

HELLEBORE

THE

CLOWN

\*\*\*\*\*

by

Maurice

Rowdon

\*\*\*\*\*

## C H A R A C T E R S

HELLEBORE ... .. ... a clown, otherwise Jonathan Finstanley.

Edgar... .. ... a child and the son of Hellebore.

Albert Lorraine ... .. ... a theatrical manager and owner.

Bernard Charpentier. ... .. ... a journalist.

*Heinrich Eiselheim*  
~~Wink~~... .. ... an illusionist, otherwise ~~Heinrich Eiselheim~~.

Eliza Manning. ... .. ... One of <sup>*Eiselheim*</sup> ~~Wink~~'s assistants.

Helen Eugenie. ... .. ... another of <sup>*Eiselheim*</sup> ~~Wink~~'s assistants.

Jean Duloi-Bordeau.. ... .. ... an acrobat.

Pierre Duloi-Bordeau ... .. ... his brother, also an acrobat.

Henry Sangson. ... .. ... a young Englishman.

Giordano Celida ... .. ... an Italian jeweller.

Maria Celida... .. ... his wife.

Francine Berger ... .. ... a seamstress, nicknamed "The Virgin"

Benedict Amurrat ... .. ... the producer.

Louis Comte... .. ... the stage manager.

Jaques... .. ... the dancing master.

### *PROLOGUE*

The scene - apart from that of the ~~ANANNNA~~ - is laid in Paris during Easter, 1920.

## PROLOGUE

---

Scene: A hill in Sussex during the early spring of 1907.

Dawn.

A group of actors stood on the crest of the hill with Hellebore, while the others strolled down to a path which crossed the valley. On the right of the hill was the road leading back to London, and waiting there at this moment were the four hackney carriages belonging to the company. The coachmen were gathered round the first carriage polishing wine-glasses and putting them on a large silver tray.

Hellebore was wearing a black overcoat much too big for him, and at his side, holding on to his trousers, stood a child of <sup>about</sup> ten ~~was~~ years. They were both looking down into the valley, a few feet from the other actors. Hellebore had thrown part of his overcoat across the boy's shoulders.

The first morning wind was beginning to blow.

Hellebore: <sup>Hellebore glanced down at the child and spoke to him:</sup> "You were asleep, Edgar. We had to carry you down to the cab.

Edgar: "Jeanne promised to wake me up, but she didn't, the bitch, <sup>"the child answers, pointing."</sup> Did you see her?"

Hellebore: "No, I only saw the Irish girl. Jeanne was still asleep. How is she?"

Edgar: "Oh, all right," ~~he replied~~ <sup>But the child seemed unwilling to say anything.</sup>

Hellebore: "How are things at Monty Brane's?"

Edgar ~~instantly~~ <sup>because excited and completely told of everything</sup> "Two of the ponies got something wrong with them," <sup>he said.</sup> "They both went down together, and they had to be shot."

Hellebore: "Have you been watching Jeanne lately?" <sup>He asked the child.</sup>

*close together, dreaming, while the actors behind them talked and stamped their feet. At the back of the hill was darkness, and before them was light, increasing now as they watched.*

Edgar: "Yes, but I don't like trapeze work. She wants me to try, but I don't like the work."

Hellebore: "Well, they can't make you do it if you don't want to."

Edgar: "Oh, Jeanne told me to tell you that people still talk about the Fins," <sup>Edgar told him simply.</sup>

Hellebore: "Do they? I should never have thought so."

Edgar: "What was the Fins?"

Hellebore: "Your mother and me used to do a turn together. Did you try those stunts I showed you?"

Edgar: "Yes, and I did them on my own," <sup>he glanced down at the child, his eyebrows raised, while Edgar hid further under his</sup>

Hellebore: "I'll come down and see you at it one day. I'll take you by surprise," <sup>he said.</sup>

Edgar: "Are you going to take me away this summer?"

Hellebore: "Well, the show comes off in the first week of

June, - I'll write to Jeanne about it. Don't

sweat on it."

*The child was silent for a moment, then added:*

Edgar: "I heard Jeanne say to Monty you're a rich man. Is it true?"

Hellebore: "Yes, I'm richer than those two rolled together. What were you doing listening?"

Edgar: "I was next door. I heard them."

Hellebore: "Don't call Jeanne a bitch, either."

*Hellebore*  
He looked down at the child and put his arm round *the child's* his shoulder, *and* He turned to a young actress standing near him.

Hellebore: "Hear what he called Jeanne?" *he asked.*

Actress: "Oh, I expect he hears worse than that."

