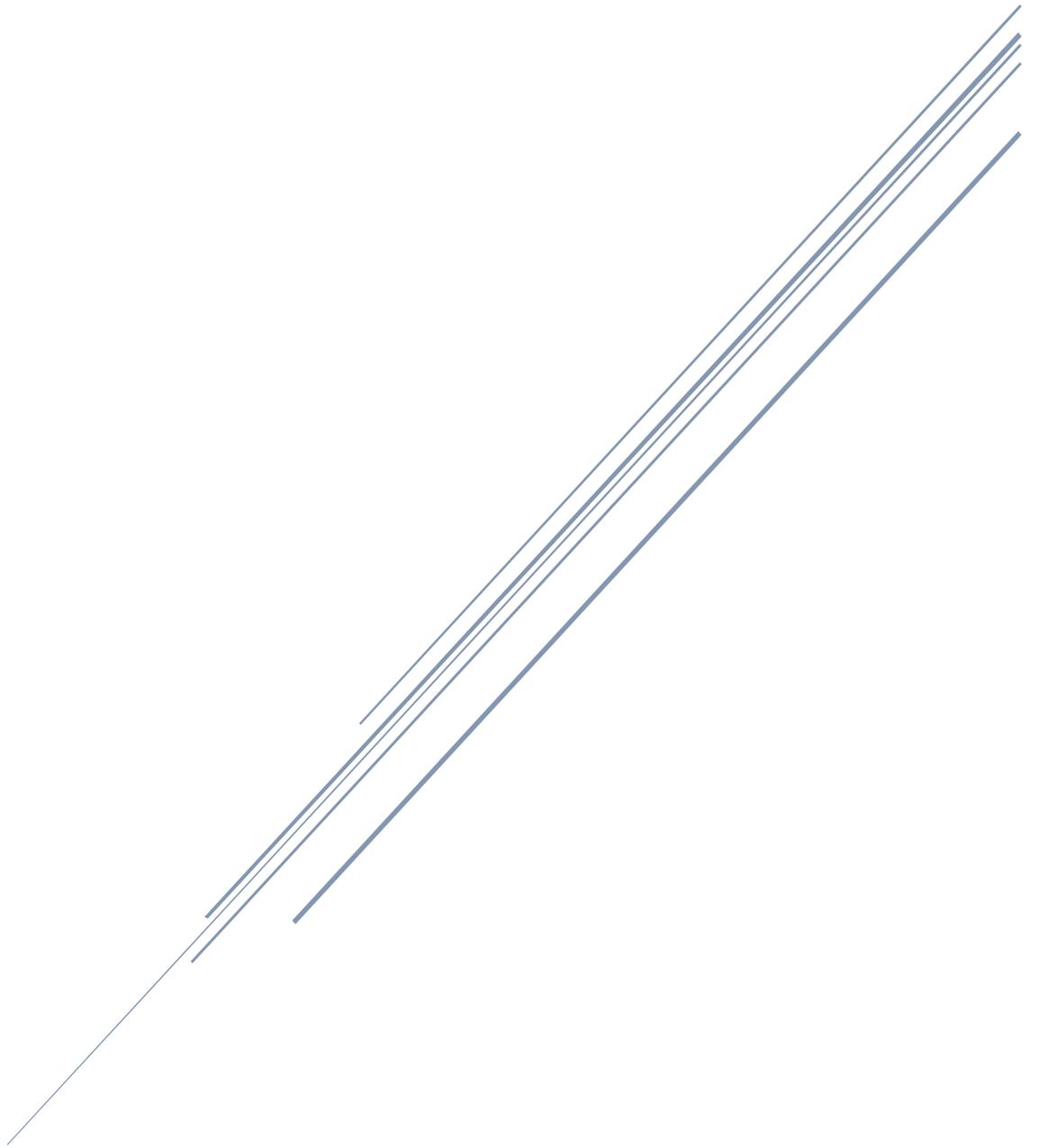


THERESE RAQUIN



Leslie Sands
a stage adaptation of Emile Zola's novel

Characters

Therese

Laurent

Madame Raquin

Camille

Grivet

Michaud

ACT ONE

Scene One

The living-room has a lofty ceiling and is wallpapered in a faded and undistinguished grey. Up Right is an archway, through which may be glimpsed the hand-rail of a staircase, descending to the shop below; this area also gives access to MADAME RAQUIN'S bedroom, which is understood to be off-Right. Up Left, and at an angle to the rest of the room, is a bedroom alcove, with bed and night-table or low shelves. Both arch and alcove may be fully screened off by curtains as and when necessary.

The door to the small kitchen is in the Left Wall, and Down Left is the ornate fireplace. Facing this (Down Right) is a sash-window that looks out on the roofs of Paris. The bedroom alcove has windows also, and some of these have been converted to form a glass door that is normally kept locked and leads to a narrow outside stairway.

Down Right, a chaise longue; upstage in the Right Wall, built-in bookshelves; two armchairs near the fire, one green and one blue; in the middle of the Back Wall, a substantial sideboard or dresser; fairly centrally situated, a circular table with flaps (at present extended), covered with an oilcloth cover.

If space is available, other furnishings could include a tall cupboard used for clothes, a small work-table, a stool and numerous shelves, all crowded with shabby oddments. The general effect should be one of cluttered comfort, combined with Practicality.

An evening in September.

The bedroom alcove is shut off by the curtains, and from behind them comes muffled laughter and the sounds of a lovers' struggle. THERESE RAQUIN bursts through the curtains, her dress hastily flung on, the bodice still wide open. She is a lithe and beautiful animal, with a touch of the mulatto about her. A male arm, bare, extends from the alcove, trying to hold her back.

THERESE *(laughing, breathless)* No! Let me — go!

She breaks free and, still laughing, runs to the mantel to check on a clock there. Then, hurrying, she comes downstage and starts to lace up her bodice as LAURENT emerges through the curtains, lazily doing up his shirt and rolling down the sleeves.

LAURENT What's all the rush?

THERESE Do you know what time it is?

LAURENT No.

THERESE It melts away when you're here.

LAURENT I don't believe in clocks and watches, they're all illusions.
This is the only reality; a man, a woman and — this.

He puts both arms around her waist and swings her round towards him.

THERESE Are you never satisfied?

LAURENT Never. (*Kisses her*) Neither are you. (*Kisses her again*)
Admit it.

THERESE (*Pouting*) I still don't know why I let you come near me
today. You didn't deserve to, keeping away for a whole week
like that. What's the matter? Are you frightened I love you
too much?

LAURENT That's not possible.

THERESE (*teasing*) Frightened we'll be caught, then? I've told you, as
long as you use that door (*points to alcove*) and we're
careful, it's quite safe. No-one's going to find out.

LAURENT I'm scared the whole world's going to find out — that one
day I'll go home shouting out loud in the streets how much I
love you.

*They embrace Passionately, then he breaks from her and goes to the stairhead,
where he stands listening.*

THERESE It's only the house; the damp makes the stairs creak.

*She puts her foot up on a stool, the better to straighten her stockings and adjust
her garters, her skirts held high. LAURENT crosses in admiringly.*

LAURENT That flesh of yours. It glows like alabaster in warm sunlight.

THERESE You're supposed to be a painter, not a poet!

LAURENT All artists appreciate beauty; they live by it. (*Strokes her leg*)
Does Camille ever show his appreciation?

THERESE *(slaps his hand)* Go away.

LAURENT Over here, for instance, on this bed of ours?

He drags back the curtains at the alcove. The bed is rumpled and his jacket lies across it. THERESE is suddenly quieter.

THERESE Never. No.

LAURENT I can't think what you ever saw in him.

THERESE My aunt gave me a home when I was seven years old. Nobody else wanted me. Sometimes I think I married him out of gratitude.

LAURENT What happened on your wedding night?

THERESE That's not the sort of question you should —

LAURENT *(masterfully)* I want to know. I have the right.

Slight pause.

THERESE We were married in Normandy. That night, we went up the stairs as usual; instead of going into my bedroom on the left, I went into Camille's on the right. And that was all.

LAURENT It's the truth — you promise?

THERESE *(winds her arms about him)* You're jealous! And there's no reason on earth. *(Presses into him)* I've never loved anyone as I love you — from the very first night he brought you here.

LAURENT I didn't want to come; he had to force me.

THERESE I was sitting near the fire, doing some embroidery, and secretly watching the pair of you. You didn't know, you were too wrapped up in your stupid game. Suddenly this feeling gusted over me. I didn't know it was love then it seemed more like hate. After that, whenever you came here, my nerves were stretched to breaking-point. Yet when you were away, I found myself longing for the pain. Then we made love —

LAURENT On *our bed*.

THERESE (simply) I knew from that moment you were all I wanted.

LAURENT My darling.

They clasp each other again.

MME. RAQUIN (off) Therese . . . Therese!

THERESE There now, you've left it too long. Hurry!

She moves swiftly to open the door in the alcove. LAURENT whisks up his coat from the bed and slips out, grinning. THERESE locks the door behind him and straightens the bed hastily before drawing the alcove curtains.

MME. RAQUIN (off) Therese, where are you?

Her aunt, MADAME RAQUIN, ascends the stairs, breathing hard. She is sixty, and, though a sturdy and self-confident woman of peasant origins, moves more slowly than we might expect.

THERESE Sorry — I've been in the kitchen.

MME. RAQUIN (gratified) Putting things straight, I might have guessed. Though how you can see to work in this light.

THERESE What have you done with the lamp?

MME. RAQUIN In the kitchen — didn't you see it? I always trim the wick before they come on Thursdays.

THERESE So you do. (*She goes off to fetch it.*)

MME. RAQUIN Otherwise, Doctor Grivet complains the only domino he can see is the double-six.

THERESE (off) That man! He'll go to his grave complaining about something.

MME. RAQUIN He's a good doctor, for all that.

THERESE (off) Then why don't you take some of the medicines he gives you?

MME. RAQUIN I don't need his pills and potions, they can't make me any younger. But his company, that's always welcome.

THERESE *returns, with a lighted oil-lamp.*

THERESE I can't think why; he only comes here for the dominoes.

MME. RAQUIN And when he loses, what an uproar! (*Peers at clock*) Where's that son of mine got to?

THERESE You asked him to call in at the wine-shop for something special, don't you remember?

MME. RAQUIN It's only on the corner. That can't have taken him till now. I do hope he's well wrapped up, these September evenings can be treacherous.

THERESE He looked like a cocoon when he went off this morning.

MME. RAQUIN Paris is cold all the year round. It makes me long for my old home in the country. One day I'll go back there, before I turn into an icicle!

She moves about the room, helping THERESE to tidy it.

THERESE You'll never get Camille to go with you.

MME. RAQUIN No, he's a true Parisian at heart. All the boys at home used to be so jealous of his fine manners and his great ambition. And he won't always be a humble clerk on the railway, mark my words. One day he'll be in command, and you'll be going to soirées and fine receptions — you forgot the glasses.

THERESE I'm sorry. (*She goes back into the kitchen.*)

MME. RAQUIN Not that I blame you: it's not every night the Raquin family has champagne!

The shop-bell goes as THERESE hurries back in with the family 's best glasses.

THERESE Someone in the shop — I'll go.

CAMILLE (*Off*) It's only me!

Her husband CAMILLE runs up the stairs, carrying two bottles of a fair champagne. He is light and slim, handsome in an effete way, and a weakling.

MME. RAQUIN Camille, my darling. (*As he kisses her*) Two bottles?

CAMILLE There'll be six of us, don't forget. Here's your change.

He gives her some coins, smirking. MADAME RAQUIN counts the money.

THERESE (*Pointedly*) Good evening, Camille.

CAMILLE *(ignores her)* See? All I spent was six francs.
(Flourishes champagne) Three francs a bottle!

MME. RAQUIN Only three?

CAMILLE *puts down the bottles to divest himself of his hat, coat and voluminous scarf.*

CAMILLE I went all the way to the Boulevard St. Michel where I'd seen them marked down in a grocer's. That's as good as any vintage wine at eight francs.

MME. RAQUIN Two bottles for six francs! *(Proudly, to THERESE)* Such a businessman.

CAMILLE Haven't you got any cakes?

THERESE They're waiting in the kitchen.

Again she goes off, as CAMILLE bears his precious bottles to the sideboard.

CAMILLE Everybody knows wine-merchants are a lot of frauds and swindlers; it's only the label that's different. Of course, you've got to know something about the stuff.

THERESE *comes back with a dish of cakes.*

MME. RAQUIN Give them to me. We'll have everything on the sideboard, on display. Now the plates.

THERESE *goes to fetch them obediently.*

CAMILLE These are all éclairs and ground-rice tarts. Where's my favourite coconut?

MME. RAQUIN There'll be no coconut till that stomach of yours clears up.

CAMILLE There's nothing wrong with it. I caught a chill in that broken-down old office —

MME. RAQUIN It always gave you trouble, even as a child.

THERESE *returns with plates and puts them on the table.*

MME. RAQUIN On the sideboard, I said! Really, — you're so absent-minded, lately.

THERESE *transfers them without comment, then goes to sit at the work-table and takes out her needlework.*

CAMILLE (*views the array*) That's better.

MME. RAQUIN They'll think we've come into money, won the Lottery or something! Oh dear, I do hope he doesn't forget to bring the picture, after all this.

CAMILLE That's the whole reason he's coming. Besides, he never forgets anything.

MME. RAQUIN Why didn't you fetch it home when it was finished?

CAMILLE Laurent wanted to have it framed first. Perhaps it won't be ready.

MME. RAQUIN Then all the champagne will be wasted.

THERESE (*drily*) We can always put it by for Laurent to drink some other day.

MME. RAQUIN It's not only for him.

CAMILLE Behave yourself, Therese. (*To his mother*) She's never liked any of my friends, all the years we've been here.

THERESE He's the worst of the lot. Here every week, eating our food and guzzling our wine —

CAMILLE You don't pay out for it, do you?

MME. RAQUIN Besides, it's the only decent meal he gets. I feel sorry for him, perched up in that miserable attic and eating in workmen's cafés all the time.

CAMILLE You should see it, Mama — the studio, I mean. I call it the Igloo. Of course, he can't afford any heating.

MME. RAQUIN You should have told me; the poor boy could have done the picture here.

CAMILLE The light wouldn't have been right. By the way, I've had a marvellous thought. To pay him back, we'll all go on a picnic this weekend to Suresnes.

MME. RAQUIN Suresnes! With all those noisy roundabouts? My nerves couldn't stand it. You children go — Laurent deserves a treat.

CAMILLE *(doubtfully)* I'm not sure I want Therese there, if you're not coming. Do you know what she did last time? Wouldn't go on anything. Just sat on the ground, bolt upright, staring down at the water like a dreary old crow. We'd be better off by ourselves.

The shop-bell goes.

CAMILLE Here he comes!

LAURENT *runs up the stairs with a framed portrait of CAMILLE, done up in rough sacking. THERESE studiously ignores him.*

LAURENT Am I the first?

CAMILLE Aren't you always?

MME. RAQUIN The others won't be here till eight o'clock.

LAURENT Good! I wanted you three to have a private view.
(Unwraps picture) There — what do you think?

