have to listen to on the

DAVE (cont'd)

Left Bank! (He laughs) You may think it odd, but this feline repartee has calmed my nerves completely. I think this will be the first time that isn't the first time - if you know what I mean!

They both laugh while the lights dim quickly. In the dark the accordion plays the most vibrant part of the waltz.

SCENE IX

The restaurant. MONIQUE enters R. and DAVE enters by the back. Both are singled out by a spotlight.

She is very elegant in black, with gold jewellery, and in spite of the time of the year - marked on the counter by a small Christmas tree - wears an almost spring-like bonnet in dirty pink faille with wild flowers and pastel-coloured velvet ribbons.

DAVE advances towards her and embraces her.

DAVE

Merry Christmas, pussy cat. Oh, you're lovelier than ever. The Army should order every man in Bastogne to come to Paris and see the sight I'm seeing. It'd be the best way for them to get reconciled to life.

MONIQUE

I thought Americans didn't know how to court a woman!

DAVE

I'm not courting you! I'm saying what I feel.

MONIQUE

Mon pauvre amour. One can see in those eyes what you've been through these last weeks.

DAVE

Oh, I've been lucky. Lucky over there, in the middle of disaster, and lucky with you - all the time. To be so happy - no responsibilities, no quarrels - it just doesn't look possible!

MONIQUE

Typical of a Puritan's conscience - to refuse happiness.

DAVE

(laughs) I refuse nothing! For every dinner I buy you, you offer me four at home. I refuse nothing!

MONIQUE

Glad to hear it. I have a dishonest proposition to make you. Let's see whether you refuse it or not.

DAVE

(Laughs) What is it now? You going to buy me a house or something?

MONIQUE

Look me in the eyes, Captain Smith. I'm dead serious. I want you to give me a child. I'd like to say to make me a child, but this language is so limited.

DAVE

(blushes, gives an uncertain laugh) To give you a child. Is that a figure of speech?

MONIQUE

No, no. I'm speaking literally; I want something from you, something I can keep.

DAVE

Something that ories at night and spoils the good times you will have with my successor, eh?

MONIQUE

You're anticipating a lot, aren't you?

DAVE

But there will be a successor, I hope. Don't you remember? Pleasure is necessary to the health of the soul; no regrets, no reproaches - ever. Sheer unbridled pleasure and nothing else.

MONIQUE

Of course there will be no reproaches; I shall keep my word. All the same, I want a child by you, Dave; he will have something to remind me of you; maybe the whites of the eyes, which are bluish in yours. I'll see him at week-ends, and it'll make me terribly happy.

Lightd come up slowly to reveal DUCHESNE as he sits at table next to them. AGENOR is pouring white wine in his glass and Monsieur RICAUD brings him the first course of his dinner.

MONSIEUR

Such an honour to have you as the guest of the house, Monsieur le Comte. I hope this timbale meets with your approval.

DUCHESNE

(sniffing the dish) Hmm. Meow meow. It has such a wonderfully spirited smell -

MONSIEUR R.

You do me honour, Monsieur le Comte.

AGENOR and Monsieur RICAUD bow and go to the back to install themselves on either side of the counter.

DAVE

(smiling at MONIQUE) Apparently, to eat here you've got to be titled.

MONIQUE

Be a little patient! I've given Madame Ricaud the recipe for an egg-nog - I wanted us to have something English this Christmas.

DUCHESNE takes a mouthful from his plate, frowns, wipes his lips with his napkin and drinks a gulp of white wine. Then he dries his lips, clears his throat for a second mouthful and takes it. This time he comes to a decision, shouts in an imperious tone:

DUCHESNE

Ricaud!

MONSIEUR R.

(rushing to him with a gesture of apprehension) Monsieur le Comte! What's the matter?

DUCHESNE

Ricaud. What have you cooked the crayfish tails with?

MONSIEUR R.

Sherry, of course; a very dry, very pale Pedro Domecq.

DUCHESNE

Yes, yes, but of what vintage? The sauce has an unthinkable flavour!

MONSIEUR R.

It must be a 1942 sherry; I think you yourself provided me with it.

DUCHESNE

I thought so. 1942! Unforgivable negligence! 1941 should be the absolute age limit for the sherry to be used; you know that as well as I do! We're practically in 1945, aren't we? On the other hand, the champagne's age is perfect, and if this sauce is at all edible - I won't have it, of course, to serve it to a man like me is an insult! - you may thank the champagne for it.

MONSIEUR R.

What a catastrophe, Monsieur le Comte. I must have lost my head. Not to have looked at the year on the label! Can you ever forgive me?

DUCHESNE

Never! Where's your honour as a chef de cuisine, let alone your dignity as a man? How could you ever permit yourself a slip like this? If things go on in this wretched way, we'll end up eating like the English!

MONSIEUR R.

Forgive me, please forgive me, Monsieur le Comte. You couldn't be more right; but as long as one gourmet like you remains alive in France, the

MONSIEUR R. (cont'd)

Earth will go 'round on its axis. I'm going to prepare another timbale - as perfect as human hands can make it - if you have the kindness and the patience to forgive - and to wait.

MONIQUE

(after following the scene, gets up in an indignant mood) Oh, no. You won't prepare anything, Monsieur Ricaud. I don't care a hoot about your honour as a chef, but where's your dignity as a man? How can you let this dirty dog insult you because the year of the sherry wasn't quite right for the sauce - according to him? The nerve of it! Don't you know the story of Duchesne and his trafficking with the Nazis?

MONSIEUR R.

(congested) Madame Périer! Take care what you say!

DUCHESNE

No, no, no, let her talk, my dear Ricaud. Hell must be packed with ungrateful people, but let them have their say on earth. Were it not for men like me, who have silently sacrificed themselves to keep the torch of civilization aflame in the darkest hours, we would see whether or not on this Christmas eve Madame would be dressed like that, having with her friend the kind of dinner she's going to have here!

MONIQUE

You pig! On Christmas eve, instead of having such an obsession with food, you should be thinking of the people who're starving all over the world!

DUCHESNE

(sweetly) "Pig". You never called me "pig" before, madame. That word tickled me even more than your other insults. It also makes me see how lonely I am on a night such as this. (Raising his voice) Ricaud! Can I eat in your private dining room, please?

MONSIEUR R.

Do you really want to, Monsieur le Comte?

MONIQUE

Yes, away with him! We shouldn't have sights like him before us when the war takes a nasty turn!

DUCHESNE

(gets up, bows to MONIQUE and DAVE) A merry Christmas to you both.

DUCHESNE takes Monsieur RICAUD by the arm and they disappear by the back, R.

MONIQUE

(after a second) I'm sorry I blew my top like that.

DAVE

Holy cow! What temper! You were a real Bastille knitter in action!

MONIQUE

(laughing heartily) Oh, Dave! You take me much too seriously. You mustn't. I'm just like any other Frenchman; liberal in theory but quite conservative in practice, you see.

DAVE

And always full of thoughts.

MONIQUE

That's the trouble; I'm afraid in France we all think too much to be really deep.

DAVE

I need a drink - any kind of drink.

Abruptly DAVE turns his head to the counter.

MONIQUE

That is one of your movements that touches me most.

DAVE

Which one?

MONIQUE

That abrupt way you have sometimes of turning your head.

DAVE

How?

MONIQUE

I don't know. I've seen pansies do it like that -

DAVE

(taken aback) What??

MONIQUE

- and it never fails to touch me.

DAVE

Hell's bells!

MONIQUE

Don't make that face, Dave. It's just an observation.

DAVE

You can keep those observations to yourself. A fine way of flattering your lover! Just after saying to him that you want a child by him!

MONIQUE

Oh, Dave! When will you learn that life is never in black and white?

MONIQUE (cont'd)

Can't you see that gesture of yours makes your virility stand out the rest of the time? What moves me most in life is that *pêle-mêle*, that terrible mixture each one of us is.

DAVE

(in mock irritation) Shut up. All that's too lousy French for me.

MONIQUE

I can imagine. You should be spending this Christmas eve with Betty, n'est-ce-pas?; administrative, alert, allergic Betty; all-American Betty, ever so affectionate.

DAVE

Hey, who told you she's allergic? (A tender conjugal smile as he evokes her) She's a damn good administrator, though. I'm sorry; but you made me think of her.

MONIQUE

Never mind; as a vivandière of the Legion, I know my duty to the soldiers returning from battle. (Drily) I'll make this Christmas as merry as can be for you - in the circumstances.

The gauze drop falls as the lights dim; when they go up, we are again in the street and see the accordionist, in spring attire, a carnation in his buttonhole, go from R. to L. playing the most cheerful part of the waltz and gaily humming it.

SCENE X

The accordionist, of course, is right; it is spring, and as the drop curtain rises and we find ourselves again at MONIQUE's living-room, spring, in the form of tulips and narcissi, is already present there, enlivening the room in two vases and one jug.

On the easel is the sketch of an evening dress in flamboyant red. MONIQUE, in a silk dressing gown, shows up at the back, R., and drags her way to the door of her apartment.

She opens it to reveal DUCHESNE, in a light grey suit with a double-breasted canary waistcoat and canary doeskin gloves. In one hand he carries a thick walking stick and in the other a bouquet of - narcissi and tulips. DUCHESNE puts the stick between his legs, takes his hat off, puts also the bouquet between his legs and finally kisses MONIQUE's hand.

DUCHESNE

Dear Madame Pérrier, how are things? And that morale?

MONIQUE

(shrugging) Oooh! The morale! Not too brilliant. Come in, please.

With his free hand, he gives the bouquet to MONIQUE, who leaves it on the table. After casting a couple of

glances here and there, DUCHESNE notices that his present will prove rather redundant in the room.

DUCHESNE

Oh, I'm sorry. I wanted to bring you a touch of spring, but I see someone has taken the lead.

MONIQUE

(with a light smile) Myself. I am sorry. Anyway, thank you very much for the nice thought.

DUCHESNE

(with a smile of light reproof) It isn't only a thought!

MONIQUE

(laughs) And for the things themselves, too. (She leaves them on the commode) Will you sit down, Monsieur de Duchesne?

DUCHESNE

With pleasure. (He opens a cigarette case) An Abdulla?

MONIQUE

Oh, yes, please; I haven't seen them for ages.

DUCHESNE lights both cigarettes.

DUCHESNE

Well, to the point, my dear lady. Your call has made me immensely happy; I'm literally biting my nails with expectation.

MONIQUE

I'd better add a little word of warning. When people call us, Monsieur le Comte, it is rarely to offer us something.

DUCHESNE

Of course. You think I was born yesterday? I never ended my sentence. I meant to add: "with expectations... of offering my services to you".

MONIQUE

(smiles) Well, to go to the point, as you say. I need a rather important sum. I have a warranty, of course. (DUCHESNE raises his eyebrows) Six months ago, I made the last down payment on this apartment.

DUCHESNE

(opening his eyes wide) Did you really? How very nice for you.

MONIQUE

But naturally, I don't want to mortgage it for such a small sum.

DUCHESNE

Didn't you just say the sum was important?

MONIQUE

Important for me; small for the house.

DUCHESNE

(laughing) All's relative. I see.

MONIQUE

Five hundred dollars, to speak your language.

DUCHESNE

Good. (With a wide smile) Oh, I beg your pardon; your cigarette is out.

He is going to give her a light, when MONIQUE stops him.

MONIQUE

No, thank you. I'm not going to finish it. It has a strange taste - must be the war. Abdullas used to be the best, though. (Unexpectedly rising) Will you excuse me a minute? Suddenly I don't feel too well. Must be the stomach. I'll only be a minute.

She rushes out through the curtain at the back.

DUCHESNE

(talking pensively to himself and casting again quick, furtive glances to R. and L.) A strange taste? And she feels so unwell after a third of a cigarette? Uh-huh. If I'm not wildly off the mark, a little American will be born in Paris in a few months. I must act - and act quickly. (He takes a look around) The apartment is paid for; too good to be true. Even if it weren't - not quite - isn't it legitimate for a man to think of expanding when he can't openly invest his money?

MONIQUE reenters, looking very pale, and he addresses her in cooing tones.

Dear Madame Périer! You don't seem to be in quite good form. Shall I go and let you rest a little?

MONIQUE

No, no. I told you on the phone, it was urgent. Otherwise, I wouldn't have lowered myself as I did, asking you to come.

DUCHESNE bites his lower lip and suddenly, getting nearer MONIQUE, throws a big puff of smoke over her face. Incontinenti she faints in his arms.

DUCHESNE

(holding her like a package, goes on with his calculations) There's no doubt now - a little Captain Smith is on the way. War will be over in a matter of days - the father is leaving, he's told her "No complications" and she's going to get rid of it. But the cal won't give her the

DUCHESNE (cont'd)
money. (Indignant) What a world! (Keeping MONIQUE embraced to him with his left arm and giving little slaps on her cheek with his free hand) Madame Périer, Madame Périer! (There is still no reaction from her, and he lets her fall on the divan, shrugging) Hum. Lot's profit from this little absence to take a look at the premises.

DUCHESNE leaves quickly by the back, lifting the curtain and letting it fall immediately after. For some seconds we hear him hum of stage some bars of the "Dépaysés" waltz, while MONIQUE is still a dead weight on the divan. DUCHESNE reenters.

Oh la la! Dead as a doornail! This looks like twins.

He pats her hands, casting appraising glances around him at the same time.

There should be about 72 square meters all in all; quite an estimable expansion. (Looking at MONIQUE) And she's quite estimable, too - providing she doesn't expand. Dear Madame Périer, I hope you don't mind my taking a little down payment on account?

He gives her a long kiss, but with no reaction from her.

God! This is sheer obstinacy. (Lifting her by the shoulders and keeping her straight before him) Madame Périer! Please come back to earth! Men have discovered no better place yet! (He kisses her earlobe) But what am I doing? This is the time to know the truth.

He imitates the long, plaintive mewling of a tomcat in heat. MONIQUE, obviously still in a dead faint, responds with a shy, restless mewling in her turn.

Uh-huh. I was sure of it. This rounds it up very, very nicely.

Again he gives MONIQUE two or three little slaps.

MONIQUE
(opening her eyes) Where am I?

DUCHESNE
(smiling at her as an actor who receives his first Oscar) Home and in safe company, beautiful neighbour. You're quite all right, and you mustn't worry. Everything has just been solved for you in the best of all possible ways!

Blackout. Several bars of the third part of the waltz are heard in the dark. Lights go up very slowly.

SCENE XII

Again at MONIQUE's apartment, 48 hours later. The mistress of the house is in better shape, and looks very elegant in a black pencil skirt and

a generously-collared tailored jacket of mustard flannel, covered from shoulder to waist with narrow lines of black braid which cross diagonally and end in little tassels, the whole of Goyaesque inspiration. She opens the door and reveals DAVE, who stays there, staring at her in silence.

MONIQUE

Good evening, Captain. Come in, come in. What's the matter? This is V-E day, and you come from the streets as if nothing were happening.

DAVE

And nothing is! Haven't you been out, yourself? People are quite pooped; they walk in silence, like shipwreck victims trying to recognize a strange shore.

MONIQUE

Beautiful image, Captain; but it can't be true.

DAVE

(disregarding her bitterness) Oh, I don't blame them. This is a hell of an anticlimax. I for one shall miss the bombs. You had very few of them here in Paris, you poor people. But they were fantastic. With bombs falling all over, each drink, each kiss could have been the last. Life took on such a zest, the dumbest guy acted like a drugged poet.

MONIQUE

You're talking like one now!

DAVE

Never mind me. (He holds her tighter against him)

MONIQUE

Captain Smith, will you kindly let me breathe a little? It's an old custom of mine I'd like to keep, especially now that peace has come to us.

DAVE releases her and looks at her from a certain distance.

DAVE

How wonderful, the face of defeat.

MONIQUE

Defeat?

DAVE

Yes, your defeat, my darling; the defeat of the woman who used to proclaim: "Pleasure for pleasure's sake; no American sentimentality, please; let's be rational; after all, we're in France, the land where intelligence reigns. Even in the rest of the world, nobody believes in love any longer; sex is all that matters; sex and pleasure." (He gives a sarcastic laugh) Ha! Ha!

MONIQUE slaps him with great gusto, then, hanging from his neck, gives him a passionate kiss.

MONIQUE

Con man. Gangster. (She kisses him again) You're getting the hell out, by your own decision. Behind you, you leave freedom, pleasure, the joy of living - and trade all that for Miles's mumps, the car paid in installments, Betty's ruthless handling of every cent you make, as if she earned it. Coward! You can't wait to rush back to comfort and security, dive straight into your air-conditioned jail, can you? (DAVE kisses her) When are you going? Two weeks, a month from now? When?

DAVE

We don't know yet. Please don't torment yourself.

MONIQUE

Oh, I don't! In my mind I have bade you farewell.

DAVE

Not farewell! I hope not!

MONIQUE

(pushing him away from her) Leave me alone. When you receive a card announcing my marriage you'll see whether it's farewell or not.

There are two knocks on the door; DAVE releases MONIQUE again, and she goes and opens the door. A beatifically drunk CHUCK, his face completely covered by marks of lipstick, smiles at them and extends his arms to MONIQUE.

CHUCK

Long live victory!

MONIQUE

(to DAVE) So people are quite pooped in the streets of Paris, are they?

(To CHUCK) And how do you account for those marks of euphoria?

CHUCK

You mean my facial tattoo? That I got the hard way - forcing women in the street to kiss me. They did it, but without joy, without grace. What a difference with the 24th. August.

DAVE

Be that as it may, you look beaming.

CHUCK

I've got other reasons. Where's the soft one?

MONIQUE

She'll be here any minute now. (She goes to curtained door at the back)

MONIQUE (cont'd)
and, before leaving, asks CHUCK) Want a wet towel?

CHUCK
Nope. Won't clean my face before I become a document for posterity. I must meet a Life Magazine photographer first.

MONIQUE laughs and goes out.
When are you leaving, bud?

DAVE
To-morrow. Have a special chance. Don't say a word to anybody. It's either to-morrow or weeks from now. And you? What are your plans?

CHUCK
I think I'll stick around for a while.

After a small pause, there are more knocks on the door. DAVE opens it. SUZANNE comes in and sees with great surprise CHUCKS' facial decoration.

DAVE
Oh, yes, it's your Chuck all right; the V-E day playboy!

CHUCK
(going to SUZANNE) Baby-baby, I've reserved you the neck - the whole of it.

SUZANNE
(laughs, then says suddenly to CHUCK) What's that bulging in your pockets?

CHUCK
Dave would call it plunder.

He takes from his pockets two enormous wads of notes and throws them on the table.

It's for you, Susie - so that you can take good care of yourself.

MONIQUE reenters, bringing a platter with a bottle of champagne and four glasses.

MONIQUE
What's that? (To CHUCK) Have you assaulted a bank?

DAVE
Worse than that. I'm afraid he must have robbed some German civilians to help Suzanne. I would definitely call it plunder.

SUZANNE
Not plunder, Dave; it's just loot! And all for me! Is it really for me? (Looking at CHUCK) To go to the Jura? It looks like a fortune. (Suddenly very moved) Chuck, you don't have any rouge on your lips; may I?

With extreme care, so that she does not wipe off the other marks, she gives him a long kiss on the mouth.

CHUCK

Oh, shucks. So much fuss about the requisition of two lousy German cars that had escaped the French eye when Leclerc's boys got first to Heidelberg.

DAVE

And the free transportation to Paris - the Air Force facilities - and the sale of the cars over here - how do you call that?

MONIQUE

(giving him a glass and taking him to a corner) And you, dear Captain, how do you call leaving behind, without a word of regret, when she's just about to have an abortion practiced on her, the woman who's lived all these months only to make you happy? Without a word of regret and without a penny for the operation. How do you call that?

DAVE

(lowering his eyes) I call it a stinking thing to do.

MONIQUE

That's better. (Raising her glass) Well, here's to victory!

DAVE

Aux jours heureux!

SUZANNE

Happy times! (She sighs)

CHUCK

Tchin-tchin. Gee, I wish I could make this toast with the champagne of the Roma Wine Co. of California. The ads say it's the best in the world.

DAVE

Are you kidding?

CHUCK

I mean it!

MONIQUE

(smiling) California champagne! How nationalistic can one get?

SUZANNE

(suddenly looks at the banknotes) I would drink it gladly. Roger will be delighted with the news.

At once she bites her lip.

CHUCK

Who the hell's Roger?

SUZANNE

You don't know him. It doesn't matter, really.