Hellebore: "Down at Monty Brane's, you mean?"

Actress: "Yes."

*Hellebore nodded:*  
Hellebore: "They have to grow up early down there."

Actress: "Has he started properly yet?" *the actress asked.*

Hellebore: "No, not till he's turned fourteen. Then he'll be like his dad."

*came up from*  
An actor *and whispered to him:*  
behind Hellebore? "Well, you can keep your dawns, Jack."

*answered*  
Hellebore *with a laugh*: "You'll pull through. There's some brandy coming."

The coachmen brought the silver tray and glasses to a stile at the foot of the hill, and when he saw them Hellebore walked down with the others. When the company was together again he filled the glasses with brandy and took the tray from one person to another.

While the carriages were being turned round they stood drinking in silence, watching the dawn come up. Hellebore bent down and gave Edgar a sip from his glass.

1

I .

\*\*\*\*\*

i/ Scene: The Hôtel de la Reine in the Rue de Rivoli. The evening of Good Friday, 1920.

*was due to meet Albert Lorraine in the foyer of the H. de la R. in the Rue de Rivoli.* On the evening of Good Friday, 1920, Hellebore

The foyer was a long hall with wicker chairs and palms on either side, and at the end there was a wide staircase leading up to the apartments. Albert Lorraine stood waiting at the foot of the staircase in his evening clothes. He glanced at his watch, then touched his hair lightly with the tips of his fingers. He was between fifty and sixty years old, a small, plump man with a very pale face. He had tiny, delicate eyes and lips nervously pursed.

He walked back and glanced in at the lounge, where there were already thirty or forty people, most of them standing and talking together. A clock on the foyer-wall chimed half-past seven.

Hellebore turned the corner of the first landing and waved to Lorraine. They smiled at each other. When he reached the foot of the staircase they shook hands in silence, looking into each other's eyes. Lorraine took Hellebore's arm and they went toward the lounge, and asked him:

Lorraine: "Did the journey pass quickly?" *asked him.*

Hellebore (*shyly*). "Yes, I enjoyed it, Albert," *Hellebore was shy, drawing back from a little. he said.*

Lorraine *(putting his hand on Hellebore's shoulder, walking slower);* "There are fifty people coming tonight," *he said.*

- Hellebore: "Fifty? Do I know any of them?"
- Lorraine: "You know Bernard Charpenter, and Eliza Manning, Françoise Berger, Jean and Pierre Duloi-Bordeau."
- Hellebore: "Is Eiselheim here?"
- Lorraine: "No, he stayed at the theatre," *Lorraine replied.* "We've interrupted rehearsals, you see."
- Hellebore: *Hellebore stopped.* "What, for me?"
- Lorraine: "Yes. We wanted to give you a good welcome, Jack."
- Hellebore: "Have you seen Eliza?"
- Lorraine: "Yes. She's inside waiting to see you."

Hellebore glanced into the lounge and instantly took hold of Lorraine's arm. He drew him back from the door.

- Hellebore: "Is all this for me?" *he asked*
- Lorraine (with a nervous smile): "Yes, Jack," *Lorraine with a nervous smile.*
- Hellebore: "But I don't know these people."
- Lorraine: "I'll keep most of them away from you. I do promise that. We'll have the introductions after dinner."

They went into the lounge side by side and most of the guests turned to look at them. Lorraine took Hellebore between the groups of standing people, looking about him.

- Lorraine: "Can you see Eliza?" *Lorraine asked him.*

Hellebore (also looking about): "Are you sure she came?" *He asked.*

*But first then* A young woman walked up behind Hellebore and said quietly in his ear: "I'm here, Jack." *She had pushed through the crowd of people standing at the entrance of the salon.* She was a well-built young woman, a little taller than both Lorraine and Hellebore,

*and* Across her right cheek there was a dark scar. Hellebore turned instantly.

Hellebore: "Eliza!"

They hugged each other, laughing.

Eliza (*glancing* at him closely): "I've been so nervous waiting for you," she said.

Hellebore took her hand and turned to Lorraine.

Hellebore: "Let's find somewhere quiet, - just the three of us," *he said.*

Lorraine: *Lorraine nodded - agreed and nodded and told that they would* Yes, we'll have the introductions after dinner.

They walked to a corner of the lounge and sat down, a little apart from the other guests.

Lorraine: "I heard you kept cattle in the War, Jack," *he said.*

Hellebore: "I only had a couple of Ayrshires."