CAMILLE Look, Mama — isn't it clever? Isn't he clever?

LAURENT *holds the picture in front of his chest. It is quite a Presentable work.*

MME. RAQUIN But it's so lifelike!

CAMILLE *(bubbling)* Look at my dress suit: the cloth of that collar looks absolutely real.

MME. RAQUIN So does the arm of the chair.

CAMILLE Laurent painted it green, so it would look like that one.
(Points at his armchair) The one we brought from Vernon.

LAURENT You're not disappointed, madame?

MME. RAQUIN I think it's absolutely splendid. And we must hang it up before they come, in the place of honour.

LAURENT *(flattered)* Where?

MME. RAQUIN Over the fire, of course. Camille, can you take that old landscape down?

LAURENT I'll do it — if you're sure you want it there?

CAMILLE It's the only possible place for it. Don't you think so, Therese?

THERESE Does it matter what I think?

CAMILLE I've warned you once tonight.

The shop-bell goes.

MME. RAQUIN No peace for the wicked. (*Moves to answer it*) It's not eight o'clock yet, it must be a customer. Someone wanting fresh ribbons for the weekend, I shouldn't wonder.

CAMILLE Or a new hat.

MME. RAQUIN Oh, I hope not. Hats always take so long...

She goes off down the stairs. LAURENT has taken down the landscape and looks round for somewhere to put it.

THERESE Over there, I'll see to it later.

CAMILLE Laurent, look! (*Points at bottles*) We're celebrating.

LAURENT Champagne!

CAMILLE (*nods excitedly*) And that's not all. On Sunday, when I'm free of that wretched office, the three of us are going off on a picnic to Suresnes!

LAURENT Better and better.

CAMILLE Mama won't come, she likes to rest her legs on her day off.

THERESE I don't have to come either if you'd rather be by yourselves.

LAURENT I wouldn't hear of it. Would you, Camille?

CAMILLE Of course she'll come. (*To his wife*) If you don't, who's going to see to the food?

LAURENT Listen, I know somewhere better than Suresnese. It's always so crowded at the weekends – and the smell! What about St. Ouen? We can spend the afternoon out on the island and then have dinner at one of those little inns by the river. What do you say?

CAMILLE I'll be sorry to miss the roundabouts.

LAURENT They always make you sick anyway. And we won't have to dress up as much. Therese?

THERESE We'll go wherever Camille wants.

LAURENT There speaks a dutiful wife.

THERESE No. It's just that he always gets his own way in the long run.
(She returns to her work.)

CAMILLE It's Laurent's idea, and I think it's wonderful. St. Ouen it is!

THERESE If you say so.

CAMILLE I do! And I just hope you're not going to sit there like a stuck pig all evening. *(As she regards him darkly)* Look at those eyes, Laurent. When she was small, when Captain Degans left her with us, those great big staring eyes used to frighten me to death. They still can!

THERESE Don't be so ridiculous.

CAMILLE They say her mother was the daughter of an African chief — and her father was a renegade sea-captain. What a combination, eh?

LAURENT He's only teasing.

CAMILLE Of course I am. We all know she's a good girl at heart. *(Kisses her Perfunctorily)* And I'll say this for her, she looks after me marvellously when I'm ill.

MADAME RAQUIN'S *voice comes from below.*

MME. RAQUIN *(off)* Camille, come and do the shutters for me, will you?

CAMILLE Coming. *(Crosses to stairs)* Laurent, will you give me a hand with the extra chairs?

LAURENT *(indicates portrait)* As soon as I've done this.

CAMILLE *potters down to join his mother, as LAURENT hangs the picture.*

THERESE *comes to his side to admire it, her manner changing completely.*

THERESE You've caught him exactly. It's Camille to the life.

LAURENT It looks good up there.

THERESE It could look better.

LAURENT How?

THERESE If that were you looking down on us instead of him.

LAURENT Master of the house?

THERESE You were made for it.

LAURENT *(takes her hands)* If only you were free!

THERESE Don't let me dream. The best dreams never come true.

LAURENT This one might. When Camille comes back, just watch and listen.

THERESE Laurent — you've thought of a way?

LAURENT Watch. Listen. And wait till Sunday.

CAMILLE *(shouts, off)* Laurent, what are you doing up there?

LAURENT *(calls back)* Making love to your wife.

CAMILLE *(off)* Oh, that's all right. But don't let Mama catch you at it!

LAURENT Therese, how much would you dare?

THERESE For us? Anything.

CAMILLE *puffs his way upstairs, carrying two chairs.*

CAMILLE I've done it myself, just to shame you both. But I shouldn't have — all this lifting's bad for the heart.

LAURENT They're not heavy. *(He swings them easily into place at the table.)*

THERESE You'd better sit down, Camille.

LAURENT Yes, sit down — save your strength for Sunday.

CAMILLE Sunday?

LAURENT We're taking a boat out on the river and you can do most of the rowing.

CAMILLE *(worried)* I'm not very good at it.

THERESE The Seine? His mother would never allow it.

CAMILLE You mind your own business. Nobody tells me what to do and what not to do.

THERESE You know what she'd say.

CAMILLE If I want to go on the river I'll go on the river, whether she likes it or not.

LAURENT Perhaps it's not such a good idea after all.

CAMILLE She's only being awkward because you suggested it.

THERESE What if we had an accident?

LAURENT (*innocently*) They happen anywhere, don't they?

CAMILLE Of course. In town, in the country, on the river and on dry land.

LAURENT (*playing up*) Even in the street, a tile can fall off a roof and knock your brains out.

CAMILLE And almost anyone can be struck by lightning!

The two friends laugh together like schoolboys.

THERESE Very well. But only if you tell her first.

CAMILLE I'll do as I please.

THERESE If you don't, I shall.

He glowers at her. Outside, a clock starts to strike the hour.

LAURENT Eight o'clock already? It can't be.

CAMILLE (*counts aloud*) . . . five. . . six. . . seven. . . *eight*.

He points dramatically towards the stairs. DOCTOR GRIVET is ascending them, with MADAME RAQUIN on his arm.

MME. RAQUIN Here's my doctor, on the dot as usual.

LAURENT Good evening, Grivet.

GRIVET Easy up the stairs, we have to watch those arteries of yours.

MME. RAQUIN There he goes, making work for himself as soon as he arrives.

They come into the room, GRIVET is a dry old stick fussy and garrulous.

GRIVET Good evening.

CAMILLE Hello, doctor.

THERESE Let me take your umbrella. (*She relieves him of it and crosses with it to the fireplace.*)

CAMILLE Not raining, is it?

GRIVET I never trust anything about September, especially the weather. Excuse me, not that corner. (*He moves to the fire and positions the umbrella to suit himself.*) That's not the place for my umbrella. My umbrella goes in this corner.

MME. RAQUIN Therese, take his galoshes.

GRIVET Thank you, I can manage them myself. (*Sits, to do so*) I always do things for myself and then I know they're done properly. There. (*He slips them off and sets them beside the immaculately furled umbrella.*)

MME. RAQUIN You're out of breath, doctor — it's most unlike you.

GRIVET I'm not surprised. I was forced to hurry, otherwise I'd have been late.

CAMILLE You're never late!

GRIVET There was the most enormous crowd in the Rue St. André-des-Arts. I had to cross over, and that always upsets me. I keep to the left all the time and then I know where I am. Keep to the left, just like the trains.

MME. RAQUIN What was everyone doing there?

GRIVET I haven't the slightest idea.

LAURENT Perhaps there's been an accident.

GRIVET More than likely. Everyone goes at such a speed you take your life in your hands these days. (*He crosses and sits in front of the table.*) I'm not too sure I haven't pulled a muscle. Ah, it's good to sit down.

A jovial voice booms out from the foot of the stairs.

MICHAUD Good evening, everyone! I haven't kept you waiting, have I?

MME. RAQUIN (*calls, happily*) Come up, monsieur.

HENRI MICHAUD *comes into view, grunting with effort as he climbs the stairs. He is elderly, bushy-haired, and a burly ex-policeman.*

MICHAUD Why you can't have your living-room on the ground floor like any other decent, law-abiding family — hello, I must be late. Grivet's got his watch out.

GRIVET (*primly*) No more than usual. Your weekly average is four and a half minutes.

MICHAUD One of these days I'm going to be here on time, just for the pleasure of giving you a stroke. My dear Madame Raquin. (*He sweeps his hat off and kisses her hand in old-world, courtly fashion.*) Anyway, I've got a perfect excuse this evening. Didn't any of you spot the excitement down the road?

GRIVET I've just been telling everyone, it almost made me late. Most distressing.

MICHAUD (*shaking his head*) A tragedy.

GRIVET (*blinks*) My being late?

MICHAUD No, you fool — the reason for the disturbance.

GRIVET An accident of some sort?

MICHAUD Worse, much worse.

GRIVET I crossed over. It was nothing to do with me, and...

MICHAUD Murder has to do with all of us, Doctor Grivet,

THERESE Murder?

MICHAUD (*nods*) They found a woman's body at the Hotel Viking. Cut into four pieces. In a trunk belonging to a guest who went off in the night. Worse still, the head was missing.

CAMILLE How ghastly.

GRIVET And I passed the place. I might have been murdered myself.

MICHAUD No such luck.

GRIVET I beg your pardon?

MICHAUD (*smoothly*) Not with all those people about, I do assure you.

LAURENT Have they caught the murderer?

MICHAUD Unfortunately, no. The Inspector in charge, one of my old colleagues, as a matter of fact, says the police are baffled. The occupant of the room gave false particulars and has disappeared as mysteriously as he came.

MME. RAQUIN Do they know who the poor girl was?

MICHAUD Arms and legs are notoriously difficult to identify, madame; it's the head that adds distinction. Furthermore, the lady in question was completely naked.

CAMILLE Naked and hacked to pieces —

GRIVET Well, it's probably no-one we know. And murder is a fact of life in Paris these days. When Michaud was a superintendent of police, he had some grisly stories, I can tell you. (*To MICHAUD*) Remember the one about the gendarme who was buried in little bits? They found his fingers in a box of carrots. Do tell them.

MICHAUD You've just told them for me.

MME. RAQUIN Do let's talk of something else. All this about death and violence, you're making me shudder.

GRIVET Don't worry, madame, you're quite safe here.

MICHAUD Indeed you are. (*Crosses to fire*) This is what I'd call a God-fearing household; one of the very few left in Paris. (*Looking around*) And it's looking rather special tonight. Champgne! Are we in for a celebration?

CAMILLE It's in honour of my picture — just behind you.

MICHAUD *turns and takes it in.*

MICHAUD Well, well, well — what's all this?

GRIVET (*rises*) A portrait of Camille, I can see that from here. I keep telling you, you need glasses.

MICHAUD What a splendid likeness! I can almost smell the flower in your buttonhole.

All gather round the picture with the exception of THERESE.

GRIVET Now that's what I call a portrait. I can't stand this Impressionist stuff that's all the rage. It's nothing but a lot of coloured dots — anyone can *stipple* a picture.

MME. RAQUIN Laurent finished it yesterday and had it framed today, as a present to my son.

MICHAUD It shows considerable talent, young man, you have quite a future.

LAURENT (*modestly*) Thank you.

CAMILLE So the verdict's unanimous. Now we can have some tea.

MME. RAQUIN What about the champagne?

CAMILLE We'll drink to the picture after the dominoes. I like to keep a clear head for the game.

MME. RAQUIN Whatever you say, Camille. (*Crosses to kitchen*) It won't take long. (*She goes off, as CAMILLE reaches for the two bottles.*)

CAMILLE Actually, I want these to sit in a bucket of cold water for an hour or so. I like my champagne properly chilled. One must keep up one's standards. (*He goes off after his mother.*)

MICHAUD *fills his pipe as GRIVET sits again at the table and polishes his Pince-nez.*

GRIVET Quarter-past eight. That gives us plenty of time for the Conqueror.

LAURENT Monsieur Michaud —

MICHAUD Laurent?

LAURENT Do a lot of criminals go unpunished nowadays?

MICHAUD Ever since I retired, yes. (*He lights his pipe.*)

GRIVET Disappearances. . . lingering deaths through starvation. . . fatal falls. . . not a cry heard, not a drop of blood spilt. In many cases the police seem powerless to act.

MICHAUD That's not always their fault. They're a highly skilled and dedicated body of men. But when you've got nothing to go on. . . (*He spreads his hands.*)

LAURENT What you're saying is, there could be more than one murderer walking the streets now, in broad daylight?

MICHAUD No doubt about it. Where no blame attaches, there's often no shadow of suspicion.

GRIVET It makes you laugh, doesn't it? When you think of the taxes we pay.

MICHAUD I never laugh at my taxes, monsieur.

GRIVET *(thoroughly enjoying himself)* Thugs and killers... cold-blooded assassins. . . strolling round as free as the breeze and never arrested,

THERESE *(strained)* I wish you'd change the subject, I shan't sleep tonight.

LAURENT Don't worry, he's only leading us on.

MICHAUD Indeed I'm not. You, I, any one of us, could shake hands with a murderer tomorrow and never suspect it.

THERESE That's a horrible thought.

LAURENT There's no proof. How can he know what he confesses no-one knows?

THERESE That's true. *(Staring at LAURENT, on a thought)* What no-one knows simply doesn't exist.

LAURENT Exactly.

A beat.

GRIVET All I know is, if that tea doesn't hurry up, our dominoes may never exist!

THERESE I'll see what I can do. *(She moves off gratefully to the kitchen.)*

LAURENT And how long were you a detective, sir?

MICHAUD Twenty years — but I was a policeman a lot longer than that. I started out as the lowest form of animal life, a humble gendarme in Normandy.

GRIVET Which is where he met the Raquins.

MICHAUD Madame used to let me shelter in her shop when it was raining, and there was always a cup of her special coffee and coconut cake to help pass the time.

GRIVET He knew her long before she met her husband.

MICHAUD And courted her, what's more! But then along came the dashing Jean-Pierre from Paris and he soon saw me off the premises!

MADAME RAQUIN *comes back with tea-things.*

MME. RAQUIN What are talking about now?

MICHAUD Still crime, madame, of one sort and another.

MME. RAQUIN Well, I'd like you to give it a rest. There are other things in life.

GRIVET Such as dominoes. Now, how are we playing? Last week it was Camille and I against you and madame.

MICHAUD Then this week we must change partners.

MME. RAQUIN *(pours tea)* All right. But don't keep telling me what to do, doctor. I have a mind of my own, don't forget.

GRIVET And a very shrewd one madame where business is concerned. Unfortunately, its acumen doesn't extend to the ivory pieces.

MME. RAQUIN *(retorts)* You can't make a living out of dominoes. Anyway, I only play to make up a foursome.

All settle into their respective places.

GRIVET Oh, that wretched pipe! I do wish you wouldn't smoke while I'm trying to concentrate. It's worse than the Long Bar at the Moulin Rouge.

MICHAUD *(puffing away heartily)* Not that you've ever been there, doctor — or have you? *(Teasing him)* Part of your secret life, is it?

GRIVET T'ch! I'd better have a cigar to kill the fumes.

He lights one up as MADAME RAQUIN hands him and MICHAUD their tea. CAMILLE comes back from the kitchen, rubbing his hands together importantly.

