

THE TREAT

a play by Pam Gems

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THE TREAT

A BROTHEL IN FRANCE IN THE EARLY TWENTIES. A CHAISE LONGUE, DRESSING TABLE, JAPANESE SCREEN WITH SILK SHAWL DRAPED OVER IT, DRINKS.. BRANDY, WINE, AND CHAMPAGNE ON ICE, AND ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS AND PAMPAS GRASS IN VASES. THE SPACE IS LOW LIT.

THREE WOMEN ARE PRESENT. THEY WEAR THE LOUIS HEELED PUMPS OF THE PERIOD, LACY CHEMISES IN PALE COLOURS AND KIMONOS. FRANCINE IS BUXOM, MARIE-HELENE IS PALE, THIN AND FAIR, BERTHE IS SMALL.

BERTHE I don't. TO FRANCINE Do you?

FRAN Sure.

BERTHE Do you? SURPRISED.

FRAN We-ell.. WITH A TEMPORISING GLANCE TO MARIE.

BERTHE You don't. I don't.

MARIE LOW Please..

BERTHE Well I don't, I don't!

MARIE You shouldn't.. SHE CLAPS HER HANDS OVER HER EARS.

FRAN She's frightened he'll hear you.

BERTHE Never.

MARIE PLEADING How can you be sure?

BERTHE He won't because he can't. And he can't because he's not there. SLIGHT PAUSE. FRANCINE TAKES THE HARD SKIN OFF HER HEELS WITH A FILE. BERTHE CALLS Are you there?

BERTHE ACCOSTS MARIE WITH SWEET REASON. There's nobody there.

MARIE There is.

BERTHE There isn't.

MARIE Don't.

BERTHE Prove it!

FRAN Oh shut up, the pair of you.

BERTHE You see, she can't. MARIE MOVES APART.

FRAN Leave her alone.

BERTHE I didn't start it.

FRAN You did.

BERTHE I never, she did! She asked me if I believed in him.

FRAN She asked me.

BERTHE Well anyway, I don't. PAUSE. Waste of time. PAUSE.

A PAUSE.

FRAN TO MARIE Fancy a toffee?

MARIE No thanks.

MARIE GASPS, BENDS OVER, CLUTCHING HER ABDOMEN.

FRAN What is it?

MARIE DOUBLED UP Cramps.

BERTHE Again?

MARIE DOUBLED UP All day.

FRAN Tell him!

BERTHE No don't, you'll upset him. Take an aspirin.

MARIE MOVES TO SOFA. HUMBLY I've had eight.

 PAUSE. FRANCINE MOVES APART, GAZES OUT, BEMUSED.

BERTHE CALLS, TO FRANCINE What you doing?

FRAN Watching this fly clean its legs. It's got lovely little legs. Ah.. there it goes!

 MARIE, ON THE SOFA, HAS A SPASM, RECOVERS. SHE PRAYS.

MARIE Oh God. Thou doest love us. Thou lovest and seest us in this our earthly torment...

 MONSIEUR RAYMOND, THE BOSS, ENTERS WITH A MAN.

RAYMOND La Choix, Monsieur. Mes enfants - Monsieur ... 'Max'.
MAX, WHO LOOKS LIKE A BOXER ON HIS NIGHT OFF, SMIRKS.

AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE MEN THE GIRLS ARE IMMEDIATELY
'ON'.

'MAX' Yers, well.

THE GIRLS LIFT THEIR SKIRTS TO EXPOSE THEIR BODIES..
FRONT FIRST, THEN THEY TURN, TOGETHER, TO EXPOSE THE
REAR. MONSIEUR 'MAX' WALKS ALONG THE LINE, TAKING HIS
TIME, INSPECTING WITH SHREWD ATTENTION. HE GESTURES.

RAY Tournez, mes enfants.

THEY TURN TO THE FRONT AGAIN.

RAY May I introduce, Monsieur Max, for your pleasure ..
Mademoiselle Francine, fresh from the buttercup
meadows of.. ah.. Normandy Mademoiselle
Marie-Helene..(SOTTO VOCE).. from a good family,
Monsieur, tragic story..... et la petite Berthe!

MAX Yers. Pas de fausse mineur?

RAY La petite Berthe will oblige, Monsieur!

MAX Nah, she's too old.

RAY Monsieur will be amazed, I assure you. Allons, la
petite!

BERTHE GOES. THE BOSS GESTURES MONSIEUR MAX TO SIT.
FRANCINE OFFERS HIM A BOX OF CIGARS AND A BOX OF
CIGARETTES. HE CHOOSES A CIGAR. SHE OFFERS HER THIGH,
HE ROLLS THE CIGAR AGAINST IT. FRANCINE CUTS IT FOR HIM,
MARIE LIGHTS IT.

RAY Un petit peu, Monsieur? INDICATING THE DRINKS.

MAX What you got there?

RAY POURING Un vrai petit vin du pays.. you
won't be disappointed.

MAX Oh, where's it from?

RAY CAUGHT OUT Oh.. from the.. ah... Auvergne. WARMING
TO THE FICTION My home. MAX TASTES. We have
others in the cellar if Monsieur -

MAX No, this'll do.

RAY I know the vineyard personally. My brother -

MAX It'll do, it'll do.

FRANCINE SITS ON HIS LAP. HE ASSESSES HER THROUGH
HIS CIGAR SMOKE, THEN TAKES A GOOD LOOK AT
MARIE.

MAX Yers.. yers.

RAY Good to relax, Monsieur, after a hard day at
.. er... affairs and all that.

MAX Yers.

RAY Good for the constitution. And the bowels.

MAX BLOWS OUT SMOKE.. TAKES ANOTHER LOOK
AT MARIE.

RAY GESTURES EXPANSIVELY, REFILLING HIS OWN GLASS
A small establishment, as you see. But of superior

RAY quality. We cater to the man of taste .. the man
 of sophistication.

MAX So I've been told. Where's your negress, I don't
 see your negress, is she - ? WAVES A HAND OFF.

RAY Alas, not at the moment, sir. We like to keep up with
 the fashion but I have my clients' pockets to consider
 - we don't go in for stupidity here. Next month, perhaps.

MAX WHO HAS BEEN EYING MARIE HEAVILY You. Come here.

 SHE APPROACHES AND, AT A GLARE FROM RAYMOND,
 INTENSIFIES HER HAUGHTY LANGUOR.

MAX Come on, girl, let's see what you've got.

MARIE COLD Monsieur desires?

MAX SLAPS HER Don't give me your airs and graces, you're
 nothing but a common whore. SLAPS HER. What are you?
 SLAPS HER AGAIN.

MARIE LOW A common whore.

MAX What?

MARIE A common whore.

MAX Right, and don't you forget it.

RAY Good for you, Monsieur. She's a haughty bitch, needs
 keeping in her place.

 MAX APPRAISES MARIE THROUGH HIS CIGAR SMOKE..

MAX No. Too scraggy.

 HE TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO FRANCINE, PUSHING HER
 ROUND ROUGHLY, ASSESSING HER. HE MURMURS THOUGHTFULLY,
 NODS TO RAYMOND.

MAX Good haunches, I'll give you that. I like plenty of weight on the haunch, you can keep the featherweights. Bar the fausse mineurs, of course.

RAY Oh, absolutely. A childlike scantiness .. for the man of taste .. in a certain mood. HICCUPS SLIGHTLY INTO HIS GLASS. Makes a change.

MAX ASSESSING FRANCINE, WHO TURNS INDOLENTLY IN HIS HANDS
Yers. A bit thick in the waist - but good quality.

RAY Monsieur can be confident of that, we offer only the best, hand-selected..... aha, voici.....voila!
La Petite!

BERTHE ENTERS AS THE FAUSSE MINEUR. SHE IS DRESSED AS A CHILD, IN WHITE MUSLIN, WITH A WIDE SASH OF BLUE RIBBON ROUND HER WAIST. HER HAIR HANGS TO HER WAIST, AND SHE WEARS A LARGE BLUE BOW OF SATIN RIBBON ON TOP OF HER HEAD. SHE WEARS BALLEP PUMPS AND WHITE STOCKINGS AND CARRIES A WIDE-BRIMMED STRAW HAT DECORATED WITH FLOWERS AND MORE RIBBONS.

SHE CURTSIES SHYLY TO MONSIEUR MAX.

FRAN Ah!! Isn't she sweet!

MARIE SHE IS NOT SUCH A GOOD ACTRESS Lovely.

RAY Monsieur?

MAX Very good.. very good... excellent!

HE BENDS OVER BERTHE.

And what's your name, little girl?