Lorraine (*glancing* about the room): "Well, I want to hear about all that. Have you decided what it's to be after the Théâtre de la Fête?" *It was as if Lorraine*

Hellebore: Yes, Madrid, - the Circo Allegria. *To*

Eliza) What about Eiselheim? Where will he be going? *He asked.*

*he said*

Eliza (<sup>ed</sup> watching him with a smile): "Belgium again, I think,"

"He went down well there. I shall see more of you now that you're working again, shan't I? Did you really not go on a stage once?"

Hellebore: "I gave three private performances, that's all. And one of those was at my own place."

e / all those who <sup>t</sup> touching the back of his hand with her finger-tips: <sup>ed</sup>

"Why, Jack? Nobody here knows why you did it."

Hellebore: I don't think I know myself.

Lorraine turned towards them, and *spoke to Eliza:*

Lorraine (to Eliza): "He did keep his hand in, though. Did you hear about the gymnasium?"

Eliza: "Yes, Bernard was telling me last night," *she said*

Lorraine (to Hellebore): I told Bénédict a dress rehearsal at three o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Is that convenient?"

Hellebore: Yes, provided I have the stage in the morning.

Lorraine: I shall call for you here soon after ten o'clock.

(To Eliza): Has he changed?

Eliza (gazing at Hellebore): I don't think so, Albert. The eyebrows are a little fairer, and he isn't quite so slim. (To Hellebore) What about me?

Hellebore: No, you haven't changed, my dear. Are you

going to have lunch with me tomorrow in the  
Crimson Tower? Does it still exist?

Lorraine:

I had it lengthened, Jack. It now has a  
magnificent balcony of its own, and the walls  
are panelled with mirrors. I shall take you  
round the theatre tomorrow morning.

Eliza:

All right, then, we'll lunch together in the  
Crimson Tower.

Hellebore:

And ask Helen. Is she here tonight?

Eliza:

No, she's at the theatre with Heinrich. They  
do annoy me.

Hellebore:

Why, are they together too much?

Eliza:

They spend all day together, but he never  
says a word to her. They just look at each  
other. She adores him, you know. And I  
think he's jealous of you.

Lorraine (quietly): You shouldn't tell Jack these things.

Eliza. I don't know what you can have against  
Eiselheim. What have you got against him?

Eliza (half smiling): His silence, his composure ....

Sometimes he makes me feel quite frightened.  
Sometimes I turn round, and there he is  
watching me. His eyes are so clear!

Hellebore laughed.

Eliza: He hasn't come tonight because he is jealous of you, Jack (To Lorraine, as he began to speak) Of course he is ! And Helen must always follow his whims. Sometimes I'd like to bang their heads together.

Lorraine: Don't listen to her, Jack. Eisenheim is at rehearsal.

Eliza: (Waving her hand in front of Lorraine) Oh, the rehearsal isn't important! We only finished at Brussels three days ago. He could easily have come, Jack. So could Helen.

A waiter brought each of them an aperitif. Lorraine and Eliza raised their glasses to Hellebore, and they drank. Hellebore (looking up at the ceiling, then at the palms); This is different from the old place in the Rue de Tournon. They'll miss me there.

Lorraine: I thought it was better to have you near the theatre.

Hellebore (to Eliza): You know why, don't you?

Eliza: No, tell me.

Hellebore: He likes to keep an eye on his first turns. There's a clause in my contract about my leaving the hotel after midnight, too.

He couldn't keep his eye on me in the Rue de Tournon.

Eliza: What's the clause, then?

Hellebore: You tell her, Albert.

Lorraine: It simply says that if Jack leaves his hotel after midnight during rehearsal-time he is guilty of a breach of contract, except in the case of war, fire, pestilence, robbery, earthquake, assault or kidnap. But Jack isn't the only one who has it in his contract.

Eliza: (To Hellebore, with a smile): You're his prisoner, dear.

Hellebore (hiding a yawn with his hand): A willing one tonight.

Eliza: Did the journey tire you out?

Hellebore: No. I sat on deck and enjoyed myself. It was sunny all the way over.

Eliza: Have you spoken to Bernard yet?

Hellebore: No.

Eliza (pointing): Well, there he is. He has just come in.

She pointed to a tall man, not older than forty, who was standing by the entrance to the lounge talking and laughing. He wore a heavy black cloak with a bronze clasp and chain at the neck. He stooped a little as he talked.

Lorraine: I've asked him to manage the press tonight. We shall be leaving the press until after dinner.

Hellebore gazed at him with a frown.

Hellebore: Leaving what? What are you springing on me?