CAMILLE All ready? (*He goes to the sideboard to take an expensive box of ivory dominoes out of the top drawer.*)

MME. RAQUIN Will you take tea, my darling?

CAMILLE No, thank you. I'm saving myself for the champagne. (*He brings the dominoes and sits in his green armchair behind the table ruling the roost.*)

MME. RAQUIN Sugar, Doctor Grivet?

GRIVET Just four lumps. May I? (*He helps himself.*)

MME. RAQUIN Therese, look after Laurent.

THERESE has no tea herself but pours a cup and takes it to LAURENT at the fire, where he lounges against the mantelpiece, smoking a cheap cheroot.

GRIVET Well, isn't this delightful? Do you know, every Thursday morning when I open my eyes, I say to myself, 'Hooray! Tonight I'm going to play dominoes at the Raquins.'

MICHAUD And since we've been doing it for years, do you ever take yourself completely by surprise?

MME. RAQUIN All supplied? Then let's begin.

She nods at CAMILLE who opens the box ceremoniously.

CAMILLE Ladies and gentlemen — the pieces! (*He empties them neatly on the table.*) And may the best man win.

GRIVET Shuffle them well.

CAMILLE (*doing so*) Naturally. Laurent, come and stand by me — bring me luck.

LAURENT With pleasure. (*He saunters to CAMILLE'S shoulder.*)

GRIVET Now we each take seven —

MICHAUD As domino-players will, to the end of time.

CAMILLE I've got the double-six. That means I lead.

LAURENT Splendid.

CAMILLE It doesn't always pay.

LAURENT What I mean is, who better than you, Camille, to be the first to go?

He smiles blandly at THERESE who bends assiduously over her work.

CURTAIN

Scene Two

The following Sunday evening. The table is clear, except for a snowy-white cloth, two soup-dishes and two spoons. There is a vase of Autumn flowers in the centre. MADAME RAQUIN comes from the kitchen with bread on a breadboard and a large kitchen knife. She places these on the table and then crosses painfully to peer at the clock on the mantelpiece.

MME. RAQUIN *(mutter)* Half past ten! *(She glances up at the portrait.)* I'll make you dance, young man, for staying out till this hour. *(She moves towards her chair but pauses before sitting in it.)* Oh, these old legs of mine; they're like lead tonight, Camille.

The jangle of the shop-bell comes from below.

MICHAUD *(off)* Don't trouble yourself, madame, it's only old Michaud. *She settles in her chair with a sigh of relief as he puffs his way up the stairs.*

MME. RAQUIN This is a fine time of night to call — and on a Sunday, too.

MICHAUD The better the day, the better the deed.

He removes his hat and stands looking at her, clearly not at his ease.

MME. RAQUIN Well, sit down, now you're here. Can I offer you some soup?

MICHAUD I don't think. . .

MME. RAQUIN I have it ready for the children.

MICHAUD No, thank you. But I wouldn't refuse a drink.

MME. RAQUIN We don't keep any in the house, except when we have guests.

MICHAUD I'm a guest —

MME. RAQUIN An unexpected one.

MICHAUD Then it's a good thing I came prepared.

He takes out a pocket-flask and sets it on the table. Then he simply gazes at it and seems at a loss for words.

MME. RAQUIN The usual procedure is to remove the cap and pour a small quantity into a glass. . .

MICHAUD Suddenly I don't feel like it. (*He wanders away to hang up his hat and she regards him with some amusement. He catches her at it.*)

MME. RAQUIN Something's troubling you?

MICHAUD Profoundly.

MME. RAQUIN What can an old friend do to help?

MICHAUD Sit there, quite calmly, and hear me out.

MME. RAQUIN (*clasps her hands*) What have you been up to now?

MICHAUD It's not me, madame. I'd best come straight to the point. It's your son, I'm afraid.

MME. RAQUIN Afraid?

MICHAUD You know they all went on the river this evening?

MME. RAQUIN Yes, and I wish they hadn't. These evening mists — so bad for his chest.

MICHAUD The fact is, Camille's not back yet. The other two are downstairs. They called at my house first.

MME. RAQUIN (*sobering*) Why should they do that?

MICHAUD They wanted me to have a word with you before you see them. It seems there's been some sort of accident. The boat capsized.

MME. RAQUIN And Camille got a soaking? My poor boy, where is he now?

MICHAUD (*obliquely*) Therese and Laurent are back —they're safe.

MME. RAQUIN Stop beating about the bush. Where's my son?

MICHAUD We're — not sure, madame.

She utters a sharp cry and comes to her feet, clinging awkwardly to her chair. He pours cognac from the flask.

MICHAUD Drink it, please.

MME. RAQUIN No, no, I —

MICHAUD Drink it and sit down. *Please*, madame.

She sips from it briefly and then turns away as he recaps the flask.

MME. RAQUIN Where's Camille, what have they done with him?

MICHAUD I'm going directly to St. Ouen.

MME. RAQUIN My son...

She moves across to the portrait with her back to him. MICHAUD goes to the stairs and calls down softly

MICHAUD You can come up, now.

His eyes are still on MADAME RAQUIN, troubled, as LAURENT ascends the stairs. He is in a borrowed outfit and carries a bundle of sopping clothes.

LAURENT I'm so very sorry, madame.

MADAME RAQUIN *makes no move or answer.*

MICHAUD Where's Therese?

LAURENT Gone to get you a carriage.

MME. RAQUIN (*stonily*) How could you come back and leave Camille?

LAURENT *glances at MICHAUD.*

LAURENT Leave him?

MME. RAQUIN You should have stayed till he was found. It was heartless of you.

LAURENT (*stammers*) Michaud — haven't you told her?

MICHAUD I've told her he's missing. That's all we know for certain. Well, isn't it?

THERESE *runs up the stairs, white-faced, wearing borrowed clothes.*

THERESE The man's waiting. He says he has the fastest horse in Paris.

MICHAUD Thank you, my dear. (*Gets his hat*) I'll come back as soon as I can. see she gets some rest.

He bustles out and leaves them. They watch the old lady for a moment before LAURENT goes closer.

LAURENT It's all my fault, madame. I'll never forgive myself.

There is no reply. THERESE crosses him and touches her aunt tenderly.

THERESE You mustn't make yourself ill.

Finally, MADAME RAQUIN turns to face them. From somewhere, she has found a new strength.

MME. RAQUIN Michaud will find him soon enough. He's never let me down in his life. Those aren't your clothes.

THERESE The people at the inn, they found us something. (*Takes bundle from LAURENT*) These are ours.

MME. RAQUIN They're sopping wet.

She takes the bundle off into the kitchen, closing the door behind her.

THERESE She's taking it better than I thought.

LAURENT It's that fool Michaud. He's given her reason to hope —damn him for not being man enough to tell the truth.

THERESE Step by step, he said. We don't want an invalid on our hands.

LAURENT Camille's gone for good. The sooner she realises that —

THERESE (*snaps*) You tell her, then. Camille's dead. That's all you have to say — dead. Drowned.

He stares at her, biting his lip. Then he feels for a chair.

LAURENT My God, Therese, when you say it like that —

THERESE We did it because it had to be done.

LAURENT You weren't the one — the one who. . . (*He gives way, and starts to shake.*)

THERESE I would have been, if I'd had your strength. That's what we both have to depend on now — your strength.

LAURENT He fought like a wild beast — bit me on the neck. (*He shows her the wound, which is still bleeding.*)

THERESE It's only on the surface, that'll soon heal. (*She takes out a lace handkerchief to wipe it clean.*)

LAURENT When you do something like this; when you force yourself to —

THERESE She'll hear you.

LAURENT It's different from all the talking. My God, it's different. (*He clutches at her.*)

THERESE Control yourself. She's clever, she could guess the truth. It all depends on what we tell her — and how we tell it.

LAURENT *comes to his feet.*

LAURENT You still love me, now it's over?

THERESE More than ever. It makes the two of us one.

He touches her features, his hand trembling. The kitchen door opens and he leaves her, pulling up the workman's scarf about his neck to hide his wound. At the fire, he gazes up at CAMILLE. MADAME RAQUIN comes in with a bowl of steaming soup. She crosses to the table and ladles it into the dishes.

MME. RAQUIN You must both eat. At a time like this, it helps.

THERESE Yes. (*She sits to start on her soup.*)

MME. RAQUIN Laurent, come and have yours.

LAURENT Not without Camille.

MME. RAQUIN He won't be away long. I've saved him the lion's share.

She goes to the alcove for two dressing-gowns and puts one carefully round THERESE'S shoulders.

THERESE (*quietly*) Thank you.

MME. RAQUIN Laurent, you can use Camille's till he gets back.

She crosses with it, but he prevents her.

LAURENT You still don't understand, madame. The currents in the river — they're strong and fierce.

THERESE We all know he couldn't swim.

MME. RAQUIN I wanted him to, but he was always afraid to learn.

THERESE (*standing*) He's gone. We have to face it.

MME. RAQUIN (*harshly, the composure breaking*) How can you give up so easily?

LAURENT He couldn't be found, madame. He went under and — he couldn't be found. The currents. . .

MADAME RAQUIN *drags herself to her armchair and sits, trying to regain her composure.*

MME. RAQUIN I want you to tell me every detail.

Pause. Then LAURENT starts on his Prepared story.

LAURENT We ordered dinner in the restaurant and then decided to go out in the boat again while it was cooking. Camille was at the tiller and I was rowing. He wasn't watching the course, trailing his hands in the water, laughing and joking. I warned him we were coming to a dangerous bit — it's where they set the eel-nets — but he wouldn't take any notice. Then we hit one of those thick stakes they use for fixing the lanyards. I felt the bump. The rope shot from his hands. Camille stood up in a panic and the boat went over. I . . .

He breaks off and sits, apparently overcome. THERESE takes up the story.

THERESE I was fighting for breath, half-drowned myself. Then Laurent put a fist under my chin and swam for the shore, holding me up. He saved my life.

Pause.

LAURENT As I dived in again I heard a shout from downstream. Then there was silence.

THERESE It was growing dark. Three times he went back in at different points — three times! He fought the currents till he could do no more. When I made him come out, there was blood on his mouth. Look.

She produces the handkerchief and shows the old lady the stains.

LAURENT He's been taken from us, madame. We'll never see him again.

MADAME RAQUIN *rises, staring about her wildly. Then she makes for her room.*

THERESE (bars the way) Where are you going?

MME. RAQUIN To get my shawl. To go and find him.

LAURENT It's no use —

MME. RAQUIN I'll search every inch of the river. I'll help
Michaud —

She starts out again, but THERESE grips her firmly by the shoulders.

THERESE He hasn't gone to find Camille; only to recover a dead body.

MADAME RAQUIN *swings round and gazes at her for a long moment. Finally she drops her head.*

MME. RAQUIN I can't give up hope. Not till I see him. Forgive me. I'm an old woman. Stupid. Useless. But I'm also a mother. I've guarded and protected him for thirty years. Tonight, when he needed me most, I wasn't there.

THERESE *starts to guide her out.*

THERESE Come to your room.

MME. RAQUIN There'll be no rest —

THERESE Lie down, at least.

MADAME RAQUIN *tries to resist but the attempt is only half-hearted. Then she starts to cry.*

MME. RAQUIN Oh, Therese, I warned him — warned you all! That hateful river. . .

Weeping she allows herself to be led off. Alone, LAURENT wipes his face slowly with his hands, still sweating after the ordeal. Then he feels eyes upon him and turns slowly to face the portrait. He backs from it a pace. Trying to collect himself, he crosses to the sideboard and drags open the door of a low cupboard where wine is sometimes kept. He finds a bottle, but it turns out to be empty. He flings it into a chair nearby and searches feverishly, but without success. At last he slams the door shut and turns for the kitchen. . . only to find himself staring at the picture again, as though hypnotised. THERESE returns.

THERESE She won't go to bed. She's sitting in a chair by the open window, saying his name over and over.

LAURENT I'm sorry for her. None of it was her fault.

THERESE She made me marry him.

LAURENT That's cruel, Therese.

THERESE *(ignores this)* She wants you to stay the night.
Slight pause.

LAURENT Is that what you want too?

THERESE No. Someone has to be with her; and Michaud will be coming back.

LAURENT Than shouldn't I be here?

THERESE It's better if you're not.

LAURENT *nods, and turns from her. Again, he is looking at the picture.*

LAURENT It's changed.

THERESE How could it?

LAURENT That's not the Camille I painted. Not that smile. And never those eyes. *(Shudders)*.

THERESE Put it out of your mind. Come back in the morning for your clothes. She'd like you to open up the shop.

LAURENT *Tomorrow* — ? She's opening tomorrow?

THERESE Everything must go on as usual. That's what she insists.

LAURENT Why does she want me. . .

THERESE *(suddenly strident)* We can't manage the shutters — Camille always did them for her!

A beat.

LAURENT I'll be here at nine.

He goes straight out.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene One

Afternoon, a year later.

The room is tidy and spotlessly clean. The table has been moved under the window Down Right and the chaise longue now shares the Centre with MADAME RAQUIN'S armchair and the stool. GRIVET has just finished a detailed examination of her and is now moving back to his capacious medical bag.

GRIVET Thank you, madame. Relax, please. *(He watches her out of the corner of his eye as she lowers her legs to the ground with difficulty.)* The legs don't get much easier, do they?

MME. RAQUIN No, they don't. But why shouldn't they complain? I've been standing on them most of my life.

GRIVET And the arms?

MME. RAQUIN Stiff. well, stiffish.

GRIVET I see. *(Produces pills)* So we'll take one of these thrice daily until the pain eases. Always with food. Plenty of good rich nourishment. That's what we need from now on.

MME. RAQUIN I'll try. But I seldom feel like eating.

GRIVET *opens up his diary to enter medical details.*

GRIVET Good gracious, we're almost at the end of September.

MME. RAQUIN *(thoughtfully)* Twelve months next Sunday.

GRIVET Sorry?

MME. RAQUIN Twelve months exactly since I lost my son.

GRIVET *(checks)* I have a note to send you flowers.

MME. RAQUIN I don't think I'll ever get used to living without him.

GRIVET Come, come we mustn't give way to these morbid inclinations; that's the worst possible thing for us.

MME. RAQUIN Then what do you suggest we do about it?

GRIVET Get out and about more. for a start.

MME. RAQUIN *(harshly)* With these apologies for legs?

GRIVET There are such things as carriages for hire.

MME. RAQUIN Cabriolets cost a fortune. As for public transport, that's nothing more or less than a struggle for survival. There's no pleasure in it.

GRIVET Then why not have more people come to you?

MME. RAQUIN I see all I want of people, down in the shop.

GRIVET That's not the same. Besides, it's wrong for you still to be working. No good can come out of standing behind that counter and stretching up to those high shelves.

MME. RAQUIN I can't let Therese and Laurent do everything for me.

GRIVET Then you should get additional help.

MME. RAQUIN I'm a haberdasher, doctor, not a millionaire.

GRIVET I'm worried about Therese, too. She looks paler every time I see her.

MME. RAQUIN And unlike me, she won't be helped.

She stands and, using a stick, moves to the sideboard to put the pills away in the top drawer.