CHUCK

No, no, it does. It does to me. Tell me, Monique, who's Roger?

MONIQUE

(to SUZANNE) Tell him! Our glorious liberators are going; this is the hour of truth, anyway. (To CHUCK) Roger is Suzanne's fiancé, you see.

CHUCK

Her fiancé?? Since when?

SUZANNE

Almost since we were children. It'll be eight years come July, Chuck.

She looks down.

CHUCK

Eight years of going steady! And your mother's still worried that they may think you a virgin!

DAVE

(putting his fist against CHUCK's nose) Take care what you say, you bastard.

CHUCK

You don't need your fists, pal; knock me down with a feather if you wish.

DAVE

(to MONIQUE) Have you got a feather?

SUZANNE

Chuck. Don't look at me like that. Some day or other you all had to go, so, while you were there, why shouldn't I've made you happy?

CHUCK

So what?

SUZANNE

So - there was still, between us two, the word I'd given another man.

CHUCK

And you kept your mouth shut. Toujours la politesse!

He takes the wads of banknotes and throws them against the door.

Merde, merde et remerde!

DAVE

Ha! Ha! To complete this inspiring picture of victory and farewell there was one touch missing: to see you here, half drunk and making a fool of yourself! Christ Almighty!

CHUCK gives DAVE an uppercut that makes him fall, throwing down the table - champagne glasses and all.

SUZANNE

Stop it! Stop all this nonsense! You call this love? If that's what love does to people, I'm glad I never fell in love with anybody!

CHUCK

(beside himself) So you don't love your fiancé, but all the same, you're going to marry him! A marriage of reason; so wise and so French! Congratulations!

SUZANNE breaks into sobs.

MONIQUE

I have a feeling that the moment we begin to talk about America and Americans, there'll be nothing intact in this room: not a thing!

CHUCK

Well, you don't have to wait until then! Let's start right now, sister!

He goes to fireplace and takes the Meissen group.

MONIQUE

(taking the china piece from his hands) No, Chuck! Not that! It's the only valuable thing I have! I mean, it has a sentimental value to me. A present from one of my uncles.

CHUCK

I bet you don't even remember his name. Sentimental! Who's sentimental here in Paris? Don't give me that bullshed!

MONIQUE

You're bitter and unjust, Chuck, but I can't blame you. Go ahead, break what you want. But don't insult all and sundry 'cause you feel cheated! Don't think you're the only one who can love here!

She gives him a Sèvres vase with a chipped edge.

For I'm a Parisienne, you see, a typical one, but as sentimental as anybody, and, right this minute, just as heartbroken as you are!

CHUCK

(with tears in his voice) Merde, merde et remerde! The hell with it all!

He breaks the vase against the wall. MONIQUE hands him a small opaline box.

"Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition". Lieutenant Howell M. Forgy, Pearl Harbour, December '41. (To SUZANNE) You won't call this an untime-ly quotation, will you?

CHUCK throws the box against the wall and breaks it. By now DAVE, still slightly groggy, is on his feet. Stumbling towards CHUCK, he lands a blow near his ear, making him fall in his turn. SUZANNE kneels and helps CHUCK to sit on the floor. Still stupefied,

he gives her an engaging smile, partly due to the whisky he has drunk and partly to the blow he has just received.

SUZANNE

Chuck. Is this what we've been waiting for - and dreaming of?

CHUCK

Dave, you son of a bitch, you've got a first-class fist. You've shaken me and woken me up for ever, you son of a bitch. Take me with you in that New York plane that leaves to-morrow.

MONIQUE

(to DAVE) Surprise, surprise. So it is to-morrow you're leaving, isn't it? And you just said you didn't know when. "Don't torment yourself". How brave and noble of you. Go away, then! Away with you!

She gives him a really hard slap.

Now, this very minute! I don't want to see your snout ever again!

DAVE

Well, this is all right as an outburst, pussy cat; but - where's the second part?

CHUCK

What? You want a second part?

DAVE

(closing his eyes) Yes. The kiss that comes after every slap of hers.

MONIQUE

You'll have to do without it this time. Or any other time! Away from here! I can't stand the sight of you!!

DAVE

All right. (Lifting CHUCK and taking him by the arm) Come on, boy, let's beat it.

CHUCK

(while DAVE opens the door and, seeing that he is about to fall flat on his back, takes him by the collar of his tunic and drags him off-stage) One last quotation, Mlle. Lamolle. What did General MacArthur say when he left Corregidor? Three memorable words: "I shall return!" Remember that!

Lights dim slowly and two spots concentrate on the faces of MONIQUE and SUZANNE, who seem to look out to the future with apprehension. Two other spotlights show us downstage R. the faces of DAVE and CHUCK, who have similar expressions of anxiety. The waltz's leit-motiv is beginning to spin when one last spot shows us, at stage center, the face of DUCHESNE who, looking out to the audience, gives us a mysterious smile.

CURTAIN

Part II

"Andante ma non molto maestoso"

The main body of the scenery, composed of MONIQUE's small living-room and a part of the RICAUD's restaurant, remains the same.

New additions are a section of the SMITH's living room in Long Island, New York, and a tiny office at the American PK where CHUCK PETERS reigns in Frankfurt. For a snappy change of scenes a revolving stage would be ideal, but faute de mieux, each new piece of scenery can be brought on-stage on sliding cars and left at either side of it.

At the back of DAVE and BETTY's living room there are two doors, one leading to the street and the other to the kitchen. Shelves full of books and "bric-à-brac" line the walls between them, and downstage a circular sofa, divided in three parts and covered with a synthetic material in a violent turquoise hue, stands out facing a kidney-shaped table full of bottles and glasses, as well as smoking accessories.

On the left side of the sofa is one of those pseudo-Japanese modern lamps whose white globes hang from metal wires and can be raised or lowered at will. Discernible among the books is a reproduction of Van Gogh's inevitable sunflowers, later to be replaced by a Georgia O'Keeffe.

In CHUCK's office are a big desk with two piles of metal drawers flanked by telephones, and a mountain of papers in the middle. CHUCK sits at this centre of operations on a wide revolving chair. At the back, a door frame and an enlarged photograph of President Truman hang from wires over a black backcloth.

PROLOGUE

The accordion plays an animated theme as the curtain rises on DAVE's apartment, but one look at the master of the house, who sits at one end of his turquoise sofa, is enough for us to see that this peacetime "andante" is far less "maestoso" than he would like to admit.

Through the dark, piercing the fake moonlight of the spot that singles out DAVE, a naked feminine arm thrusts a letter at him. It is his wife's, Betty, to be revealed by the sarcasm that adds a metallic element to her voice.

BETTY

That's for you, darling. Damn those Parisiennes. They never let go, do they? I bet this lady of the violet scent doesn't know yet we're reunited. Well, tell her, darling. Why keep alive the illusions of that poor wretch after all these months?

DAVE takes the letter and, as someone hiding an incriminating proof, hurriedly puts it in his shirt pocket. He pretends to concentrate on the papers in his hands, but after two or three seconds turns his head and, apparently reassured that BETTY is no longer there, takes the letter out of his pocket, opens the envelope and reads it.

A sudden nostalgia for Paris takes hold of him and is well underlined by the accordion playing the "Prelude and Fugue" waltz. Soon afterwards his expression

changes, and a broad smile lights up his face.

After reading six or seven more lines, DAVE giggles, but the sound of his own laughter alarms him and makes him again turn his head in search of BETTY.

She is no longer there, of course, but DAVE plucks up enough courage to summon her - in a lowered, mouse-like, utterly conjugal voice.

DAVE

Betty!

There is no answer, and encouraged by the silence, he raises his voice a little.

BETTY!

Silence again. DAVE heaves a sigh of relief, recovers his calm and goes on reading MONIQUE's letter. He has not gone through six more lines when a spasm of jealousy abruptly distorts his placid expression.

That Count, an ardent lover? Ha! Ha! Ha! She says that only to tease me! Ardent lover! I'd like to see him at work in bed!

SCENE XIII

The accordion gives an emphatic echo to DAVE's spiteful words by playing the last bars of its march. The spot lighting him goes off, while the lights at MONIQUE's apartment in Paris slowly come up to reveal the new splendour introduced in the small living room by DUCHESNE after his marriage to his "beautiful neighbour".

The coffee table facing the divan is now an Italian piece with gilded legs and a green marble top; the earthenware jug where MONIQUE put flowers has become a heavy baccarat vase; on the mantelpiece there stands an ornate brass clock and two brass amphoræ with plates of white china over which there are engraved brilliant garlands of enamel flowers and birds; the china figures on the shelves are choice Meissen and Capodimonte; the divan has an elegant loose cover in flowered chintz and the new curtain at the door at R. is made of rich, heavy apple green satin, with golden tassels.

Only the easel on which MONIQUE used to leave her drawings is the same as in Part I, although, to indicate the present recess in her activities, it is now empty.

MONIQUE herself, standing before the fireplace mirror, where she is purring on a collar of pink paste diamonds, wears an evening dress of white satin, with big "paniers" on the side and the slightest intention of a train. Her "décolleté" is bold enough to accentuate the glory of her bosom, and the collar, in its turn, underlines the purity of her neckline.

Enter DUCHESNE in tails, with a cloak lined in red satin and a silk hat in his hand.

DUCHESNE

You look wonderful, pussy cat. How do you feel?

MONIQUE

(looking at her skirt) Fine, darling; almost as fine as these rags I'm wearing.

DUCHESNE

I don't find words to express my pleasure. (Kissing her shoulder) True love, you know, is always dumb, almost paralytic.

MONIQUE

True love! You married me for the apartment!

DUCHESNE

Exactly. I have a true love for your apartment; as for you - I admire you, I revere you, I have a constant desire for you. Quite a different story. God preclude my feeling any true love for you; it would soon vanish, as all loves do; whereas this thing, now, is indestructible. It makes me shy, too; I don't really know what to say when I'm alone with you. (He kisses her other shoulder) I can only hope that flowers do the talking for me.

He takes a small bouquet of violets from one pocket in his cloak.

MONIQUE

(laughs) Come now, Bibi! What can violets say? Don't you know they are notorious for their modesty? But now that winter approaches, I for one could listen to the voice of mink, you know. Mink can be really eloquent at times.

DUCHESNE

Good God! Mink! Can you see me giving a mink coat, not to my lawfully wedded wife, but to any "petite amie"? A man of my position? Preposterous. A mink coat's all right for a starving student to give to his girl; for him it means an unattainable luxury, something he must swindle and steal for, disgracing himself for ever. But for me! Can you see a man like me actually buying mink? How unspeakably vulgar!

MONIQUE

It may be vulgar, but it's warm, and here in Paris no woman has bought a new coat since 1935. I feel cold, because I'm tired.

DUCHESNE

Don't tell me that, pussy cat. You know that nothing excites me more than a languid woman.

MONIQUE

At your age, Bibi, it's indecent to say things like that.

DUCHESNE

(laughs, then draws her to him and kisses her) What age? Dear Countess, do you by any chance notice my age when I make love to you?

MONIQUE

No, but if you go on at that rate, people will soon notice mine.

DUCHESNE

Ha! Ha! Ha! Priceless girl! You really do know how to flatter a man!

MONIQUE

Hmm. I wish you'd slipped in the bathtub and lost a child as I did; a big boy, quite finished in every detail, too! You would see then what's what!

DUCHESNE

You poor pussy cat. You poor, poor thing! Go look at yourself in the big mirror; put a last touch of lipstick, and out we go, to arrive at the ball with British punctuality.

MONIQUE

(going to curtained door back) How many minutes do you give me?

DUCHESNE

(looking at his watch again) Fifteen, not one more.

MONIQUE

All right, tomcat. Ta-ta for now.

DUCHESNE

(with the enigmatic smile of his big moments) So long, puss. (Exit MONIQUE)
As long as half an hour, if I know cats.

He follows MONIQUE to the door, is reassured that she actually goes over to her boudoir, takes out of his trouser pocket three wads of five thousand franc bills, presses a button on the wall and makes one of the shelves revolve, revealing a big wooden box inside. After opening it with a key, DUCHESNE feverishly inspect its contents. His first look at it is a look of mistrust; his second, one of alarm. Then he takes a wad of notes out of the box and, wetting his forefinger and thumb, he counts the bills with fantastic speed. Then he looks inside the box.

Ten, twelve, fifteen. They're all there, thank God.

After kissing the wad of notes he has extracted from the box, DUCHESNE caresses repeatedly the bill on top; as he does so, his expression of ecstasy is so intense, it looks as if he were having an orgasm. It is rather embarrassing to see, and one would feel like turning one's eyes away from him had not theatre tickets such steep prices as they have these days. (There is absolutely no question of missing anything.)

Suddenly DUCHESNE realizes that his inspecting job has taken longer than he thought. He quickly shuts the box, locks it, puts it in its place, presses the button and closes the shelf. As he does this, MONIQUE's voice comes from behind the curtained door.

MONIQUE

Bibi!

DUCHESNE stumbles; he must grab the mantelpiece with both hands not to fall. As she enters, MONIQUE surprises him in that position.

What's the matter?

DUCHESNE

I almost had a heart attack, darling. A woman who's ready to go out in five minutes -

MONIQUE

(laughs) Come on, let's go. I like to be punctual.

DUCHESNE

You do? (Shaking his head) I wish I'd known that. This is our first outing together; so, to be on the safe side, I've taken the precaution of making all clocks and watches in the house 45 minutes fast - an extra margin of time.

MONIQUE

Forty five minutes? What on earth am I going to do here, if I can't even sit in this dress?

DUCHESNE

Oh, the dress. Well, we can take it off for a while, darling Minou; this is one of the domestic chores I really excel in. Then... well, then... we can use our imagination, can't we?

DUCHESNE kisses her on the shoulder again. MONIQUE laughs; then, awake to love's playful ways, she mews with great relish. DUCHESNE repeats his own mewing; the shy, inquisitive, inimitably poetic, Walt-Disney-like mewing we have come to expect of him. Blackout.

SCENE XIV

Lights come up lingeringly on DAVE's living room to find him worked up in a rage as he finishes reading MONIQUE's letter.

DAVE

Ardent lover! That's some joke!

The door chimes stir. DAVE puts the letter in one of his pockets, goes to the door, opens it, picks up a parcel, signs the piece of paper which is handed to

him with it and returns it with a quarter coin. While he does this BETTY enters R., stops, puts her arms akimbo and looks at him with a raised eyebrow. BETTY is a slightly raucous-voiced blonde who soon shall step out of her twenties; slim, economical of gesture and very direct, for all the pleasant fragility of her aspect.

BETTY

Just a minute. It must be a mistake. I didn't do any shopping this week.

DAVE dismisses the invisible messenger with a wave of the hand, closes the door and faces his wife.

DAVE

No mistake here, honey; it's from Bergdorf Goodman and says quite clearly "Mrs. Betty L. Smith".

BETTY

Then there must be some other Betty L. Smith in Great Neck. Or maybe in Manhasset. Look at it. (But he doesn't, and so BETTY becomes suspicious)
Unless - unless -

The flicker of a smile floats over DAVE's lips.

David Augustus Smith!!! Is this is another of your presents, I'll return it right now! Miles needs sweaters for the winter. The chairs need new covers; and our poor dog needs a fur coat.

DAVE

How about you?

BETTY

I certainly don't. I always go out in your overheated car, and between one overheated shop and the next, I only take a couple of steps in the open. Furs are an absolute waste on me!

DAVE

(after a pause) But aren't you going to open the parcel? (Another pause)
Not even out of curiosity?

BETTY

I see. This is all your own doing; don't you dare deny it. And I bet it's a mink coat, too. (Furious) Mink, the last thing on earth I'd want for myself! (Raising her voice) Give me that!

She receives the parcel from DAVE's hands, unties the frilly knot of pink silk ribbon at one corner of the box and takes out a... sumptuous mink coat.

Blue mink! And wild, too! Mink with all the aggravations! Well, what does this mean? (Silence) Speak! Say something!

DAVE

(moussily) Well, honey, it's just what the ads always advise you to do: "Say it with flowers - say it with perfume - say it with milk".

BETTY

What the hell's the matter with words?

DAVE

Gee, honey, we are in the atomic era, as newspapermen call it. Can you conceive a man of this era saying to his wife "I love you" - unless he's drunk or drugged or dying?

BETTY

Of course I can conceive it! Women will never, never tire of hearing it - in all the eras to come! It's incredible that after all these years together, you still don't know what really gives me pleasure. If you had come in an hour ago with a small bunch of violets in your hand and whispered in my ear "I love you, honey", you would have made me one thousand times happier than I am with these insulting furs!

DAVE

(taking her by the arms and shaking her) All right. I love you. I LOVE YOU! God-damn it, I LOVE YOU!!!

BETTY

(pushing him away) You brute! Is that what your Paris girl friend taught you?

DAVE

(tearing the coat from her hand and dropping it on the sofa) I don't need lessons from any female. And don't worry about those lousy pelts: I'll return them!

BETTY

You would have to, anyway! How did you expect to pay for them?

DAVE

Oh, Christ, who cares about that? Money's made to roll along, to be spent and enjoyed by everybody!

BETTY

You swore to me -

DAVE

I know I did. I only wanted to mark the raise I got at the office.

BETTY

A raise?? Oh. Why didn't you start by saying that?

DAVE

Really!

BETTY

How much is it? Tell me.

DAVE

Oh, five hundred bucks.

BETTY

Well - Spread over the whole year, it's not much, is it?

DAVE

You crazy? It's five hundred a month!

BETTY

What??

DAVE

You realize the difference? I do; that's why I bought you the coat. On credit, naturally. For after all, what is that coat but a symbol of our climb up the social ladder? A symbol, that's what it is. And what did those pelts try to tell you? "Dave's made it, he's made it; he's a vice-president!"

BETTY takes the coat and caresses the fur.

BETTY

Really? Oh, darling! (A pause) My dearest darling! I can't believe it!

DAVE

And so here I go, out on the wilds of Manhattan, to the quest of my first ulcer!

BETTY

(laughing and embracing him) Oh, Dave! Why didn't you tell me the coat was a symbol? I've always respected symbols immensely. I'll wear the coat all my life, even if it puts me on a par with Hollywood prosties. Nothing like a worthwhile sacrifice to make one really happy, darling!

SCENE XV

Lights dim slowly on the ensuing conjugal clinch. Three invisible characters cross the stage in the dark, running. Each of them carries a placard over which a number is painted in phosphorescent colours; and so "1946", "1947" and "1948" rush before our eyes, like so many almanach leaves.

As the lights come up on the RICAUD's restaurant, Madame RICAUD is behind the counter and Madame LAMOLLE faces her. Somewhat plumper than the last time we saw her, Madame RICAUD sticks to the same historical hair-do she wore then; but the velvet ribbon round her neck has been replaced by a five-tier custom necklace of big pearls - pink, grey and brown - tied on the nape of the neck with a brown velvet ribbon.

Madame LAMOLLE, on the other hand, has undergone an amazing transformation. Under the sun of the Riviera, her grey skin has acquired a pink salmon tone,

and under other influences her grey hair has become a crown of golden locks redolent of Shirley Temple's glorious childhood. Over this success of modern chemistry Madame LAMOLLE is wearing a big red rose, held on the head by a net.

On one of the black velvet lapels of her black wool tailored suit Madame LAMOLLE has pinned another success of modern chemistry: a dazzling polymeric star of paste glass which looks somewhat better than the real thing. Her handbag, gloves and shoes, all in black calf, are other discreet though unmistakable symptoms of her present prosperity.

MME. LAMOLLE

Dear Madame Ricaud, I'm sorry to bother you at these hours, but Suzanne has sent me a note asking me to meet her here.

MADAME R.

Oh, no bother. I'm glad to welcome a French face now and then, you know. Only bloody foreigners seem to be able to afford eating here.

MME. LAMOLLE

It's dreadful, I know. After all the sacrifices we made in wartime! And with all the millions of dollars Americans give us every day; how many? nine?...

MADAME R.

Give us? Lend us, you mean. Those ones never give away anything - at least officially - is they don't take double in return.

MME. LAMOLLE

We don't give anything away either, do we? But as I was saying, after all our sacrifices, we're worse off than in 1940.

MADAME R.

How true. (Raising her eyes to the ceiling) Take your case, for instance; you pay a rent of three thousand a month and have to charge eighty thousand to the people who rent your apartment. (Hypocritically) It must be a terrible weight on your conscience, my poor friend.

MME. LAMOLLE

Oh! That is nothing compared to the violence it causes me to have to come every three months and put my tenants in the street. That really breaks my heart. Of course, if I didn't put them in the street, they would put me!