BERTHE HALF-WHISPERS, IN A LISP Lisette, Monsieur.

HE PATS HER CHEEK. BERTHE DROOPS, RUBBING A
KNUCKLED FINGER INTO HER EYE.

FRAN Ah, she's shy!

MARIE Ah..

MAX You're not frightened of me, are you, little
girl?

FRAN Don't be silly, Lisette, the big man's not going
to hurt you.

SHE HOLDS OUT A DISH OF BONBONS. MAX TAKES ONE, EATS.
FRANCINE INDICATES, HE PROFFERS ONE TO BERTHE, TANTALISES
HER, THEN POPS THE SWEET INTO HER MOUTH.
SHE JUMPS UP AND DOWN WITH GLEE.

BERTHE Thank you, Thir.

MAX Such a tiny little mouth! My poor little girl,
never mind, Daddy will be very, very gentle.
Now come along, I've got a great big surprise
for you!

BERTHE Ooh!

MAX But you must promise me not to scream. You won't
scream, will you?

BERTHE HANGS BACK.

BERTHE Don't want to.

MAX Come on.

BERTHE No..

FRAN Now she's being naughty.

MARIE Yes.

FRAN She needs her bottom smacked.

MARIE AFTER A NUDGE FROM RAYMOND A good spanking.

FRANCINE, A BIT TOO QUICK, HANDS HIM A LARGE WOODEN HAIRBRUSH.. HE FROWNS AT HER OVER-PROMPTNESS.

BERTHE 'WEEPING' Please Daddy, don't hurt me... say you won't hurt me.....

SHE DRAGS HER FEET AND HE HAULS HER OFF.

Please, Daddy ... please THEY GO.

THE OTHERS SWITCH OFF LIKE A LIGHT. RAYMOND EXITS SEPARATELY, RETURNS WITH A LARGE CAN BASKET FULL OF UNDERWEAR.

RAY Here you are. Francine, you mend the stockings, you've got a finer stitch.

FRAN Oh, come on, guvnor! I'm getting prick marks all over my hands!

RAY Shut your mouth, I'm not having you girls sitting about doing nothing, make yourselves useful.

HE GOES.FRANCINE PULLS A HORRIBLE FACE AT HIS BACK.. MARIE GIGGLES.

FRAN Oh why don't you buzz off!

MARIE He never stops.

BUT THEY PICK OVER THE MENDING, SELECT PIECES AND AND BEGIN TO SEW.

MARIE How's your tooth?

FRAN Fell out, yesterday. (SHE SHOWS MARIE, LIFTING THE
SIDE OF HER MOUTH WITH HER FINGER)

MARIE Oh good.

FRAN I'm saving up. I'm gonna have them all out, get
a proper set.

MARIE I'd like that.

FRAN Yes, really white. (THEY SIGH WITH PLEASURE AT THE
THOUGHT, AND SEW)

MARIE The trouble is, she'll go to hell!

FRAN No she won't. She won't do that. Never.

MARIE But it's a terrible sin - look at St. Peter!

FRAN (BAFFLED) Eh? Oh .. yeah.

MARIE She's so careless.

FRAN I know what you mean. (BITES OFF A THREAD) Still, if you
look at it her way - I mean, she's got a point.
Well you can't prove it!

MARIE But God IS. He's there!

FRAN Yes but you can't prove it.

MARIE You can.

FRAN How?

MARIE It's in the Bible!

A PAUSE. THEY SEW.

FRAN Look at this, all ripped - can't be worth mending.

MARIE That was last night, Monsieur Emil. TAKES THE SEWING.

FRAN Sew a bit of lace over it, he can pull that off for a thrill. LEANS IN. Just catch it together, then he won't rip the cambric and get us told off.

THEY SEW.

MARIE If I could just put it across to her.

FRAN Oh no! (MUTTERED) ALOUD Don't take any notice. Ignore her.

MARIE I worry.

FRAN Worry about yourself.

MARIE QUICK Why, has he said anything?

FRAN Course not. Marie, he's not going to turn you away, you're his favourite.

MARIE That wouldn't stop him.

LOUD, AWFUL SCREAMING FROM WITHIN. MARIE MERELY RAISES HER VOICE TO BE HEARD OVER IT, MODULATES BACK WHEN THE SCREAMING CEASES.

He's always going for me.. making threats. When he's not messing me about he's trying to frighten the life out of me - Monsieur Henri, what a charming surprise..... how sweet of you to call.

HER VOICE CHANGES MID-SENTENCE INTO AN UPPER-CLASS PURR AS SHE RISES. EXTENDING A HAND TO GREET AN ELDERLY MAN USHERED IN BY THE BOSS. HE WEARS DATED EVENING CLOTHES, AND A CLOAK-COAT, AND CARRIES A VICTORIAN POSY OF FLOWERS. HE KISSES MARIE'S HAND REVERENTLY.

HENRI Cherie ma cherie.....

MARIE TAKING THE FLOWERS, For me? How delightful ..white roses... so kind..

HENRI La Divine..divine... embrasse moi... embrasse moi...

HE DIVES FOR HER.

Ooh, your lovely tits! .. your beautiful squashy tits squeeze, squeeze ...

MARIE Monsieur Henri... SLAPS HIM LIGHTLY WITH ONE OF HIS GLOVES... naughty boy, naughty boy... ow!

FRAN TO DRAW HIM OFF Wine, cher Monsieur Henri?

HENRI Ah, La Francine! Now, now.. no need to feel neglected, you shall have a cuddle later on at the Mayor's party - now you must all be on top form - no slacking!

FRAN Depend on us, cher Monsieur.

HENRI We'll have some real fun eh?.. but first I must have a little nibble at my lovely girl here.. before the others, heh, heh..oh.. HIS EYES SHINE... by the way, Francine - guess who's coming tonight?

FRAN Ooh.. who?

HENRI Go on, guess!

FRANCINE, WITH A GRIMACE ASIDE, MIMES GUESSING.

FRAN I give up!.. Monsieur Henri, you're a terrible tease! ABOVE HIS HEAD, SHE AND MARIE EXCHANGE A DERISORY GLANCE.

HENRI I am, I am, I know! You'll never guess .. not in a million years! Have a go!

FRAN Rudolph Valentino?

HENRI No-o ..

FRAN Ah the Kaiser?

HENRI TANTALISING No-o

FRANCINE SLIPS FOR A MOMENT, LOSING PATIENCE.

FRAN IRRITABLY Who then?

HENRI Your favourite your favourite - you know!

FRAN What?

MARIE Who?

HENRI Monsieur Guillaume! The bald one! With the ...
HE GESTURES AN ENORMOUS STOMACH. THE GIRLS BLENCH.

FRAN MUTTERS Oh, Fatty Arbuckle.

MARIE GIGGLES BEHIND HENRI'S BACK.

FRAN MUTTERS Eight months if he's a day.

HENRI CHUCKLES, AND CHASES AFTER FRANCINE, WHO OBEDIENTLY RUNS AWAY FROM HIM.

HENRI CHUCKLING The one who likes to be - HE MIMES WHIPPING, POINTING HIS FINGER AT FRANCINE IN DELIGHT.

FRAN Ooh, yes. Bravo.

HENRI You'll give him a good stroke tonight, eh? ... and me ..
 and me!

FRAN I shall be very firm with you both. Very firm.

HENRI Ooh!

SHE TURNS HIM TOWARDS MARIE, KISSING HIM LIGHTLY ON TOP
OF THE HEAD AS HE GOES, HANGING ON TO MARIE.

HE HAS LEFT HIS CLOAK. FRANCINE GOES THROUGH THE POCKETS
ABSENTLY, A ROUTINE TASK .. BUT FINDS NOTHING OF
INTEREST. SHE FINDS A LETTER, READS IT, SHAKES HER HEAD
DISMISSIVELY AS THE BOSS ENTERS.

RAY Anything?

FRAN Nothing. WAVES THE LETTER. It's only from his sister.
SHE INSPECTS THE CLOAK. Coat's worth a bob or two.

RAY Mean old sod. I wouldn't mind putting a touch in.

FRAN Yeah - local man. Be worth his while to cough up.

RAY Not him. Too mean by half.

FRAN Threaten to split, tell his family. Go on.

RAY Nah. there's only the wife and the old girls. What
do they matter?

FRAN Send Big Louis round, give him a punch in the
head.

RAY No-o. Wouldn't work. He's too well in.

FRAN I still think he won't want his wfie to know what he
gets up to.

RAY Don't be a bigger twot than you are. You want to sit

RAY in church of a Sunday, watch him put a fortune on the
plate and her sitting beside him in a coat so old it's
green on the shoulders, bloody disgrace.