Lorraine: (stroking his chin) Well, I thought they'd like to hear a few words from you. After all no-one in Paris has seen you for five years. (Turning to look at Charpentier) Naturally, the newspapers are interested.

Hellebore (nodding ironically): Ah, the newspapers ... what do they want to know?

Lorraine (preoccupied): Will you excuse me if I go and have a word with Bernard? (Rising). What do they want to know? Perhaps you'd better talk to Bernard about that over dinner, Jack. I've put him next to you at table. Will you excuse me, then?

Hellebore nodded, and Lorraine left him.

Hellebore (watching Lorraine walk towards the door): What's he up to?

Eliza: Well, you have a big reputation now, dear. People haven't seen you on a stage for nearly five years. He wants you to meet the journalists afterwards and talk to them.

Hellebore: (still watching Lorraine). Well, I'm not a paper doll.

Eliza (laughing and squeezing his hand): Perhaps you are to Albert, my dear. He has sunk six hundred thousand francs in this show. He told me this afternoon he'd never spent more on a show in his life.

Hellebore: I doubt that. (Glancing at her) I was very surprised to see that note waiting for me, you know, telling me to wear my dinner jacket and be punctual. I thought we were going to have a nice little supper-party on the stage or in my dressing-room, like we used to. Does he expect me to enjoy this?

Eliza: What about us, then? We haven't had a bite to eat since two o'clock this afternoon.

Hellebore: Why not?

Eliza: We came straight from rehearsals. Albert insisted. He promised us a little snack as soon as we got here, but nothing came of it. He said he must have at least five people from the theatre here, - so there are Francine, the Duloi-Bordeau's, myself and Charpentier.

She picked up his glass and offered it to him. He took a sip and she laid it down.

Eliza: You haven't asked after the Virgin.

Hellebore: No, I was looking round for her a minute ago.

Eliza: Even now she doesn't look a day older than seventeen. She was a nurse in the War. She was in one of the hospitals very near the front line, and she had to deal with all sorts of horrible cases, - so Albert was telling me. And when she was offered leave she wouldn't take it. She refused leave twice.

Hellebore: Yes, she's a calm girl, very calm. Has she still got that lovely fair hair down to her shoulders? She hasn't cut it?

Eliza: No, dear.

She took his hand again.

Eliza (in a low voice): I heard about your son. Where was he killed?

Hellebore: Flanders somewhere. I don't know exactly.

Eliza (with a sigh): We came down from Brussels by car, and all along the road there were those ruined villages.

They sat in silence for some time.

Eliza: Did you notice my scar when you came in?

Hellebore: No, of course not. It doesn't make any difference to your face.

Lorraine came back and sat down again. He watched Hellebore anxiously.

Hellebore: What's the matter?

Lorraine: I was thinking, Jack. There's still time enough to postpone - (intimately) if you really want to. I have everything ready in case you want to do the wise thing and rehearse for another week. You know what I feel about it from my letters.

Hellebore: I know just when I need a long rehearsal, and at present a day's enough for me.

Lorraine (frowning): Of course, this leaves me feeling a little worried.

Hellebore: When weren't you worried over a First Night?

Lorraine: I sent you twenty-four cables inside ten days, Jack, but you seem set against all advice. In 1911 you let me revise the whole of your turn, but you've changed since then. (Leaning forward) You see, Jack, business has been none too good since the Armistice, and I have sunk more into this show of yours than I like to think about. My restoration costs since 1918 have actually trebled the fund I set aside for repairs and dilapidations. During the War, Jack, my

my theatres went to wrack and ruin. Now without you I can't recoup that loss. Naturally, I'm unwilling to take unnecessary risks. Of course, Jack, like all business men I tend to minimise my profits and make much of a loss. But business isn't an easy game, and I don't want to throw away our chances for the sake of a few more rehearsals.

Hellebore: What do you think I've been doing in England?

Lorraine: But I wasn't there to see you, Jack, and from my point of view over here that show of ours is going to be under-rehearsed. It's not a risk I enjoy taking, and the more I think about it the more terrible it seems. <sup>m</sup>Who can I consult about your rehearsals in England?

whom/

No one. Four years is time enough to lose all your abilities, Jack. In that time you could forget how to act, you could run to fat, you could lose enthusiasm, you could forget what it feels like to stand in front of two thousand people every man, woman and child of whom look on you as the greatest clown in the world.

Eliza: Don't be depressing, Albert. You're silly to talk like that.

Lorraine (watching Hellebore): I want him to do the wise thing. And I wonder whether an English manager would take the risk I'm taking.