MADAME R.

They can't!

MME. LAMOLLE

Yes they can. If two neighbours testify someone has lived in the same place for three full months, the place is his to rent. And if they do that to me, good-bye Riviera!

MADAME R.

(sarcastically) Oh, well, that at least would be a relief for you, my poor friend. To live in the Riviera! What an ordeal for a woman born in Paris!

MME. LAMOLLE

Yes; it means living far away from my daughter, too! Terrible! But if I stayed there - I couldn't eat. That would be terrible, too.

MADAME R.

Of course. But there must be some little compensations for you all the same. Look at you! In three years you have taken twenty off your shoulders. And that hair... what colour is it now?

MME. LAMOLLE

(extremely annoyed) I don't quite know. It's Jean-Loup's idea, you know.

MADAME R.

Oh! So there is a Jean-Loup. I should have imagined it. Congratulations, Madame Lamolle.

MME. LAMOLLE

(sighing) He's thirty one, a teeny-weeny bit young for me. And there's another handicap - he's Polish. But he's a serious boy, faithful and generous as they come.

MADAME R.

On your eighty thousand a month, he can afford to be generous, for sure.

MME. LAMOLLE

Don't make fun of me, Madame Ricaud. This is a serious situation. If they hadn't frozen the rents, they ought to have frozen me!

MADAME R.

Not too bad an idea when the worst comes to the worst, ma chère. My Agónor says that the day will come when man, disgusted with the world, shall be able to put himself under ice, asking to be awakened a century later.

MME. LAMOLLE

A century later it will be much much worse, believe me.

SUZANNE runs in from R. in a wide grey coat, tall black boots, a knitted grey woollen cap with a big tassel hanging from it and matching grey gloves. Without saying a word, she runs out, back.

Suzanne! What's this? Where are you going?

After a small pause, she raises her voice.

Suzanne!!

There is no reply from SUZANNE. A kind of answer comes, though, in the shape of CHUCK, who enters R., in an

olive trench coat, cap in hand, hair in disorder, panting and sweating as a man who has been running like mad - a truly pathetic sight.

He takes his coat off and throws it on the floor. On tiptoe, with arms raised at shoulder height, he does a breathing exercise by raising his arms vertically over his head while he inhales air; then, in the same vertical position, lowering them down to his thighs while he noisily exhales the air and imperceptibly flattens his feet on the floor.

MADAME R.

Monsieur Chuck! (He nods) What's the matter? What do you think you're doing? (He shakes his head) Can't you breathe? Do you want me to call for an iron lung? (He shakes his head again)

MME. LAMOLLE

Perhaps we can do the mouth to mouth with him - as they do with the drowned.

Without interrupting his frantic gymnastics, he gives her a terrified glance, although he does not recognize her.

MADAME R.

(to Madame LAMOLLE) I think only your daughter can help. She must come out and see him, for Heaven's sake.

Madame RICAUD leads Madame LAMOLLE offstage, back.

Some seconds later SUZANNE reenters and addresses CHUCK without giving him one single glance.

SUZANNE

Chuck, why on earth have you followed me now? What do you expect from me, what do you want? I've just been to the Town Hall with my fiancé; we're getting married on the 8th., you see -

CHUCK

(who has just exhaled) Roger!

SUZANNE

No, it isn't Roger. We broke off two weeks after V-E Day, when he had just returned from Salzburg.

CHUCK, who has his hands up when she says that, takes them to his head, which he shakes in disbelief, from left to right and viceversa, while SUZANNE nods hers with no less persistence.

While Roger was in London he hated it, but once in Paris he was dying to go back there. And back he is, working as a BBC announcer and married to an English girl who looks like Fernandel.

CHUCK

(about to inhale air once more) Then (he points at SUZANNE) with whom...?

SUZANNE

(while CHUCK goes through with his routine) Mo? With a solid, quiet businessman of forty; just what I need, Chuck.

Exhaling air, CHUCK makes more noise than ever and, once the last drop is out of his lungs, lets out a sob that paralyzes him for a second.

Chuck! Don't stay like that; go on, go on, for Heaven's sake! You haven't caught your breath yet!

He resumes his exercises.

This isn't fair of you. I wrote you six letters from the Jura. They were all returned unopened. What did you want me to do, to wait for you till Doomsday?

Madame LAMOLLE enters, back, and SUZANNE addresses her directly.

Without beating about the bush, which is something I hate, I'd like you to know that Thierry and I got a marriage license this afternoon.

MME. LAMOLLE

You did what?

SUZANNE

You heard me! And all you may say to dissuade me will be useless.

MME. LAMOLLE

Then, what is this character doing here?

CHUCK falls onto a chair.

SUZANNE

He's run after me for blocks and blocks. He's breathless.

MME. LAMOLLE

(looking at CHUCK) A fine shield you've brought to protect yourself while you shoot your news at me!

SUZANNE

Leave him alone a minute or two; that's all he needs.

Madame RICAUD reenters with a tall glass full of a brownish liquid, which she puts straight away into CHUCK's hands.

MADAME R.

Here, lieutenant. Have a Coke. It kills ants, but it revives Americans, I understand.

CHUCK gulps the glass and, indeed, the beverage seems to have a magic effect on him.

CHUCK

(to SUZANNE, in a crescendo of despair) Oh, baby. I've been looking all over Paris for you; three days of a blind, wild chase. Look at me, please, at least look at me! Heaven is against me, we know that; but you, you should show me some mercy!

Madame RICAUD discreetly leaves again, back, but Madame LAMOLLE remains to watch with majestic condescension the unorthodox meeting of the two lovers. CHUCK lowers his voice.

Your concierge told me you were still in Paris - not married yet - but she didn't give me your present address. At the Actor's Association they had your old one; I went to Monique's and she's doing a film in London; I came here and it was closing day. I've been running against Fate all the time, without knowing it - like a man who gets on a plane where someone has put a time bomb. And when I find you, when I find you at last, it is to learn you've just taken a marriage license! It's too unfair for words, God damn it! There's no bloody justice in this world!

CHUCK throws his cap on the floor.

MME. LAMOLLE

No need to despair; she's not married yet.

CHUCK

(recognizing her at last) Mother!

SUZANNE

She never was your mother, Chuck, and never will be, never! I'll marry Thierry if the world blows to pieces!

MME. LAMOLLE

And blow it will, don't you worry; that character only intends to split us apart for ever.

SUZANNE

Can you blame him? For God's sake, mother. He's a serious man, and a serious man wants a serious homo. He would never take home to live with him a mother-in-law who, well on in her fifties -

MME. LAMOLLE

Shhh!

SUZANNE

- starts dying her hair pink and studying Polish by correspondence!

MME. LAMOLLE

And you dare blame me for that? Blame rather the war, the post-war, the times we live in! (To CHUCK) I was all right with my grey hair and grey

MME. LAMOLLE (cont'd)
face and grey life. But life, apart from being grey, became so horribly expensive I was forced out of this city into a place where the sun shines all the time. And what with the sun shining and some extra francs in my purse, how could I help changing? (To SUZANNE) Only the bourgeois cannot change; and you can say what you will about me, but accuse me of being a bourgeois.

SUZANNE
That's the whole trouble, mother. I want to be a bourgeois. I've been pining for a conventional home, with people who think like everybody else-

MME. LAMOLLE
And who, whenever their mother comes home, charge her for every phone call she makes. I know the kind of place. The daughter charges her mother, and the mother charges her daughter when she returns her visit. Sordid, contemptible people.

CHUCK
(to SUZANNE) Never mind. I have enough money for us to install ourselves in a big house, with one wing devoted to bourgeois living and the other, run by your mother if she likes, to existentialism.

SUZANNE
Indeed! And how would you manage? Nobody's as rich as all that at 26!

CHUCK
I can manage. I know the ropes now. All the people who want black-market things from the Army have taught me one little lesson or other. I did it for your sake, 'cause I loved you. And all the time I've been faithful to you - (lowering his voice) even when I thought I'd forgotten you.

SUZANNE
So what? When will you learn that you can never impose your love on anybody?

She runs out R.

CHUCK
(following her) Baby! Listen to me!

MME. LAMOLLE
(shouting) Don't waste your time! No one will make her change her mind now! I know her as if I had brought her into this world! (Lowering her voice, to herself) My God! What am I talking about? I have brought her into this world! (A naughty laugh) Only - I'd like to see the face my Jean-Loup would make if he knew that!

Blackout. By playing the refrain from the Valse des dépayés the accordion underlines the sentimental tension of the moment. A spotlight searches for the accordionist, spots him on stage and follows him for a couple of steps. Then it flutters about until it surprises the figure of MONIQUE, sitting at a secretaire in her living room, wrapped in a romantic brown velvet dressing gown with a large lace collar.

SCENE XVI

MONIQUE is writing a letter and repeating the syllables she writes as the pen runs over the paper.

MONIQUE

"fu-ti-li-ty". (She rereads the sentence she has just finished) "Believe me, for all the contracts I get, all the limelight, and Duchesno's endless bouts of love-making, life, without the delicious toothpaste your lips had, is an affair of stupefying futility".

She leaves the pen on the secretaire and turns over the sheet of paper to find the beginning of the letter, which she also reads aloud.

"Dave darling". (To herself) I don't care what he thinks when he reads this. It's true, true! Saying it is a relief! (Reading through) "For three months now I haven't got as much as a post-card from you, in spite of which I'm devoting you my first spare afternoon in a long time. The living room you know so well is very changed, and so's my life - let alone Paris. Existentialism seems to be a pretext for Paris people to get dirtier, more cynical and worse-tempered than ever. Poor Kierkegaard! If he only knew where his theories have led the French youth!

The weather is so bad all the time as in London. Tourists have a puzzled look, as if spring in the Champs-Élysées were just another publicity stunt of the American Express. I wonder how much longer they will keep on coming. The grey of Paris's façades seems to have seeped into people's lives; after one and a half centuries of accumulating dirt, one can bet anything those façades will never be washed anew. When the grey turns to pitch-black, I'm sure I shall die, my darling, thinking that you're laughing in the sunshine, with no problems of any kind, because in your blessed land people are rich, young and happy forever!"

SCENE XVII

As MONIQUE says "problems of any kind", lights start to dim in her area and to come up on DAVE's living room in Great Neck. At this very moment

BETTY's bad temper has got the best of her, playing havoc with her hair, which falls in disorderly locks over her forehead. She addresses DAVE in staccato tones - a DAVE who remains obstinately invisible to us.

BETTY

As if you had ever cared what kind of education Miles gets, or what people think of me! In the three years we've lived here in Long Island I've always gone alone to those parents-teachers meetings, as if I were the mother of a bastard!

DAVE

(shouting offstage) Count yourself happy it's happened that way! The day I decide to attend one of those meetings, I'll give such a piece of my mind to those morons, that you'll be for ever repent - !

But BETTY drowns the rest of DAVE's sentence in the frenzy of a jazz-playing clarinet she providentially finds on the ether as she tunes in the radio at full blast. A few seconds of pandemonium follow before the chimes of the street door are heard.

BETTY goes to the door, opens it and reveals a tall, broad-shouldered, dark man it takes some time for us to recognize as the M.P. in Scene II.

Since the jazz tune goes on at a deafening pitch, STEVE has to shout his name in BETTY's ear. She nods, extends her arms, tosses her head slightly backwards, closes her eyes and opens her mouth. Quick on the uptake, STEVE gives her a long kiss; then he closes the door and turns off the radio.

BETTY

Sit down, make yourself at home. What did you say your name was?

STEVE

(sprawling on the sofa and letting his head lean on a cushion) Steve, Steve Mo.Kay. I used to work for Dave's father, you know.

BETTY

Oh.

STEVE

My, am I glad to be in America! Only in Germany could one get a welcome kiss like yours. German women are the best, really.

BETTY

How about the French?

STEVE

Don't care much for them. The Parisiennes give a sexual meaning to kissing. Imagine!

BETTY

It takes all sorts to make a world.

They laugh. DAVE bursts like a maelstrom into the room, shouting:

DAVE

What the hell do you mean, tuning the radio at that...?

As he sees STEVE, DAVE halts. STEVE sits up as if moved by a wire spring.

STEVE

(warmly) You old son of a bitch! How's life?

DAVE

By golly, this must be ghosts' week. You're the fourth of the boys I haven't seen since Europe who materialize all at once. How are you?

STEVE

Better since last time, to be sure. Boy, that was a binge, that was!

DAVE

Which, yours or mine? Don't quite remember.

STEVE

Neither do I! Only know the whole thing started at the Ritz and that the next morning we woke up in Brussels.

He and DAVE laugh. STEVE sprawls on the sofa again.

BETTY

Then you both got plastered!

STEVE

It's quite possible. (Looks smilingly at DAVE) What a son of a bitch! That night I really understood him for the first time.

BETTY

I hope it wasn't for the first and the last!

STEVE

Well, it all depends on him. He's the difficult, the different one. (Looking at the ceiling) With things as they are in the world, and now we're neighbours in Great Neck, I came over to see where he stands - generally speaking.

BETTY

(to DAVE) You see? I told you your ideas would finally put us in a jam.

DAVE frowns. There is a short pause.

DAVE

(slowly) Darling, before jumping to conclusions we should know what did actually bring this gentleman to the house.

He says "gentleman" without the smile that might make the word plausible. As STEVE continues looking at the ceiling, BETTY takes thumb and forefinger to the corners of her mouth and pushes them up, indicating to DAVE that he should smile.

STEVE

Dave, did you know I've spent the last three years in Germany?

DAVE

Yeah. My old man told me so when we visited him last month in Vermont.

STEVE

You should see it now, Dave boy. Goodness, how fast these people recover! What plumbing! What beer! What women! And how sturdy they are. Three men a night - six - ten - they can take anything in their stride. (Looking at BETTY) Oh, I beg your pardon.

BETTY

Go on, don't mind me. The anthropological findings of our soldiers have always fascinated me.

DAVE

(ironically) Tell me, Steve. What's brought you to the house?

STEVE

(sitting up on sofa again) I think you need help, Dave boy, and I'm bringing you some. I want you to join our new Veterans' Federation - Long Island chapter. When you think of all the traitors and subversive characters at large among us -

DAVE

So! That's what you wanted to come to. Treason and subversion. A subject very much in the air right now. You're quite right, too; there are millions and millions of subversive characters in America.

BETTY

(with a false giggle) Millions and millions! Now honey, let's not exaggerate!

DAVE

I don't. Where in history has the world seen a dictatorship of the proletariat such as we have over here? Last winter was one of the bitterest in Europe's history, wasn't it? Some of our newspapers decided that all the cows in England had died; they told us too that in the Alps most villages perished under one avalanche or the other; that in unheated shops assistants were serving the public wrapped in blankets. And many people believed all that, including some of the characters who secretly run the mining unions. Then one of them must have told the others: "The hell with Europe!

DAVE (cont'd)

Let it die of cold! Let it sink! Let's go on strike again so that they don't receive one single lump of coal! At the same time, we'll show the President of the U.S.A. who's the real boss here!" They had their reasons, too; their parents never had a chance in the ghettos and slums of a still feudal Europe, and, not unnaturally, they got quite a following. And that's the only dictatorship of the proletariat the world shall ever see.

STEVE

A reasonable caricature of the truth, if I may say so.

DAVE

(with a stony face) It's the truth, and nothing but, brother!

STEVE

(after a longish pause, shaking his head) Bejesus, I didn't want to believe it, but you leave no room for doubt.

DAVE

What didn't you want to believe, what?

STEVE

That you were an egghead.

BETTY

(making light of his statement) What an unkind slander. Dave has a completely round head. (To STEVE) Look; it's really a lovely shape.

STEVE

(unpleasantly) Very funny. His head may be as round as a ball, but he reasons like one of those God-damn intellectuals who are such a danger to our country.

DAVE roars with laughter.

BETTY

(nervously, to STEVE) Oh, Steve, don't you know him? He'll never be a member of any association, or club, or federation or anything. We've been living here for three years, and do you think I've succeeded once in taking him to one single P. T. A. meeting? Never!

STEVE

Christ Almighty! What's wrong with attending meetings and exchanging ideas with people?

DAVE

This; that they don't exchange ideas; only prejudices. It's as bad a way as any other for them to run away from the utter emptiness of their lives. I don't need that. I'll never find enough time to be alone - and indulge my solitary vice of thinking!

STEVE

And you admit it just like that! Boy, I admire your courage.

DAVE

We all need lots of it those days. With courage, you needn't be afraid of what other people think of you. Or of any kind of witch-hunting organized by any group of ignorant, petty reactionaries. Tell that to the boys of your Federation.

STEVE

You crazy? That would be the end of you!

Again DAVE roars with laughter.

BETTY

Go on, laugh your head off. That's how much you care about Miles and me!

DAVE

A society that may punish you or my son for my way of thinking isn't worth giving up an inch of one's convictions.

STEVE

All right. I think that settles it. (He gets up and addresses BETTY) Good night, honey. It was grand meeting you. By the way, what did you say your name was?

BETTY

Betty.

STEVE

Oh. (He kisses her on the mouth) Take care- and be careful, Betty honey. I'm afraid you'll have to.

He opens the door and slams it shut.

DAVE

(quietly) Please bring some ice at once for a Martini. If you don't hurry up, I'll dispose of the gin bottle as it is!

BETTY

I hope not by smashing it against the door, as you did last week. I understand how you feel; but please remember that these days Gordon's comes as high in price as Scotch.

Blackout. Not without irony, the accordion plays vibrantly the march we have already heard.

SCENE XVIII

After some seconds, lights come up and CHUCK's office in Frankfurt. Over his desk, simultaneously with the frame of a door and Truman's photograph over the backcloth, is lowered one of those round green lamps that

generally adorn billiard pools. CHUCK sits with his feet on the desk. He has several sheets of paper in both hands, and with his shoulder holds the telephone receiver against his ear.

CHUCK

(talking with irresistible authority) Hell, no, that was quite clear from the start, and don't you try to pull any wool over my eyes, 'cause you'll be sorry. They have to buy two can of peanuts to get one of coffee; those are the regulations. (A pause) What regulations? My own regulations, baby; I'm sole boss here. (Pause) All those bastards have a mother, don't they? And most of their mothers have two or three squalid chickens in the yard, don't they? Well, believe me, chickens would do very well on a peanut diet. We could do very well, too, on a diet of chicken a bit less athletic than what's seen on German tables. (Pause) Listen. I got your sales sheet here with a note saying you've given away practically two pounds of coffee a week on free samplings. (A pause) You think we're the Salvation Army or something? What did I tell you? Just a cup of coffee before or after the act, that's all. (A pause) You know the score, baby; and if you don't do much better over the next two weeks, back to the street you go. (Firmly) Good-bye.

CHUCK hangs up the receiver and puffs out. SUZANNE shows up at the door as if by magic; an amazing SUZANNE in a daring red dress, overly made-up and turned into a platinum blonde. The minute she answers CHUCK, we perceive with some surprise that she speaks in a deeper voice than usual and that she has a trace of a German accent.

CHUCK

(getting up and going towards her) Susie! Oh, Susie! I knew you'd finally come to me. You have no idea how much I've thought of you - every spare moment business left me. (She gives a little laugh) For crying out loud, what's all the lousy make-up for? Wipe off that lipstick, baby; I hate it.

He puts a handkerchief into her hand, but she keeps it there, paying no attention to his order.

Wipe off that lipstick, I say! You look like a whore.

MARIA

(because it is MARIA, and not SUZANNE) Whore, your grandmother!

CHUCK takes her by the wrist and throws her under the glaring circle of light the green lamp makes.

CHUCK

It is Suzanne, out to taunt me once more, isn't it? (Looking more closely at her) Or else- who are you?

MARIA, with a brazen smile, points at a framed photograph CHUCK has on his desk. But CHUCK won't release her. Suddenly he says very slowly:

CHUCK

"There are people who'd never have fallen in love had they not heard other people speak of it".

MARIA

(inviting CHUCK to repeat the sentence) What?

CHUCK

You heard me. What great philosopher said that?

MARIA

What a question! Why, Goethe, the only genius that ever was!

CHUCK lets her go and lowers his head in a gesture of deep disappointment.

CHUCK

Pstt. Another German broad. Leave me alone, leave me alone, beat it!

MARIA

What's wrong? Wasn't it Goethe?

CHUCK

No, it was a Frenchman. An old friend of mine - and of Suzanne's as well.