FRAN DRY I shouldn't worry. What she don't get, you
do, eh? HE TURNS ON HER, GLOWERING AND SHE
BACKS AWAY PRUDENTLY. I still think he'd like it
kept quiet, guvnor.

RAY No, not that old sod. People knew, he'd strut round
like a bloody rooster.

FRAN Pity though.

RAY Yeah.

FRAN He must be well off.

RAY DISGRUNTLED Yeah.

FRAN There must be something he'd mind.

RAY Keep thinking.

 HE GESTURES HER TO GET ON WITH THE SEWING AND
GOES. SHE PICKS UP THE SEWING OBEDIENTLY BUT DROPS
IT AS SOON AS HE DISAPPEARS, MUTINOUS.

 BERTHE PASSES THROUGH.

 FRANCINE LOOKS ABOUT, SIGHS, BUT CAN THINK OF NOTHING
TO DO WITH HERSELF SO PICKS UP A PIECE OF THE MENDING.
SHE SETTLES ON THE SOFA, AND BEGINS TO SING

TUNEFULLY TO HERSELF, A COUNTRY SONG, LOW AND SWEET.

BERTHE RETURNS IN HER CHEMISE AND WRAP. SHE PICKS UP A PIECE OF MENDING.

BERTHE Thank God for small mercies. We're on our own for a bit.

FRAN She's all right.

BERTHE She's potty. Barmy.

FRAN Look, if it makes her feel better -

BERTHE Why should I believe a lot of rubbish, just to please her?

FRAN Talk about something else!

BERTHE You can't! You start talking about dancing, or having your shoe mended, all of a sudden she's back to God again. It's getting worse ... she's been like it for days this time.

FRAN All I'm saying is, just nod your head and agree with her.

BERTHE What for?

FRAN Because I say so.

BERTHE You're not the boss! Anyway, why should I be the one to shut up, why don't you tell her to shut up?

FRAN She's an orphan!

BERTHE MOCK SYMPATHY Ahh! So what.

FRAN You know she's ill.

BERTHE So she says. MUTTERS TO HERSELF. Believe what she wants, I'm not stopping her .. why blame it all on me?

MARIE ENTERS, TYING HER KIMONO. SHE TIDIES HER HAIR AT THE DRESSING TABLE.

FRAN You were quick.

MARIE Yes, he felt queer.

FRAN Oh good - that's good.

BERTHE You look better, you got a bit more colour.

MARIE Yes. I don't feel so faint. (SHE SMILES GRATEFULLY, PICKS UP SEWING)

FRAN (SEWING SWIFTLY AND DEFTLY) Roll on the party, eh?

MARIE (DISMAYED) Oh! I'd forgotten!

BERTHE Think of the food! (TO FRANCINE) What are we having?

FRAN I asked the old girl, It's quenelles, game pie, duckling and fresh pineapple.

BERTHE Oooh!!

FRAN Remember the strawberries, at the Baron's farewell?

BERTHE Not half! You made a pig of yourself.

FRAN (FONDLY) I know! A marble bath of wild strawberries -

BERTHE Silver buckets of cream -

FRAN Gold casters full of sugar -

BERTHE You could buy a house with the cost -

FRAN God, they know how to live!

BERTHE Remember the quail inside the capon inside the turkey inside the swan?

FRAN (TOGETHER) Inside the swan! And log fires as big as a forest!

BERTHE And that Italian woman singing opera - (TO MARIE) - you burst out crying!

MARIE I didn't mean to.

FRAN You looked lovely that night, Marie, just like the Virgin.

BERTHE She was supposed to! And you fainted.

MARIE It was the flowers ..

FRAN All those lilies. But what about the sheets, eh? Real silk!

BERTHE Yeah, imagine being able to sleep in them -

FRAN You'd never want to get up.

BERTHE And presents ..

FRAN Lipsticks, and fans ... and little evening purses, with tassels -

BERTHE And Suzanne found herelf a patron -

FRAN No. That's off.

BERTHE Why?

MARIE (TOGETHER) Oh! What happened?

FRAN Fell for a baby, the old biddy who saw to her made a mess of it, she ended up in hospital.

BERTHE No!

FRAN And they did their usual. Left an arm inside her, she had it two weeks later . She's been ever so ill.. septic. Lucien says she looks like a bladder of lard.. lost all her looks.

MARIE Oh God, please God..

BERTHE Poor kid. Still, she'll be all right. Legs like that, she'll never want for work.

MARIE FEARFUL Not if she's lost her looks.

FRAN I'll put in a word for her with the boss.

BERTHE QUICK No you won't.

FRAN Why not?

MARIE LOOKS FROM ONE TO THE OTHER.

MARIE Has he said anything, he's said something, hasn't he?

FRAN No, I was just trying to do her a good turn!

MARIE He was looking at the girl in the bakery.

BERTHE Rubbish. Anyway, I never liked Suzanne, too argumentative, what's more if we did ask that mean sod for anything - A MAN BURSTS IN, FOLLOWED BY THE BOSS... WINNINGLY Bonsoir, Monsieur!

MAN I said, how much?

BOSS Monsieur.. Monsieur, if you please.

MAN How much?

BOSS If Monsieur would care for a glass of wine -
THE MAN GRABS HIM BY THE LAPELS, SWINGS HIM ROUND.

MAN How much?!

BOSS GETTING UP OFF THE FLOOR Whatever Monsieur desires, I assure you, it's what we're here for..

MAN BERTHE APPROACHES, PLACATING What's this supposed to be?

BOSS Perhaps Monsieur could advise me as to his tastes -
PUSHING BERTHE OUT OF THE WAY.

MAN Tastes? THE MAN GLARES FRIGHTENINGLY. I want a fuck, I need a fucking fuck, that's what I'm here for!

HE GOES FOR THE BOSS AGAIN, KNOCKING MARIE TO THE FLOOR AS SHE BRAVELY TRIES TO INTERVENE TO PROTECT RAYMOND. RAYMOND STUMBLES. THE MAN HAULS HIM TO HIS FEET BY HIS LAPELS.

INTO RAYMOND'S FACE How much?!

RAYMOND WAVES HIS ARMS, PLACATING. HE SIGNALS TO THE GIRLS BEHIND THE MAN'S BACK BUT THEY GESTURE, HELPLESS TO ASSIST HIM.

RAY Very well, Monsieur, very well. Our special rates. With my compliments.

HE DUSTS HIMSELF, STRAIGHTENS HIS TIE.

MAN And less of the fucking fuss.

HE TURNS, GLOWERS AT THE GIRLS, JABS A FINGER AT FRANCINE.

You.

RAY Ah, Monsieur favours Mam'selle -

MAN Shut up. I don't want to know her name.

FRAN QUIETLY, This way, Monsieur.

THE MAN FOLLOWS HER OFF. THE BOSS COLLAPSES. MARIE GETS HIM A DRINK.

MARIE You did the right thing, Georges.

RAY Leave it.

BERTHE On the cheap, eh? HE GLARES AT HER.

MARIE What was the matter with him!

BERTHE He's had a row with his wife. You can see it in his eyes.

RAY Shut your mouth.

BERTHE He'll take it out of Francine now.

RAY CUFFS HER ACROSS THE HEAD And where were you when you were needed?

BERTHE What was I supposed to do!

RAY Hit him with a bloody bottle!

BERTHE Oh yeah? And get a knife in my guts?

RAY TWISTING HER ARM Next time be quicker about it.

BERTHE Ow!

RAY Get on with your work.

HE GOES, TAKING A BOTTLE WITH HIM. THE SOUNDS OF A BEATING NEXT DOOR.

FRAN OFFSTAGE Stop it! Ow .. ah! No don't ah!

MARIE TRIES TO SEW BUT HER HANDS SHAKE. SHE PUTS DOWN HER WORK.

BERTHE Feeling bad again? MARIE NODS.

MARIE NODS, AND BENDS, CRAMPED, OVER THE SEWING.

Could be something you ate.

MARIE APOLOGETICALLY It's all the time now. It never stops.

BERTHE You're going to have to pull yourself together.

MARIE LOW I know. BERTHE SITS AT THE DRESSING TABLE, GIVES

HERSELF A HEAVY MAKEUP, REDOING HER HAIR. MARIE TRIES TO CONTROL HER SHAKING. PAUSE.

BERTHE AT THE MIRROR Look ahead, make plans for yourself, I do. REDOES HER MOUTH. I don't intend to be doing this for the rest of me life. You gotta plot, learn to get your own way.

MARIE SAD How?