GRIVET *(too casually)* You know it wouldn't hurt to start your little soirées up again. I have the fondest memories of our old Thursday evenings round that table.

MME. RAQUIN I've considered it, But when I see us all, sitting there in my mind's eye, it breaks my heart. *(Gently, she takes the box of dominoes out of the drawer.)* The box hasn't been opened since he left us.

GRIVET *(understandingly)* No.

MME. RAQUIN Do you remember how proud he was of them? *(Echoes CAMILLE)* 'Ladies and gentlemen — the pieces! And may the best man win'... they're real ivory, you know; a present from his father.

GRIVET I'm sure he'd like them to be used again.

MME. RAQUIN I don't think I could bear it. No.

She puts back the box and closes the draw. GRIVET consciously changes the subject.

GRIVET What's happened to Laurent today? He usually brings me up.

MME. RAQUIN He's out shopping. Dear Laurent. He's here every day God sends.

GRIVET You're lucky to have found someone so devoted—

MME. RAQUIN How he finds the time to paint, I'll never know.

GRIVET He does, nevertheless. *(He shuts up his bag and comes to her.)* I happened to be seeing a patient in the Rue Mazarine the other day, and took the opportunity to call on him. You've visited his studio, I take it?

MME. RAQUIN Never.

GRIVET *(surprised)* But he invites everyone.

MME. RAQUIN He's told me all about it, never fear. An attic, isn't it? With a great big skylight that lets the rain in?

GRIVET *(carefully)* Has he ever discussed his work with you?

MME. RAQUIN No, but it doesn't surprise me. He's a solitary artist, very sensitive, and I don't like to ask, I have such a conscience about him and his work.

GRIVET I shall never forget the sight. The shelves, the floor, even the landing outside, all crammed with canvases Faces, mostly. Children's faces, women's faces, old men's faces, even the face of an angel. And they all had one thing in common.

MME. RAQUIN Every painter has an individual style.

GRIVET This wasn't a style, madame; it was more like an obsession. Every painted face I saw that day reminded me of Camille.

MME. RAQUIN How could that be?

GRIVET They all had Camille's eyes, and that little crooked smile of his. Imagine that, an angel with a crooked smile! Whatever he paints, Camille is there on the canvas. It seems you're not the only one with a conscience.

MME. RAQUIN Oh, the poor boy. Camille stays with him too, then? I'll never forget how I misjudged him on that awful night.

GRIVET You must have been out of your mind with shock.

MME. RAQUIN I was monstrous to him. And how did he repay me? He went to the morgue every single day for almost a fortnight, searching among the bodies. Till one day he recognised my son. I wasn't allowed to go there, they wouldn't let me see him. Michaud did the identification.

GRIVET I remember. (*Sourly*) And how he revelled in it! Especially that long article in the newspaper.

MME. RAQUIN I won't hear a word against Michaud; even though he never comes to see me now.

GRIVET You don't invite him.

MME. RAQUIN That shouldn't be necessary.

GRIVET Besides he's very busily engaged.

MME. RAQUIN But I thought he'd retired?

GRIVET He has, of course. But he's started writing a book about his experiences.

MME. RAQUIN Henri Michaud, an author?

GRIVET I'm correcting the manuscript for him as he goes along. I'm quite good at grammar and syntax. Why do you smile?

MME. RAQUIN Nothing to do with you. I was just wondering whether I have the honour of appearing in it. I don't know if I ever told you, but as a young man he was quite attached to me.

GRIVET He never stops telling everybody. But this is a serious study of crime, not a romantic idyll.

MME. RAQUIN (*laughs*) Then it won't sell half as many copies!

LAURENT *comes up the stairs with two bags of shopping*

MME. RAQUIN Hello, Laurent.

LAURENT What's this — you with a smile on your face?

MME. RAQUIN The doctor's been making me laugh.

LAURENT Your jokes must be improving, Grivet. How are you?

GRIVET As well as can be expected of an old man in this kind of weather. You're in rude health I see?

LAURENT I'm never ill.

MADAME *half-rises to help him.*

MME. RAQUIN I'll unpack those in the kitchen.

LAURENT You'll do no such thing. Stay where you are.

She smiles gratefully and settles back again as he takes the shopping off.

MME. RAQUIN You see? I'm no longer mistress of my own house.

GRIVET He's turning into a second son. Except...

MME. RAQUIN What?

GRIVET To be frank madame I don't remember Camille ever showing that degree of consideration.

MME. RAQUIN *(as the smile fades)* I was never as poorly in his day.

LAURENT *returns with a glass of water for her.*

LAURENT And how do you find madame?

GRIVET Improved, I'm glad to say. But not as much as I'd like. She must rest more.

LAURENT We'll see she does. *(He hands the water to her with a smile.)*

MME. RAQUIN Thank you, Laurent.

GRIVET *(picks up bag)* Rest, madame. Not only of body but of mind too. *(To LAURENT)* Only madame herself can see to that. No sudden shocks and starts, no brooding and no depressions.

MME. RAQUIN I'll do my best.

GRIVET I'll look in again soon, though, sadly, not on Thursday evening eh?

MME. RAQUIN I'll think about it, I can't promise more than that.

GRIVET Good-day to you both (*He leaves them.*)

LAURENT Thursday?

MME. RAQUIN He'd like me to start our social evenings up again. What do you think, Laurent? Should I invite them here just once, for old times' sake?

LAURENT I wouldn't. You'd only work yourself to a shadow and you heard what he just said — no strain, no over-excitement.

MME. RAQUIN There's no chance of that. You and Therese don't let me stir a finger,

LAURENT We'll find you plenty to do when you're well again,

MME. RAQUIN And that may give you a chance to paint properly. That's why you came to Paris, after all.

LAURENT I manage well enough.

MME. RAQUIN What about that large canvas you were going to have ready for the Exhibition, have you started on it yet?

LAURENT This year, next year, what's the difference? Your health comes first with me.

MME. RAQUIN Why do you give so much of your time to me — so much of yourself?

LAURENT You really want to know?

MME. RAQUIN (*Pressing*) So much of *freedom* - ?

LAURENT *sits before he answers*

LAURENT First, because I can never forgive myself for what I did to you.

MME. RAQUIN You weren't to blame, Laurent, I've told you a thousand times,

LAURENT We'd never have gone to St. Ouen that day if I hadn't thought of it.

MME. RAQUIN So you sacrifice yourself for Camille's memory?

LAURENT Partly. But it's no sacrifice. I *enjoy* it because, second, you and Therese are the only family I have.

Pause.

MME. RAQUIN You don't hear from your father anymore?

LAURENT Not a word. He turned his back on me when I deserted the Law for painting. And my father never looks over his shoulder.

MME. RAQUIN And you have no mother?

LAURENT She died when I was born. That's why he never liked me.

MME. RAQUIN Then as your adopted family, we must do our best to be worthy of you.

LAURENT (*rising*) I'd better get on with some work.

MME. RAQUIN Wait. First, I have a little surprise for you.

LAURENT What sort of surprise?

MME. RAQUIN Starting next week, I'm making you a personal allowance. Fifty francs a month, for as long as I live.

LAURENT But I don't want paying! Besides, you can't afford it.

MME. RAQUIN Nonsense. I can manage it quite easily out of the income on my capital. The shop's thriving, and that covers all our living expenses. I know how you have to plan and scheme at the moment.

LAURENT Scheme, madame?

MME. RAQUIN To keep that cupboard of a studio going. This will make you a little more independent. You might even afford some new brushes now and a few decent canvases. Make sure you buy one big enough for the Salon.

LAURENT *has lowered his head.*

LAURENT I don't take easily to charity.

MME. RAQUIN This isn't charity. Look on it as a reward one - you've more than earned.

LAURENT In that case, I accept. And thank you.

MME. RAQUIN *(rises)* And now I've sat in here ever since lunchtime and I'm tired of these four walls. Hand me my stick, I'm going down to give Therese a little rest.

LAURENT *(hands stick)* Half an hour at the most. If you stay there longer, I'll carry you back myself.

MME. RAQUIN Bully. She needs the rest much more than I do.

She goes off down the stairs. LAURENT watches her off with pretended solicitude, but the moment he has the room to himself, he drops all pretence. He crosses, smiling broadly, to pick up the glass she has left behind. Whistling merrily, he waltzes it off to the kitchen. THERESE comes up the stairs, looking pale and wan. LAURENT returns.

LAURENT Therese what do you think? I've come into money.

THERESE What are you talking about?

LAURENT The old girl — she's just told me. She's settling fifty francs a month on me from now on.

THERESE Why would she do a thing like that?

LAURENT Wages! For coming here and helping you both. *(Laughs)* If only she knew the real reason why I come!

THERESE Not so loud, she'll hear.

LAURENT Me drawing a salary! I've never had one before in my life —

THERESE I'm very happy for you. *(He goes to touch her but she moves away.)* Don't.

LAURENT Let's go out tonight and celebrate. Somewhere new, and alive — far away from this mausoleum.

THERESE You know we can't.

LAURENT *(hardening)* No, I don't.

THERESE If people saw us out together they might suspect. We have to be so careful.

LAURENT To hell with being careful — just for once!

THERESE I said no, Laurent. *(She sits, wearily.)*

LAURENT I've been careful for a year now, and I'm sick to death of it. We could find somewhere with lights and music, somewhere we could dance. That's one way of holding you in my arms.

THERESE I'm sorry — no.

LAURENT You never let me come near you nowadays. You've turned into some sort of ice-maiden ever since —

THERESE Don't say it. We swore we'd never speak of it in this room.

LAURENT I have to. I need you, Therese.

THERESE It's just as bad for me. But it can't be long now. Day by day she's moving closer to what we want — that money proves it. But the idea must come from her. Otherwise. . .

LAURENT I know you're right. Logic tells me so. But I have feelings, too.

THERESE We can't show them yet — either of us.

LAURENT I never dreamed —

THERESE What?

LAURENT Oh, never mind.

He goes to gaze gloomily into the fire, THERESE gets up and follows him.

THERESE No doubts. No doubts, my darling — ever. I'm still yours. I always will be.

He turns to face her.

LAURENT How long, Therese

THERESE As long as it takes. You promised.

The shop-bell goes, downstairs, where we hear MADAME RAQUIN greet someone happily.

MME. RAQUIN (off) Therese — Laurent! We have a distinguished visitor!

THERESE *moves swiftly away to the stairhead, as MADAME RAQUIN ascends with MICHAUD, who carries a carpet-bag.*

MICHAUD Good afternoon.

LAURENT What brings you here, monsieur?

MICHAUD Conscience my young friend; the iron of the soul.

MME. RAQUIN He's not only writing books now, he's beginning to talk like one. (*As MICHAUD glances sharply*) Yes, I know all about your little secret, you needn't bother to deny it.

MICHAUD Grivet told you. I expressly forbade him to.

MME. RAQUIN Why?

MICHAUD Because you'll only make fun of me, you always do.

LAURENT You said something about conscience, monsieur?

MICHAUD I like you, Laurent, because you never laugh at me. Yes, I was sitting at my desk nibbling on my pen and wondering how I ever came to solve the Longchamps murder alone and unaided, when it suddenly struck me — I hadn't been near this house for over a month.

MME. RAQUIN Nine and a half weeks, to be precise.

MICHAUD Is it so long? That's what comes of struggling with a masterpiece, you lose all count of time. Anyway, I went straight out and bought presents for you all to make amends. Here...(*delves in bag*) . . . Therese. (*He hands her a posy of flowers.*)

THERESE (*kisses him*) They're lovely. Thank you. I'll put them in a vase. (*She takes them off to the kitchen.*)

MICHAUD Laurent? That was a bit more difficult. But then I thought, 'What man doesn't revel in a good smoke?' So, cheroots, Laurent and I hope they're to your liking. (*He hands over a box.*)

LAURENT They're my favourites — when I can afford them. Thank you, Michaud.

MICHAUD And finally, for madame.

MME. RAQUIN The last on your list, monsieur?

MICHAUD Something extra-special. I tramped halfway across Paris to track this down. (*Produces it with a flourish*) One jar of coltsfoot jelly.

MME. RAQUIN How touching — it's exactly what I wanted.

MICHAUD *(misses her irony)* That'll have you back on your feet in no time. My mother used to swear by it before she died. *(As they laugh)* Oh dear, that's not what I meant to say at all!

MME. RAQUIN You'll never change, Henri.

THERESE *returns with the flowers, now in a small vase. They watch her as she crosses and puts them on the mantelshelf beneath the Portrait. It is like an offering.*

MME. RAQUIN *(in a hushed tone)* She's passed them on to Camille.

MICHAUD *(thoughtfully)* So I see.

LAURENT Tell us your news, Michaud. Is it true you're writing a book?

MICHAUD Yes, and it's coming on splendidly. That's another reason I'm here. I want to browse over my early days, with madame. Would you both excuse us for a quarter of an hour?

THERESE Certainly. I'm needed in the shop anyway. Coming, Laurent?

LAURENT Yes, it could do with a tidy-up. And I promised to fix those brackets for you...

The two young ones leave.

MME. RAQUIN Well, sit down, now you're here — if you can spare the time! *She indicates a chair with a wave of her stick. He catches hold of the end of it.*

MICHAUD You still need this, then?

MME. RAQUIN *(nods)* Ever since Camille died.

MICHAUD I'd hoped it would be a temporary measure.

MME. RAQUIN Old age makes fools of us all. Your turn will come.

MICHAUD Talking of old age, I ran into Doctor Grivet at the end of the passage. We had quite a chat.

MME. RAQUIN Did it come to blows?

MICHAUD *(chuckles)* Not this time. For once, I found myself entirely in agreement with him. He'd like our Thursday evenings back again — and so should I.

MME. RAQUIN He asked me, and I said they could never be the same without my son.

MICHAUD Quite, quite. I understand the problem, madame, but perhaps it's not incapable of solution. (*He has wandered to the fire.*)

MME. RAQUIN So you haven't come about the book after all? I knew it, by the way you couldn't keep still; you never could, when you were telling lies.

MICHAUD No, the book can take care of itself. I came to talk to you about Therese.

MME. RAQUIN How do you think my niece is looking?

MICHAUD Like a wraith.

MME. RAQUIN Grivet said the same. Sometimes I think he should be attending her instead of me.

MICHAUD That wouldn't help. Therese has a sublime sickness of the soul. Grivet's medicines are powerless against that.

MME. RAQUIN Life lost all meaning for her when her husband died.

MICHAUD She's told you as much?

MME. RAQUIN She doesn't have to. She's like my own flesh and blood.

MICHAUD Does she talk about it at all?

MME. RAQUIN Never. If I try, she gets angry and shuts herself away from me like a wounded animal. We're two of a kind, I'm afraid.

MICHAUD And yet at her age one shouldn't be inconsolable. Did she cry much at first, when it happened?

MME. RAQUIN Therese doesn't cry easily, she never did. What came upon her was a kind of silent agony that lasted for months. Then her nerves began to tell on her.

MICHAUD Nerves?

MME. RAQUIN One night — and I haven't told this to anyone — I heard a stifled sobbing in here, and of course came in to see what I could do. She didn't even know who I was. I think she was having some sort of awful nightmare, twisting and turning, muttering away to herself.