But she will not move. CHUCK looks at MARIA, gets closer to her, lifts one of the blond locks that cover her ears and, without a word of warning, pulls it out, taking off MARIA's wig. At the sight of the girl's cropped black hair he suddenly becomes incensed and gives her a forceful slap on the cheek.

MARIA

(with a cry of pleasure) Aie! (She takes a step towards him) There. You can try the other cheek, darling.

CHUCK

(laughing sarcastically) I never thought girls like you would strike such Christian attitudes.

MARIA

It's no attitude, mein liebe; I like it. Oh boy, you do have a hard hand! I could have some lovely times with you.

CHUCK

Get out of here, you dirty slut!

Turning his back to her, he sits again at his desk. MARIA stays in her place, while he pretends to go over his lists. There is a longish pause.

CHUCK (cont'd)

What are you doing still here? Out with you!

MARIA picks up the wig and puts it on, looking at herself in an imaginary mirror at R.

MARIA

I'm a friend of Anneliese, Hilda and Henny. They told me that you might have a job for me.

CHUCK

(abruptly) You know the conditions?

MARIA

Oh, yes. (She smiles) But I didn't come for that. The other day the girls were gathered at the corner of the Continental Hotel. Each one of them was boasting of having a kind of exclusive on you - but it looked like too many exclusives to me! Suddenly I dropped a bomb. "Maybe - I said - maybe he doesn't go to bed with any of you". (After a short pause, she stares at him, smiling) Then they started asking each other questions. You'd never laid them, but they worked for you all the same, as if you were the Sheik of Araby. What a man! (She laughs)

CHUCK

I'm not their sheik. I only have a cut on the coffee.

MARIA

But psychologically it's as if you had it on everything they make. That's what they led me to believe - between the lines. Then they added that you had on your desk the photo of a girl who looked exactly like me - as a blonde. I borrowed one of Marlene's wigs and came to try my luck. Mysterious types like you have always excited me.

CHUCK gets up and MARIA approaches him.

As I was saying, we could have some lovely times together, darling. And this is the right moment, too; right now I've got no man to work for, you know.

CHUCK takes the handkerchief from MARIA's hands and wipes off her lipstick. He stares at her for a time; then, taking her by the waist abruptly, almost brutally, he gives her a long raging kiss. When they separate, they are both panting.

CHUCK

Oh, baby, I've waited so desperately for you, all the time! Every fibre in my body, every pore have!

MARIA

Mein liebe.

CHUCK

Shut up, you're Suzanne now. Susie, Susie! To go into you in an endless embrace, what an unbelievable dream! It'll be living, at long last; I'll be able to say I'm alive!

Lights dim on another wild kiss CHUCK gives MARIA. In the distance, the accordion reminds us of 1945 by playing "Paris des dépayés". Lights come up again on MONIQUE's apartment.

SCENE XIX

It is mid-morning. MONIQUE, in a "new look" dress of dark red wool, whose long skirt is formed by three wide ruffles, is arranging flowers in a vase. DUCHESNE, in a double-breasted Prince of Wales check suit, enters by the back, an umbrella hanging from his arm. He wears a grey bowler, grey chamois gloves and brown chamois desert boots.

DUCHESNE

Oh! So you've finally bowed to Monsieur Dior.

MONIQUE

(looking at her legs) Yes. But what cheek, to call that the "new look"! It's the oldest of old looks. Unfortunately, French fashion is like love-making; they can't come up with anything new.

DUCHESNE

You may be right as far as fashion is concerned; as to love - I'm not so sure. (Fixing his necktie with a presumptuous air) I must re-read my Marquis de Sade one of these days, to see if the old boy gives me some fresh inspiration. (MONIQUE laughs, while DUCHESNE inspects her new dress) Shall we exhibit that touch of genius of dear little Christian? In other words, would you like to lunch out with me?

MONIQUE

Where?

DUCHESNE

"Chez Marius".

MONIQUE

Place du Palais-Bourbon? That's always full of MP's. Something must be cooking if you want to go there.

DUCHESNE

One never knows. In a country which changes its presidents as quickly as kings used to change their favourites -

MONIQUE

(laughing) Much quicker than that! Speak up, Bibi. Are there rumours of another change, really?

DUCHESNE

I don't know. Bomba called last evening and asked me to stand by. He seems to have noticed a particular stir in the corridors.

MONIQUE

Bah! I'm sure it's the same old story; a new old government getting ready to take over.

DUCHESNE

Maybe; but suppose it's a new new government. With a new now government, Count Trajan de Duchesne could at last put in an appearance on the political scene, couldn't he?

The phone rings, making them start. DUCHESNE goes to it and puts out his arm to pick it up, but suddenly he withdraws it as if he were about to touch red-hot iron.

MONIQUE

Afraid of something? Let me answer, then.

DUCHESNE

Afraid, me? I've never been afraid in my life; this is only a touch of apprehension.

He takes the receiver with his left hand and puts it against his chest.

You know, yesterday, while I passed under a scaffolding, I saw two nuns walking along - rather, I saw their backs, which is really bad.

MONIQUE laughs.

Oh, you can laugh your head off; but it isn't funny. Just as I saw them Madame Ricaud appeared out of the blue, forcing me to take off my hat. I was carrying a couple of books, I had both hands occupied; and so I didn't have a chance to conjure off the jinx by doing this.

He raises his right hand and puts his middle finger over the forefinger.

MONIQUE

Oh, Bibi! You, superstitious! Really! (She laughs again)

DUCHESNE

(while she leaves by the back) Science has advanced so much, Minou, that she has only left superstition for superior men to cling to.

He lifts the receiver and speaks.

Hullo. Duchesne speaking. Right. Who's that, Bomba? (Nicely) Good morning, old boy. (Pause) Well, speak! What's cooking? (Pause) Atomic explosion, here in Paris? Haven't heard a thing. (He gives a little laugh) I can see you're in one of your apocalyptic moods. No wonder they chose "Bomba" as

DUCHESNE (cont'd)

a nickname for you. (Pause) Top secret, yes. But if it is top secret, for Heaven's sake say it in Coptic, or ancient Celtic, or basic Portuguese. (Pause) Wait. I have a better idea. Speak very, very low, with your lips over the receiver.

There is a long pause. DUCHESNE falls onto a chair and goes pale as a sheet. In a matter of seconds he has an air of absolute prostration. Then he reacts and grabs the receiver.

I refuse to believe it!! How could I? What government would voluntarily decree the end of the world? No!! Call Tuteur for me, please. Yes, Tuteur. Forgive me, but I trust him better.

A long pause in the telephonic conversation, which DUCHESNE uses to make a feverish, almost delirious calculation.

82.000.000 divided by 15. Let's see. 15 by 5, 75, and 7, 82. Now. Seventy five divided by 15. Yes - yes - yes - yes - I had first a 5, then a 4, then a 6, and finally another 6. As 10 is two-thirds of fifteen, for 82 million francs I need 5.466 persons and two-thirds. Two-thirds of a person? Where on earth could I find that? Oh, yes. I could do with someone who's lost both legs.

Another pause. He goes back to his telephonic communication the moment he hears a voice at the other end.

Hullo. (In a faltering "basso profundo") Yes, Bibi here. How are you, old boy? Did Bomba ask you...? Yes.

Pause. As he listens, his expression becomes lugubrious - and so does his tone when he finally speaks.

Oh. Oh! Ooh! Then it's all true! (Pause) It's the end of the world all right. (Pause) How can I find in three days 5,466 and two-third persons ready to do that for me?

Pause. He speaks in an even lower voice.

Yes. I realize that. What Frenchman - even the most destitute - doesn't keep three 5.000 franc-bills in his woollen sock? And then there's the question of giving them a little commission. How much you think they would ask? What?? 99 1/2 %. Monstrous. This is a nation of robbers. (Pause) No, no, I'm taking it easy; easy does it; you know my philosophy, Tuteur. Don't worry about me, I'll be all right. Bye -

He hangs up and falls on the floor in a dead faint. MONIQUE enters and rushes to him. Kneeling beside DUCHESNE, she pats him on both cheeks. He comes to his senses, looks at her and breaks into convulsive laughter.

MONIQUE

What's the matter, what happened?

DUCHESNE

Nothing. This morning all the banks have closed for a three-day holiday. (A little laugh) When they reopen their doors, every citizen of the Republic will have the right to change for new ones only three of the current five-thousand franc notes he may keep in hand. The rest - except a small sum, if and when he can justify his possession of it - will lose its value completely. (He laughs once more)

MONIQUE

I don't understand.

DUCHESNE

Just a minute, I'm going to illustrate the whole thing for you.

He opens his wallet and from one of its sections extracts about 15 five-thousand franc bills.

Suppose that in three days from now, I take this money to the bank. The clerk withdraws three bills, like this (he proceeds to illustrate the measure) changes them for new ones - good ones, and rejects the rest. And what do I do with it? This!

He tears the remnant of the banknotes, a gesture which makes MONIQUE shriek with horror.

MONIQUE

No - !!!

DUCHESNE

You understand now?

MONIQUE

It's impossible, impossible!

DUCHESNE lets himself fall onto the sofa. There is a longish pause.

How much money do you keep in five-thousand franc notes?

DUCHESNE

All I have in the world, with the exception of two or three million. You must remember that most of the money issued by Vichy in wartime was in five-thousand franc notes.

MONIQUE

(bursting into nervous laughter but all the same keeping a serious, rigid face) Funny, the little jokes Fate plays on us from time to time. Happily, money never meant a thing to me. (She looks lingeringly at DUCHESNE) But I understand how you must feel, poor Bibi.

DUCHESNE

Do you? The fact of the matter is, I don't feel, I don't feel at all. It is as if I had died a moment ago and my spirit was still hovering over here. Are you sure that while I was down there on the floor I didn't pass away?

MONIQUE

Don't be silly.

DUCHESNE

One never knows!

MONIQUE

We're not in India, my dear; here, when people die, they do it in all seriousness. But there's no question of that; we must go on living! (With sudden inspiration) Listen. I have an idea. I have an idea!! You'll go out and see what you can do from your side; in the meantime, I'll go downstairs to see the Ricauds. If I can enlist their help, I think we'll be able to save something. Cheer up, darling! (He shakes his head) Cheer up

Blackout.

SCENE XIX

As a prelude to this scene, there is a funeral couple of bars from the accordion; then lights come up slowly on the drop representing the facade of the house.

DUCHESNE, in a dark grey overcoat with a large otter collar, comes and goes from R. to L. and viceversa, a briefcase in his hand. Without uttering a sound, but very perceptibly moving his lips, he talks to himself, like some ^{one} who has gone mad. The FLIC enters R., his presence enriched by a brand-new double chin and a cleaner, fresher uniform than the one we saw him wear at the Ricaud's wedding.

DUCHESNE

(looking up) Good day, Monsieur l'Agent.

FLIC

Good day, Monsieur le Comte.

DUCHESNE

Er - Could you by chance take a little present of half a million francs?

FLIC

In five-thousand franc bills? (DUCHESNE nods) Thank you very much, sir, but what could I do with that?

DUCHESNE

I don't know. You could paper your bedroom walls, for instance. Can you imagine the luxurious look?

FLIC

Yes, but what if I fall ill and one of my pals comes to see me? Can you imagine the reputation I would get?

DUCHESNE

(looking into his eyes) Yes, you're right. That wouldn't do any good.

(Pause) I have an idea. You know all the whores in this arrondissement. You know very well what they're after, all their lives. Couldn't you distribute half a million among them?

FLIC

Who, me? I can go knock on every door; but you think they would open to me? Not on my life. Instead of making them glad, I would give them the greatest shock of their existence. Suppose, on the other hand, that I go to the commissariat and find them all together, as they were last Wednesday. Suppose I start giving away 20,000 francs to each of them. Can you imagine the enquiry the Ministry would open? And the lines in the "New York Herald Tribune": "Philanthropic policeman distributes hot money among Left Bank broads"? It's all right for a René Clair film, but -

DUCHESNE

(interrupting him dejectedly) Yes, yes, of course. I can see there's nothing to do, really.

He opens his briefcase and extracts a wad of bank-notes from it.

Look at this. For each of these bills I've paid an unspeakable price. To sell my conscience, my good name - that's nothing compared with the degrading things I lowered myself to do. And all for what? A simple signature on a decree, and at once I lose everything - all I possess in this world. I have done all those terrible things - for nothing. FOR NOTHING, do you hear me?

FLIC

You're not the only one, Monsieur le Comte. People are throwing away millions at the entrance of some villages. And they say that this morning there were children at Boulogne-Billancourt playing football with packs like this.

DUCHESNE

(with the air of a lost man) Football - with this? (He gives a hollow laugh) Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!

FLIC

(taking the wad DUCHESNE has in hand) With your permission, Monsieur le Comte. Can I keep the rubber for my Jean-Pierre's sling-shots? He uses dozens and dozens of them every week, you know. You're very kind, very kind indeed. Thank you.

DUCHESNE stares at him vacantly, and the mirthless laugh he gives grows in strength until it sounds

almost like a sob. Shaking his head, the FLIC goes out at a slow pace.

DUCHESNE

There he goes, quite unmoved. He's like the others; nobody cares a damn. No one, except MONIQUE, has shown any pity! (He looks around) Poor Minou! To think that, apart from a Louis XIV chamberpot, some kitchen utensils, a collection of birdcages and several majolica jugs, all she's been able to buy with my fortune are four bathrooms! (A bitter laugh) When they know of this, Bomba and Tutar will call me "King of the bidet".

He opens his hand and the wind scatters the banknotes in all directions. As if it had listened to him and would like to show its solidarity with him, the tree on the restaurant corner sheds the leaves of two of its branches, letting them fly away in concert with DUCHESNE's banknotes.

At least someone sympathizes with me. Brother tree, you're giving me a lesson in humility. On behalf of whom are you speaking? (A silence) Answer me.

He shakes the tree, but no leaf falls this time.

But what am I talking about? It must have been a vision, that's all.

He now shakes his head vehemently, as if he wanted to chase the vision away. Something he sees on the river seems to reanimate him a bit all of a sudden. He lifts his briefcase and cries:

Hey, you! Can you stop your boat for a second? Thank you. Do you hear me? All right. I'm going to throw half a million to you. I hope it can be of some use. You don't mind, do you?

But before he can make a move an enormous wad coming from the river hits him on the shoulder and almost makes him stumble. DUCHESNE mutters to himself:

Son of a bitch. Crooks in his category generally have better manners.

Mechanically he puts the big wad of banknotes in the briefcase, together with his own, and with a sigh, recapitulates:

Out of my 82 millions, I've recovered only 750,000 francs; the rest, I haven't been able even to give away! What an end for a connoisseur, a man of the world, a sort of flower of civilization! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Civilization! What have I got to do with it now? What do my arts and parts mean if I don't have a penny? And what IS the world anyway? A vacant lot where children play football with what man holds most valuable most precious in life! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

DUCHESNE's laughter has been growing so much in intensity that we begin to have fears for his reason. Furious

ly he takes five or six wads of banknotes out of his briefcase and throws them on the floor.

DUCHESNE (cont'd)

I wish I had my parents and uncles within reach. Grubins! To teach a child that banknotes are real things, with a real value; that money is the open-sesame, the key to everything! One fine day a gang of wrathful third-rate politicians who are in power dispose of that fallacy in 72 hours. Family of imbeciles! How I wish I could resuscitate them right now! Oh, Lord! What a field day I would have kicking some sense into them! I would do this to Uncle Aymon (he kicks a wad towards L.) and this to Mémé (he kicks another wad to R.) and this to Aunt Clota (he kicks another wad against the tree) and this to Father (another kick while the lights dim) and this to Uncle Carol, the greatest imbecile of them all!

But Uncle Carol's kick is lost in the dark.

SCENE XX

In the dark, as well, the curtain rises as the accordion plays its gay march while three placards rush before us with the numbers 1949, 1950 and 1951 drawn with phosphorescent paint on them. There is the shortest of pauses, and as the last notes of the march are heard, lights come up on the RICAUD's restaurant, where Madame RICAUD is helping herself to a glass of vermouth. She wears a simple black dress with short sleeves. Behind the counter, AGENOR washes glasses.

AGENOR

But Madame Ricaud! How many times must I repeat it! If we know one day what life's all about, it will be thanks to science.

MADAME R.

Oh, nonsense. Nonsense! I'm not alone in thinking that science is leading us all to a quick death.

AGENOR

What about it? That seems a deep-seated wish of man to-day, doesn't it?

MADAME R.

To die? What a monstrous notion.

AGENOR

It may look monstrous to you, but it is well in Nature's nature. Haven't you heard of those little animals from Canada called lemmings? They gather together every year at a given place - sometimes as many as a million and a half of them - and, at a given signal, they all run to a precipice and jump together to their death. It's the world's greatest

AGENOR (cont'd)
mass suicide, and suicide is instinct with them.

MADAME R.
Not with me!

AGENOR
I can understand that. (Sighs) I find life beautiful, too. Especially the human nude.

He looks at her with his habitual deadpan and then, concentrating his glance on her naked arm, suddenly roars.

MADAME R.
Be quiet, please, have some decency!

AGENOR
Madame Ricaud, the man who doesn't change dies; luckily enough, I've changed. (Approaching her and sensuously smelling her arm) I'm glad to have taken up anatomy. Such a terribly exciting science.

MADAME R.
(timorously) What do you do in those courses you attend: listen - and draw?

AGENOR
Oh, no; there's dissection as well.

MADAME R.
Jesus!

AGENOR's lewd glance makes her utter a little cry. As if that cry were an invitation of sorts, he takes her by the arm.

What exquisite little veins. And the whole arm, what lovely core of plumpness! Really irresistible. Yam-yam-yam!

He bites her, rather brutally, on the inside of her left arm. Her little cry develops into a first-rate scream. AGENOR's ardent attack upsets Madame RICAUD so much that she upsets in her turn a metal jug in the washing-basin, making a formidable racket.

MADAME R.
(in a troubled voice) You wild native! You must be following courses in cannibalism!

But AGENOR, impervious to his victim's insults and rather proud of his exploit, gives her a triumphant smile. Enter by the back, in great agitation, Monsieur RICAUD.

MONSIEUR R.
What's going on? This is an infernal racket. Didn't I tell you I was going to do my yoga?

MADAME R.

You and your yoga!

MONSIEUR R.

Thank God I found out about it. Somehow or other we have to recuperate the energy we lose because of radioactive fallout.

MADAME R.

Here we go again!

MONSIEUR R.

(sizing her up) Answer me! What was all that noise?

MADAME R.

Hum - the jug fell and hurt my arm. You know how heavy it is -

MONSIEUR R.

(goes around her and finally finds the marks on her arm) Yes, I know. Heavy - and full of teeth. You're all set for a medical course.

He shakes his finger at AGENOR.

This must be the latest development of your interest in science. Ah, you science-minded people, what a public danger you are! And what idiots! Don't you see that truth can only be found in the realm of art? There is a lot of truth in cooking, for instance.

AGENOR looks at him and gives a shy little laugh; he looks down, takes a tray and starts setting tables. Monsieur RICHAUD talks to his wife.

Come on. Come put some mercurochrome in that arm and a couple of band-aids. It looks disgusting. Come on, come on. I must finish my exercises before that madman the Count arrives.

He lets her go first through door R., back; then, with an Olympic look at AGENOR, he follows her.

AGENOR goes to counter and fetches some glasses, then goes on with his chore. One or two seconds after he is back downstage DUCHESNE enters, pale and melancholy, all in black. In spite of the total silence that accompanies his appearance, AGENOR starts and turns round to face him.

AGENOR

My God!

DUCHESNE

(in a neutral voice) Good evening, Agénor.

AGENOR

You made me start, Monsieur le Comte. It's the first time I feel "cosmically" the presence of someone.

DUCHESNE

Cosmically?

He stares at AGENOR, raising his eyebrows repeatedly at the same time, but refrains from making any comment.

AGENOR

(diplomatically) And it is such a rare pleasure to see you here.

DUCHESNE

Ah! But even for this visit, you have to thank my wife. As for myself, I think going to a restaurant is an awful waste of time and money. Everything they serve you tastes absolutely the same.

AGENOR

Please don't talk so loud when you say such things, Monsieur le Comte. The boss might take offense, you know. Even customers might object; after all, we're in France.

DUCHESNE

If you like. But France is placed right in the middle of a world where nothing has any importance any longer.

AGENOR

(laughs) You see! Whether you want it or not, you're always the wittiest man on the Left Bank. Come on, smile a little, Monsieur le Comte. The boss has been keeping for you a few bottles of that Puligny-Montrachet 1945 you used to love so much.