BERTHE Start on little things, work your way up. TRIES A SPANISH COMB IN HER HAIR. One time I wouldn't say boo to a goose. My first guvnor knocked me about something horrible if I didn't get through thirty a night minimum. I was working in Marseille. I hate Marseille. Horrible place. FINISHES HER TOILETTE. But I knew something would turn up. I said to myself, keep your eyes open, Berthe.. and it did. I met this Spanish bloke.

MARIE What happened?

BERTHE We went to the races, and he had a good day, we were drunk as newts after, him worse than me. I was through his wallet and on that train to Paris the same night. Bought meself a whole new wardrobe, silk undies, the lot. All I need now is some old gink to set me up. With a bit of luck he'll peg out from it and I'm laughing. Know what I'm going to do?

MARIE No what?

BERTHE Run me own sweet shop. I'm having gold boxes, mauve ribbons and special silk roses for weddings and christenings.

MARIE It sounds lovely!

BERTHE I'll have a little orchard out the back, somewhere to sit for morning coffee. Pomeranian dog.. couple of cats, Persian. I've even thought of keeping chickens.

MARIE Oh Berthe! HER EYES GLOW AT THE THOUGHT.

BERTHE You wanna stand up for yourself. Enter into it a bit more. Worth while, you know, we get a good class clientele.

MARIE APOLOGETIC I bleed all the time.

BERTHE What did the doctor say?

MARIE That I was fit to work. No infection.

BERTHE Perhaps you got a fibroid.

MARIE What's that?

BERTHE On your womb! They grow as big as a grapefruit! Then just when you think you're having twins the bloody thing explodes. Either that or it strangles your tripes. You constipated?

MARIE No, I get diarrhoea all the time.

BERTHE Oh, good.

MARIE It gives me such terrible cramps.

BERTHE Tell him!

MARIE He says I'm complaining.

BERTHE But you've gone all thin.

MARIE He likes me like that.

BERTHE Come on, he'll be back in a minute. JOINS MARIE WHO IS TRYING TO SEW. Look. can't you stop your hands shaking, it gets on my nerves!

MARIE Sorry.

BERTHE Here.. SHE BITES OFF HER COTTON, THROWS HER SEWING TO MARIE.. if he wants to know you've done tha bit.
FRANCINE EMERGES, HOLDING HER FACE. STUMBLES THROUGH, RETURNS, SITS HEAVILY, THE BOSS ENTERS AT ONCE WITH TWO MEN.

RAY La Choix, Messieurs... La Choix! Who is it to be this week, Monsieur Paul.... la belle Marie-Helene... our little Berthe of the dazzling derriere ... BOTH LAUGH, AND INDICATE FRANCINE.. ONE MURMURING IN THE BOSS'S EAR - aha, the triple crown! An excellent choice! Our beautiful Francine will accommodate you.. strong thighs, messieurs, perfect for your purpose, to work, Francine!

FIRST MAN Yes, come on, Francine! What about last week, eh? I brought you off, didn't I?

FRAN You did, you did - you're a real sportsman!

FIRST TO RAYMOND There's not many do THAT with a whore.

RAY No indeed, sir!

SECOND GOOSING HER Come on, Francine.. Francine!

FIRST Francine...Francine! FONDLING HER TOGETHER.. THEY ARE DRUNK.

FRANCINE TAKES THE ARM OF THE FIRST MAN. THE THREE MAKE FOR THE EXIT.

RAY You'll get yuor money's worth with Francine, sirs
worth every penny.

SECOND GAILY We'll see to that all right, don't you worry,
Monsieur Pimpo. Francine!

FRANCINE TAKES THEM OFF. RAYMOND, FURIOUS, TRIPS OVER
THE SEWING BASKET. BERTHE MAKES THE MISTAKE OFF
GIGGLING. HE TURNS, PICKING UP A GARMENT.

RAY UGLY What's this?

MARIE We put a piece of lace on. To cover the tear.

RAY Who said you could do that? Who said you could do
that?

MARIE SMALL Nobody.

RAY What do you think I am? Wasting good lace. Do you
think I'm made of money?

HE THROWS THE SEWING AT HER FEET. SHE PICKS IT UP,
TRIES TO SHOW HIM.

MARIE It's all torn ..

RAY Then cobble it together, you stupid tart!

BERTHE SHAKES HER HEAD AT MARIE WARNINGLY.

MARIE I'll unpick it carefully, and use the same bit of cotton
to darn it.

RAY That's all very well - do the job twice that's still
my time you've wasted. Stupid bitch.

HE GOES, MUTTERING TO HIMSELF.

BERTHE Bloody mending.

MARIE I should have thought.

BERTHE BITING COTTON We shouldn't be doing it, the old girl ought to do it. Ruins your hands.

MARIE That's what Francine said.

BERTHE She's right! I was in trouble the other day with Monsieur Bertrand, he commented that my finger was real rough. Mind you, piles the size he's got, he's going to find anything painful.

MARIE I know. As soon as you push them in they pop out again.

BERTHE Silly old fart. And him. JERKING HER HEAD AT THE DOOR.

MARIE SMILES. SHE WATCHES BERTHE SEW. A THOUGHT OCCURS.

MARIE Berthe. BERTHE LOOKS UP. You must have believed when you were little.

BERTHE GRIMACES FEARSOMELY Look, please.

HIATUS.

MARIE LOW, APOLOGETIC It's just that it's such a terrible sin.

BERTHE Well that's my worry, innit?

MARIE Don't you care?

BERTHE I care that what goes on in here SHE TAPS HER HEAD is mine. One thing they can't take away from you.

MARIE But it's all in the Bible!

BERTHE That's no proof! If you tells me milk comes out of a cow's tit and I say it comes from a factory in a bottle you can take me in a field, show me a bloody cow and squirt it in my face. That's proof. Anyway, God didn't write the Bible.

MARIE He did. Well he got his prophets to.

BERTHE That's what I'm saying. It was a lot of old ginks - Isaiah .. Elijah ... Numbers.

MARIE Yes, but where did They get it from?

BERTHE God knows.

MARIE (GIGGLES) That's just what I'm saying.

BERTHE LAUGHS. THUMPING AND SQUAWKS FROM NEXT DOOR.

It had to come from God in the first place .. where else? God's everywhere everything in the world comes from God.

BERTHE Even misery?

MARIE It's sent to try us. We should feel blessed to suffer, we're carrying the sins of the world. He loves us, Berthe ... he loves us!

BERTHE Look, I don't want to argue, believe what you want. But after losing my brother, sicking his lungs up all over the bed, and my bloody stepmother worried about the sheets getting dirty -

MARIE I know ..

BERTHE And losing my little girl ... what was all that for?

MARIE I know ...

BERTHE Sick every sodding day for nine months, then three days in labour, and then born perfect, not a mark on her, like a little doll ... then all of a sudden out like a light, for no reason you tell me, who dreamed that up? What did I do to deserve that, who thought that one up for me. If somebody's there, he's got a few things to answer for. I may not be perfect, all right, suppose I'm due for punishment but why take it out on the kid?

MARIE Perhaps God needed her, on His right hand.

BERTHE Why bother sending her in the first place, then? Putting me through it. Bloody spiteful if you ask me.

MARIE Berthe, don't. Perhaps God chose her to suffer for your sins.

BERTHE What? Oh, that's nice. Anyway, why me? I'm not wicked. I don't see why I should be picked out for punishment.

MARIE Yes but -

BERTHE There's a lot worse than us.

MARIE D'you think so?

BERTHE Yeah!

MARIE We're harlots.

BERTHE I don't think that's bad.

MARIE Most people do. The Church does.

BERTHE What about Mary Magdalene?

MARIE I know.

BERTHE Ah, bollocks to the Church.

MARIE Berthe!

BERTHE Shit on it and set fire to the tower - and Him! -

MARIE COVERS HER EARS No, don't! Stop it! I won't listen!

BERTHE Go on, it's only swearing.

MARIE You're taking the Lord's Name in vain. It's wicked!

BERTHE Oh all right. Look, I'll wash me mouth out with cold cream. SHE PICKS UP A POT OF CREAM, PUTS SOME INTO HER MOUTH. Ugh! MARIE GIGGLES. BERTHE SPITS OUT THE CREAM, GAGGING, WIPING HER MOUTH. Anyway, I don't know what you want to listen to priests for .. that's just a lot of old men! Half the world's women! SHE SCRAPES HER CHAIR CLOSE TO MARIE. Listen, they only thought all this up .. the Church and that .. to keep us down 'cos we're quicker than they are. Bloody have to be and all.