MICHAUD About what?

MME. RAQUIN Nothing I could make out. But she was calling on Camille constantly. She won't come in here at nights now without a light. In the daytime she's so exhausted she can hardly eat enough to keep a mouse alive. I'm afraid for what may become of her.

MICHAUD I'll be blunt, madame. Forty years of knowing you have given me that right. The girl must marry again.

MME. RAQUIN Therese? You don't know what you're saying.

MICHAUD Indeed I do.

MME. RAQUIN Oh no, Michaud. It would be a kind of sacrilege. You see how she is, she lives in the past. Even your flowers — she offered them straight to Camille. That picture and his memory, that's all she's got left.

MICHAUD When a woman's afraid to go to her room at night it's because she needs a husband, whether she realises it or not. But realise it she will, as time goes by. By then it may be too late for us to act.

MME. RAQUIN (*alarmed*) If anyone took her away from me, it would be like losing Camille all over again.

MICHAUD Don't alarm yourself. There's no question of her leaving here.

MME. RAQUIN You mean bring a stranger into our home? That would be intolerable.

MICHAUD No strangers either. What we have to do is find someone you both know and love, who would be a good husband for Therese, and a second son to you.

MME. RAQUIN There's no-one.

MICHAUD On the contrary, I think you see such a gentleman every day.

Pause.

MME. RAQUIN Laurent?

MICHAUD An admirable choice — why didn't I think of it?

MME. RAQUIN Therese — and Laurent?

MICHAUD Someone who, I am sure, has already given his heart to her.

MME. RAQUIN They're fond of each other, I know, but not in that way; they're more like brother and sister.

MICHAUD Then we must open their eyes for them. I want the three of you to be a family, happy and united. In fact, I want the old days back again and I think this is the way to have them.

MME. RAQUIN We must think of their good, not ours.

MICHAUD That was my primary concern, believe me.

MME. RAQUIN But would we be doing right?

MICHAUD That's for Therese to say. Why not broach it to her? I'm sure the young man's mind is half made up for him. The way he looks at her, the way he hangs on her every word...

MME. RAQUIN I wish I could be sure. I'm old. I can hardly move myself about now. All I ask is to spend my remaining days here in peace and security.

MICHAUD You're forgetting happiness. This could mean happiness, for all three of you. Three dear souls who at the moment are torn apart by an unfortunate and tragic memory.

Pause.

MME. RAQUIN Would such a thing be fair to Camille?

MICHAUD I think he would wish it. Laurent was his greatest friend, and he saved Therese's life, don't forget.

MADAME RAQUIN *decides.*

MME. RAQUIN Will you go down and tell Therese I want to see her?

MICHAUD With the greatest pleasure. And while she's up here, I'll keep him company in the shop.

He goes downstairs. MADAME RAQUIN crosses slowly to the portrait.

MME. RAQUIN Camille, my son... will you ever forgive me?

She looks up at him beseechingly — it is almost a prayer — and then hobbles back to her chair and sits with her hands clasped over her stick. THERESE comes quietly up the stairs, her head bent.

THERESE Michaud said you wanted to see me.

MME. RAQUIN Yes, my child. You've hardly spoken a word all day. What's wrong,

THERESE Nothing. No more than usual.

MME. RAQUIN Both of my old friends have remarked on how ill you look.

THERESE I'm tired, that's all. Just very, very tired, (*She walks slowly over to the portrait.*)

MME. RAQUIN Is it your heart perhaps? Or your chest?

THERESE No, I don't know. It's just that everything inside me seems empty... finished... numb

MME. RAQUIN Dear Therese (*She pulls herself to her feet and crosses to her niece.*)

THERESE There's nothing you or anyone can do. It's never going to go away. (*She sighs and sits in CAMILLE's armchair.*)

MME. RAQUIN I can't bear to see you like this, my child. You 're all I have now.

THERESE It's no easier for you. Can you forget Camille, and how he left us?

MME. RAQUIN Never. (*Gently*) But we're not here to talk about my grief, It's you who must be consoled.

THERESE Tell me honestly — can anything console you? (*A pause, then MADAME, RAQUIN shakes her head.*) You see? Please let me go now, it hurts to talk about it, (*She rises.*)

MME. RAQUIN You live too much within yourself.

THERESE I'm not complaining. Have you ever heard me complain? I had my fair share of happiness before it was snatched away from me.

MME. RAQUIN I'm old. I have the time to grieve. You're young, you're not yet thirty. You must find yourself again, through others.

THERESE What others? There's no-one but you in my life.

MME. RAQUIN You have a future to consider. Do you want to spend the rest of your days widowed and childless?

THERESE Such things are decided for us by God. They have to be. We have no say.

MME. RAQUIN Listen to me — and don't fly into a rage. I've been talking things over with Michaud.

THERESE (*bridles*) What things?

MME. RAQUIN We care about you, deeply, both of us. He thinks as I do, that you should marry again.

THERESE *stares at her and then violently shakes her head.*

THERESE Never.

MME. RAQUIN I told him you'd say that, but he persisted. And he's right, Therese: there should be room for more than blackness in any young person's heart.

THERESE Michaud has no business meddling in my private affairs.

MME. RAQUIN I asked you not to be angry.

THERESE What else do you expect? Talking me over like a piece of merchandise in my own home — and with outsiders.

MME. RAQUIN I knew him before you were born. Won't you even consider it?

THERESE I don't need to. Someone of my blood can only fall in love once. Then it's for ever.

MME. RAQUIN There are different kinds of love, Therese, We learn that as we grow older.

THERESE There's no point in discussing this.

MME. RAQUIN Very well. The subject is closed.

She moves away and sits again. THERESE, not wanting the matter to end there, hovers uncertainly.

THERESE I suppose you've got someone all ready and waiting? Who is he — what's he like?

MME; RAQUIN You know me better than I thought.

THERESE I know Michaud. He's nothing if not thorough.

MME. RAQUIN You may as well hear it all. We'd like you to marry Laurent.

THERESE (*secretly delighted*) Laurent!

MME. RAQUIN Can't you see how suitable he is? And he loves you, we're sure of that.

THERESE But I don't love him and I don't want to love him. He wouldn't want it either.

MME. RAQUIN Suppose he were to ask you, what would you say?

THERESE What I've said to you. Look at me, I'm still in mourning. All I ask is to go on mourning the man who loved me to the grave. It's wicked of you to try and change my life.

MME. RAQUIN Is it so wicked to want to see young people smile again? To find a kind of happiness together? Is that too much to ask?

THERESE I've always tried to please you in everything I've done. I've never gone against your wishes. But this!

MME. RAQUIN You could at least think about it.

THERESE Even that seems like a betrayal.

MME. RAQUIN Camille wouldn't see it as such. He'd want it too.

THERESE But why?

MME. RAQUIN Because he can no longer bring you happiness — only grief and sorrow. He'd see it as a new beginning, for all of us. Have you the courage Therese? You've never lacked courage before.

THERESE A new beginning...

MME. RAQUIN Only you can make it possible.

THERESE (*going closer*) I've never denied you anything, all the years I've known you.

MME. RAQUIN And this means more than anything I have ever asked.

Pause.

THERESE (*quietly*) Why couldn't you leave me alone with my heartbreak?

MME. RAQUIN Because I am sixty years of age. You're only thirty. So you'll agree? For all our sakes?

THERESE (*hesitantly*) If Laurent wants it so — I won't stand in the way.

MME. RAQUIN Oh, my dear. (*She puts her arms around her niece.*)

LAURENT (*off*) Madame — Madame Raquin!

He runs up the stairs with a handsome bouquet of flowers.

LAURENT Another present for you — not coltsfoot jelly this time!

MME. RAQUIN What have I done to deserve these?

LAURENT (*laughs*) They're not from me. Michaud sent them — he said something about congratulations.

She smiles to herself.

MME. RAQUIN See to them, Therese.

THERESE *takes the flowers and, as if she cannot meet LAURENT'S gaze, hurries off into the kitchen.*

LAURENT He made me go with him to the shop next door.

MME. RAQUIN I thought he wanted to talk to you about something important?

LAURENT He did. And being Michaud, he came straight out with it.

MME. RAQUIN Did you give him an answer?

LAURENT There's only one — but I don't think Therese would ever listen to me.

MME. RAQUIN I've just put it to her — and she's accepted.

LAURENT (*eyes widening*) It can't be true. (*Shouts*) Therese, come back here!

THERESE *re-enters.*

THERESE What's all this noise?

LAURENT Is it true? Will you marry me? (THERESE *goes and stands at the portrait, looking up at it.*) She never meant it, madame. She's as far away from me as ever.

THERESE (*turns*) I never say anything I don't mean, Laurent, We have a duty to make our mother happy. I'll be your wife.

LAURENT *takes a quick pace towards her and she hesitates.*

MME. RAQUIN Kiss her, you idiot! Kiss her before she melts away out of sheer embarrassment.

LAURENT *plants a chaste hiss on THERESE'S forehead.*

MME. RAQUIN On the lips, man — call yourself a Frenchman?

The lovers now embrace Properly, to her delight.

LAURENT Thank you, madame. A thousand times.

MME. RAQUIN You're sure, Therese?

THERESE It's for the best. I know that now.

MME. RAQUIN Be a good and faithful wife, Laurent, only you can make her smile again. Camille will thank you for it.

THERESE'S *hand feels for that of LAURENT, in silent triumph.*

CURTAIN

Scene Two

Midnight, six weeks later. The room is in darkness, except for the firelight's glow. The clock outside is striking twelve, as MICHAUD and GRIVET climb up the stairs like two conspirators. Both have imbibed freely, but GRIVET is the more affected by this. MICHAUD lights the main lamp.

MICHAUD Let there be light and there was light.

GRIVET My umbrella. I must put my umbrella somewhere safe.

He attempts to prop it up in its usual corner. It falls own. In retrieving it GRIVET almost falls down himself, ending up on his knees.

MICHAUD Stand up, my friend; we've done enough praying for one day. Let me help.

He assists him to a chair, where GRIVET collapses, takes out a large silk handkerchief and sniffs into it.

GRIVET Thank you. I'm sorry, weddings always have the strangest effect on me.

He blows his nose noisily as MICHAUD studies him, poker-faced.

MICHAUD Outside in the cab you were singing your heart out. Now you're bawling your head off. Why?

GRIVET Therese and Laurent... such a handsome couple. They looked so innocent — so unspotted.

MICHAUD And that reminded you of your misspent youth. I understand. *(He crosses to make the fire up.)*

GRIVET No, you don't. I don't mourn for myself; I mourn for what Life may do to them.

MICHAUD They'll never end up like you, so they'll avoid the worst. Now give me the nettles.

GRIVET The what?

MICHAUD The nettles, man! Before the others get here.

GRIVET I forgot.

He half rises, to grope inside one of his tail- pockets. Finally he brings out a bunch of crumpled nettles.

MICHAUD Have they been there all the time — in your tail-pocket?

GRIVET *(nods blearily)* Ever since we picked them outside the restaurant.

MICHAUD You sat on them throughout that dreary meal?

GRIVET Throughout. To keep our guilty secret.

MICHAUD How are you feeling?

GRIVET I've got a posterior like a pin-cushion. *(He sits again, very gingerly.)*

MICHAUD I'm told it's good for rheumatism.

GRIVET I haven't got rheumatism! Not there, anyway.

MICHAUD Then look upon it as preventive medicine. I shall now put these little beauties where they belong.

He crosses to the bedroom alcove, eases a curtain back, and buries the nettles in the beautifully made bed.

GRIVET Would you believe it? I nearly got married once. Several times.

MICHAUD To different ladies?

GRIVET *(sadly)* Always the same one.

He sniffs into the handkerchief. again. MICHAUD has produced his pocket-flask.

MICHAUD And why did you never take the fatal step?

GRIVET Because — for some incalculable reason — she didn't want to marry me. Can you understand that?

MICHAUD Perhaps it's something to do with your profession. I never knew a woman yet who trusted doctors. Santé.

He sits near his friend and takes a healthy swig from his flask before offering it to the doctor.

GRIVET I'd better not. I must maintain my dignity in front of the others. Michaud, do you think they stand at least a fighting chance of happiness?

MICHAUD Why not? They're admirably suited.

GRIVET But the marriage has been, to a certain extent, arranged.

MICHAUD It's better than no marriage at all. Besides, I sometimes think there's no such thing as happiness. When we think we're happy, it's only that we're a little less unhappy than usual.

GRIVET You're a philosopher.

MICHAUD I know.

GRIVET And you're a cynic.

MICHAUD I know that too.

GRIVET But I still like you.

MICHAUD I never knew that before.

The shop-bell sounds.

RIVET Someone's coming! What about the nettles? (*He half-rises again.*)

MICHAUD Sit down, you fool; it's all been taken care of.

They sit like two angels as THERESE and MADAME RAQUIN ascend the stairs.

MME. RAQUIN So here you are?

MICHAUD Welcome home, ladies.

THERESE *is calm and quiet and has only a demure smile for them both.*

GRIVET My dear, dear friends.

He rises, sweeps off his hat and sits again, all in one movement, and then finds he is sitting on his hat.

MICHAUD You must forgive him. I've never seen him quite so carried away,

MME. RAQUIN I should hope not.

MICHAUD (*indicates*) The lamps are lit, madame, the fire blazes, and the marital couch awaits. (*GRIVET emits a high-pitched giggle.*) Have I said something funny?

GRIVET Of course! I mean, of course not.

MME. RAQUIN Thank you for your help.

MICHAUD Now that my duties are complete, all that remains is for me to wish all future happiness to all concerned — and to kiss the bride.

MME. RAQUIN For the fifth time since dinner?

MICHAUD One never tires of paradise. (*He kisses THERESE fondly.*)

THERESE Thank you, monsieur.

MME. RAQUIN Now you must leave us in peace. We have a lot to do before the bridegroom gets back.

MICHAUD I was wondering — a dish of tea, perhaps?

MME. RAQUIN It wouldn't sit easily on the wine, and Doctor Grivet needs his bed. Don't you realise, you're keeping Therese waiting?

MICHAUD Laurent isn't even here yet!

MME. RAQUIN Have you forgotten *everything* about Vernon? He mustn't see the bride till she's undressed.

MICHAUD What a charming thought. Can I be of any assistance?

MME. RAQUIN No, you cannot. Now off with you both.

MICHAUD Grivet! Get your umbrella.

GRIVET *wakes from a doze and totters over for it.*

MME. RAQUIN Wait. (*She has noticed the open curtain at the alcove and now looks back at MICHAUD.*) You wouldn't dare.

MICHAUD Dare what, madame?

MME. RAQUIN Perhaps you do remember Vernon, after all.

She marches over to the bed and finds the nettles.

MICHAUD Now how on earth did those get there?

MME. RAQUIN They weren't there when I made the bed, monsieur. Look, Therese, see what they were going to do to you? Villains.

GRIVET Good gracious, that looks exactly like a bunch of nettles.

MME. RAQUIN Because that's exactly what it is — and that's exactly where it belongs. (*She dumps them in a waste-basket.*)

MICHAUD Well, it was a damned good idea while it lasted.