DUCHESNE

1945. The year of my marriage. My God! The only good thing about marriage is that you always make love to the same woman. Like that you're spared all the tricks of the trade, the stratagems and tactics which are such a waste of time since deep inside all women are alike. (AGENOR laughs) What are you laughing at?

AGENOR

I laugh because I agree with you, sir. And I'm happy at the thought that there are other inhabited worlds apart from ours. For it is plain and evident that we are seventh-rate citizens in a fourth-rate planet, Monsieur le Comte.

DUCHESNE

Who has put those ideas into your head?

AGENOR

(approaching him and lowering his voice) You may think as you like, sir, but I do believe in flying saucers, that is, in life in other planets.

DUCHESNE

(shocked) Do you?

AGENOR

Oui, Monsieur le Comte. And I also think people are not mad when they see this here to-day, there to-morrow and everywhere the day after, in the most faraway

AGENOR (cont'd)

and also the most populated areas in the world. It isn't possible that of a Sunday afternoon the whole of Washington suffers a collective hallucination and sees some flying saucers come and go, quicker than thought, almost as quick as light, even on the radar screens.

DUCHESNE

When did that happen?

AGENOR

Oh, almost a year ago.

DUCHESNE

I never heard of it.

AGENOR

How can you, if you - excuse my insolence, Monsieur le Comte - are as good as dead? But you can confidently come back to life - that is, if you want to; for things are not as hopeless as they look.

DUCHESNE

So you're not only for science, but for science fiction as well!

AGENOR

Well, sir, I think fiction is a way of telling the truth without scaring people too much.

DUCHESNE looks at him, laughs mechanically and sits.

Think it over, Monsieur le Comte. I can assure you it's the only way out of the jam we're in.

MONIQUE and CHUCK enter R. She wears a small pink silk drum of a hat, a black Persian lamb coat and pearls; he, a camel-hair coat over a double-breasted blue suit and an Eden hat. His diamond ring and big cigar are other signs of his present affluence. DUCHESNE stares into space, elbows on table, chin resting on his knuckles.

DUCHESNE

Flying saucers! Of all the nonsense in the world!

As he goes to the back, AGENOR sees MONIQUE and CHUCK.

AGENOR

Excuse me. Bonsoir, Madame la Comtesse. (Bowing indifferently to CHUCK)
Monsieur...

CHUCK

(smiling) Pre - pare -

AGENOR

Aim - fiire! (He recognizes CHUCK, laughs) Lieutenant Peters! How are you! You look wonderful; not like yourself at all.

CHUCK

(slightly piqued) Like whom, then?

AGENOR

Like your father or something -

CHUCK

(laughs, not without irony) I don't mind that. "Few people know how to be old", as La Rochefoucauld says; but I'm doing my best to learn.

AGENOR

Excuse me. (He goes out, back)

MONIQUE

(approaching DUCHESNE's table) So La Rochefoucauld is back with us.

CHUCK

(shrugging his shoulders) Well - I know 55 of his maxims by heart. You should see the way the German hausfrau lap them up. When I visit them and things reach a rather intimate stage, I dish them out one of the maxims. And if I don't raise my forefinger to indicate it's a quotation, they think the phrase is mine. How about that!

MONIQUE laughs, and DUCHESNE, as he rises, laughs in his turn, but rather strangely. AGENOR re-enters bringing the wine to the DUCHESNEs' table, then leaves silently by the back.

MONIQUE

Chuck, you must excuse us for the early hour of this dinner; but since his spiritual crisis, Bibi simply cannot see people. The main thing is, you'll meet Suzanne. It'll do her lots of good, especially when she notices to what heights her ambition has carried you.

CHUCK

(laughing) Oh, that! Trouble is, one often passes from love to ambition, but from ambition one rarely returns to love.

MONIQUE takes CHUCK's forefinger and lifts it, while he laughs. SUZANNE enters R. and, in spite of MONIQUE's greeting, sits alone at the next table, not without telling her friend:

SUZANNE

Bonjour, mon poulet.

MONIQUE

Bonjour, ma cocotte.

The moment he sees SUZANNE, CHUCK gets up, goes to her and, as he kisses her hand, clicks his heels in teutonic fashion.

CHUCK

Susiel! Wie geht es Ihnen? Es freut mich, Sie zu sehen.

SUZANNE

And you, Chuck? How are you?

CHUCK

Danke, sehr gut.

MONIQUE

(to CHUCK) Did you know that Suzanne is now Madame Pormentier?

CHUCK

(bowing to SUZANNE with a falsely sad air and taking her hand rather abruptly) Ach! Erlauben Sie mir, Ihnen mein herzlichstes Beileid auszusprechen.

SUZANNE

(addressing MONIQUE at the next table) What's that?

MONIQUE

(laughing) To judge by his face, I should say he's extending you his deepest sympathy.

CHUCK nods several times.

SUZANNE

(smiles with pursed lips) Very funny.

DUCHESNE

(to himself) Flying saucers! And after all, why not?

MONIQUE

Come sit with us, will you?

SUZANNE

I can't, ma chère; Thierry will be here any minute.

MONIQUE

You mean any hour. We all know your Thierry by now. Mon pauvre chou, and hours you're the only woman in Paris who waits for her husband hours/at a café's table - all by herself.

SUZANNE

A glass or other always makes me company.

MONIQUE

That makes it even worse. Come on, come sit with us.

SUZANNE

I don't know if I should -

CHUCK

What's the matter? Afraid of sitting by my side?

SUZANNE

Don't be ridiculous.

MONIQUE and SUZANNE install themselves at DUCHESNE's table, followed by CHUCK, who takes with him an extra drinking glass.

DUCHESNE
(still talking to himself) Visitors from outer space! Oh, would that it were true; there would still be some hope for man!

With a slight joke of a gesture, SUZANNE puts her hand before DUCHESNE's lips, so that he may kiss it. He stands up and does his bit of hand-kissing mechanically, without so much as a look at SUZANNE. Then, again to himself, he says:

A hope, yes, but at the same time, what a blow to our pride, we wretched little worms!

MONIQUE
(snapping her fingers at DUCHESNE's nose) Bibi! Yoo-hoo! We are at the Ricaud's; kindly get out of wherever you are and pay us a visit, will you?

CHUCK and SUZANNE sit down, laughing.

SUZANNE
(to CHUCK) And you, aren't you afraid of sitting beside me?

CHUCK
Why should I be? I'm at peace with life; time has passed, but not in vain.

SUZANNE
Are you sure?

CHUCK
Dead sure. I'm cured, Susie; cured thank^sto time - and absence.

He gives an insincere little laugh.

SUZANNE
Hmm. A good friend of mine said once: "Absence diminishes little passions and increases great ones, much as the wind blows out a candle and fans a fire".

MONIQUE
(ironically) Excuse me.

Looking at SUZANNE, the trio- CHUCK, MONIQUE and DUCHESNE - raise their fingers and burst out laughing.

SUZANNE
Have you gone mad?

CHUCK
Allow me to answer your friend with some other words of his own: (lifting his forefinger) "The duration of our passions depends as much on ourselves as the length of our life".

DUCHESNE

A goal for America. Hurrah!

CHUCK

But all those are big words, Susie, don't you think? More than passion, this was a case of friendship. Remember that (lifting his finger again) "However rare true love may be, it is still less rare than true friendship".

MONIQUE

(while she gives SUZANNE a glass of wine) Boy! You've learned the whole book by heart, haven't you?

DUCHESNE

(again immersed in his soliloquy) Now, if they indeed come over here, why couldn't we go over there ourselves?

MONIQUE glances at him, then at CHUCK and SUZANNE, shrugging her shoulders.

CHUCK

(to SUZANNE) Tell me about your theatrical career, baby. (He clears his throat) I mean, Madame Parmentier.

SUZANNE

My career! You know how long is it since I last set foot on the stage?

CHUCK

No -

SUZANNE

Three years.

CHUCK

And how's that? Too absorbed by your home life?

SUZANNE

It's not only that. To remain in the theatre you have to belong in a clan, a clique, a lodge - sexual or ideological, or both. I don't know how to. I can't.

DUCHESNE

(always in the clouds) And how could we communicate with them? Only mentally, no doubt. Now, what kind of a brain should one have to do that? (A dry laugh) Voilà la question!

MONIQUE

(after hearing him, she snaps her fingers once again in DUCHESNE's face) Wake up, Bibi. This is not the age of communication, you know; only of communications, in the plural.

CHUCK

(to SUZANNE) But you still have your marriage.

SUZANNE

(with a defiant air) Yes; and it's a good one, as marriages go.

CHUCK

(smiling and lifting his finger) "There are good marriages; there are no delightful ones".

MONIQUE

For Heaven's sake, Chuck, leave the old duke alone. Don't you think the joke has lasted long enough?

CHUCK

Joke? I've never been more serious in my life.

SUZANNE

(to CHUCK, with ill-repressed anger) Neither have I. You may be sure that mine is a happy marriage; Thierry has his faults, naturally, but everybody likes him.

CHUCK

Of course. In the trading of life we please people more by our faults than by our good qualities.

Quick as lightning, MONIQUE and DUCHESNE raise their forefingers.

Oh, no, enough of your kidding! I thought that one out; this is my idea.

MONIQUE

(cordially) Is it really? The puppet turns ventriloquist, a rather interesting development.

SUZANNE

Not to me! (She gets up)

MONIQUE

Wait a minute, Suzanne. I grant you that Chuck has carried his joke a bit too far, but shouldn't you feel flattered by it? Isn't this La Rochefoucauld recital the best proof that he hasn't forgotten you?

SUZANNE

Neither forgotten nor forgiven. But one more quotation and I'll break this bottle over his head. (To CHUCK) When I first met you, Chuck, I was hungry and afraid to die; I had nobody to protect me, nothing to defend myself with. In my poverty I adorned myself with the duke's maxims. I'm cured now - and married; I've suffered, I've seen a lot - and I can think for myself. Your lesson was all right for the first couple of minutes, but you can't help being an American, can you?

MONIQUE

What do you mean?

SUZANNE

(to CHUCK) I mean that, according to all my reports, in your land the coffee must overflow and flood the saucer for the customer to be satisfied; cocktail glasses must overflow and ruin the best tables; floor-shows must overflow and be one hour too long. You've overflowed much too much, too; so it is good-bye for me, I mean, farewell!

She runs out by R.

CHUCK

(gets up) Susie!

MONIQUE

Leave her alone; you'll make your excuses to-morrow. Come here, Chuck. Come along, I tell you! (Slowly CHUCK goes back to table) You've been merciless with her; I hardly recognized you.

CHUCK

Funny thing is, I couldn't recognize myself. I firmly believed I'd left all that way behind me!

MONIQUE

But you haven't. It's evident you've never forgiven her. And if we go back to our dear duke once more, now she's no longer with us, we must remind ourselves that (lifting her forefinger) "One pardons in the degree that one loves".

DUCHESNE

Bah! It's all blah-blah-blah. Let's have some quiet, please.

He gives MONIQUE a piercing look, then calmly pours wine in the three glasses. A comfortable silence begins to settle among them while the lights dim. For one minute we hear the melancholy notes of the "Dépayés" waltz, which fade as lights come up on MONIQUE's apartment.

SCENE XXI

Some months have passed, and winter is present in the living room, not only in the shape of a small Christmas tree standing on the commode, but also very much in the air and even in the tone of MONIQUE and DUCHESNE.

When the lights reveal him to us, he has been sitting for God knows how long on a corner of the divan, his chin on his right hand, lost in space. He wears black satin pyjamas and a black velvet dressing gown, with a quilted silk collar. As a refreshing contrast, MONIQUE enters by the back in a lilac tulle negligee with pink ostrich feathers round the edge of its wide sleeves. MONIQUE, who brings four letters in her hand, goes to the secretaire, throws two of the letters in the wastepaper basket and puts the other two in small drawers. Slowly she turns to DUCHESNE.

MONIQUE

Bibi!

Two or three seconds go, though the absolute immobility of man and wife might give the sensation that hours have passed. DUCHESNE takes his hand off his chin, slightly raises his head and says, as if he gave a yawn:

DUCHESNE

Wha- a- a - t?

MONIQUE

Did you actually say "what"? (DUCHESNE nods) That's an extraordinary development. For months and months you've only opened your mouth to yawn.

As though this were a signal, DUCHESNE opens it again to do just that, with a sound worthy of a hippopotamus.

Now, Bibi, don't exert yourself. A yawn and a monosyllable, all together, are a bit too much after such a long silence. (A pause) Have you any idea of the date? It's the night of St. Sylvester, the 31st. of December; first New Year's eve for which we haven't received one single invitation.

DUCHESNE

Thank God! All the silly asses we know seem to have grown tired of waiting for me to change. They can wait to the end of their God-damned lives!

MONIQUE

(takes a small notebook from her secretaire and goes quickly through it) How about me? In the year which is about to end, you made love to me three times; the 15th. April, from 6 o'clock to 6.45; the 12th. August, probably because it was my birthday, from 10 to 11.17 in the evening (quite an orgy, as you can see); and the 2nd. November, the day of the dead, from 1 to 1.09 in the morning.

DUCHESNE

Heavens! How time flies! I fancied myself somewhat more active than that.

MONIQUE

(stares him in the face, says with dry sarcasm) Active! I've been thinking this over the whole afternoon, and I've reached a decision. It's one of two things: either you take those five million I have in the bank and try some little speculation that may give you back the taste for money -

DUCHESNE

Good Heavens preserve us!

MONIQUE

- or you become a convert. Any religion will do; as far as I'm concerned, you may join the Black Muslims to-morrow if you wish.

DUCHESNE

So you too think that religious conversion takes place in the head. For shame, Monique. Next, like so many people seem to do nowadays, you will be expecting a formula from science for believing in God rationally. Well, I never. Conversion is a trance, you know - the heart must be illuminated first.

MONIQUE

How about the brain? You can't dismiss the brain as easily as all that.

DUCHESNE

Unfortunately not. The Catholic religion, for instance, might attract me - there seems to be quite a revival of it, and it'd be far more fashionable did people but know that Freud died a Catholic. But who can assure me that their God doesn't have a nose similar to General de Gaulle's? And if He has, how do you expect me to believe in Him?

MONIQUE

(laughs) Oh, Bibi, really. It's evident you can't stomach the Earth any longer. Well, why don't you go to some other planet? Maybe things are better in outer space.

DUCHESNE

(sitting up and staring at her) You know, Minou, the idea has been haunting me all year long.

MONIQUE

(approaching him) Fortunately, it can only haunt you.

DUCHESNE

(with cynical humour) I've been pondering the advantages of passing away, too. As a divorcee you were sensational, but can you imagine what a widow you would make?

MONIQUE

(laughing) At last, a little life! Bravo!

DUCHESNE

Not life; I'm talking about the opposite.

MONIQUE

Shut up! It's 11.45 in the evening, the year is coming to an end, and in streets, cafés, dining-rooms, people sniff at each other, kiss, laugh, drink together -

DUCHESNE

Because they are all idiots, if not murderers.

MONIQUE

- while we two have a cosy little chat about death! (She sits on a pouf, facing him) Tell me something, Bibi. Have you ever thought of me since that fateful day in 1948 when you lost everything?

DUCHESNE

(looking at her as though she were a piece of furniture) The fateful day. Yes, I've thought of you - occasionally.

MONIQUE

Can you imagine for a moment what kind of existence I've been leading all this time? Me, a woman made for love? A woman in love, to top it all? (Reacting to a surprised look of DUCHESNE) I'm still in love with the American, you know. And what have I done about it? I've been faithful to him with you, that's all.

DUCHESNE

(shaking his head as though he had seen a blurred TV image) How's that again?

MONIQUE

I say I've remained very faithful to him - with you. The first months of our marriage it was sheer pleasure - mad, exhausting pleasure, and don't you dare deny it.

DUCHESNE

(sighing) I was an innocent man then. I didn't know what we're come to Earth for.

MONIQUE

Dave won't be able to reproach me anything on that score. Not counting you, I haven't made a fool of him with anybody - in six years. Six years! 72 months! 2,190 nights! Mamma mia!

Absolutely flabbergasted by the figure, MONIQUE slaps the top of her head.

That's what love does to you, you see.

DUCHESNE

(bowing and kissing her hand) All the same, I find it very strange.

MONIQUE

I should say so! Put yourself in my place! Whenever I think of all the time lost, all the life passing through without really being lived, I feel like banging my head against the wall!

DUCHESNE

(looking at her with compassion and detachment at the same time) Poor human animals!

Resting his chin on his closed right hand and his elbow on his leg, DUCHESNE reverts to his initial position. MONIQUE raises her hands, heaves a sigh of impatience and defiantly tosses her head backwards. Then she gets up, goes to her secretaire, sits down and prepares paper to write. The moment she takes the pen, she turns towards DUCHESNE.

MONIQUE

Hey, you! How do you spell exorbitant?

DUCHESNE, immobile, does not utter a sound. After a couple of seconds, MONIQUE shrugs and is immediately immersed in her epistolary activity. Lights come up at the same time at the RICAUD's restaurant. Monsieur RICAUD sits on a stool in exactly the same position as DUCHESNE. Madame RICAUD washes glasses at the counter.

MADAME R.

Henri!

There is a long pause, during which Monsieur RICAUD does not seem to notice that someone is addressing him; then he takes his hand off his chin, raises his head slightly and says, as though he were sighing:

MONSIEUR R.

Wha - a - a - t?

MADAME R.

(very nervously) Speak! Open your mouth! You think we can go like this much longer?

MONSIEUR R.

No, but I see no chance of a universal revolution for the time being.

MADAME R.

Universal revolution! I'm talking about you and me. You think we can go on like this, you and me?

MONSIEUR R.

There's no other way, is there?

MADAME R.

But this is no way to go on together, either. We're facing disaster - could go bankrupt in no time. Have you ever seen a restaurant close on New Year's Eve?

MONSIEUR R.

Close is nothing! I'd actually pay not to see the faces of those blink

MONSIEUR R. (cont'd)

ing idiots with their rattles, their party favours and their bored, boring cows of wives!

MADAME R.

(sighing) Oh, God! There was a time when you liked people, remember?

MONSIEUR R.

Yes. And then came the time when they poisoned me and killed my love for life.

MADAME R.

Poisoned?? Who's poisoned you? What do you mean? For Heaven's sake, be coherent!

MONSIEUR R.

Oh! You wouldn't understand. You'd say it's my old hypochondriac mania taking over. Nobody understands! I've been left completely alone - the loneliest man on earth, I should think.

MADAME R.

Well, you must like it that way, since you never take the trouble of explaining a damned thing!

MONSIEUR R.

What for? Can you by any chance feel the same as I? Never! You couldn't! And even if you could! You're like the rest; you only believe in experiment only the scientific approach is good for you.

MADAME R.

Thank you!

MONSIEUR R.

(chiding her as he would a child) Please! I'm not blaming you personally. It isn't your fault! Mankind's made like that; a sloppy job at best, and most probably not God's. Maybe in other planets it's better.

Madame RICAUD shrugs her shoulders and goes on washing glasses in silence. Monsieur RICAUD returns to his meditation, while MONIQUE, in her room, interrupts the writing of her letter to address DUCHESNE again.

MONIQUE

Bibi!

There is a longish pause before DUCHESNE makes a movement, however imperceptible.

DUCHESNE

(drawling the word) Whaaaat?

MONIQUE

Bring the champagne, will you? It's five to midnight, hurry!

DUCHESNE

Why?

MONIQUE

We're going to have a toast - to my trip. I've decided to go to America.

DUCHESNE

All right - But I don't see the need for drinking champagne, when Pôrier water makes absolutely the same "pschttt".

MONIQUE

(getting up in a fury and going towards door back) The same "pschttt"! Silly ass! Don't you know I loathe self-pitying people? What do you think an English education means, if not that?

While MONIQUE goes out with the force of a curse, DUCHESNE returns to the same position, apparently quite unmoved by her reaction.

In the restaurant, after their long pause, Madame RICAUD talks again to her husband.

MADAME R.

Henri. Open the bottle, come on!

MONSIEUR R.

Can't you ever stop squandering?

MADAME R.

I'm paying for it out of my own savings!

MONSIEUR R.

That's all right. But why champagne - clinking glasses - all that silly business?

MADAME R.

I want to drink to a New Year free of atomic radiation - so that you can be your old self again.

MONSIEUR R.

Ha! Like hell I shall! Next year the Russians will be off with their first series of tests - they're well on their way already!