MARIE Oh Berthe, don't say such things. The Church is our only refuge -

BERTHE Bugger the Church. Here, who's the most regular client we got - Father Antoine! Don't go telling me there's a God. Devil maybe.

RAYMOND ENTERS, MURMURING OBSEQUIOUSLY TO A CLIENT, HIS MANNER NERVOUS AND CAREFUL.

RAY La Choix!

THE MAN AT ONCE POINTS TO MARIE, WHO RISES. HE WHISPERS TO RAYMOND, WHO GESTURES TO MARIE. MARIE EXITS. THE MAN SITS, TALL AND BONY, LOOKING STRAIGHT AHEAD. BERTHE PICKS UP THE CIGARS TO OFFER HIM BUT RAYMOND SHAKES HIS HEAD.

RAY CLEARS THROAT A.. a glass of wine, Monsieur le Comte? Brandy perhaps?

THE MAN SHAKES HIS HEAD, QUELLING THEM BOTH WITH A GLANCE.

MARIE RETURNS. SHE IS DRESSED AS A NUN, AND CARRIES CHAINS AND WHIPS.

BERTHE Thought things were a bit quiet. TO MARIE, WHO LOOKS DISTRAUGHT.

MARIE EXITS WITH THE MAN. RAYMOND EXITS SEPARATELY, RETURNS AT ONCE WITH ANOTHER CUSTOMER.

RAY If you prefer to wait, Monsieur, or I can offer you la petite Berthe.

MAN Too small. Nothing else?

RAY A few moments, Monsieur.

MAN I haven't got time. How much if I don't mount her, I don't find her attractive. THEY MOVE APART, STRIKING A BARGAIN. Right.. all right. HE NODS. TO BERTHE Come on. Be quick about it, I haven't got all night. HE AND BERTHE EXIT.

PAUSE. FRANCINE PASSES THROUGH, THE WORSE FOR WEAR. THE BOSS BIDS FAREWELL TO THE SPORTSMEN, OFF.

BOSS OFF Au 'voir, messieurs, au 'voir ... come and see us soon.. always glad to welcome real sportsmen ..aha.. ha..ha..ha...

FRANCINE ENTERS, CROSSES TO DRESSING TABLE, TO REPAIR HER FACE. THE BOSS ENTERS WITH A SENILE OLD MAN.

RAY Et voici, la belle Francine, waiting to enjoy your company, Monsieur Vincent!

VINCENT Francine! EMBRACES HER How are you, my dear.. plump as ever?

FRANCINE Monsieur Vincent.. SHE SUPPORTS HIM AS HE WAVERS.

VINCENT AS THEY EXIT TOGETHER I thought we might try a new variation this week ... have you got the little book?

FRAN Of course. SHE ASSISTS HIM OFF.

BERTHE ENTERS, CROSSES, EXITS. SHORT PAUSE. BERTHE RETURNS, SITS, GRABS AN APPLLE, HAS NO TIME TO TAKE A BITE.

BERTHE MUTTERS God Almighty AS RAYMOND USHERS IN A YOUNG MAN. SHE RISES, SMILING.

RAY INDICATING BERTHE Voila, Monsieur .. la petite soeur de Monsieur.

BERTHE CURTSEYS.

YOUNG MAN She don't look much like our Paulette.

RAY She will, my dear young man .. she will. Describe your sister, Monsieur.

YOUNG MAN SULKY She's got long hair. And she's very shy.

BERTHE LETS DOWN HER HAIR, AND TURNS AWAY SHYLY.

YOUNG MAN And she's got a smile like St. Bernadette.

BERTHE SMILES AT HIM.

RAY REVERENTLY Kneel, cher Monsieur.. kneel.

THE YOUNG MAN, MESMERISED, DOES SO. BERTHE APPROACHES, PUTS A HAND ON HIS HEAD. HE GROANS AND BEGINS TO PANT. RAYMOND GIVES BERTHE A QUICK LOOK, SHE TAKES THE YOUNG MAN'S HAND AND LEADS HIM OFF QUICKLY. MARIE ENTERS, WEEPING QUIETLY.

RAY What's the matter with you?

SHE DISPLAYS HER BACK, THEN HER CHEST. SHE IS COVERED IN WEALS, AND THERE ARE MARKS ON HER THROAT.

MARIE He's getting worse. He'll kill me next time, Georges - you'll have to stop him.

RAY How can I? IRRITABLE.

MARIE Don't let him in.

RAY You know who he is, I can't do that!

MARIE But I swear he'll -

RAY I can't afford to upset the gentry. You'll have to take your chance.

MARIE Georges, please..! FOR A MOMENT HE WAVERS.

RAY IN A TEMPER Now don't start! HE GOES.

FRANCINE ENTERS, CROSSES, EXITS.. RE-ENTERS AND SITS.

FRAN TIRED Just old Vincent.. all talk. Hullo, what's up?

MARIE SHOWS FRANCINE HER BACK.

FRAN Oh my God. No, that's too much.

MARIE He'll kill me, Francine, next time, or the time after.
I can see it in his eyes.

FRAN What did the guvnor say?

MARIE He said there's nothing he can do.

FRANCINE MUTTERS UNDER HER BREATH, TURNS TO THE
DRESSING TABLE AND SPONGES HER FACE, THEN ATTENDS TO
MARIE'S WOUNDS.

FRAN Frightened to upset him. Wouldn't be the first time
either. Turn round.

MARIE What d'you mean?

FRAN Remember Esmeralda?

MARIE The one who went to Italy with a lion-tamer?

FRAN That's his idea of a joke. SHE PUTS HER HANDS ROUND
HER NECK, MAKES A CHOKING SOUND. And one of the maids
on the estate. They hushed it up.. said she'd
fallen down a well. Likely.

RAYMOND ENTERS WITH A BUSINESSMAN.

RAY La Choix, Monsieur..... La Choix!

BUSINESSMAN Good God this one's badly marked. You need some
new flesh, Monsieur Raymond. Well, it'll have to be
Francine again.

RAY As you say, Monsieur.

BUSINESSMAN At least she's got a good ass on her.

RAY Indeed, Monsieur. FRANCINE AND THE MAN GO.

RAY Vulgar bugger. I hate that sort of talk.
Ah! AS A MAN IN A MORNING COAT ENTERS. Entrez, my
dear Monsieur Richaud.. a grand occasion I see!

MARIE WITH A SMALL CURTSEY Bonsoir, Monsieur Richaud.

RICHAUD Hullo Marie.. TO RAYMOND can't stop, old thing,
reception's in full swing up there.

RAY Of course, your daughter's wedding!

RICHAUD Just popped in with a bit of cake for the girls.

RAY Oh I say! There, Marie! Think of that!
Cher Monsieur - oh they will be pleased - well, you
know women!

RICHAUD I should think I do - five daughters.

RAY You've time for a glass, no, I insist..
POURS A BRANDY, RICHAUD KNOCKS IT BACK. Mention the
word wedding to my girls, oh, they all pipe their
eye! To the young couple.. to their
good health .. hang on, this calls for
something special! OPENS CHAMPAGNE.

RICHAUD Haha! Bravo!

 THEY DRINK.

 Bless you!

RAY Reception's going well eh?

RICHAUD Costing me a fortune..five piece band, I can't bear to look. All the ushers touching up the bridesmaids.. not a plain face among them.

RAY Ah, girls! Nothing like it.

RICHAUD I will say my little Anne's the prettiest of the lot, in her white dress.Fit to eat. HE SIGHS HEAVILY.

RAY SOFTLY We're always here, old friend.

RICHAUD Yes, yes.

RAY I tell you what! We'll dress Marie-Helene here as the bride! To celebrate the occasion!

RICHAUD Oh I wouldn't put you to the trouble.

RAY Not a bit of it! It's the least we can do for a man who's losing his prettiest daughter - not that they aren't all good-looking.. lovely girls. Off you go, Marie-Helene .. the best dress, the one the Countess gave us .. you know the one, my dear, with the Brussels lace. SHE GOES. Marvellous girl. Good family, you know. All these lovely girls.

RICHAUD Yes. It's a strange feeling, Georges. One minute they're sitting on your lap gazing up into your eyes and asking for bonbons... all of a sudden some young whippersnapper comes along, wants to get up to I don't know what with them. Makes you think, Georges.. makes you think.

SHORT PAUSE. THEY DRINK REFLECTIVELY.

RAY DISCREETLY Good arrangements?

RICHAUD Can't complain.

RAY I hear she's marrying into a fine family. Building supplies, was it?

RICHAUD And sanitary fittings.

RAY She won't go wrong there.