MME. RAQUIN (*laughing*) Now will you please take yourselves off home?

GRIVET Goodnight, Therese. (*Kisses her hand*) I hope your marriage will be a great success.

MME. RAQUIN Why shouldn't it be?

GRIVET One feels a certain responsibility.

MICHAUD Come on, Grivet. Goodnight, ladies.

GRIVET *puts on his battered hat and follows.*

GRIVET After all, if I hadn't brought the two of them together.

MICHAUD (*stops in his tracks*) You did what?

MME. RAQUIN Goodnight, gentlemen.

GRIVET (*starts downstairs*) Who thought of it in the first place?

MICHAUD *I thought of it. If I hadn't come round here to see madame...*

GRIVET Only at my instigation...

Their voices die away as they leave, still arguing.

MME. RAQUIN And now, my dear . . .

THERESE Now I know why they call it a marriage market.

MME. RAQUIN You'd better . . .

THERESE Let me be; just for a moment. (*She sits in the green armchair.*)

MME. RAQUIN As you wish.

THERESE What with two ceremonies, then that long drive, then the meal in the restaurant with all the wine and speeches...

MME. RAQUIN You must be quite worn out.

THERESE What about you? You haven't stopped all day.

MME. RAQUIN God provides extra strength when you work for others.

She returns to the alcove and turns down the bed, afterwards fluffing up the pillows. THERESE sits still and silent, almost morose. Then she looks slowly round the room.

THERESE I could have wished —

MME. RAQUIN What?

THERESE Nothing.

MADAME RAQUIN *brings her robe.*

MME. RAQUIN Laurent said he'd be half an hour at the most.

THERESE I'm not ready yet. Let's talk.

Her aunt sets the robe to warm by the fire and then transfers a bowl of roses from the living room to the bedside table.

MME. RAQUIN Everything went off very well, didn't you think? And what a pleasure to see the Mayor in his full regalia!

THERESE (*with the ghost of a smile*) When he began to read from his little red book, I daren't look at Laurent. He looked so pompous.

MME. RAQUIN Laurent kept his head bent most of the time.

THERESE I noticed. He's very shy, in public.

MADAME RAQUIN *brings brush and comb and THERESE'S slippers from the alcove.*

MME. RAQUIN Anyway, I much preferred the church service. I couldn't help it, the tears were rolling down my cheeks.

THERESE Women take these things much more seriously than men.

MME. RAQUIN And your man's going to be here before very long.

THERESE All right.

She stands obediently, and allows her aunt to help her off with her dress.

MME. RAQUIN I cried so much at my own wedding, I could hardly make the responses. That one took even longer.

THERESE It couldn't have.

MME. RAQUIN Jean-Pierre stood up so straight and strong, and looked the priest full in the face. (*Pricks herself*) Oh dear, that was a pin. (*Searches for it*) I should remember where it is, I put it in myself. Shall I go and get Michaud to help?

THERESE He's probably still arguing with Grivet, out in the street.

MME. RAQUIN Those two! But they're quite inseparable, really. Ah, I've got it.

She releases the pin and the dress is easily slipped off.

THERESE Thank you.

She Proceeds to take off her corselet and Petticoat. MADAME RAQUIN is admiring the wedding-dress.

MME. RAQUIN It's so lovely, this grey silk. And so beautifully finished! It could stand up by itself. How nervous you are, Therese — you're positively shaking.

THERESE I think I have a cold coming on.

MME. RAQUIN Not on your wedding night; it's just good, old-fashioned modesty.

She puts the dress and other things away in the wardrobe cupboard.

THERESE At least Michaud left us a good fire. (*She warms herself at it.*)

MME. RAQUIN Now we'll do your hair.

THERESE I can do it.

MME. RAQUIN It's my privilege. (*As THERESE sits again*) Put your head down, that's right. You're so lucky, you've been blessed with lovely hair. (*Brushes it tenderly*) It suits you to have it down, you look like a princess in a fairy-story. Now I'll roll it up in the neck.

THERESE Leave it loose. If you'd just tie it back.

MADAME RAQUIN *does so, with a white ribbon.*

MME. RAQUIN Beautiful.

THERESE I could have wished it wasn't winter. And not in this room. In Vernon, in May, the acacias are in full bloom and the nights are warm.

MME. RAQUIN It was May the last time you — (*halts abruptly*) There, you see how elegant you look? (*Offers mirror*) Now put on your nice, new dressing-gown.

She puts away the brush, comb and mirror, as THERESE does as she is bid.

THERESE You've been so extravagant with us. (*She snuggles into the robe.*)

MME. RAQUIN Oh, you're like a real bride now — all that lace! Now I'm going to leave you to prepare yourself.

THERESE (*urgently*) Wait till he comes, please; I think there's something else we have to say to each other. (*She glances at the portrait of CAMILLE.*)

MME. RAQUIN (*sternly*) No, nothing. I haven't allowed myself one word all day, you must have noticed it.

THERESE Yes, and I was thankful while the others were there. Still —

MME. RAQUIN The past is something to be locked away. Anything else would be unfair to Laurent.

THERESE Yes — mother.

The shop-bell sounds.

THERESE He's here.

MME. RAQUIN That bell should have been taken off the hook. In all the excitement we forgot.

LAURENT *comes up the stairs, singing softly to himself. He carries a bottle of vintage champagne.*

LAURENT Here I am, then, and this is the last bottle we had left —
He stops as he catches sight of THERESE.

MME. RAQUIN There, Laurent. What do you think of your bride now?

LAURENT *(breathes)* I think she's the loveliest creature God ever made.

THERESE *turns away to the fire.*

MME. RAQUIN The future's bright now. I know you won't leave me to go off on honeymoon, but as soon as I'm strong enough, we're all going away, for an extra-special holiday.

LAURENT Where to?

THERESE *(as if she knows)* Vernon.

MME. RAQUIN Yes — how did you guess? You'll love Normandy, Laurent. In spring-time the mimosa lights up the valleys like a million lanterns.

LAURENT That's something I must paint.

MME. RAQUIN You will. You'll paint everything. Goodnight — my son.

LAURENT Goodnight. And thank you for everything. For all the new clothes, for that wonderful reception and most of all — for her.

THERESE *crosses in silence to kiss her aunt.*

THERESE You've been too good to us. I mean that.

MME. RAQUIN Be happy, my children. Goodnight.

She leaves them. Pause.

LAURENT Therese, my darling.

THERESE Wait, Laurent.

LAURENT What's the matter?

THERESE I'm not ready. And it's so cold in here. (*She moves away from him.*)

LAURENT Go back to the fire.

She returns to the green armchair and he stands admiring her before moving away to take off his jacket and waistcoat. Then he goes to kneel by her.

LAURENT Married. Legally married. Can you realise it? I can't — not yet. (*He takes her hand to look at her wedding ring.*) And there's the proof. You're trembling!

THERESE It's been a year now — over. It's only natural that I should be nervous.

LAURENT Nervous of me?

THERESE I can't explain it, even to myself. But it's as if — as if we'd never met before. Not our real selves. As if we came together, two strangers in darkness, and only now...

LAURENT I know a first-class cure for that.

He rises from her and goes over to open the champagne.

THERESE I'm not the only one. It was on your mind too, all through the ceremony. Especially in church.

LAURENT There's nothing wrong with me that a drink won't put right.

THERESE So you drink not because you want to but because you need to?

LAURENT I drink because I like it.

THERESE Don't pretend. It hasn't come to that, has it?

LAURENT What's wrong with you, Therese?

THERESE We're both talking for the sake of talking, don't you feel that? We haven't had the courage to kiss each other yet. But you're afraid you'll look a fool if you don't kiss me, aren't you? If we don't make love. That's so stupid. We're not ordinary married people, we don't have to pretend to each other.

LAURENT I'm ordinary. I don't know about you, but I'm an ordinary man, having an ordinary drink on the most extraordinary evening of his life. And I'd like my wife to join me. (*He holds out her glass.*)

THERESE In a moment.

She crosses to the arch, where she stands listening anxiously.

LAURENT Who's being stupid now?

THERESE I just want to be sure she's sleeping.

LAURENT Therese we don't have to worry about other people any more...

THERESE (*not immediately*) I'm sorry. If you want the truth, I suddenly realised that almost ever since I came in, I've been sitting over there — in Camille's chair.

Pause.

LAURENT I see. That kind of nervousness.

He pushes the chair with his foot so that it rolls clear of them.

THERESE Be patient with me; I'll be myself in a minute or two. It was only the chair.

LAURENT Oh, damn the chair! Have your drink.

THERESE *sips her champagne and then puts the glass down.*

THERESE (*making conversation*) Do you think we really shall go to Vernon?

LAURENT How should I know? And why should I care? (*He drinks deeply.*)

THERESE Don't sulk. I'd love to show it to you.

LAURENT Vernon in the Spring — how many times have I heard that little love-song? I suppose it was in the Spring when you married before?

THERESE *looks as though he has hit her.*

THERESE It was springtime when I first went there and found a home.

LAURENT And there the conversation ended. (*He goes to refill his glass.*)

THERESE What time is it?

LAURENT Getting on for one.

THERESE What a long day it's been. Are you the same as I am, Laurent? I don't like being in cabs very much. I'd sooner go on foot.

LAURENT I like anything that's expensive.

THERESE Driving about for hours bores me to tears. What's more, I hate eating out in restaurants.

LAURENT I agree with you there — unless it's by the water. There's something about those little riverside inns — (*stops*)

THERESE Underneath all you say, I hear other words. While you're talking I can hear your thoughts. You'd got as far as the accident, hadn't you?

LAURENT (*sharply*) I thought we weren't supposed to talk about that?
She now sits on the stool and presses her hands to her head.

THERESE Do as I'm doing. Shut your eyes. Force yourself to think of nothing.

Pause.

LAURENT Therese, for God's sake say something — anything!

THERESE Even when I'm doing this, I think. I can't not think. (*Opens her eyes*) Silence doesn't work. One must talk. (*She gets up, forcing a brightness she is far from feeling. LAURENT does his best to fall in with her subterfuge.*) The Town Hall was freezing this afternoon.

LAURENT Freezing.

THERESE The only warm place all day was that little grating in the floor of the church. Did you see it — quite close to where we knelt?

LAURENT Grivet planted himself on top of it as soon as we moved to the altar. He looked triumphant, the old devil.

THERESE At first. Only at first. Then he kept crying.

LAURENT I know. I couldn't look at him.

THERESE I daren't look at you.

They both try to laugh but it is a miserable failure.

LAURENT The church was too dark. That was the weather. Weddings ought to be in sunshine.

THERESE Sunshine, yes.

LAURENT Did you see the lace on the altar-cloth?

THERESE Worth ten francs a metre at least. There's nothing so good in the shop.

LAURENT And the smell of incense. It always turns my stomach.

THERESE He was just the same, he — *(stops herself, gasping)*

LAURENT *(quickly)* At first I thought we were the only people there, in that great empty building. Just our little wedding party. Everything echoing all around us. Then the echoes became a chant. People chanting. You must have seen them, in that chapel across the nave?

THERESE *(nods)* People with tapers.

LAURENT A funeral!

THERESE When I raised my eyes, I saw the black pall, with a great white cross. The coffin passed quite close to us. *(Whispers)* I saw it. A little, narrow, shabby coffin. Some poor creature. *(They have drawn quite close now. Suddenly her head goes on his shoulder.)* When you went to the morgue... you saw him? Really saw him?

LAURENT I saw him.

THERESE You saw his face? It wasn't just the clothes?

LAURENT On the tenth day I went there, I saw his face.

THERESE Did he look as if he'd suffered?

LAURENT *(deep in memory)* Horribly.

THERESE His eyes were open, weren't they?

LAURENT Staring at me.

THERESE I've tried to imagine —

LAURENT Like a visitation from hell. The face was mottled blue, and swollen. Grinning. The corner of his mouth all twisted up.

He feels at his throat, where CAMILLE bit him on the night of the murder.

THERESE Tell me everything. I must suffer what you've suffered. On the nights when I can't sleep I can never see him clearly, and I must. *I must see him.*

LAURENT Damn his memory!

He pulls violently away from her and tears off his collar and cravat.

THERESE Laurent —

LAURENT It hurts where he bit me — hurts. (*Looks at his finger wonderingly*) It's bleeding...

THERESE The collar's chafed it, that's all.

LAURENT It means —

THERESE Nothing! Let me make it better. (*Kisses the spot, then recoils*) It burns me!

He takes hold of her.

LAURENT Put this out of your mind. I saw nothing in the morgue. Keep telling yourself that. We'll make ourselves believe it

THERESE I knew the thoughts would break through, they had to. Everything we talked about led up to it: Vernon in the Spring, the riverside inns, that miserable little coffin. We can never talk of ordinary things again, Camille's made sure of that.

LAURENT He's dead. Camille can't hurt us now.

THERESE He's here with us — here in this room. He's all around us. He had you by the throat!

LAURENT Don't go on like this, it's madness —

She breaks away from him and goes back to the fire.

THERESE Send him away, Laurent. For God's sake, send him away!

LAURENT I know how, we'll turn the clock back. We won't be man and wife, we'll be Therese and Laurent, all over again. (*He goes for his coat.*)

THERESE Don't leave me!

LAURENT Only for a moment. Downstairs, through the shop, along the passage as far as our door. When you hear the signal, let me in.

THERESE Yes — oh yes, my darling — please!

LAURENT Be ready. (*He urges her gently towards the alcove.*)

THERESE Don't forget the bell. If she hears that she might come in.

LAURENT I'll quieten it. (*Keeping up the charade*) We don't want anyone to find out now.

He closes the curtains on her. Then he looks round the room, breathing hard. He crosses to pour another drink and tosses it back in a single gulp. He goes off down the stairs, and the room is still and quiet as the clock outside strikes one. THERESE parts the curtains, unlocks the alcove door and comes back into the room, barefooted now and wearing only her nightdress. She puts out the lamp so that the only illumination now comes from the moonlight and the glowing embers. As she stares up at the Portrait of her first husband, it seems to shine with an unearthly light. LAURENT'S shape appears outside the windows and he knocks three times, softly, on the glass door. THERESE moves to the door and opens it but shrinks back as he steps into the room. LAURENT holds out his arms to her. She is shaking her head slowly.

THERESE Green. Everything's green tonight. Camille's chair. The wine bottle. Now the moonlight on your face. Close the curtains, shut it out!

He swishes the curtains together and the room is now bathed only in the soft glow from the fire. He comes to THERESE and takes her in his arms. Her body is rigid and unyielding.

LAURENT Therese... you're my wife.

THERESE (*whispers*) Useless. I can't feel your touch. (*Backs out of his grasp*) We're not in love any more.

LAURENT I've waited, and I've suffered, more than a year. I've built my whole life round tonight.

THERESE We killed love.

LAURENT *(desperately)* That's only your fancy. It's late and you're tired. Now put your arms around me, hold me close.

THERESE No, no, it's asking for sorrow. If we made love now, Camille would be here with us, laughing at us, cursing us!

LAURENT *(advancing)* He shan't have you back.

THERESE *(turns, cowering)* Don't. Don't come near me.