Hellebore: Shall I go back and find out?

Eliza: You're annoying him, Albert.

Lorraine: In the War, Jack, people used to be asking about you all the time. Bernard kept you alive in this country, and without that column of his people would never have gone on asking, Where is Hellebore?

Eliza: Don't take any notice, Jack. He had no sleep last night.

Lorraine: No, I'm very worried about it.

He gazed at the floor with a frown, then he suddenly smiled and looked up at Hellebore.

Lorraine: I promise not to worry over dinner. And - (feeling in one of his pockets) - I wanted to give you something for luck, Jack. Did I bring it?

Eliza: Yes. I saw you put it in your pocket. It's only beads, Jack.

Hellebore (with a smile): Ah, you still carry your beads, do you?

Lorraine: Now don't refuse them, Jack, because I must be humoured in these things, as Bernard will tell you.

He took from one of his pockets a rosary with black beads and a silver-plated crucifix. He handed it to Hellebore.

Lorraine: Now take it to the theatre tomorrow. (Smiling at Eliza and leaning back in his chair) There, that makes me feel better. Do I look tired?

Eliza: A little pale, Albert.

Hellebore: Do you still suffer at nights?

Lorraine nodded.

Lorraine: Nowadays I keep a little samovar in my bedroom, and when I know there's no hope of sleep I drink tea. I usually know by three or four o'clock. (With a sigh) Leaving the bedroom at dawn is like walking out of a tomb. Sometimes I have gone without sleep for three or four nights together, Jack.

Hellebore: You worry too much. You ought to see a doctor.

Lorraine: But I don't believe in doctors. (Glancing about him again) And the older I grow the more I think about death.

Eliza: You've got a long way to go yet.

Lorraine: Whenever I see a young girl, I imagine to myself what she'll be like in fifty years' time. I can't sit in this lounge without thinking what it will be like tomorrow morning when everybody

has gone. Sometimes I'm afraid to go to sleep, you know. Perhaps that is why I don't sleep at nights. Perhaps I'm afraid I shall die in my sleep. Well, sleep is a kind of death, isn't it?

He raised his glass to Hellebore and smiled.

\*\*\*\*\*

II

ei /

Scene: Hellebore's apartment in the Hotel de la R<sup>ei</sup>gne.  
Fifteen minutes before midnight on Good Friday, 1920.

On the mantel in Hellebore's drawing room stood a slim damask vase with a handle on each side. He took Lorraine's rosary from his pocket and laid it over the neck of this vase, so that it was supported by the two handles. A large and hot log-fire burned in the hearth.

He sat down and for some time gazed into the fire, then he began to doze. His head fell very slowly to the back of the chair, his mouth opened and his right hand became limp on his knee. He breathed deeply, as though exhausted.

A church-bell near the hotel struck midnight, and he woke up with a sharp snore and stared about him. Then he went to the bedroom and undressed in the dark. He fell asleep instantly.

At ten minutes past midnight there was a knock on his drawing room door, then silence again. The door opened and closed. Someone took two or three steps into the room, and the lights went up. A male voice called out softly: "Mr. Finstanley." It was an Englishman's voice, precise and educated. Hellebore opened his eyes.

Hellebore: Who is that?

Visitor (in confusion): I'd no idea you'd be in bed.

Hellebore: Who is it?

Visitor: My name is Henry Sangson.

Hellebore cursed. He went to the bedroom door and opened it. He stood on the threshold in his pyjamas, his hair tumbled, frowning and peering into the lighted drawing-room.

Henry Sangson stood before the log-fire. He was a slim young man, no taller than Hellebore. He had a sharp, pale face, and long hands. *Looking his vacation, not forced into it* He had the appearance of a young priest, ~~who had been his~~

Hellebore: I'm sorry. We haven't met before.

Sangson: My name is Sangson. I knew your son, - Edgar.

Hellebore walked into the drawing-room, staring at the young man.

Sangson: We were in the army together.

Hellebore shook hands with him absently. They *without* watched each other ~~without~~ speaking.

Sangson (lowering his eyes): I was told you kept late hours, otherwise I should never have come.

Hellebore: Were you with him when he was killed?

Sangson: Yes.

Hellebore nodded, then yawned.

Hellebore: You must give me time to wake up.

without /

Sangson (anxiously): Let me see you tomorrow.

Hellebore: Now that I'm up you may as well stay a few minutes. Who told you I kept late hours, - Edgar?

Sangson: Yes.

Hellebore: You are about his age, I expect.

Sangson: A little older.