MADAME R.

(with a grimace of disgust) You're a born optimist, aren't you? You and your ideas!

She puts a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket.

MONSIEUR R.

Ideas? They're not ideas. Why must you always mistake ideas for nervous reactions? How many times must I repeat to you that nerves are fibres, filaments, living things, and that mine, being the nerves of an artist, are particularly alive?

MADAME R.

Nerves! Bah! According to you, before atomic tests started, no one had nerves, and no one had ever suffered from insomnia, either.

MONIQUE enters her living-room with a tray and immediately devotes herself to the task of opening the bottle of champagne.

MONSIEUR R.

Ah, blind, insensitive mankind, dead mankind, that cannot even notice what is happening to its very nerves and cells! I know when there's strong radiation in the atmosphere 'cause my energy goes off through my fingertips. And that's a concrete sensation, you hear me? No ideas there

MADAME R.

Don't be silly; it's just your menopause.

MONSIEUR R.

(stamping his foot on the ground) Menopause! Age has nothing to do with it. When I have a mind to, I can do all that a 20-year old does.

MADAME R.

But you never have a mind to; and that is age, you see.

All of a sudden, while Monsieur RICAUD turns to his wife, she uncorks the bottle of champagne. The noise makes him jump; he takes his hand to his heart. She comes and gives him a full glass. Almost simultaneously, the cork pops off MONIQUE's bottle and she in her turn gives a glass to DUCHESNE. The Countess does so in dead silence.

Happy New Year!

MONSIEUR R.

(raising his glass) Happy New Year to you: for if the Russians enter the atomic race, I'll be no good to anybody. And for that, the whole world will be responsible, the whole world; peoples, rulers - they can see quite clearly what a few men are doing to mankind, but all the same they close their eyes to it. The whole damn world! They're all murderers!

DUCHESNE has a sip of his champagne while MONIQUE says:

MONIQUE

Happy New Year to me!

With a disapproving glance at her, DUCHESNE goes to the imaginary fourth wall of the room and opens one of its imaginary windows, while Monsieur RICAUD gets up and does the same. Both DUCHESNE and RICAUD alternately shout insults at the imaginary passers-by.

MONSIEUR R.

Murderers!

Imbeciles!

DUCHESNE

Suicides!

MONSIEUR R.

Lunatics!

DUCHESNE

They look at each other and bow.

MONSIEUR R.

Of course, it goes without saying, Monsieur le Comte, that I wasn't addressing you, only mankind in general.

DUCHESNE

I can only say the same, my dear Ricard.

MONSIEUR R. and DUCHESNE

(together) Happy New Year!

Before the perplexed stare of DUCHESNE and Monsieur RICAUD a young boy runs from L. to R. carrying a placard with the number 1952 painted on it. As the lights dim they both take their hands to their heads, amazed no doubt at the speed at which times flies - at least on this planet.

Maybe to suggest the inevitability of a reunion of DAVE and MONIQUE in New York, the accordion takes up the second part of the "Dépayés" waltz while a projector spots in the dark the figure of the FLIC at L. The policeman follows with ill-concealed interest the three consecutive appearances Monsieur RICAUD, followed by a projector, puts in as he takes in his arms three wooden planks with which he covers, one after the other, his establishment's windows.

There is a chalk inscription carefully written across the three planks: "AMERICANS GO HOME - RUSSIANS STAY PUT". As he sees it, the FLIC laughs, surprising Monsieur RICAUD, who turns to him.

MONSIEUR R.

Oh, good evening, my friend. (Looking at the chalk inscription) Yes, it's my own work, I admit it. They always made a fuss at home about good writing. Besides, I love neatness; I'd rather do it myself than leave it to some messy passer-by.

The FLIC takes two or three steps towards him and shakes his head. Then, as a sign of congratulation for the aesthetics -or is it the politics? - of Monsieur RICAUD, he kisses his own hand in typical French style and goes on to R.. While Monsieur RICAUD exits for the third and last time, the accordion player shows up at L. and goes from there all the

way to the R. as he finishes the part of the waltz
he had started playing in the dark.

END OF PART II

PART III

ALLEGRO AGITATO

DAVE's living-room, towards the end of January, 1953, that is, one month after the cheerless Christmas we have witnessed in Paris. There is also evident prosperity here, in the shape of an Epstein bust among the books on the shelves and a real Georgia O'Keefe instead of the reproduction of the Van Gogh sunflowers: an almost pornographic assembly of bones the painter calls "Pelvis in the Desert".

SCENE XXII

As the lights come up, the apartment is empty. The door chimes are sound; then, after two or three seconds of silence, DAVE enters in a camel hair overcoat, shouting:

DAVE

Miles! Miles! (A pause) Damn it, there's never a soul in this house.

DAVE picks up two big parcels he had left at the door and puts them against the wall. He calls impatiently:

Betty! Are you in? (To himself) But what am I calling her for? She won't be here before midnight. Oh, well.

The door chimes sound again, and before opening the door, DAVE shouts:

Miles! It's Miles, isn't it? Guess what I brought you, boy!

But as he says that, DAVE has not the least inkling of what Fate has brought him at his very doorstep. MONIQUE is there, as large as life and twice as pleasant, all in black: the velvet picture hat with "aigrettes", the coat with a big fox collar, the jersey dress - Greek style - the antelope handbag and gloves; all black, without one single jewel to boycott the studied severity of the ensemble. DAVE remains dazed for a moment, then says, in a moved voice:

Pussy cat! Monique! You here! Oh, my God! It's you, YOU! It doesn't seem possible!

MONIQUE

But it is. Touch and you will see. (She comes in. DAVE closes the door and kisses her) You know, I've come three or four times already. But your house is like your office; no one ever answers. After eight days of vainly trying to get in touch with you, I was writing some lines of Good-bye at the drugstore opposite - when all of a sudden I saw you open the door.

DAVE

You have been here eight full days? Oh, my God! (Kissing her) My darling

DAVE (cont'd)

pussy cat! Blast Liebfraumilch's ugly mug!

MONIQUE

Liebfraumilch?

DAVE

Yes, one of the agency's clients. But let's not waste time talking 'bout people like him. (Looking ardently at her, and lowering his voice) Hello.

MONIQUE

Hello!

DAVE

You know you look devastatingly beautiful this evening, Madame la Comtesse! (Shouting with joy) More beautiful than ever!

MONIQUE

Such a statement, made in a loud voice, makes me think that we're probably alone - am I right, darling? (He nods) Oh, good. Now in my turn, Monsieur l'agent de publicité, may I say you look dazzling with cleanness and sex-appeal?

They laugh and kiss each other, still more like good friends than lovers. Then MONIQUE licks her lips:

Hmmm. Let me see.

She takes DAVE's head in her hands, kisses him again.

Open your mouth! A bit more! Hell, I'm not going to rape you!

DAVE, laughing, does as he has been ordered and she gives him a more lingering kiss. Then she moves away with the air of someone who has suffered a bit of a shock and tells him reproachfully:

You've changed your toothpaste, Dave!

DAVE

That's right. What a fine sense of perception. You see, Betty is mad about supermarket sales; whenever they announce five giant tubes of something or other for the price of three, we're stuck with it. She's made quite a stock of that new toothpaste; I'm afraid I'll have to use it until 1960.

MONIQUE

(dramatically) Good God. I didn't expect anything of the kind.

DAVE

(laughing) Of what kind? You're joking, aren't you?

MONIQUE

Joking? Had you carefully read your Proust, you would know what a taste, a flavour discovered in childhood can mean in a man's life - all the way, to the very end.

DAVE

Like the taste of your lipstick.

DAVE takes MONIQUE by the waist and kisses her passionately. MONIQUE lets him do, then rejects him suddenly.

Oh, no, my friend. If we start something now we'll have to see it through, right here in your house. I'm leaving to-morrow for California.

DAVE

Pussy cat, you can't do this to me!

MONIQUE

Yes, I can. It's all arranged, and I can't get out of it even if I wanted to. I have to talk business with Mankiewicz on Wednesday. You have your Liebfraumilch, I have my Mankiewicz.

DAVE

Nonsense! I have no Liebfraumilch! You know what the agency wants me to do for that character? To organize a big wham of a party with all the boys in Broadway musicals.

MONIQUE

I see. I suppose that's what you call public relations over here.

DAVE

The hell it is. He wants his relations with the boys to be as public as possible. The nerve! I know it takes all sorts to make a world, but that sort won't get any encouragement from me!

MONIQUE

Poor Dave! And you have disconnected your phones because of that son of a -

DAVE

(interrupting her) No. That's another story. Betty's brother is to appear before one of those Senate committees any day now. The poor girl's scared to death.

MONIQUE

A Senate Committee? You're mixed up in that?

DAVE

In a way - But please, pussy cat, let's not talk about it.

MONIQUE

On the contrary, let's talk about that first. If you can stand it all so coolly, you're not the man I used to know.

DAVE

Who's standing anything? I still have the same ideas; I seem to be the only one to think like that in the whole blessed world, but I stick to

DAVE (cont'd)

them; only now, they're stronger than ever, if you care to know.

MONIQUE

I sincerely hope so. For - for - coming from outside, what happens here looks like a nightmare. The day of my arrival I saw something fantastic on the TV set in my hotel room. A cobra - a real human cobra - in what I took to be one of those old gangster films Warner Brothers made in the thirties. But I was wrong. When they brought me the afternoon paper, I saw it wasn't a film, but something actual - a trial of "guilt by association". Incredible! I almost threw up.

DAVE

Who was the cobra?

MONIQUE

Need you ask that? Senator Mc.Carthy, of course.

DAVE

Ugh. (The door chimes are heard) Just a minute. It must be Miles.

He goes to the door, opens it. It is another surprise for DAVE: his wife BETTY, incongruously attired in a tweed coat and a pair of evening shoes entirely embroidered in red sequins. DAVE looks at her, stunned.

BETTY

Hello, darling. Yes, it's me. Bob came to see mother, too, and the minute he walked in, out I went - as if I'd touched a live wire.

DAVE

Why did you do that? How could you? Your own brother! And you know damn well he's innocent.

He hugs her in a mechanical way.

BETTY

(looking at MONIQUE) I hope I'm not intruding, am I? (He gives a false laugh) You must be an old friend of Dave's, Countess Duchesne, aren't you? I can't think of any other female friend of his who can dress half as well

She extends her hand to MONIQUE, who shakes it with a worldly smile.

MONIQUE

Thank you. Pleased to meet you, Betty. (Imitating her) You're Betty, aren't you?

BETTY

Uh-huh. Dear Countess, would you like to take off your coat? (Smiling) Dave, the Countess' coat, please.

While DAVE helps MONIQUE to take off her coat, BETTY takes off her own, revealing a simple slip of an evening dress entirely embroidered with red sequins, like her shoes. After looking at her in astonishment, as though she had gone mad, DAVE takes for the door at L., back. He suddenly stops, turns to BETTY and takes an enormous cardboard label off the lower part of her back - or, to be more specific, her behind.

BETTY (cont'd)

Darling, please! Such familiarities before strangers!

DAVE

(going out in a rage) You had a label pinned on your buttocks!

BETTY

(laughs, shrugging her shoulders) And such foul language! (A brief pause) Tell me, my dear Countess. Something worries me; that black - it doesn't mean something has prematurely happened to the Count, does it?

MONIQUE

Oh, no. Black is an old tradition of elegance among Paris' dressmakers.

BETTY

But not always. This is a little Dior number I've just bought here in the neighbourhood. You must excuse me for wearing it now, but I can't stand seeing myself in a shop mirror when I'm trying on something - my face looks like Edith Sitwell's in her prime, and my body, like Helena Rubins-^{is}tein in her old days. Seeing such an image of myself is enough to make me rush out just as I am!

MONIQUE

You can look at yourself now in any other mirror. The effect is quite charming.

BETTY

How very kind and encouraging you are, Countess.

MONIQUE

I think Christian is, not me. How well he knows people! He knows for instance that American women, with their red hair, their childish laughter, their narrow hips, their technicolour glamour, look wonderful when they're decorated like a Christmas tree. Like you, for instance. You're just perfect like that.

BETTY

And so are you, thank you so much. Besides, if you had to go to a funeral, you would have a great advantage over me.

She gives an entirely innocent laugh.

What can I offer you? I think there are a couple of bottles of champagne in the fridge - a leftover from New Year's eve party.

MONIQUE

Thank you very much, but I only have champagne in the morning; I make my gargles with it. I do love Daiquiris, though.

BETTY

Really? You're lucky; they're one of Dave's specialties. (Getting up) I'm going to get the necessary ingredients for him. (Venerously) Will you kindly excuse me, dear Countess?

BETTY leaves L., back, as DAVE re-enters; behind her there remains a silence which pierces the air, like a cry.

MONIQUE

Congratulations, darling. Your little wife is worth three times her weight in gold.

DAVE

(lowering his voice) Tell me, what hotel are you staying at?

MONIQUE

I told you it's no use -

DAVE

The moment you leave the house -

MONIQUE

I'm leaving right away; I feel a storm in the air, and I'm in no form to duck the blood and thunder of it.

DAVE

The moment you leave the house, I'll phone my secretary and put her to work. She's marvellous finding people's addresses.

MONIQUE

I tell you, it's no use. No use!

DAVE

Listen, darling - (Suddenly) Shhh. That's Betty.

Indeed it is: BETTY re-entering with a large platter containing all that is necessary to make the Daiquiris, plus a bucket with a bottle of champagne, which she leaves on the coffee table.

BETTY

Countess, you can't imagine how much I longed to meet you. Dave's had no other interest for years. Now that I know you, my instinct tells me that he's right - and that the others are wrong.

DAVE

(suddenly on his guard) What others?

BETTY

You mind yor Daiquiris, darling; you do them divinely. And open the bottle

BETTY (cont'd)
of champagne, please; I'm getting thirsty, you know.

DAVE
(pouring lemon juice in the shaker and then adding sugar and ice) Now, you can play the character you like before Honique; it's your privilege as a woman. But I know you. So speak up. And be clear: Who are those "others"? What have they said about Honique?

BETTY
Oh, they've talked nonsense. After knowing the Comanches, the whole thing doesn't stand on its feet.

DAVE
Then why didn't you keep your mouth shut?

After adding the rum and a dash of Angostura bitters, he goes to work with the cocktail shaker.

HONIQUE
(to BETTY) You begin to intrigue me, Betty. What did "the others" say?

BETTY
Well, to be quite candid, they were a bit perplexed at you; a woman with the same liberal ideas as Dave has - and God knows that because of his ideas we can land in jail any day; - a true woman of the left or whereabouts, who during the war, for all that, appears to have given certain Nazi officers a red-carpet welcome.

DAVE uncorks the bottle of champagne, and the noise makes BETTY jump.

HONIQUE
(laughs) Oh! You know that! How very well informed you are. But of course this is the land of mass communications. Well, I'll tell you. There were certain Nazi officers very well made - both by Mother Nature and Army training. (DAVE hands BETTY a glass of champagne) Unfortunately, at love-making time they generally gave out very little. But whenever I saw one, I kept on trying. A well-made male body is one of the very few reasons a woman has for standing all she has to stand in life.

BETTY
(enthusiastically) Very good! Whatever people say about you, they can't accuse you of being puritanical!

HONIQUE
Neither puritanical nor hypocritical, I hope. In 1945 we all thought that Hitler was going to be the master of Europe "per seculum seculorum". I

MONIQUE (cont'd)

decided then and there that no political reasoning would prevent me from following my natural "penchant" for well-made men - a taste as natural as it is beautiful.

BETTY

So there. Sincerity like yours, one can only hope to find in the Memoirs of Casanova.

The three laugh with nervous, false laughs. BETTY has downed her glass of champagne and pours herself another.

MONIQUE

And what else have you heard about me?

BETTY

(after gulping her glass) Oh, lots of praise - your help to a young actress who was ill and poor, but beautiful and young enough to put you in the shade, so to speak - your talent to let the men around you to feel they are really free at all times. A truly intelligent policy, worthy of an old continent like Europe. Matriarchies are inevitable in our days, of course; things have got too complicated for little children like men to really run the show. But - should a matriarchy be as open, as shameless as it is among us here? Hmm?

DAVE stares at her with growing astonishment, but once more BETTY plays the innocent.

I'm asking you a simple question. I wouldn't dream of knowing the answer myself.

MONIQUE

(while BETTY pours herself a third glass of champagne) My dear Betty, in all confidence and from woman to woman, I'd like you to know that a champagne hangover is one of the worst.

BETTY

Don't I know it! I have had several, my dear Countess. According to world statistics, France is the most alcoholic country in the world, but, oh boy! I can tell you that right here, with the kind of hectic life we have to lead, we're doing our best to take that championship away from you. (She laughs, looks at MONIQUE with what would appear extreme cordiality and warmth. An ominous silence sets in).

DAVE

(desperately trying to revive conversation) And your husband, Monique? How is he doing?

MONIQUE

Oh, I think we'd better leave him alone.

DAVE

How about Suzanno?

MONIQUE

Her marriage is on the rocks, poor thing.

DAVE

And those people who had the restaurant... what is their name?

MONIQUE

The Ricauds? He's becoming unbearable. I wouldn't be surprised if his wife started an affair with the bottle any day.

BETTY

Oh la la! Is that what our boys call "gay Parec"?

MONIQUE

Yes, Betty. The whole world lives on false pretenses, as you can see.

BETTY

Dave says that Paris cannot be gay because people over there live with their heads, not their hearts.

MONIQUE

Indeed! I wouldn't have thought Dave felt attracted by the dangerous game of simplification.

BETTY

And what else does he say? Oh, yes. He says that France has five good things: her cuisine (wines included), her popular songs, her literature, her perfumes and her Parisiennes.

MONIQUE

In that order?

DAVE

(to BETTY) What the hell are you talking about? I never made that list!

MONIQUE

(nervously) Never mind. I can see it is exactly what you would think. I know you!

DAVE

You know me! I know you, too! You French people, what a hopelessly provincial lot you are! You do believe that all that's French is the best, don't you - never take the trouble to learn how the others think, what they do! No, sir! Well, you have been flattered for too long, first of all by your own selves! To have invented cultural propaganda four centuries ago was a stroke of genius indeed; everybody has believed religiously in it ever since, you yourselves to start with!

MONIQUE

(furious) And you? How about you? What do you think of yourselves?

DAVE

Well, we have tried to create our own way of living -- perhaps the way of living corresponding to this century, that's all. And quite possibly you'll come around and imitate it any day now.

MONIQUE

Us? Never! The hell with this century! I'd love to live in the 8th. century, you know, the 8th.! Every time I raise the toilet lid in my hotel room I expect to hear Chaplin's music for "Limelight"; it comes out of every hole in New York at all times; loudspeakers, restaurant's doors, cigarette boxes, even bottle corks! It's a nightmare! If that's what you call this century, you can take me straight back to the Middle Ages!

MONIQUE composes herself for a second, even manages to give BETTY a pallid smile.

My dear, please excuse my temper. I have enjoyed myself immensely in your company, but unfortunately I have to go. I have an appointment in Manhattan at 8. (Coolly to DAVE) Will you please bring me my coat?

DAVE rushes out by door L., back.

You're a clever girl, Betty. You shouldn't forget, though, that in the fight we're all engaged in, the last one, the good one, is death's round.

BETTY

How true. I'm very sorry you have to leave so early, dear Countess. I like to hear people express deep thoughts, you know; we Americans are quite incapable of thinking them, let alone expressing them. The word "death", for instance, flung like that at a cocktail party in Manhattan, would be considered a first-class obscenity. What do you expect! We're a young nation.

MONIQUE

Young, but not at all stupid; I can see that. I take off my hat to you, Mrs. Smith.

BETTY

Oh! There's nothing to it. Any woman who has to defend what belongs to her, finds somehow the strength to fight all the Joans of Arc who may come her way, believe me.

MONIQUE covers her face with her hands. DAVE re-enters with her coat.

DAVE

(to MONIQUE) What's the matter, are you tired?

BETTY indicates to DAVE with gestures - among them, the gesture of pursing her lips, frowning and shaking her head, all at once - that he should leave MONIQUE alone.

MONIQUE

(taking her hands off her face) Yes I am - a bit. There are moments when everything looks too horrible, too disconnected, too senseless to me. Excuse me. Will you please let me rest like this - just a minute or two?

She falls on the sofa before a harassed DAVE and a skeptical BETTY. Lights dim slowly and the accordion attacks a chaotic hodge-podge of the musical motives we already know - to be insensibly replaced by the swelling notes of the organ.