RICHAUD The wife saw to it all.. she doesn't stand for any nonsense.

RAY A good match, eh?

RICHAUD Oh yes. They NEED an older man. Anyway, once she's had a couple of children - by the time she's twenty she'll have too much to think about.....aha! Oh my dear girl! Oh, what a picture!

MARIE APPEARS DRESSED AS A BRIDE.

RICHAUD You've done me proud, old friend. BLOWS HIS NOSE INTO A LARGE SILK HANDKERCHIEF.. BREAKS DOWN AND CRIES.
....not every day a man loses his daughter ...

RAY And there's nothing wrong with a manly tear about it! You're a man of sentiment, sir.. a man of sentiment! Come, kiss the bride. RICHAUD AND MARIE APPROACH EACH OTHER. I now pronounce you man and wife... back with the veil, my dear, you're a married woman now - she's all yours, my friend, to have and to hold, eh? Look at her lovely lips .. they're all trembling for it ... she can't wait for your hand on her ... it's what they're made for, friend it's what they're made for

RICHAUD GROANS, GRASPS MARIE GREEDILY AND EMBRACES HER, SMOTHERS HER FACE WITH KISSES.

RICHAUD I shan't forget this, Georges. A day to remember! LIFTS MARIE, AND STAGGERS OFF WITH HER.

BERTHE ENTERS.

BERTHE I'm having trouble with the kid.

RAY What sort of trouble?

BERTHE He's crouched down in the corner crying. I can't get him to move.

RAY Didn't he get off into you?

BERTHE You kidding, I can't hardly stand up, I think he's done me an injury, I can't feel this arm.

RAY Let's have a look. SHE SHOWS HIM HER BLACKENED UPPER ARM. It's not too bad, put some violet on.

BERTHE Can I stop work?

RAY You'll pack up when I tell you to and not before.

BERTHE Oh, have a heart, boss, he nearly whacked me through the floor, I'm not kidding.

RAY TAKES A SMALL BOTTLE FROM HIS POCKET GIVES HER TWO TABLETS You can have two of these.

BERTHE Thanks, boss, you're a treat!

RAY Don't tell the others. And don't say I don't look after you!

THEY EXIT SEPARATELY.

FRANCINE APPEARS, CROSSES, EXITS, RE-ENTERS.
PAUSE. SHE BEGINS TO DOZE.

BERTHE APPEARS, WALKING AWKWARDLY.

FRAN SLEEPY What's up?

BERTHE INFORMATION Lunatic. Pain's just coming through.

FRAN Guvnor give you anything?

BERTHE Yeah.

FRANCINE GIVES HER A SHARP LOOK, UNSEEN. IF TABLETS
HAVE BEEN DISPENSED THE INJURY IS REAL.

FRAN Put your legs above your head.

RAYMOND ENTERS.

RAY Messieurs..... La Choix!

TWO MEN FOLLOW HIM ON.

1ST. MAN TO THE SECOND Turn and turn about?

SECOND I'll take the littlun first. Want a good poke, littlun?

BERTHE SMILES CHEEKILY.

BERTHE You and who else... whoops! AS HE GOOSES HER.

1ST. MAN TO FRANCINE Right, it's you and me, lovely. Look
lively, we ain't got all night. HE WHACKS HER BEHIND,
SHE JERKS FORWARD. That's better.. AS SHE MANAGES A
GRIN.. we're here for a bit of fun, not for the knitting.
TO THE BOSS How much for buggery?

RAY Twenty, Monsieur.

1ST. MAN Mmm, a bit steep - thirty for the two?

RAY Thirty-five.

RAY No, come here.

MAIRE Oh Georges, not now.

RAY Just a quick one. Come on. There, that's better, isn't it? Best bit of prick you've had all night.

MARIE Georges .. please .. I don't want to go with Monsieur Guy any more.

RAY Let me finish, for God's sake. Ah. Ah. HE DOES SO. SITS, CUDDLES HER. There. That was all right, wasn't it?

MARIE Oh yes.

RAY What's the matter now? I look after you, don't I?

MARIE Yes, Georges.

RAY Well then.

MARIE He'll kill me!

RAY Rubbish. Keep away from him.. arms length.

MARIE How can I? Please, don't make me.

RAY LOOKS DOWN AT HER, SOFTENS Look, there's nothing to worry about.. he's a gent... aristocrat... he knows what he 's doing.

MARIE He's going to kill me.

RAY You'll have to take your chance.

MARIE But you know he's dangerous, you know!

RAY Shut up!

MARIE He'll murder me, like he did Esmeralda!

RAY CLOSE AND DANGEROUS. You shut your face this instant. I don't want to hear that again.

MARIE He'll do it. I know. NO RESPONSE. You'll be a girl short!

RAY Plenty more where you came from. Look, it's what you're paid for. Try and keep his hands off your neck. Do what he wants, get him through it, that's your job.

MARIE A maid on their estate was found strangled.

RAY TWISTS HER ARM Another word and you'll be living at a new address-down the docks.

BERTHE APPEARS.

What are you doing, get back!

BERTHE They both want Francine.

SHE GOES OFF TO WASH. MARIE WEEPS.

RAY And you can stop that. Stop it. SHE SNIFFS, TRYING TO STOP.

You got a good meal coming up.

MARIE I'm not hungry - I'm ill, Georges.

RAY Bollocks, pull yourself together. I want you looking fresh tonight - you're the surprise.

MARIE Oh no, please! HE FINISHES HIS DRINK AND GOES.
BERTHE ENTERS, SITS.

BERTHE Ooh you do look queer.

MARIE I think I've come on again.

SHE GOES BEHIND SCREEN.

BERTHE CALLS All right?

MARIE FROM BEHIND SCREEN I don't know what to do, it won't stop.

BERTHE Shove some cotton wool up. I hear the madman was in.

MARIE OFF Yes.

BERTHE No wonder you've got the flow again.

MARIE COMES OUT, SITS GINGERLY. SHE IS DEATHLY WHITE.

BERTHE Did he hurt you?

MARIE LOOKS AT HER.

BERTHE Tell you what.. next time he comes - yell! Me and Francine'll be in there, scratch his eyes out... we don't care.

MARIE Will you?

BERTHE Yeah! Course! Here... SHE POURS MARIE A GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE, WITH A QUICK GLANCE, OFF... have some of this.

MARIE SIPS WITH DIFFICULTY.

BERTHE Go on, knock it back! SHE IS WORRIED THAT THEY WILL BE CAUGHT. Listen, if you go sick, me and her will have to see to the lot of them between us.

MARIE I am trying. SHE DRINKS. IT SEEMS AS IF SHE WILL

FAINT .. HER EYES ROLL UP..

BERTHE Oh Christ..

.. BUT SHE OPENS HER EYES AGAIN AND CLUTCHES BERTHE
IN ECSTASY.

MARIE Berthe ... Berthe! Believe! Please ... please believe!

BERTHE Oh, that's better. More like your old self. SHE GIVES MARI
MORE CHAMPAGNE. Put your feet up a minute, get your
strength back. SHE LIFTS MARIE'S FEET ONTO THE
OTTOMAN, EVEN STROKES THE HAIR BACK FROM MARIE'S FACE.

MARIE CATCHES BERTHE'S HAND, CLASPS IT TO HER I must try to
save you!

BERTHE Yes, OK. DISENGAGES HERSELF.

FRANCINE CROSSES, EXITS. MARIE MUTTERS FEVERISH
PRAYERS.

MARIE Please, Berthe.. please..... Help me. Help me,
sweet Jesus.. MUTTERS PRAYERS... give me light....
MUTTERS..... Mary, Mother of GodMUTTERS TO HERSELF.

FRANCINE ENTERS.

MARIE, STILL MUTTERING, SWINGS, ALMOST FALLS OFF THE
OTTOMAN ONTO HER KNEES, STILL PRAYING. SHE CLASPS
HER HANDS TOGETHER AND BEGINS TO MOVE ACROSS THE FLOOR
ON HER KNEES, WITH AN INCANDESCENT LOOK ON HER FACE.

FRAN Christ, what's up with her?

BERTHE Dunno.

FRAN Here.. Marie.....

BUT MARIE RISES, IN ECSTASY. SHE LIFTS HER ARMS IN INTENSE, JOYFUL PRAYER.

MARIE Oh Lord ... Thou who givest us light, and air, and all the beasts of the field, and of the forest ... all the birds, and those that swim in the deep and are unknown dearly beloved Lord, see this thy sister.. blessed be the Lord who giveth me lightoh! Oh! Lord, Thou blesseth me beyond my desert or knowing.. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

SHE CRIES OUT IN TRIUMPH, TURNS TO THE OTHERS, EYES STARING.