LAURENT It's that damned picture. You've lived with it too much. I want it down, I want it out of here.

He sweeps her aside and THERESE falls with a cry against CAMILLE'S armchair as LAURENT tears the picture down in a fury. Neither of them notices that MADAME RAQUIN has come quietly out of her bedroom and is standing at the corner of the archway, listening.

LAURENT I created this, and I can destroy it. *(Holding the thing in front of him, he lets all the hatred pour out of him.)* Curse you, Camille. I threw you in the river and held you down till you were dead. Now you come back from hell to haunt us both—

A hoarse scream comes from MADAME RAQUIN.

MME. RAQUIN Murderers!

The lovers turn to stare at her as she goes towards them menacingly.

MME. RAQUIN You killed my son. My son! *(Suddenly her face contorts in agony and she puts a hand to her heart.)* God damn you both!

Another seizure strikes her, taking her speech. Her arms hang limply as she sits, Powerless, her chest heaving.

LAURENT She can't move.

THERESE We were warned — her mouth!

LAURENT All twisted up, like Camille's.

MADAME RAQUIN'S *breath rasps harshly in her throat.*

THERESE Is she dying?

LAURENT No. Look at those eyes — they're alive with hate.

THERESE May God turn her lips and hands to stone.

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

Evening, some months later.

There is now an air of general dilapidation over the whole room. CAMILLE'S portrait has vanished from over the fireplace and the old landscape is back once more. The bed in the alcove has been replaced by a narrow truckle affair, which has been left carelessly unmade, the bedclothes in an untidy heap. The table has been moved back to Centre and some windows are open, though the weather is wintry.

LAURENT *pushes a wheelchair in through the arch. In it is MADAME RAQUIN. She is dressed from head to foot in black and is now completely paralysed.*

LAURENT This is what you need, a little change of scene. (*Settles her near table*) All right there? Now we'll close the windows and get rid of some of the draught. I know how you hate cold air, and it's not the time of year for open windows. (*He closes windows and lights the lamp.*) I spoil you, don't I? You don't get this sort of attention from her, you know. You could rot in that old bedroom of yours for all she cares. Self, self, self, — that's all it is with her.

THERESE *struggles up from below with a couple of extra chairs.*

LAURENT Hello — are your ears burning? We were just talking about you.

THERESE I asked you three times to bring these up for me.

LAURENT I was feeding her.

THERESE Why am I always left to do the donkey-work?

LAURENT It's your own fault. You should never have started these Thursday evenings up again.

THERESE We had to — we. Everything must appear as normal as possible. Anything else is dangerous.

LAURENT If you ask me, it's a damned sight more dangerous to let those two back into our lives.

THERESE One's her doctor and the other's her oldest friend. What do you want me to do, bar them from the house? That would give people something to talk about.

LAURENT All right! Grivet's got to come, I know. But why Michaud?

THERESE As normal as possible, I said.

LAURENT I don't trust him and never have. Once a policeman, always a policeman.

THERESE Oh, I see. Michaud's no threat. He lives in a world of his own nowadays.

LAURENT So you say. He always seems sharp enough when he comes here. The way he picks up the least little thing.

THERESE (*dismissing it*) I thought you were supposed to be cleaning up in here?

LAURENT I've only got one pair of hands.

THERESE Look at that bed of yours — why the hell don't you make it in the mornings?

LAURENT *crosses and slings the covers roughly into place, afterwards drawing the curtains on it.*

LAURENT Separate beds, separate lives. What's normal about that?

THERESE I have to be with her during the nights.

LAURENT It doesn't matter anymore. I'm getting used to our kind of normality by now.

THERESE (*crosses to sideboard*) They'll be here soon and you haven't even got the wine yet.

LAURENT I've been waiting for some wine money.

THERESE I'm getting it. (*She unlocks the top drawer and takes out a cash-box.*)

LAURENT We ought to offer them a bite to eat as well. There always used to be cakes in the old days.

THERESE The housekeeping won't run to it. Here. Two francs will have to do.

LAURENT *(takes coins)* What sort of vinegar can I buy for two francs?

THERESE Malaga. We can't afford the Chablis any more.

She locks the box away.

LAURENT Michaud's going to love that.

THERESE Times have changed. He'll just have to put up with it.

LAURENT If you were a bit more organised — sent some accounts out now and then, and stocked a few new lines . . . Madame knew how to run a shop; we were always in profit in her day.

THERESE Perhaps you'd like to find the time to do it for me?

LAURENT Perhaps I'd like to find the time to do some painting. *(He lounges towards the stairs.)*

THERESE And take the bell off the hook while you're down there.

LAURENT I may be only the hired help now, but I don't take orders, from you or anyone.

THERESE Please.

LAURENT That's better.

He leaves. THERESE sets to work to tidy the room, talking sporadically to the hunched figure in the wheelchair.

THERESE Dirt, that's all I am, these days, He treats me like dirt. I used to have a bit of self-respect. That's gone now, like everything else. I should have known the kind of man he was from the beginning. He only came here in the first place to get a free bed and as much food and drink as he could stuff down himself. Laurent the Pig! And he hasn't changed underneath. It's a good thing they gave me the power to act for you, and not Laurent the Pig. He'd like to get his hands on our money but he'll never do that. I only keep enough in the house to live on; the rest is in the bank, where it belongs. He'd run through it in no time, what with his drinking and his 'little

outings', as he's pleased to call them. (*She sets the chairs in place at the table.*) And making me lift heavy furniture about, just like a servant! It was never like this with Camille. Whatever his faults, he always treated me like a lady. Look at me now! (*She checks her appearance in the mirror.*) I'm old. I'm haggard. He'd never have let this happen to me. But then he was a gentleman, born and bred. But this one! And going on like that about the shop. I know you were better behind the counter — you've been in business all your life — but Camille always did the paperwork for you and there was never a penny out of place. That's why we prospered. It wasn't an ideal marriage but it was peaceful enough until he brought this monster into our lives. (*She goes to the old lady and now talks directly at her.*) I wish I knew how much of all this you can take in. Sitting there watching us all day long. Can you ever understand a single word we say?

LAURENT'S *voice breaks in on her reverie.*

LAURENT (*calls, off*) We're here, Therese!

He comes up the stairs with MICHAUD, who carries bottles of wine in a paper bag.

THERESE (*flustered*) You're early, monsieur.

LAURENT He caught me going into the wine shop and wouldn't let me buy anything. Everything's been provided for, he says.

MICHAUD (*jovially*) And so it has. I brought it with me.

He unloads his bottles on to the table.

THERESE I don't understand.

MICHAUD One...two...three. Chablis, the best there is.

THERESE You bought the wine last time.

MICHAUD And I've bought it this time.

THERESE How much do we owe you?

MICHAUD Not a sou. I've just had a handsome advance from my publisher, and money was made for spending.

THERESE *(takes his hat)* You're very good to us. I promise you, when the shop's doing better —

MICHAUD *(brushes this aside)* How's madame tonight?

LAURENT There's no change.

THERESE It's a cruel, heartless thing, paralysis. Sitting there in that chair all day long, never moving a muscle. It's like being buried alive.

LAURENT Sometimes we think she might be better off if —

MICHAUD Don't say that. Look at those eyes, Laurent. They burn with life. Besides, there's always a chance she may return to something like normal.

LAURENT Grivet maintains there's very little hope.

MICHAUD It still exists. He said in the beginning that she might regain the use of her limbs one day, if only partially.

LAURENT I suppose it's been known, but...

MICHAUD Why, she might even learn to speak again, given time.

THERESE *(startled)* Grivet said that?

MICHAUD Of course, it's only an outside chance.

LAURENT He's never mentioned a word of this to us.

MICHAUD Probably didn't want to build up your hopes.

THERESE He was right to keep silent. We wouldn't dare to count on it.
She exchanges a glance with LAURENT.

LAURENT Will you keep her occupied, monsieur? We must see to the wine.

MICHAUD I shall delight in it.

LAURENT The glasses, Therese.

THERESE I'll get the best ones.
She goes off to the kitchen as MICHAUD brings the stool closer to MADAME RAQUIN and sits.

MICHAUD We've been friends for a long while, you and I. You always did the talking before; now it's my turn. Watching's no good, madame, you've got to hurry up and get better, be a part of everything again. There's no-one to boss me about, these days! *(After studying her, he turns back to LAURENT, who is opening the wine.)* Something's wrong tonight. She's very black. I'll talk about the old days — that nearly always works.

LAURENT She loved her life in Normandy. We were all going off there for a holiday, if this hadn't come about.

MICHAUD *(back to MADAME)* What about when we first met— eh? I was only a young policeman then and you were the prettiest girl in Vernon. It was the year of the Gorge aux Loups murder, as I recall *(THERESE re-enters.)* Remember, madame? That woman and her lover, who murdered the husband?

THERESE checks in her stride, but only momentarily. Then she takes the best glasses to LAURENT at the sideboard.

He was a van-driver, wasn't he? And they tried to make it look like an accident. Soaked the old chap in absinthe and sent him over the cliff at Point Cabel. I talked it over with you at great length and I remember you saying whoever heard of a poor van-driver getting drunk on absinthe? So I went and searched their filthy cottage, found the bottles, and arrested them myself. *(He looks over at the lovers.)* My first big success. I got promotion and they both got the guillotine. *(A silence falls, during which the clock outside can be heard as it strikes. MICHAUD checks his large watch by it.)* ... six... seven... eight. He's late! By all that's wonderful, Grivet's going to be late.

GRIVET *(appearing)* Oh no, he isn't. *(He comes up the stairs to join them.)* The shop bell's off the hook and I crept through the shop to surprise you. Good evening, Therese — Laurent.

LAURENT *(nods)* Doctor

Grivet crosses to place his umbrella in its usual position and to take off his galoshes.

GRIVET Long faces? What's the matter with you all?

THERESE Michaud's been raking over old bones.

GRIVET Let me guess — the Wolf of Montmartre?

MICHAUD Earlier than that.

GRIVET The stranglings at Epinay? We haven't had that one for ages.

MICHAUD Long ago and far away. Miles and miles away from Paris.

GRIVET Then it must have been the van-driver in Vernon.

MICHAUD Top marks. I can see my book's made a great impression on you.

GRIVET He solved that within a week, you know. Murder usually takes him longer.

MICHAUD But never as long as it's taking you to cure madame.

GRIVET That's the difference between doctors and detectives. We can only work wonders, never miracles. Still, I can communicate with her, which is more than you can do.

MICHAUD Then I wish you'd tell us what's wrong with her tonight. (*He moves away to light his pipe.*)

GRIVET Certainly, certainly! One look, just one look, and I know exactly what's going on in that mind of hers.

MICHAUD I can guess, of course. She thinks it's time we all had a drink.

LAURENT (*apologetically*) It's your stories; they put it clean out of my head.

He goes to pour the wine as GRIVET takes the place recently vacated by MICHAUD and turns on his best bedside manner.

GRIVET There now, let's have a nice friendly little chat. Is there something you wish to say to us, apart from telling Michaud to mind his own business? (*Stares intently*) I've got it — she's hungry.

LAURENT She had supper in her room before you came.

THERESE *is busy handing round the drinks.*

MICHAUD A drink — perhaps that's what she needs.

GRIVET I wouldn't advise it.

MICHAUD Oh, not a whole glass, just a thimbleful. That couldn't harm, surely? And it makes her feel one of us, instead of — (*moves in towards her*)

GRIVET (*not pleased*) Oh, very well Just one sip — as long as someone else administers it. Laurent, you feed her as a rule, don't you?

LAURENT *offers his own glass to MADAME RAQUIN'S lips, but they are shut tight.*

LAURENT She won't have it.

MICHAUD I tell you, she's playing us up deliberately.

GRIVET (*rises to him deprecatingly*) Michaud, you may have been the finest detective Paris ever had.

MICHAUD (*gruffly*) I was a policeman, from beginning to end. Just a policeman. But we have a saying, doctor... you look, and you know. I looked at her tonight and I know she's trying to tell us something.

LAURENT Therese, see if you can set his mind at rest.

THERESE *goes to her aunt and takes both of her hands, gazing deeply into her eyes.*

THERESE (*at last*) She's perfectly happy, monsieur; she wants for nothing.

GRIVET Well, now that's settled, can we get on with the game?

THERESE Of course. Laurent, bring the dominoes.

LAURENT, *pouring himself another drink at the sideboard, tries the top drawer.*

LAURENT I will if you'll unlock this drawer. (*To the others*) You didn't know the damn things were so precious, did you?

GRIVET (*Blinks*) Precious dominoes?

LAURENT They must be. She keeps this drawer locked up all through the week.

THERESE They're precious to me. They belonged to my husband.

An embarrassed pause, during which she unlocks the drawer and hands the box over to LAURENT.

LAURENT I'm honoured. Does anyone mind if I take the holy chair as well?

Deliberately, he pushes CAMILLE'S armchair into its old position at the table, and sits in it.

THERESE You've had too much to drink.

MICHAUD But we've only just started!

THERESE Laurent was out earlier in the day, seeing some old friends. You must excuse him.

LAURENT They envy me, don't you, gentlemen? Now what was it Saint Camille used to say? (*Quotes*) 'Ladies and gentlemen — the pieces!' (*He cascades them on to the table.*) 'And may the best man win.' You'll notice he never included the ladies in that bit.

THERESE (*flushing*) I never played. I shan't play now. (*She moves away.*)

All is now ready for the game, with MICHAUD, GRIVET and LAURENT at the table, and MADAME RAQUIN stationed next to LAURENT, who is shuffling the dominoes.

GRIVET If you're going to smoke, I'd better have my usual cigar.

MICHAUD Save your money, my friend, the pipe's gone out.

GRIVET Oh. (*Determined*) Still . . . (*He takes his cigar-case out.*)

MICHAUD What's more, I shan't light the thing again; not while I'm sitting next to madame.

GRIVET (*takes his point*) That's most considerate. (*He coughs, and puts the case away.*)

The three men take their dominoes and study them in dedicated silence. Suddenly —

THERESE (*gasps*) Her hand —

All look towards MADAME RAQUIN. Her wizened index finger is curled like a brown claw over the table, and she is moving it slowly.

MICHAUD It's moving!

GRIVET She's trying to write — it's a miracle. Madame's trying to write something on the table. Madame —

MICHAUD Leave her alone. (*Watches, eagle-eyed*) I can't make that out.

GRIVET It could have been an 'I'... or a 'T'

LAURENT *rises slowly from his chair, his gaze fixed-on the moving hand.*

MICHAUD Here. (*He empties ash from his pipe on to the oilcloth table-cover.*) Write in the ash, madame — write in that.

MADAME RAQUIN'S *head is thrown back in anguish and she is sweating with effort, but the hand ploughs on. LAURENT moves involuntarily towards THERESE.*

LAURENT Therese —

THERESE Be quiet.

GRIVET What's this, madame? You're your old self again. Just look at those fingers, dancing a proper little jig!

MICHAUD Quiet, Grivet! She's made a capital 'T'.

GRIVET Good heavens, so she has. 'T' that's it. She wants some tea.

MICHAUD Nincompoop! Can't you read? She's written Therese's name. 'Therese and...' go on, madame, go on.