Hellebore indicated a chair by the fire, and they sat down.

Hellebore: I have nothing to offer you here. And I can't ring for anyone, because that might worry my manager. I'm a prisoner here, young man. I'm insured down to my finger-tips. Did Edgar tell you that?

Sangson: (watching him thoughtfully) Yes, he was always talking about you.

Hellebore: How did you come by the name of this hotel? But perhaps you were at the dinner-party downstairs?

Sangson: No, I wasn't. Mademoiselle Berger told me.

Hellebore: You know her?

Sangson: A little.

Hellebore: She was there to-night.

Sangson: She told me when you'd be arriving in Paris

and when your dinner-party was likely to end,  
I promised Edgar that I'd visit you.

Hellebore: He asked you to?

Sangson: Yes.

Hellebore (ill at ease): Was that his dying wish?

Sangson (with a smile): Oh, no! But I felt under a special obligation to him because we were intimate friends, and because when he asked me to come and see you he asked me in a specially serious way.

Hellebore: Why?

Sangson: I don't know why.

They both gazed into the fire.

Sangson: He worshipped you.

Hellebore: Did he?

Sangson: It was a kind of religious worship. The thought of you consoled him. He never connected you with the War. Among your theatres and circuses you were holy and immaculate. As for himself, he thought he was exactly the kind who ought to suffer it. So there was a kind of mercy in it for him, - the mercy that it wasn't being inflicted on you. If you had put on a uniform and gone out to Flanders he

would have lost faith, because the only thought that made it bearable to him was the thought that there was something in the universe unconnected with war, - namely, you.

He looked about the room with a smile.

Sangson: I feel like a child who has just come into a palace. And like a child I don't really believe you exist. After a time Edgar and I ceased to think of you in the flesh. You have a beautiful room here.

Hellebore: I hadn't really noticed it.

Sangson: It's the kind of room I expected you to have. Edgar told me about the extraordinary houses you used to buy in England. He told me you decorated them fabulously, then got tired of them in a few weeks and sold out.

Hellebore: Oh, those are stories people pick up. I wasn't used to money, that's true. But don't believe all those stories.

Sangson: He used to tell me about your retinue of doctors, secretaries, gymnasts and masseurs in the old days. He used to tell me about your little daily ritual<sup>s</sup>: massage at ten o'clock in the morning, a ride in the afternoon, a

s /

coffee-party before each performance. He told me about the banquets in your honour, your crowds at the stagedoors, your magnificent clothes, your opening of charity bazaars, your statements to the press, your signature under the forewords of books, the gymnasium you built in Wiltshire during the War which could be turned into a little theatre with a seating capacity of a hundred. There were so many things, and I've forgotten most of them. I never expected to know you in the flesh, and now, with you in front of me, I can't bring the two together in my mind - you and Hellebore. He told me about your tours from country to country, and how half the world never realised what nationality you were. The French claimed you as French, the Hungarians claimed you as Hungarian. He told me about the little royal processions of hansom carriages you used to take out of London to see the dawn come up, and the brandy you served from a tray just before the return journey. (Watching Hellebore with awe) When you came into this room from your bedroom just now it was rather like seeing God for the first time.

Hellebore (puzzled, staring at the young man): Was it?

Sangson: A porter at the door downstairs has instructions to keep out visitors. A banquet is given in your honour. Legends fly about that you keep late hours and perform every evening on two or three hour's sleep. A special hush falls on people at the Théâtre de la Fête when your name is mentioned.

Hellebore: What people?

Sangson: I'm thing of Françoise Berger. She is a lady-in-waiting of the court. A kind of sacredness surrounds you. That's how Edgar and I used to think of you. We felt we had a special claim on your attentions because he was your son and I was your son's best friend. We seemed to possess you. We could carry you like a feather in our caps, and sometimes you made us feel immune to danger.

Hellebore (glancing down): I'm glad.

Sangson: He was always proud when people told him he was like you. And sometimes he annoyed me by appearing to have a secret too good for other men, too good even for me. The secret was you. It annoyed me to think that you were more his.

possession than mine, being his father. But I used to console myself with the thought that after all he was very unlike you: he had none of the clown in him. We used to talk about you in the dug-outs, and between bombardments, and when it was cold and raining, and when we were going up for an attack, and when a patrol had turned out badly. (Awkwardly) When he was killed the world he had made up for both of us - out of you - fell to pieces, and I was left in its ruins. You see, he should never have been allowed to come back to the front after he was wounded the first time.

Hellebore: Wounded? Was he wounded?