SCENE XXIII

The gauze drop covering the restaurant and MONIQUE's apartment is replaced by a dark backcloth on which a red foliage is projected. As if caressed by the wind, this foliage moves from time to time.

In a way which suggests somehow a kind of absent-minded quadrille, Monsieur RICAUD, Madame RICAUD and the FLIC run from L. to R., while SUZANNE, CHUCK and STEVE do the same from R. to L., all apparently looking for something - they don't seem to know exactly what. AGENOR runs from the back and meets DUCHESNE, who is suddenly pinpointed by a projector.

Our friend the COUNT is impeccably dressed in a light grey suit with a blue necktie and a tattersall waistcoat in blue and yellow stripes crossing over a white background. His attire is completed by a light grey bowler and yellow suede gloves; a get-up that, along with the energetic tone in which he speaks, would seem to indicate that happy days are here again - at least for him, who has regained his old drive. He hands a slip of paper to AGENOR and takes from him a glass full of a brownish liquid.

DUCHESNE

Here are the three addresses. Learn them by heart and then burn that paper, will you?

AGENOR

Oui, Monsieur le Comte.

DUCHESNE

Take my suitcases to the Gare de Lyon to-morrow and check them in. If you receive an envelope from East Germany with just a piece of yellow paper in side, send them to the second address, that is, Scotland. The piece of yellow paper will mean that I haven't been able to establish contact with them in East Berlin and that I must go to the other places where they've been seen.

AGENOR

(starts fidgeting with his necktie and fixing his hair, things that he will do alternately throughout the scene) You make me so envious, sir.

DUCHESNE

I don't know yet if I can concentrate strongly enough to communicate with them.

AGENOR

Of course you can! Swedenborg did it in the 18th. century already, and he was a Swede! You're almost a Frenchman! You can't fail!

DUCHESNE

Well, you never know. Think of all the idiocies that pass pompously for thoughts here on Earth. I'm not sure I'm actually capable of thinking.

AGENOR

(laughs as if he was being tickled) Excuse me, sir; I'm as nervous as I was on the day of my first communion. To think that in 2,000 A.D. this will be quite an everyday occurrence!

DUCHESNE

I hope you will come and visit me.

AGENOR

If I do so, you may not recognize me, Monsieur le Comte. You will be so much younger than I. Remember that for every 28 years on earth, only 3 pass over there.

DUCHESNE

Humm. I don't know about that. I'll tell you later.

AGENOR

(with a sigh) Oh, sir. How can you keep so calm within days - maybe hours - of the great plunge? I'm so nervous, I feel like climbing up the wall.

DUCHESNE

Well, I'll tell you. These last four years I've been living only for the present. Last week, though, when I stopped dreaming of my mother at night and began to forget my classmates' names by day, I knew I could get prepared for the great cosmic adventure.

AGENOR

(with tears in his voice) But at what price! You forget for ever the taste of Monsieur Ricaud's "timbale de crustacés".

DUCHESNE

Not for ever. Everything came back to me this morning: the taste, the smell, the sensuality - so I decided to leave to-day. (AGENOR bursts into comic weeping) I won't have any of your ridiculous displays! Don't you know how badly regarded any kind of feeling is in this country?

Lights dim as the organ plays two or three of its chaotic bars while another spot follows SUZANNE as

she takes four or five steps in the company of a rather plump woman in black broadcloth trousers and a sailor short coat. The face of this woman is almost completely concealed by a pair of black glasses and her long black hair, which covers her forehead - down to the eyebrows - and falls down on her shoulders.

SCENE XXIV

THE WOMAN

Suzanne!

SUZANNE

What do you want of me? Who are you?

THE WOMAN

But don't you recognize my voice?

SUZANNE

Not if you don't take off your glasses!

The unknown woman does as requested, and it is of course Madame LAMOLLE.

Mother!

For a second or two SUZANNE is appalled and quite speechless.

I love some change here and there, but when you change, you go all the way! Christ Almighty!

MME. LAMOLLE

This is Danny's work - my Danny. He wants to see me always young, always flexible, like a tropical creeper!

SUZANNE

Who's Danny?

MME. LAMOLLE

My latest. The grand amour. (SUZANNE frowns) Oh, I assure you, this time it is true, I'm not fooling myself. He is hardly 17, but so smart he gives you the impression of being in his forties.

SUZANNE

1911 Mother!! You're stark-staring raving mad!

MME. LAMOLLE

I wish I were nineteen myself. Each time I fall on a chair, I go pouff. If I could only take off my corset and let my rolls of fat breathe a little! But I dare not. Once I do that, I know I'd never get up from that chair. It would mean losing my Danny for ever.

SUZANNE

(shaking her head) You know, in spite of everything, I admire you. What courage you have, mother.

MME. LAMOLLE

Admire him, rather. He has such drive. You know he's almost talked me in-
to selling heroin at Place Pigalle?

SUZANNE

Heroin? Oh, mother! You're bound to land in jail!

MME. LAMOLLE

I might -

SUZANNE

Oh, my God! If you ever do, don't count on me; I don't think I could get
over the shame!

MME. LAMOLLE

Shame and dishonour, I know. But it's wonderful for a poor woman like me
to think she has a chance of going into eternity shoulder to shoulder
with the damned - Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud! A fate that no bourgeois
could ever aspire to! Oh, how I understand Raskolnikov! You have to go
plumb into the abyss and swim in the filth of the sewer really to know
what life is like.

SUZANNE

All right, mother. I don't want to go on with this kind of talk.

MME. LAMOLLE

Very well. But you called me, remember?

SUZANNE

Yes. I'd like you to go and see Monique on my behalf.

MME. LAMOLLE

Monique?

SUZANNE

Yes, mother. I'd like to borrow her apartment for one night, you see.

MME. LAMOLLE

For one night?

SUZANNE

Yes. Please don't repeat idiotically everything I say. I'm going to meet
Chuck. And don't ask now: "Chuck?" To make me nervous I have quite enough
with the hounds my dear husband has on my trail.

MME. LAMOLLE

What a foolish girl you are. Do you realize you're running the risk of
losing your divorce case?

SUZANNE

I won't. There are two street entrances to the apartment; practically nobody knows there is a connection between Duchesne's and Monique's sides.

MRS. LAMOLLE

But- but - what do you expect from this encounter - after nine years?

SUZANNE

I don't know. To confirm something - to turn the clock back - I don't know, really.

MRS. LAMOLLE

All right, I'll go see her at once. Fancy that! A night with Chuck! I remember him in the old days, clamouring for his right to keep his virginity intact. And I can't help being moved by the idea of this meeting. Yes, moved, moved, I tell you!

But the two raucous laughs Madame LAMOLLE gives as she says that and lights dim over them leave us in doubt about the kind of emotion she may mean.

Blackout, with some further chaotic bars from the organ.

SCENE XXV

One spot reveals DAVE and BETTY at L., and another, STEVE at R. During the dialogue between man and wife STEVE shall stare at them all the time, registering a series of reactions to what DAVE and BETTY say, as if he were taking part in the conversation.

DAVE is in his shirtsleeves, a telephone in his hand. BETTY wears a red-and-white check pinafore over her dress, and horrible slippers almost entirely covered by light blue swan's down pom-poms.

DAVE

Shh! (On the phone) How's that? (A pause) He's been acquitted? Nothing against him? Nothing? (To BETTY) Oh, darling, we can be happy now. He's been acquitted! It couldn't be otherwise, but what a relief to hear it from his own lawyer!

BETTY bites her lower lip, goes from L. to R. and vice-versa, followed by a spotlight. DAVE goes on with his phone talk.

Yeah, I was afraid of that. (To BETTY) He lost his job. (On the phone again) I think he ought to spend some weeks in California. He must be awfully down in spirits.

In his corner, STEVE bursts out into silent laughter. What? He wants moral support? Not economic; only moral. But of course. He can come whenever he wishes.

BETTY pulls the receiver away from DAVE's hands.

BETTY

Hallo. This is Mrs. Smith. Bob's sister, yes. How do you do? Listen. My husband is a very generous man, but there are times when he lets his feelings carry him away. Give me my brother's number, will you? I'll call him in an hour. Not an hour? 55 minutes?

Puzzled, she looks at her watch, then at DAVE.

These lawyers! (On the phone) All right. Tell Bob to take care. Bye-bye.

She hangs up the receiver and the telephone disappears from DAVE's hands into the duct as if by sleight of hand.

DAVE

(astounded) Either you've gone out of your wits or you're the greatest bitch ever!

In his corner, STEVE pouts and nods, as though he meant to say: "You deserve it, clam".

BETTY

You've gone mad, you! What man in his right senses would ask home another man who's just been investigated?

DAVE

He was acquitted!

BETTY

And who cares about that? He was investigated! He's tarnished for ever, and so are we. If you weren't a liberal, perhaps we could get away with it. He may be innocent, and so may you, but we are brother and sister and brother-in-law, and we're all branded. Now, if Bob comes to the house and stays here, we'll be plague-stricken for life- a real trio of untouchables.

DAVE laughs ragingly while STEVE applauds in his corner.

DAVE

I wish I had a recording machine. I wish I could make you listen to your own words twenty years from now. You would die of shame! (A pause) Lord Almighty, what a sucker I've been!

BETTY

That's precisely whay people say: that you're a sucker, that you don't understand the present-day world!

STEVE points his finger accusingly at DAVE.

DAVE

Maybe they're right; but I can at least understand one thing. Let's assume that when they were in college one of Bob's fellow students wanted to go

DAVE (cont'd)

to bed with him and never succeeded. Almost twenty years later, out of spite, that guy writes an anonymous letter to a senator accusing Bob of having signed in 1934 a manifesto against Hitler's concentration camps. He's summoned and questioned, and the fact is established that he never signed anything. He ought to be put in jail for that, but he's acquitted instead.

STEVE, shaking his head, gives an ironical whistle. But, having been investigated, he loses his job, his landlord evicts him and now, to put the finishing touch to the lovely picture, his own sister refuses to receive him home. In one word, society vomits him, throws him up. And why? 1) Because he never was a homosexual, 2) because he might have condemned genocide!

STEVE takes his hands to his head, as if this was the grossest distortion of facts ever.

Now, to cap it all, they will take his passport from him and he'll have to go to the desert and get a job in a gas station or something. He'll have to grow a beard and change his name. Think of it all for a minute! A whole nation offers no resistance to a civil crime of this kind; nobody does or says a damned thing against it!

STEVE, tossing his head backwards, emits a sarcastic "Ha!"

BETTY

What a way of looking at things.

DAVE

If you're incapable of feeling anything, you should at least be able to think. A man who goes through the kind of ordeal Bob's gone needs people around him, needs their esteem and warmth. You're in your right not receiving him if you don't want to; but I'm in my right, too, leaving you. With the added advantage that if I do so, your reputation as a reactionary will become unimpeachable.

STEVE, his arms crossed, nods in enthusiastic approbation.

BETTY

Do as you like, Dave. There's no question of Bob landing here. If he does come, first thing they'd do would be to investigate you! And that would be the end of us!

DAVE

Well, let them try! They'll hear me out all right!

A pause. STEVE looks up to the sky and laughs as if to say "What a sucker you are".

BETTY

Dave, Dave, please. In some years from now no one will remember this.

DAVE

Precisely! In 50 years from now, science and technology will be so advanced that to-day's ideologies will look ridiculous. What's happened to your brother will then look more than ridiculous: it will look criminal, criminal and insane!

STEVE half closes his eyes and makes a wry face, meaning "There may be a grain of truth in what this stupid ass is saying".

That's why one must revolt against such infectious madness. Man has not now, and never will have, the right to destroy another man because of his political ideas!

BETTY

(after another silence) Oh, my God! I forgot the joint in the oven. Excuse me.

DAVE

The joint! (With another sarcastic laugh) So you're worried about the joint (I know, it costs 14 dollars); but to see your brother burn alive because of the cowardice and ignorance of society in general, doesn't touch you a bit. Bravo!

BETTY rushes out. DAVE raises his voice.

Well, take good care of the joint, my dear! You'll have meat for three days; for I won't be home to eat it!

The spots go out on a sudden blackout, in which we hear DUCHESNE's laugh serve as a musical link between this flash and the next.

A spot picks him up as MONIQUE approaches him in a large tweed coat, her head covered - American style - by a black scarf.

SCENE XXVI

MONIQUE

Bibi! Oh, Bibi! Look at you! (Gladly) I can't believe it!

DUCHESNE

Chère Minou. (In a quite insincere tone) You here, so soon? What an extremely pleasant surprise.

They embrace. DUCHESNE sniffs MONIQUE's perfume, raises his eyebrows and grunts with pleasure.

MONIQUE

(taking a step back and looking at him) How about you, dressed up like that, laughing and actually smelling at things? I can't get over it! The cook told me about the change of mood you underwent at lunch time, but even seeing it, I can't believe it. What are you drinking?

DUCHESNE

An Amer Picon, the classical "apéritif" of the French connoisseur.

MONIQUE

Amer Picon? But - but you always found it ghastly. You said it tasted like medicine.

DUCHESNE

It still does, but what's wrong with a bit of a good medicine now and then?

MONIQUE

(staring at him) What's happened, Bibi? Something's happened. Have you finally found your religion?

DUCHESNE

I - don't - know if you can call it a religion. Let's say I've found a faith.

MONIQUE

And with faith, the taste of things has come back to you!

DUCHESNE

Completely. You, for instance, smell of "Blue Grass" and have had a honey-and-almond cake at lunch. But - but I'm afraid you haven't got what you were looking for in America.

MONIQUE

That's a sixth sense you've developed - the sense of clairvoyance. How did you guess it?

DUCHESNE

I haven't guessed it. Something tells me it is so.

MONIQUE

(still staring) Well, something tells me that you aren't quite back in the swing of things, not quite. But there's been a prodigious change.

DUCHESNE

(condescendingly) Very clever of you, Minou.

He raises finger and eyes to heaven.

MONIQUE

(going out R. and shaking her finger at him) Not of that kind, I hope! The time is not ripe yet to move into other planets!

DUCHESNE gives a nervous, overwrought laugh. The spot light singling out MONIQUE goes off.

DUCHESNE

(shouting) Agénor!!

AGENOR

(rushing in) Please, sir, don't shout like that, you've given me a scare!

DUCHESNE

I must go now. I left a word for my wife under the willow. She may take a little rest before dressing for the evening - and quite possibly she may find my note of adieu. Give me a glass of that Bollinger you're keeping on ice, will you?

He takes a ten-thousand franc note out of his trouser pocket, gives it to AGENOR.

AGENOR

(servicing the champagne) Dressed as you are, Monsieur le Comte, you can't pretend you're leaving incognito, can you?

DUCHESNE

(laughing) Don't you worry about that, my boy. The Countess will have them look for me in London, but certainly not in Eastern Germany. (raises his glass) I hope this is farewell to the world, a slightly sad farewell, I must say. The world! Men have turned it into a horror; but how pleasant that kind of horror can sometimes be! Oh, I find it hard to bid good-bye to this city. But if ever a man did have to do it, this is the time. Good-bye, Paris, you lovely bimillennarian bitch. Good-bye, wild strawberries of the spring, and good-bye, goat cheese; you're one of the few great successes of civilization. Good-bye Périgord truffles, dear friends, and Pelure d'Oignon, you popular, you brawling wine you - brawling and at the same time noble like anything. It's sad to think that, where I'm going, I won't probably miss you at all.

AGENOR

That's enough, sir. You must hurry. Someone may crop up: your wife, the police, who knows!

As if his words were an enchantment of some kind, the FLIC shows up at L, singled out by a spotlight, and watches with some astonishment a dialogue he cannot hear.

DUCHESNE

(visibly touched, almost with tears in his eyes) Good-bye Place Vendôme!

DUCHESNE (cont'd)

enberg, you and your four tall trees; you're the most theatrical adieu I've ever seen. Good-bye, dear old ladies of Auteuil and Passy; I think I won't be able to forget the way you had of thrusting your bony fists into my last lumbar vertebrae when you wanted me to make way for you at the bus or the underground. It was so much more original and arresting than simply saying "Pardon, monsieur". Good-bye, metaphors of Prévert and verses without metaphors of Charles Cros; you pleased me equally, I must say. And you, drunken accordions of Pigallo; good-bye to you, too.

DUCHESNE gulps his glass of champagne.

Good-bye tramps of the Seine -

AGENOR

(interrupting) Please, monsieur le Comte, that's enough!

DUCHESNE

(still at his adieu) It is quite possible that, in the world I expect to go to, I'll forget all about you. And yet - one shouldn't forget the beauty or intensity you succeeded in giving down here on earth to this dubious dream called life.

He shakes AGENOR's hand.

AGENOR

Think with all your might, Monsieur le Comte, concentrate! And above all, when they arrive, don't touch them. If they are made of antibodies, as I'm inclined to believe, the contact could make the whole planet blow to smithereens.

DUCHESNE

That would be very funny indeed. I've always maintained that one should be cautious in everything, except friendship. (He sighs) Good-bye, Agénor. And thank you - thank you so much - for everything.

DUCHESNE kisses his hand in a gesture of adieu and makes an embracing movement with his arms, as if he wanted to hold the whole world in them. AGENOR weeps for all he is worth. The two spots fixed on them go off slowly, as does the one which singled out the FLIC. The accordion attacks for a moment the allegro march. Then, as an echo with stereophonic resonances over many angles, we hear MONIQUE's voice in the dark.

MONIQUE's voice

Dave! Come, come at once! I can't wait any longer! Come!

SCENE XXVII

A spotlight takes up SUZANNE, who is shown at centre stage, bare-foot, in a dressing gown much too big for her. Since the lights come up very very slowly, for some seconds she looks like a hallucination.

The accordion sounds become louder and louder, and then fade away to be replaced by a snore - the snore of another hippopotamus.

SUZANNE
(to herself) That's Chuck. (Shaking her head) To think that the morning I met him I thought it was Leonique snoring!

CHUCK
(shouting offstage) Susie! Baby!

SUZANNE
What?

CHUCK
(ditto) Have you seen my sock?

SUZANNE
What?

CHUCK
(shows up under a spotlight very much like he was when SUZANNE saw him first in "Prelude and Fugue": hair in disorder, open-collared linen shirt and only one sock on) Where is my sock? Hell, I can't find it. I got so bored looking for it, I fell asleep again. (SUZANNE laughs) What are you laughing at?

SUZANNE
The strange coincidences of life. You look almost exactly as you did the day I first met you.

CHUCK
(looks at himself, laughs in his turn) That's right. Seems it was only yesterday, doesn't it? And yet - sometimes I feel each one of these years weighs like a century. (A little pause) Remember the first thing you said to me?

SUZANNE
No, I don't think so.

CHUCK
You asked: "Here in Paris, what can a girl without culture do?"

SUZANNE
(laughing noisily) How stupid you can get when you're young!

CHUCK

You mean when you have no experience; young, you are now.

SUZANNE

(with a curtsey) Merci, monsieur. Just a minute, I'm going to look for your sock.

The spotlight on her goes off while she runs out.
CHUCK smiles.

CHUCK

(raising his voice) Baby!

SUZANNE

(offstage) Yes -

CHUCK

And the rest of the conversation - do you remember the rest?

SUZANNE

(ditto) I think you were afraid an outrage on your decency might have been committed by a woman while you were asleep.

CHUCK

(laughing no less loudly than her) That's right. What a jackass!

SUZANNE

(reappears under a spotlight, showing CHUCK her brassière) Look! Here's your sock! (Laughing, she withdraws the sock from the inside of her bra) Why, isn't this a perfect image of our night together?

CHUCK

(taking the sock and unsuccessfully trying to put it on while he stands) Quite. It all went fine, just fine, didn't it?

SUZANNE

Honestly?

CHUCK

Honestly. You don't need me to tell you that.

SUZANNE

Oh, you never can tell - Thierry is not a passionate man, and he's been my only experience.

CHUCK

Then, baby, you deserve a medal, a blue ribbon or something. You're sensational. Excuse me a minute.

The spotlight on CHUCK goes off while he turns his back on her.

SUZANNE

(raising her voice) Chuck - You haven't told me yet why you're in uniform. Is it - is it for old times' sake?

CHUCK

(offstage) Shucks, I'm not that silly. I'm back in the Army for good, and off to Frankfurt to-morrow.

SUZANNE

What happened?

CHUCK

Nothing happened, that's what happened.

SUZANNE

And La Rochefoucauld? How did he fare in Manhattan?