Blessed be the Lord who hath given Light where there was Darkness! Blessed be His Name!

SHE APPROACHES, ATTEMPTS TO CLASP THEM.

Now I can make you understand! Berthe..... Love!

BERTHE Eh?

MARIE You understand Love ... surely?

BERTHE .Not really.

FRAN Yes you do, she does.

MARIE God Is Love!

FRAN Sure.

BERTHE Most of us get a right drubbing.

MARIE You believe in evil?

BERTHE Oh yeah.

MARIE Then you must believe in Good!

BERTHE Eh?

MARIE It's all around us...

BERTHE LOOKING ROUND What?

MARIE ... we see .. we hear ... we feel! How can you not believe?

BERTHE IRRITATED Believe in what ... what?

MARIE In God ... in Love! Love! Love supports us .. love Creates us ... nourishes our spirit.. keeps us alive. Oh Berthe, dear Berthe... use your sweet sound sense and Believe - can you not See? We are the children of Love!

SHE FLOODS.

Ohh!

SHE COLLAPSES ON THE SOFA. FRANCINE GRABS TOWELS FROM THE DRESSING TABLE.

FRAN Quick!

BERTHE Christ!

FRAN Here.. SHE HANDS BERTHE A PIECE OF CLOTH FROM THE MENDING BASKET.. GIVES ANOTHER PIECE TO MARIE. TO MARIE Quick, shove this up before he comes - if you stain this ottoman he'll kill us.

RAYMOND ENTERS. THEY MOVE SWIFTLY, IN ORDER TO HALF HIDE MARIE FROM HIS VIEW.

RAY That's it for tonight, girls. No more casuals, you can get yourselves dolled up for the party. Marie's the surprise. Come on, make yourselves useful.

FRANCINE QUICKLY THROWS A COLOURED SHAWL OVER MARIE, FOLLOWS THE OTHERS OFF. THEY RETURN WITH A LONG TABLE, RAYMOND AT ONE END, THE GIRLS THE OTHER. IT IS COVERED WITH A DAMASK CLOTH, AND DECORATED WITH SMILAX.. HAS SOME FOOD, DISHES UPON IT.

RAY TO MARIE Come on, you.. on your feet.

FRAN She's feeling a bit faint.. WHISPERS...
you know, that Monsieur Guy.
SHE HAULS HIM AWAY. She'll be OK for later. SHE SMILES. HE GRUNTS, BUT NODS AND GOES. THEY FOLLOW, AND RETURN WITH ORNATE SILVER DISHES, AND DECORATED FOOD.

BERTHE Ooh, lovely!

RAY Keep your thieving fingers off. LOOKS AT HIS WATCH.
Now make sharp and get dressed all of you, we're late.
HE GOES. THEY CROSS TO MARIE.

BERTHE Marie?

FRAN Marie? TO BERTHE I don't like the look of her.
Marie? BERTHE SHOVS FRANCINE ASIDE, LIFTS MARIE,
SHAKING HER .. THEN DROPS HER AND JUMPS BACK.

BERTHE Ugh, it's blood!

FRAN Where?

BERTHE Coming out her mouth.

FRAN Quick - mop it up! Oh Christ. Marie.. Marie...
come on, love... come on - wake up!

BERTHE Marie, don't mess about - come on!

FRAN Shut up he'll hear you! Marie Marie....? SHE LEANS OVER MARIE, THEN STRAIGHTENS UP. No good, she's flat out.

BERTHE What are we going to do? SHE PANICS, GRABS THE CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE AND SLOSHES IT OVER MARIE'S HEAD.

FRAN Steady on, mind out, you'll Stain everything! Give it here, for Christ's sakes. SHE TAKES THE BOTTLE, DABS CHAMPAGNE ON MARIE'S FOREHEAD. BERTHE GIVES HER THE GLASS AND THEY TRY TO MAKE MARIE DRINK, WITHOUT SUCCESS.

BERTHE Shall I get the old girl?

FRAN No she'll tell him. THEY LOOK DOWN AT MARIE.

BERTHE Here.. she's not dead is she?

FRAN Don't be so daft. BUT BERTHE LAYS HER HEAD ON MARIE'S CHEST.

BERTHE I can't hear nothing.

FRAN Let me have a go. SHE LISTENS. Neither can I.

BERTHE Look at her face it's gone blue.

FRANCINE LOOKS AT MARIE'S FACE, LIFTS HER HAND, FEELS FOR A PULSE.

BERTHE What you doing?

FRAN Feeling her pulse.

FRANCINE IS STILL FOR A LONG MOMENT. THEN SHE PUTS MARIE'S HAND DOWN GENTLY. Give us that glass. BERTHE HANDS HER THE CHAMPAGNE GLASS, SHE GESTURES IRRITABLY. BERTHE HANDS HER A GLASS. SHE PUTS IT TO MARIE'S LIPS THEN LOOKS AT THE GLASS, BERTHE CRANING OVER HER SHOULDER.

BERTHE She is dead, you know.

BERTHE GIVES A MOANING SCREECH.

FRAN HISSES FRANTICALLY Shut up!

BERTHE What are we going to do?

FRAN It's not our fault!

BERTHE She said she felt ill.. the sheets in her room are black with blood, it smells horrible in there, ooh, I feel funny.

FRAN Sit down. Not there, you fool! AS BERTHE GOES TO SIT ON THE OTTOMAN. BERTHE FLOUNDERS, RECOVERS, STANDS.

BERTHE Who's going to tell him?

FRAN I'm not telling him.

BERTHE Nothing to do with me!

FRAN Let's go and get changed.

BERTHE Yeah. Then he can come in and find her..

FRAN .. and it's nothing to do with us.

BERTHE We weren't here at the time.

FRAN Right. She was fine when we left.

BERTHE Drinking his champagne!

FRAN Leave off. THEY GO. PAUSE. RAYMOND LOOKS IN, SEES MARIE.

RAY DOUBLETAKES Look sharp, Marie, we haven't got all night. LOOKS ROUND SHARPLY .. GOES. A PAUSE. FRANCINE ENTERS, DRESSED AS A SORT OF DEMETER, GODDESS OF PLENTY, IN PINK AND CREAM AND YELLOW, WITH HIGH GOLD BOOTS. SHE TOTTERS ACROSS, LOOKS AT MARIE AFTER REPLACING CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE AND TOPPING IT UP.

FRAN LOOKING DOWN AT MARIE SADLY Ah, what a shame. What a shame.

BERTHE ENTERS. SHE IS WEARING VERY LITTLE AND LOOKS LIKE
A FAIRY FROM THE TOP OF A CHRISTMAS TREE, IN SPANGLES.

BERTHE He's bringing the wine in and they're coming. He says
for Marie to get in the whatsit. THEY LOOK DOWN AT MARIE.

FRAN Where's her dress?

BERTHE In the whatsit. Oh, I couldn't, I couldn't touch her!

FRAN I can't do it on me own! Here, catch hold of her. We can't
leave her in here, he'll know we've seen her! Come on!

BERTHE All right! Ooh, God, she's heavy! You wouldn't think it!

FRAN You've only got the feet end. What's the matter now?

BERTHE Lost me wand.

FRAN Never mind that that, he'll be in here!

BERTHE I can't do it.. I can't !

FRAN What's the matter with you!

BERTHE I've never seen anybody dead before. I don't like
dead people.. I hate death!

FRAN THROUGH HER TEETH WILL you come on!

THEY MANHANDLE THE BODY OFF. PAUSE.

RAYMOND ENTERS, GIVES THE TABLE A QUICK INSPECTION.
VOICES OFF, AS THE PARTY ENTER.

A PARTY OF MEN ENTERS, INCLUDING MONSIEUR HENRI.

FIRST I put it to him, straight.

SECOND Did you, by God?

FIRST I said to him .. when did you last pay a dividend,
I said.

SECOND By God, you didn't mince your words!

FIRST I didn't!

HENRI Wait till you see, gentlemen, wait till you see ..

THIRD Wife well?

FOURTH Oh yes.

THIRD Still cooking?

FOURTH (GLOOMY) Yes.

THIRD At least you get a return on your outlay, mine's
spend, spend, spend ... now it's paintings, she's
buying daubs by a chap called Pickasso .. it's
money thrown in the Seine... evening, Sardine ...

HENRI Wait till you see! All beautiful girls
beautiful and so strict!

THIRD Hardly Paris, old man.

HENRI Ah, Paris!

THIRD My brother-in-law, from Bruges. In buttered almonds.

FIRST Come for a spanking time, eh?