GRIVET 'Therese and Laurent...' Both your names.

MICHAUD 'Therese and Laurent have . . . 'K' — (*As the hand pauses*) Well, what have they done?

GRIVET It's no good, she's stopped.

MICHAUD Rest a moment and then try again. Finish the sentence. Please, madame!

With a great effort of will, MADAME RAQUIN brings her eyes round to look directly into MICHAUD'S. Her hand falls back in her lap.

MICHAUD She won't.

GRIVET She can't, you mean.

He takes the hand and wipes it gently with his silk handkerchief, before carefully testing the fingers and the wrist.

LAURENT Well?

GRIVET Gone back to stone. I fear she will never move again.

THERESE *takes in a breath sharply as he folds MADAME RAQUIN's hands in her lap.*

MICHAUD If only she could have told us.

GRIVET It may be as well she didn't; the strain was proving too much. Anyway, there's no mystery in what she meant, is there?

LAURENT (*daring*) What do you think it was, doctor?

GRIVET It's perfectly obvious. 'Therese and Laurent have kept me alive with their kindness.' That was it, I'm sure. 'My blessings on them both.' Something of that sort, almost certainly.

MICHAUD And they'll have their just reward; here or hereafter.

He turns to face the two of them and his face is grim.

LAURENT That's an odd thing to say.

MICHAUD It's rather an odd evening, monsieur, don't you agree?

THERESE Go on. (*Pause*) Don't leave it at that.

MICHAUD (*Shrugging*) All I'm saying is, the message couldn't have ended simply on kindness. We all know how much you've done for her.

GRIVET And they're enjoying their reward this minute. Look at the two of them, with their arms entwined!

MICHAUD Yes, I noticed.

GRIVET It's so refreshing to see a couple so wrapped up in each other. And to think it's all thanks to me!

MICHAUD (*heavily*) If I've told you once, I've told you a hundred times—

THERESE (*embarrassed, breaking from LAURENT*) Please, gentlemen, I think she's had enough excitement for one evening.

GRIVET Indubitably. (*Rises*) Michaud, our presence here is quite superfluous. Where's my umbrella?

MICHAUD (*rises, grumpily*) Where the hell do you think it is?

He nods at the fireplace and GRIVET crosses to get it, sitting to put on his galoshes first.

GRIVET Put her to bed, my dears; her pulse is racing.

THERESE brings MICHAUD his hat, but his eyes have gone back to MADAME RAQUIN.

THERESE Goodnight, monsieur.

MICHAUD Was that all there was, old friend?

LAURENT What do you think, Michaud? What do you really think?

MICHAUD I think she changed her mind.

GRIVET Nonsense. You saw her hand fall. You saw me examine it. She's spent, and there's an end of it.

MICHAUD Perhaps; and perhaps not. Goodnight, everybody.

He stumps off down the stairs.

GRIVET Now what's come over him?

LAURENT Goodnight, doctor. I'm sorry it was such a short evening.

GRIVET There'll be others. Michaud, wait for me!

He hurries out after his friend, his galoshes slopping awkwardly. LAURENT waits till they have gone and then pulls the wheelchair round for MADAME RAQUIN to face him. He studies her intently.

THERESE It was a chance in a million.

LAURENT It happened. What if it happens again?

THERESE It can't. You heard what Grivet said.

She goes off into the kitchen. LAURENT starts to clear the dominoes away and then finds that MICHAUD'S pipe has been left on the table. He makes for the stairs with it to go out after the visitors but then changes his mind and sets the pipe aside. THERESE returns with a board on which is a small Vienna loaf and the kitchen knife. She puts them on the table.

LAURENT Another second and she'd have given us away.

THERESE It's over and done with.

She goes out again, now perfectly in control once more. LAURENT picks up the knife and tests its sharpness against his thumb. He is about to cut bread then he feels the old lady's eyes upon him. He crosses round to her with the blade extended. THERESE returns with two plates and a bowl of salad.

THERESE Laurent — no!

LAURENT So simple. Slash the wrists. They'd call it suicide,

THERESE By someone who can't move?

LAURENT She had the strength to write —

THERESE But not to kill. Everything would come out. You. know what that would mean.

LAURENT *looks at her and then tosses the knife back on to the table.*

LAURENT All right. But we'll never be safe again while she's alive.

THERESE Eat something. You'll feel better.

LAURENT I'll finish my wine.

He throws the drink back and then fills up his glass once more. THERESE sits to start her meal.

THERESE Stop dwelling on it, you'll only make things worse.

LAURENT What am I supposed to do, ignore it? What if her speech came back? Michaud said that was the next step. Do you think she'd spare us then?

THERESE It never will.

LAURENT He'll find out, sooner or later. His mind was full of it when he left.

THERESE If only you'd stop harping on Michaud!

LAURENT Grivet, then. When I apologised for the evening, did you hear him? 'There'll be others' — what did he mean by that?

THERESE Simply what he said. They know nothing. They're ordinary people, simple and uncomplicated.

LAURENT They'll put us before a judge in the end. Think of that! Two clever murderers like us sent to the guillotine by a pair of simple, uncomplicated fools.

THERESE *rises and moves about restlessly.*

THERESE Oh God, let's talk about something else. Why does it always come back to this when we're left alone?

LAURENT We're never alone. Perhaps she brings it back. Or you do.

THERESE All I want is to escape from it.

LAURENT We can never do that now.

THERESE We must!

LAURENT It's gone too far. It began the day you seduced me, here in this room. It'll go on until we pay for it. In full.

THERESE Laurent, I don't want to fight with you. Can't you see I'm tired out? That I've had more than I can stand?

LAURENT Go on, make a martyr of yourself as usual. That's all you're good for nowadays.

THERESE Be careful.

LAURENT Why? We died on each other long ago. (*Finishes his drink*)

THERESE All right! We won't eat, we won't try to talk sensibly. You'll drink yourself into a rage and we'll finish up clawing each other's eyes out as usual.

LAURENT People can't talk to each other when they're a million miles apart.

THERESE I know why you turn like this every night. It suits you when we shout and rave at one another till you're exhausted. Then you can sleep.

LAURENT You get no more sleep than I do.

THERESE I dread the nights. If you knew what it was like, in that bedroom of hers. Like a tomb. I see Camille there all the time and sometimes wish to Heaven we'd never — never. . .

She breaks off and sinks her head in her arms.

LAURENT Never killed him? That's what you were going to say, isn't it?

THERESE You killed him. I didn't.

LAURENT You were as much to blame as I was — more.

THERESE No — no.

LAURENT Lying there on that river-bank while he was asleep I whispered to you, told you what was in my mind. Did you try and stop me? You got into the boat with me, you let me do it.

THERESE I was mad for you. I didn't realise what giving way to you would mean.

LAURENT Think back. I warned you when I was going to overturn the boat. Did you stop me then? You clung to me, and wished him dead.

THERESE The two of us together, happy and in love. It filled my mind. Even in the water.

LAURENT Liar! You enjoyed the killing. You revelled in it. Remember what happened on the way back in the cab — we were on fire for each other. That's what murder did for us, made love-making all the better! You wanted him out of your life.

THERESE Not before he brought you here.

LAURENT Two years ago. Look what those two years have done to me. Was I like this when I first came here? Drinking like a fish, afraid of my own shadow? I was a decent human being but you made me a murderer. All I can think of now is the arrest, the trial and the guillotine. God help me!

He sinks into CAMILLE'S chair, his body shaking.

THERESE You'll give us both away. You'll be the one.

LAURENT I don't care anymore.

THERESE Is this the brave Laurent? Is this the man who wanted me so much he'd dare anything to have me?

LAURENT It's what you've made of him.

THERESE And I once thought I loved you. If you want the truth, I can't bear you near me. Every time I see your hands, they're stained with Camille's blood.

LAURENT Camille — Camille — that's all I ever hear. It's in every thought that comes out of your head. It's in her eyes, every time she looks at me. Camille did this, Camille did that. He was so perfect, too perfect to be a saint! Poor Camille. There was no living with him, now there's no living without him.

THERESE Laurent, for the last time —

LAURENT *leaps up wildly.*

LAURENT Don't call me that! It's not my name. I'm not Laurent any more, I'm turning into Camille. It started with my hands. Now my voice, my face, my brain! I am Camille. Soon I'll begin to giggle and complain like him. Then, when I talk like Camille, look like Camille, suffer like Camille, maybe I'll have Camille's wife in my bed again.

THERESE Laurent — Camille — whoever you think you are, all I know is I hate you.

LAURENT Tracherous bitch! (*He strikes her full in the face and knocks her to the ground. Immediately he is on his knees beside her.*) I'm sorry . . . sorry . . . God forgive me sorry.

She crawls away from him.

THERESE He punishes me every day you walk the earth.

LAURENT Not any more.

He pulls himself to his feet and moves towards the stairs.

THERESE (*fearfully*) Where are you going?

LAURENT To give myself up. It's the only freedom I've got left.

THERESE (*defiantly*) Send them here then. I'll be waiting I've faced everything better than you, all the way through. I'll face the guillotine too.

She drags herself painfully upright, using CAMILLE'S chair for leverage.

LAURENT *stands stock-still, his back to her.*

THERESE Why don't you go? God damn you, *why don't you go?*

Slowly he turns to face her. Tears stream silently down his face.

LAURENT I can't. It's not for myself, all I want is peace. It's what they'd do to you, I can't *allow* that.

THERESE (*wonderingly*) Laurent...

LAURENT I'll tell them I did it. That from beginning to end, you knew nothing about it.

Pause.

THERESE After all I've said — you can do that for me?

LAURENT Anything. Whatever you say, whatever you *are*... I'll love you till I die.

He turns to go.

THERESE Wait! (*She goes very close to him.*) I spoke madness just now. I was only testing your love. Believe it, my darling, it's you, it's always been you. Love me, that's our salvation. Hold me — love me now.

He crushes her in his arms and for a moment they gaze at each other, lost in a miraculous rediscovery. They are very near MADAME RAQUIN and THERESE'S back is towards her. The old lady's hands come gradually into view. They clutch the knife. She plunges it deep into THERESE and then sinks back into her chair. THERESE slumps to the ground.

LAURENT Therese

He goes down beside her and plucks the knife from her, then rises and backs in horror at the sight of her life's blood. MICHAUD'S voice is heard on the stairs.

MICHAUD (*off*) May I come up? (*He comes into sight, breathless from hurrying.*) I was halfway home before I realised I'd forgotten my pipe — (*He turns into the room and pulls up short at what confronts him.*) Dear God in Heaven! (*Soundlessly, he crosses to the body and kneels to make a brief examination.*) Dead. (*He rises to face LAURENT, who still holds the knife, staring at him dully.*) You couldn't trust her then to keep your secret? that message tonight: 'Therese and Laurent have killed my son.' Guilt was written all over you both.

LAURENT You think I could do this — to Therese?

MICHAUD Who else, monsieur?

LAURENT *sways round to look at MADAME RAQUIN, who is once again immobile.*

A helpless invalid? She can't move hand or foot. Give me the knife.

LAURENT *gazes at him, broken. He passes the knife across and MICHAUD takes it in his gloved hand. Then he bends towards MADAME RAQUIN.*

MICHAUD I'll send someone up, madame, you won't be alone long. (*To Laurent*) Come with me — now!

LAURENT *is taken off down the stairs at knife-point. MADAME RAQUIN stays absolutely motionless until they have gone and the house is quiet. Then she raises her head and looks directly at us. She is smiling a crooked smile.*

CURTAIN

PROPERTY PLOT

(Essentials)

ACT ONE, scene 1

SET ONSTAGE

Coal scuttle with tongs and poker.

Clock.

Landscape picture above fire.

Waste basket.

Ashtray on table C.

Box of dominoes in sideboard drawer.

Cashbox with coins in second drawer.

Corkscrew on sideboard.

Spare glasses on sideboard.

Empty wine bottle in sideboard cupboard.

Embroidery basket on work-table or window-seat.

Jacket (Laurent) on bed.

SET OFF R

Two bottles of champagne.

Shop-bell on hook.

Portrait of Camille, in sacking.

Two ladder-back chairs, back to back.

Bundle of wet clothing.

Stage blood and small sponge.

Medical bag with pills and stethoscope.

Two bags of shopping. (French bread, etc.)

Carpet bag with posy of flowers, box of cheroots, jar of coltsfoot jelly.

Handsome bouquet of flowers.

Bundle of nettles or thistles.

Wedding posy (Therese).

SET OFF L.

Bottle of vintage champagne.

Wheelchair with cushions.

Brown bag with three bottles of Chablis (corked).

Oil lamp.

Four champagne glasses on tray.

Cakes on cakestand.

Four small plates.

Tray with teapot, milk and sugar, tongs, strainer, four cups, saucers and spoons.

Breadboard with hunks of bread and large

Kitchen knife.

Soup tureen and ladle.

Place mat.

Glass of water.

Vase ready for Therese's flowers.

Four good wine glasses.

Small Vienna loaf.

Two white plates.

Bowl of salad and server.

SET OFF U.C. (possibly concealed in alcove)

Two worn dressing-gowns.

Robe (new, preferably white).

Tray with brush, comb, powder-box, white ribbon, hairpins, hand-mirror, pin cushion.

Slippers.

Nightdress.

ACT ONE, Scene 2

STRIKE.

Used glasses.

Cakestand and cakes.

Used plates and tray.

All other used crockery and cutlery, etc.

Workbasket.

Landscape picture.

Sacking.

Spare ladder-back chairs.

Umbrella and goloshes.

Used ashtray.

Dominoes and box.

SET

Clean ashtray.

White tablecover.

Two soup dishes and spoons. Vase of autumn flowers.

ACT TWO, scene 1

STRIKE

Soup dishes and spoons.

Soup tureen and ladle. White tablecover.

Discarded dressing-gown. Empty wine bottle.

SET

Table in new position.

Chaise longue and Madame's armchair, ditto.

Stool, ditto.

Grivet's medical bag on table.

ACT TWO, Scene 2

STRIKE

Posy of flowers from mantelpiece.

Box of cheroots.

Jar of coltsfoot jelly.

SET
 Bowl of roses on table.
 White bedspread on bed.

ACT THREE

STRIKE
 Nettles from waste basket.
 Wedding posy.
 Discarded clothing (Therese).
 Bowl of roses from alcove.
 Champagne bottle and used glasses.
 Discarded clothing (Laurent).
 Camille's portrait.
 White bedspread.
 Double bed from alcove.

SET
 Landscape picture over fire.
 Single truckle bed in alcove.
 Crumpled bedclothes in a heap.
 Clean ashtray on table. Oilcloth cover on table.

PERSONAL PROPS
 (Essentials)

CAMILLE
 Four coins.

MME. RAQUIN
 Purse.
 Walking stick.

GRIVET
 Umbrella. Galoshes.
 Pince-nez.
 Two silk handkerchiefs.
 Cigar-case with four cigars.
 Watch and chain.

MICHAUD

Pipe.

Pouch.

Matches.

Pocket-flask with screw-cap.

Imposing watch and chain. Gloves.

LAURENT

Two cheroots.

Matches.

THERESE

Lace handkerchief.

Matches.

Diary.

Wedding ring.

Chatelaine.