Sangson: Yes, in the spring of 1916. Didn't you know?

Hellebore (mumbling): No, I didn't know that.

Sangson: But you must have known.

Hellebore (a little impatiently): No, I tell you I didn't.

Sangson: I say that because the authorities must have notified you.

Hellebore: I never heard a word about it.

Sangson: But he was sent back to England, and he was in an English hospital for two months. It was a hospital in Herefordshire. He came back to

my company the following year.

Hellebore: (quietly) Well, I was never told about that.

Sangson: But the War Office must have notified you.

Hellebore shrugged his shoulders, and shivered a little. He got up, rubbing his hands together, and went to his bedroom. There he put on a dressing-gown of white towelling and a pair of bedroom slippers. He walked back to the fire without looking at the young man and warmed his hands. He then went to one of the windows. He pulled the curtain aside and looked out.

Hellebore: When was he wounded, did you say?

Sangson: Early in 1916.

Hellebore: Well, it's possible they notified me, I suppose. I moved about a lot in 1916. The letter was probably passed on from place to place, and then lost. I didn't have a settled address in 1916, you see. It's possible they notified me and I never got the letter. Was it a bad wound?

a /  
Sangson: It was a shrapnel wound in the thigh from a heavy German shell. I thought it must get him his discharge from the <sup>a</sup>Army, because of the damage to his thigh-bone. But it healed and within six months he was fit again.

Hellebore (looking at the roofs opposite): I might have been able to see him, then.

Sangson: Being an officer -. You knew he was an officer?

Hellebore: (with a frown, lowering his head a little) No, I didn't realise.

Sangson: Being an officer he knew what was expected of him, so he went back to the line in 1917, and a few weeks after that he was killed. Had his nerve not been broken when he was wounded he would never have been killed, I'm sure of that. He was killed in <sup>one of</sup> the fiercest battles of the War. He could no longer bear to hear men scream. He was always on the point of running away, he was always panic-stricken, though his face looked determined enough. A terrified man in battle is like a vulnerable child. Normally he sees his own death in advance.

(Turning his head to look at Hellebore) The knowledge gives him a grey, condemned, mute, beseeching look about the eyes.

Neither of them spoke for a few moments.

Sangson: The authorities should have seen at the end of 1916 that his nerve was going ... But there....

one of /

child /

He shrugged his shoulders and there was silence again.

a /  
Sangson: He wrote you a letter, I think, at the end of 1915 or in January, 1916. It was to tell you he had joined the <sup>a</sup>Army and was embarking for France.

Hellebore: Yes, I remember that one letter.

Sangson: He thought you might disapprove of it, and he wrote the letter to find out.

Hellebore: (puzzled by this) Disapprove of what?

Sangson: Disapprove of his having joined the Army and volunteered for the western front.

Hellebore: Who was I to disapprove?

Sangson: He had such a deep respect for you. He was anxious to know what you thought. He was anxious to have your good will.

Hellebore: Oh, he had that.

Sangson: He tried to imagine your face as you read the letter. One minute he thought you'd disapprove and refuse to answer. Another minute he thought you'd be proud of him and that your answer had gone astray. Another minute you were preparing a surprise for him, a father's surprise.

Hellebore: Did I not reply, then?

Sangson: No. I think he put it down to the bad postal arrangements. They were bad at the time. It was a pity. You could have helped him, you see. You could have prevented his death.

Hellebore: How?

Sangson: He wrote you many letters, you see, and you answered none of them. He should never have been allowed to go back to France. His nerve had gone. It was quite easy to see that from his letters. He knew it himself. He wrote you two letters from hospital and asked you to do your best for him, in just so many words.

Hellebore: But I only remember that one letter.

Perhaps the others never reached me. I only remember the first one, at the beginning of 1916. And how could I help a soldier?

Sangson: You could have used your influence to keep him in England. Your influence must have been very great on certain people. In those letters he told you his nerve had gone and that if he went into the line again he'd certainly walk into trouble. He told you that nightmares woke him up at night, that

a/

he seemed to hear men screaming. He wanted the company of gentle people, so that he could learn how to be at his ease again. Yet he lacked the courage to tell the <sup>a</sup>Army that. It was up to you. He depended on you.

Hellebore: What influence had I got, - a clown?

Sangson: Everyone knew your name. You must have had powerful friends. You could have insisted like a father on his staying in England. He expected your fatherly interest and felt quite confident of it even when he was dying.

Hellebore: What could I have done?