CHUCK

Poor duke! Hostesses found him awfully old hat; they were only interested in Camus.

SUZANNE

(after a short laugh) Oh, Chuck!

CHUCK, fully dressed, reappears under a spotlight.

CHUCK

I learned something, though; if you lived abroad a year, you'd better not go back - ever.

All of a sudden, SUZANNE starts crying.

Oh, no, please, no tears now, baby. We're adult people, aren't we?

SUZANNE

(snivelling) Precisely. That's what makes me cry. If there's something I detest in people, it's maturity.

CHUCK

(staring at her) Well, I like to look at things from a certain distance, to feel a little detached. It's a comfortable sensation.

SUZANNE

But that's not maturity; that's plain old age. (Her whimpers become loud) You're not happy with me, Chuck; something didn't click last night.

CHUCK

I don't think so - but if it didn't, it must be my fault.

SUZANNE

No, no. You were so self assured, so natural about it! It isn't your fault at all.

CHUCK

(laughing) As for my self-assurance, I owe it to the silent partners I

CHUCK (cont'd)
had in Germany, baby.

SUZANNE
And maybe because of them, deep inside, you still hate me.

CHUCK
What an idea! (Tenderly) You're a crazy girl. (Whispers her) Imagine a guy who wants to get the ultimate in de luxe cars. He sees one, falls in love with it, saves money like mad to pay for the first installment - and pays it. Just then the car-makers go bankrupt, the factory closes, there is an interminable legal suit - and nine years pass before he can get his car. It is still the dream of a lifetime for him, but nine years have passed. Nine years!

SUZANNE breaks into sobs.
Please, baby. It was all right last night, I tell you. The engine didn't fail for a second and one must say that body's lines are still quite the thing. If you'd ever known how madly I cared for you, baby, you would realize I'm not just being polite. (Spanking her) Come on, madame, get dressed, vite, vite! I'm starving! What better proof you want that the night was satisfactory? Allez!

CHUCK gives a presumptuous laugh while SUZANNE goes away, her head turned towards him, laughing rather hysterically, with tears in her throat. CHUCK looks at himself in an imaginary mirror while he whistles the waltz refrain. Lights dim slowly as a cry of "Agénor!" uttered by Madame RICAUD, pierces the dark.

SCENE XXVIII

Two spotlights are projected on Monsieur RICAUD and AGENOR.

MADAME R.
(again) AGENOR!!

MONSIEUR R.
You too?

AGENOR
I too, what?

MONSIEUR R.
You too did something wrong?

AGENOR
No, patron; but after finding her this morning sobbing the coalman in the bathtub, I wish I had. It made my blood boil. I think I'll never recover from that shock.

MONSIEUR R.

Be reasonable, mon p'tit. If she had kissed him and embraced him without washing him first, we would have noticed it immediately.

AGÉNOR

(going out in anger, followed by a spotlight) It's all right for you to talk like that! You're only the husband! But I'm giving you notice, patron!

MONSIEUR R.

Come here, my boy! Oh, what a child! Agénor!!

MADAME R.

(appearing under a spotlight and addressing her husband furiously) So there you are! I want to talk to you!!

MONSIEUR R.

Not so loud, Amélie; we're in the street.

MADAME R.

(shouting) I don't care if the whole of France knows what kind of scoundrel you are! Look at this!

She opens her hand and shows a series of banknotes eaten up and reduced to a ghastly kind of paper lace.

While one sleeps in all tranquillity, convinced one's fortune is literally supporting the house in the form of gold bricks - that was a brain-wave of yours, that was - Monsieur goes back to his old habits and hides his money under a tile again. And naturally, the mice come and have quite a feast!

MONSIEUR R.

You're lying!

MADAME R.

You know damn well I never do, unless it is socially or by omission!

MONSIEUR R.

(sardonically) Ha! Ha! Show me that. (He takes the bits of paper from her hand) Where did you get it?

MADAME R.

Under a loose tile just beside the pantry door.

MONSIEUR R.

(whining) Look at that! The savings of three months guzzled up by rats! This is the final blow; I can't stand any more of this!

MADAME R.

Final blow! Ha! Wait till I lodge a complaint informing the law that by hiding that money you've not only been robbing me, but the Bureau of Internal Revenue as well!

MONSIEUR R.

(with an ironical smile) So you would go to the law, would you?

LADINE R.

Yes, I have a witness, too!

MONSIEUR R.

(his smile turns into a sinister laugh) Agéonor! Ha! Ha! Well, go on, proceed; I'll ask for a divorce and have Agéonor for a witness, too; he saw you with the coalman this morning! Then you'll never get a cent from me!

LADINE R.

I'm quite sure you'd be as wise as to descend to that!

MONSIEUR R.

Well, nothing like a good divorce to show the true nasty nature of people.

LADINE R.

You wouldn't dare!

MONSIEUR R.

Nor would you dare lodge your complaint, would you?

After looking at him for a couple of seconds, she shakes her head. There is another short pause; then Monsieur and Madame RICAUD burst out laughing at the same time.

The spotlights singling them out go off; at the same time the red foliage projected on the stage disappears. The accordion waltz is heard again, but its melody is now distorted, as if it were the musical accompaniment to a nightmare; then, some seconds later, MONIQUE's plaintive voice, slightly distorted too, is heard again.

MONIQUE

Dave! Come back! Now! This very minute! I can't wait a minute longer!

SCENE XXIX

Lights come up on the RICAUDS' restaurant. At long last spring has put in an appearance here. A green-and-white striped awning covers part of the entrance doors, which are opened onto the inside. There are three tables on the sidewalk, and on either side a shrub in a square white box.

The part corresponding to MONIQUE's apartment is covered by a gauze drop representing the facade of the building. The trees on the garden are dressed up in spring foliage. And so is MONIQUE, with a crown of pink petals on her head, held by a white veil that covers part of her forehead and a cascade of white lace on her white blouse, the whole discreetly offset by a black velvet tailored suit.

MONIQUE covers her face with her hands and sits as she did when we left her at DAVE's apartment. In that position she says again:

MONIQUE

Either you come now or I swear to you that -

DAVE, in a clerical grey suit and an Anthony Eden hat, shows up all of a sudden before MONIQUE (he must have been hiding behind the shrub) and answers her:

DAVE

That what? What have you got in that little head? Tell us.

MONIQUE raises her head, sees him, and with more terror than astonishment, shakes her head like someone wanting to wake up.

I heard your call from New York, darling, and here I am.

MONIQUE

Look at me, dreaming in public, dreaming aloud, too! (she embraces him) Oh, Dave! Have you left everything behind? The agency, the investigating committees, your home? Everything? Can that be possible?

They kiss for quite a time.

DAVE

Oui, mon amour.

MONIQUE

So you're here for good. Good!

Madame RICAUD enters by the back and sees them as they sit at table.

DAVE

Well, I'm not quite sure. I'm not sure of anything. This is a kind of trip into the unknown. Funny, now I'm here, I can see that the unknown is, in a certain sense, very well known. It's - it's like going into a clinic, you know.

MADAME R.

(approaching them) Well, I never! Captain Smith! This is a surprise! When did you arrive? How are you? Such a pleasure, to see you again!

DAVE

(getting up) Dear Madame Rivière, the pleasure is mutual. It's astonishing; but you haven't changed a bit.

MADAME R.

Thank you, sir. Congratulations, Madame la Comtesse; your friend's in fine form (she makes a typical French sound with her mouth to indicate how fine the form is) and more gallant than ever, too! Are we having lunch with the Countess, Monsieur le Capitaine?

DAVE

I expect so.

MADAME R.

Shall I bring a little "apéritif" first? (She winks at MONIQUE) Same as always? (He opens his mouth to answer, but she will not let him) Don't tell me. I remember: a very dry martini with a little onion.

DAVE

Really! You even remembered the little onion! I find that very touching.

MADAME R.

Excuse me.

She goes inside to prepare the drinks.

MONIQUE

You Americans! Anything touches you - even a little onion!

DAVE

It was damn nice of Madame Rivière to remember.

MONIQUE

Ricaud, not Rivière. Be touched if you want, but please remember names correctly. (Silence) Well, what about Betty? How did she take it? What happened?

DAVE

Look me in the eye, my dear Countess. What do you think?

MONIQUE

I? That you have the least expressive eyes in the world, dear sir. Which doesn't prevent me from loving you madly.

DAVE

(smiles conceitedly) Whatever happened to your count?

MONIQUE

I haven't the faintest idea. He went away six months ago - and it's just as if the earth had swallowed him. But I'll have to wait years yet to be legally free.

DAVE

And Chuck?

MONIQUE

Captain Smith, couldn't you leave people alone for the time being and tell me instead that you love me?

DAVE

As a matter of fact, I can. I can tell you that I love you till I am blue in the face. I could never tell Betty that - but you, oh boy, I can tell you!

MONIQUE

Then you're in love with her, you dirty rat. (He laughs)

MADAME R.

(bringing the "apéritifs") Excuse me, Countess. Shall I bring the Captain the same lunch?

DAVE

Yes, please. What the Countess chooses is always perfect.

MONIQUE

(looking intently at him) I'm not so sure of that.

MADAME R.

(to DAVE) And now, if you allow me, I'll tell Monsieur Récoud you're here.

She goes to the back. DAVE takes MONIQUE's hand and rubs it against his cheek.

MONIQUE

Don't think I haven't noticed that you're using Pepsodent again. I'm simply delighted.

DAVE

Anything to please you, darling.

MONIQUE

(sipping her drink) It's incredible that you have come at last to stay put, incredible, my love!

DAVE

Stay put? Well, there's nothing I'd like better, but -

MONIQUE

But what?

DAVE

I don't think I have a right to live in paradise while my own people go on with their battle.

MONIQUE

What battle? What people? The ones who are investigated? Those are dragged into it. But if you mean the others, you'll be wasting your time going back home; the others won't see the light of reason until they go broke again, as in the crash of '29.

DAVE

(again piqued) And for your people to see the light of reason, what will be necessary, eh?

MONIQUE

(smiling) Perhaps that they reason less.

DAVE

Or more! Please remember the mess you all made when you imitated our own revolution, back in the days of Lafayette!

MONIQUE

Imitated? Don't make me laugh.

DAVE

Yes, imitated, yes; just as you copied our Constitution and pompously called it the Declaration of the Rights of Man! Everybody laughs at us Americans, but they all copy us all the time!

MONIQUE

(seriously) Dave darling, before I start losing my temper, give me a kiss.

DAVE

Non amour.

As they clinch in a passionate embrace AGENOR arrives, beaming with contentment, and approaches them.

AGENOR

Captain Smith! Pre- pare - 1

MONIQUE

That kiss was meant for the human animal in you, who still attracts me terribly. And this is for the retrogressive brain hidden in that pleasant carcass.

She slaps him with all her might.

AGENOR

(simultaneously with MONIQUE's slap) Fire!

DAVE takes a hand to his cheek and shakes MONIQUE's with the other.

DAVE

It was for real this time, Adalbert.

AGENOR

Agénor, sir, if you don't mind.

DAVE

Adalbert, Agénor - what's the difference? All the time, I remembered it begins with an "a", didn't I?

AGENOR

(slightly offended) Oh, I remember too that you come from the state of Michigan.

DAVE

Minnesota.

AGNOR

(with a little laugh) There's no diff; they both begin with an "n".

DAVE

Touché.

AGNOR

Excuse me, Captain. (He goes to counter)

DAVE

(to MONIQUE) Your slap hurts like hell, you know. I wish we could leave Frenchmen and Americans alone. Are we going to make life impossible for each other because of them? What nonsense! There's only you and I, alone, naked, in the whole vast world, don't you know that?

MONIQUE

Not naked, darling. They would put us in jail. (DAVE laughs) We are quite dressed; dressed with our nationalistic pride, with our own stereotypes. Such is the way of the world.

DAVE

(gives a sigh) Pussy cat, this is worse than nonsense. Let's swear never to talk about France or America again, shall we?

MONIQUE

We can't. We would break our oath five minutes after making it. We're in Paris, surrounded by walls on which people are chalking all the time "Americans go home", and you have just arrived from New York, sick with what's going on in your country. How can we swear not to talk about it?

DAVE

Darling, Darling! I need you. I desire you, I want you, but I need you, too.

He gets up, makes her rise from her seat and gives her another long kiss. Monsieur RICAUD enters from the back and contemplates the scene with obvious satisfaction; then he approaches them with a radiant smile. AGNOR, in his turn, looks at the couple in amazement. DAVE and MONIQUE separate slowly, reluctantly.

MONSIEUR R.

Bravo.

DAVE

Bonjour. How are you, my dear Monsieur Rivière?

MONSIEUR R.

Mon Capitaine! This visit was long overdue. I hope this time you'll stay in Paris for ever, hehheh?

DAVE

I wish I could - (Shaking hands with Monsieur RICAUD) Thank you.

MONSIEUR R.

(to MONIQUE) Madame la Comtesse: Knowing the Captain was here, I have taken the liberty of modifying your choice ever so slightly by adding some cailles à l'Araguac. It will make for some - some sort of equilibrium, what!

MONIQUE

Thank you for the delicate thought, Monsieur Ricard. About the only place in the world where one can still expect to find some equilibrium is, thank God, a French restaurant.

MONSIEUR R.

It is I who must thank you, Madame la Comtesse.

He bows and leaves by the back. There is a pause. MONIQUE and DAVE sigh and drink in silence.

MONIQUE

Well, this is the proof we need! If we want our love to survive, we'll have to give up for life the idea of having any conversation.

DAVE

(with a mighty glare in his eye) But we still have other prospects left. Let's go to bed right this minute, shall we? The hell with Ricard's lunch. Don't look at me like that, pussy cat. In bed there will be no misunderstandings, I can assure you.

MONIQUE

And so to bed. What for? To hear you say one enormity after the other, the moment it's all over? No, thank you.

DAVE

What enormities? What are you talking about?

MONIQUE

For instance, that we copycats are doing all you Yankees do.

DAVE

That I have said and that I repeat!

MONIQUE

Then, give me an example. What are we copying which is so typically yours, eh?

DAVE

Our drugstores -

MONIQUE

A pharmacy where you can buy a bible and a contraceptive at the same time! We're not as crazy as all that.

DAVE

And the supermarkets! It's coming any minute.

MONIQUE

God forbid! Everything wrapped in cellophane, and fruit and vegetables painted to make them look ripe. Never! Here we love to touch what we buy.

DAVE

And our bathrooms! Not only shall you build them, but you'll eventually use them, too! They will still be considered a luxury, but you'll be using them!

MONIQUE

Now you're asking for another slap.

DAVE

With truth on my side, I neither offend nor fear anybody, as some South-American here said once.

MONIQUE

(defiantly) And what else?

DAVE

And the mania for changing one's car every year, and all the ideas in women's magazines, and the madness of running "en masse" out of town the moment there are three free days for everybody, and "personalized" things, and blue jeans and frozen foods and cowboy shirts and long, long trailers - You won't be the first to copy all that!

MONIQUE

Never! Never in our lives!

DAVE

And sports clothes for young girls, and electronic computers, and public relations officers - there are some already right here in Paris - and the craze for television -

MONIQUE

You think we are stupid?

DAVE

No, but ^{all} that's coming, and it's inevitable.

MONIQUE

Well, if it actually happens because of some unexpected metamorphosis of the national character, I'm sure we'll be clever enough to find out that each little innovation is a product of French genius.

DAVE

That, I'm quite ready to believe.

MONIQUE

Go on, burst with pride! It's a wonderful prospect!

Interrupting the incensed reporter for a short time, AGNEOR brings the wine. Then MONIQUE goes on:

MONIQUE (cont'd)

That last kiss, Dave - I think it was my liberation kiss.

DAVE

Liberation from what?

MONIQUE

From my silly obsession that only in your arms could there be love for me.

She gets up, takes her handbag and gloves.

I hope you enjoy - all by yourself - what should have been an unforgettable "déjeuner d'amoureux".

DAVE

Monique! Please!

MONIQUE

For now that I'm liberated, I'm going straight to the grillon bar to look for a lover who is 100 % French!

DAVE

Please, pussy cat, don't say such things. You hurt me. If I said something offensive perhaps it was - it was - well, I don't know, maybe because I'm ashamed of what's happening in America.

MONIQUE

But the fact of the matter is, you said it. You should have counted up to 500 before opening your mouth. When I said "liberated" I meant it, and if you insist, I'll shout it in the streets. Liberated, yes, liberated! It's all over! I'm free!

She runs out, followed by DAVE.

DAVE

Monique! Monique!

But he stops, halfway out.

AGNEOR

(uncorking the bottle of wine) Follow her, Captain! Don't let her go!

DAVE

(turning to him) No, no, it's no good. I saw it very clearly in her eyes. Perhaps it's better this way, after all.

AGNEOR

(serves DAVE a glass of wine) Go after her, please!

DAVE

No, she said it's all over, and she's right. Women don't know how to wait: they're not romantic enough for that. Besides, sooner or later, I'll have

DAVE (cont'd)

to go back to New York, and I'd better make it sooner.

ARMON rushes out. DAVE gulps his glass, and then another and another. Then he falls onto his chair, covering his face with his hands. The invisible recordion plays the waltz refrain. Then, some seconds later, Monsieur and Madame RICAUD come to DAVE's table, he is still in the same position.

MONSIEUR R.

Captain -

DAVE takes his hands from his face, wet with tears, and jumps up in an automatically polite movement.

DAVE

Excuse me. It's the spring dust; it always irritates my eyes.

MADAME R.

Even spring has its drawbacks, monsieur.

DAVE

Will you join me for lunch, please? I feel lonely, all of a sudden. I'll be very glad if you do. Please!

MADAME R.

(to Monsieur RICAUD) Listen to that! He'll be very glad! He says "please" to us! It takes an American to remind us of the good manners of the past!

DAVE

(manages a faint laugh) No kidding!

They sit at table, and DAVE serves wine to the RICAUDs, then serves himself, lifts his glass and gulps it.

MONSIEUR R.

It's a very changed world since the war, eh, Captain?

DAVE dare

No one knows how much. We don't give it a thought.

The wine, drunk so quickly on an empty stomach, suddenly takes its effect, and DAVE gives a hearty laugh. The RICAUDs follow with alarm this counterpoint of serious speech and mad laugh, but eventually, infected by DAVE's gaiety, they shall break into enthusiastic laugh themselves.

And there's more changing ahead yet. A day must come when people get fed up with books devoted to antiheroes and rats, to sex and violence, and throw them out the window. (He laughs) Why, if the world were not full of unsung heroes who live in mortal fear of the earth's destruction, yet shave every morning, and are polite to their fellow-workers, and even take

DAVE (cont'd)

their wives to the cinema once a week, it would already have blown up.

The RICAUDS give a tentative laugh.

Thank you for being here with me, my dear Ricauds. I haven't felt such peace and quiet in years.

But his laughter gives him the lie. AGÉONOR, a new bottle in hand, refills the three glasses.

One for you too, Adalbert.

The RICAUDS laugh openly. AGÉONOR bows and goes out to look for another glass.

I'm sorry. I got all your names wrong, I know. But all the time I was too well aware it's Ricaud, not Rividre, Agéonor, not Adalbert.

MONSIEUR R.

Don't you worry about that, sir. Memory transferring things a bit has never done anybody any harm.

DAVE

At any rate, quite possibly this is only a prologue.

MADAME R.

(alarmed) A prologue?

DAVE

Yes. It must be. One single life isn't enough - there's no time to make sense of what you do - no control of what happens to you - it ends all too soon - It's just not possible.

MADAME R.

Oh la la! You're in a dangerous frame of mind, mon Capitaine. You'll finish believing in God.

DAVE

Me? God forbid. I'm a liberal!

MONSIEUR R.

(raising his voice) Agéonor! Bring us the boudin, before it gets cold!
(Back to his normal voice) Wait till you try that, mon Capitaine. It's one of my specialities, something I really take great pride in.

DAVE

Oh, then, let's give it our undivided attention, by all means. (But his attention wanders) Do you remember the first night Chuck and I walked in here? Do you? It was like one of the old Palais Royal farces. What a night!

The RICAUDS nod repeatedly through their laughs.

Chuck was as drunk as a Plover bun, and first thing we saw when we arrived, was Countess Duchesno (he noticed her smile, I her legs), and when Agéonor

DAVE (cont'd)

came to wait on us and learned I was a Minnesotan -

By now laughter has become so irrepressible and riotous that the curtain falling comes as a relief.

THE END