SECOND Where are the ladies? Ahh!

THE MEN CHEER AS BERTHE ERUPTS RATHER WILDLY ONTO THE SCENE. THE FIRST MAN GRABS HER .. SHE SHRIEKS.

BERTHE AS HE TICKLES HER Ooh, stop it!

THIRD This one's a bit small ..

SECOND A bit of a tiddler!

FOURTH We'd better throw her back! HE LIFTS BERTHE AND THROWS HER TO THE SECOND MAN. BERTHE SQUEALS AS THEY MANHANDLE HER.

FIRST Go all the way down do you my dear?

BERTHE You'll have to find out, won't you?

HENRI Oh, la petite Berthe! .. she's a strong little madam in the saddle .. trot, canter, gallop ... we'll put her to the fences .. aha, little Berthe, giddy up, little Berthe!

THE MEN WHOOP. FRANCINE APPEARS, COOL, SMOKING A CHEROOT.

Ah .. here she is - La Francine! La Francine ... La Superba!

FOURTH Bravo!

THREE More like it!

SECOND Goer are you, eh .. eh?

FRAN If Monsieur has the petrol in his tank .. CHEERS. RAY PUSHES THROUGH.

RAY Make way .. make way for the guest of honour ... ladies and gentlemen, mesdames et messieurs .. je vous presente ... His Worship the Mayor!

FIRST AS THE MAYOR APPEARS Bravo! bravo, the Mayor I say!

ANOTHER CHORUS OF BRAVOS.

MAYOR Thank you, thank you friends...

SECOND Silence for the Mayor, friends..

MAYOR Thank you, thank you. Now I'm not going to make a speech.. you all get plenty of that..

CHORUS OF 'NO'S.

MAYOR I'd just like to offer a little vote of thanks to our friend Gaston, here, for the wonderful banquet we've just enjoyed at his restaurant.. TO RAYMOND... seven courses, without the pudding..... we'll have a job to do justice to your little spread, but we'll try...VOCIFEROUS AGREEMENT.. we'll do our best.... I see you've got trifle.... never trifle with trifle, eh? ha ha ha! THEY ALL LAUGH.

RAY One moment..... one moment, Monsieur, if I may be so bold.

MAYOR Eh, what? What's he up to?

RAY A little surprise, Monsieur le Mayor.

BERTHE A surprise!

MAYOR Not another dozen magnums of champagne - we've brought them with us, by the way, you can put your badger's piss away ha ha ha.....

RAY Gentlemen, if we may have your attention..... Francine.. the lights my dear, if you will! Berthe..... la musique!

BERTHE PUTS ON A GRAMOPHONE RECORD. RAYMOND SWOOPS

OFF.. THEY LAUGH, WAITING... HE RETURNS ALMOST AT ONCE WHEELING ON A HUGE 'CAKE' WITH CANDLES ON THE TOP. LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE.

MAYOR ASIDE Oh, not again .. the second one tonight..... and there'll be another before the night's out..... you think they'd dream up something a bit different.. no imagination, no imagination..... bravo, wonderful surprise..... oh, and candles too!

CHORUS Blow them out.... blow out the candles! Come on, Monsieur the Mayor, lots of breath please! A good blow now!

HE BLOWS OUT THE CANDLES, TO APPLAUSE.

RAY Et voila!!

NOTHING HAPPENS.

RAY Voila!

NOTHING HAPPENS.

RAY Voila... voila!

LAUGHTER.

MAYOR Hurray! What's the matter, is she stuck? LOUD LAUGHTER.

RAYMOND, FURIOUS, GIVES THE CAKE A KICK.

RAY My apologies, Monsieur! Un moment, s'il vous plait. Monsieur Raymond will take a look! HE WAGS HIS ASS SAUCILY, LIFTS THE LID OF THE CAKE, LOOKS INSIDE. AND BANGS THE LID DOWN QUICK.

SECOND Come on, come on....

FOURTE Yes, what have you got in there?

MAYOR We'll see. HE APPROACHES THE CAKE. I think I know how these things work, eh? We've seen enough of them.. remember the little girl last year... ten years old, now that WAS a surprise - you'll have a lot to do to better that, my friend. Well, let's see.

HE OPENS THE CAKE, LETTING DOWN A SIDEFLAP.

INSIDE IS MARIE, FACE DEATHLY WHITE. SHE IS DRESSED AS THE VIRGIN MARY AND THERE ARE LILIES IN HER HANDS.

RAY WHISPERS Oh my God.
HE CROSSES HIMSELF, TERRIFIED.

MAYOR Well, well, well.... what have we here?
HE PUFFS AT HIS CIGAR, APPRAISING THE SCENE.

Well, well.

RAYMOND TREMBLES.

You're a clever man Monsieur Raymond. You're better than I gave you credit for. Bold too. I like that... I can use that in a man.

SHARP Who told you? How did you know?

RAY Told me? No-one.... no-one, Monsieur le Mayor.

MAYOR Emmm. We'll talk about it later. No.. you're a wag - you're a wag, sir. Last year, and now this - no, I like a man who takes the trouble to study me - clear the stuff off that table.... just push it to one end..

RAY Sir?

MAYOR Here, I'll give you a hand ... there , that's enough
I think.... leave that. AS RAYMOND MAKES TO
CLEAR SOME OF THE PUDDINGS.

RAYMOND, PETRIFIED, HELPS HIM TO PUT MARIE ONTO THE TABLE. THE MAYOR REMOVES DISHES, PUTS HER HEAD ON A LARGE SALAMI.

MAYOR AS THEY MOVE HER No, quite imaginative. I like imagination. Knew you had a certain sort of little business here but .. no, we must have a chat sometime. There. Splendid. I congratulate you. Where did you get her, the morgue?

RAY What?

MAYOR Never mind. Discretion. No, I'm in your debt. Not easy to procure. KISSES RAYMOND IN SALUTATION. Now, if I may be allowed to enjoy my birthday treat before the others.. HE TAKES SOME PUDDING FROM A BOWL, STROKES IT INTO MARIE'S HAIR... you don't object?

RAY BACKS AWAY Not at all Monsieur. Whatever.. whatever your Honour desires.

MAYOR How peaceful she looks. Placid ... calm ... willing and silent. If only they were all like that, ooh what a world we'd have. SCOOPS UP SOME BLANCMANGE, RUBS IT IN HER FACE. There, my dear, you don't mind that, do you? See, not a murmur.

THIS IS TOO MUCH FOR RAYMOND. HE LURCHES, TURNS AND STAGGERS AWAY.

THE MAYOR TAKES OFF HIS JACKET, FOLDS IT CAREFULLY, PUTS ASIDE HIS CIGAR WITH EQUAL PRECISION. APPROACHES MARIE. LOOKS DOWN AT HER.

MAYOR Divine, silent marble! Ah! SHAKES HIS HEAD IN APPRECIATION. HE RUBS FOOD INTO HER BARE ARM APPRECIATIVELY. MOVES TO GET ON THE TABLE.

MAYOR What a treat. What a treat.

LIGHTS DOWN TO BLACK.

ALTERNATIVE ENDING .. THE TREAT

MAYOR What a treat. What a treat.

HE CLIMBS ON TOP OF MARIE. AS HE TURNS, TO
PUT DOWN HIS CIGAR, MARIE BECOMES CONSCIOUS.
SHE SITS UP SLOWLY.

MARIE Who are you? Are you God?

THE MAYOR FREAKS. HE UTTERS A STRANGLER ROAR
IN TERROR, FALLS OFF THE TABLE, GRABS THE TABLECLOTH,
TRYING TO HAUL HIMSELF UP, STAGGERS WILDLY, HAS A STROKE,
AND EXPIRES OPERATICALLY. MARIE, SITTING UP ON THE
TABLE, FESTOONED WITH TRIFLE, WATCHES IN OBEDIENT
AWE.

MARIE (TIMID) Monsieur?

SHE CLIMBS DOWN, WOBBLY AT THE KNEES.

Monsieur?

SHE BENDS OVER HIM.

What would you like me to do? We're here to oblige,
Monsieur. We're yours to command.

THE LIGHTS BEGIN TO DARKEN.

You don't look comfortable.

Can I assist? SHE TRIES TO HELP HIM TO RISE BUT HE
IS SO HEAVY THAT HER EFFORTS CAUSE HIS BODY TO SLIDE
FROM A SEMI-SITTING POSITION AGAINST THE TABLE TO
FLAT ON HIS BACK.

Oh, you poor thing .. you poor thing ahh!

SHE SITS ON THE FLOOR, CRADLING AND STROKING HIS HEAD.