Sangson: The thing to do was to go straight down to the hospital and find out how long he'd be there, then make representations to the War Office, then visit all your most influential friends in London to press your claim privately. Oh, it was often done successfully. I've heard of many instances where mothers and fathers were able to do this service of mercy for their children simply by speaking to the right people at the right time. He had done quite enough in the War. People would have known that. When he was wounded

in 1916 he was one of only twelve or fifteen survivors. That was out of a battalion. ~~the~~  
~~hundred~~ ~~strong~~

Hellebore: (turning nervously) You must understand, young man, 1916 was one of the busiest years of my life. There were contracts to terminate, managers to see, - I had thousands of jobs to do and I was never in the same place for more than a fortnight. (Pacing the room, frowning) My secretary dealt with most of the correspondence. And you must understand that every year I had many, many begging letters from people, - begging for money, for release from gaol, for rescue from cruel husbands....

He stopped and stared at Sangson, then walked to his chair.

Hellebore: (leaning back wearily) Did you come here to-night to show me how much I'm to blame?

Sangson: (politely) No, Mr. Finstanley.

Hellebore: I had the letter about his death when I was alone in the country at the end of 1917. That was one of my quieter years. I thought about his death. I wrote to Jeanne straight away.

Sangson: I remember he wrote your name as his next-of-kin in his army book. He gave your address, not his mother's.

Hellebore: Well, she brought him up. I only took him for holidays and taught him a few stunts.

Sangson: Really, I suppose, he invented you. You were one of his dreams, and very necessary to him. You were necessary to both of us, to bring some warmth into our bodies. We talked about you as if you belonged to us. You helped us to deny that everything we saw and heard and touched had death in it, that every man was dead or dying, that the meaning of everything in our world was death. You helped us to deny the truth. You helped us not to die too soon. (Leaning forward) I curse the day when my eyes were opened to that empty, forlorn world where your son died. When he died he was cold, wet to the skin, speechless and blind, and he couldn't move. I remember the rain pouring down his face. He was sitting up. It was dark. All he could do was to sit and wait for death. I wish I could put that memory out. It was one thing to know and live in a dead and

ruined world, but, my God, to fall into it, to become part of it as he did, to have the universe turn its back on you, to be without any foothold in a huge desert of emptiness...

They sat gloomily in silence.

Hellebore: Are you blaming me for that?

Sangson: You could have spared him that.

Hellebore: (quietly) But I had my own life.

He gazed at Sangson thoughtfully for some time.

Hellebore: Will you listen to me if I tell you a few things about myself?

Sangson: Of course.

Hellebore: When Edgar was born I was only a boy of twenty-two. His mother and I separated when he was five. He only grew up to think of me as a father because I had a famous name. Monty Brane and my wife lived together like married people, and Monty was more of a father to him than I was. He heard so many gaudy stories about me down at Monty Brane's - the stories he used to tell you - that he grew up very proud of me. I used to give him treats, and - another thing - I never put my hand round his mouth like Monty Brane did now and again.



~~Have you heard of the... I learnt a lot~~  
~~the... especially about the way to use my face.~~  
~~the... I had hardly used my face at all in the circus.~~  
~~the... The trouble with the circus is while you're~~  
~~making one side of the audience laugh, the~~  
~~other side can only see the back of your head.~~  
~~At last~~ I got my first good contract in London  
 in 1903, and I took the name Hellebore.

(With a smile) So I'm made of flesh and blood,  
 after all. It took me years of practice to  
 build up my turn. A lot of people used to  
 worship me like Edgar did. That's quite  
 natural. I was mobbed once. But you can't  
 lay a whole war at my feet. You and I lived  
 in two different worlds. I knew nothing  
 about yours. Thousands of men were killed  
 in the War, but you can't lay their deaths  
 at my feet.

Sangson: I would never try to.

Hellebore: (with an uneasy smile) You sounded as though you  
 were.

Sangson: (without passion) All I said was that a word from you could have prevented Edgar's death.

That was all.

Hellebore: But I hardly had a private life at all. Sometimes I never had a moment to myself for six months on end. Thousands of people used to write me letters. I had to travel up and down the country every week. When I wasn't travelling I was practising, and when I wasn't practising I was on the stage performing.

Sangson: Then you'd become a kind of statue.

Hellebore: Listen to me, young man, you could take all my carpets and my managers and my earnings and my cronies and my clothes and my cabs and my hotel suites and my foreign contracts and my masseurs, you could take them away and drop them in the sea if you liked, but I'd go out in the street and I'd do a turn and I'd get an audience somehow. That's because I've got the spunk of a clown. I'm a clown down to the nails on my feet. (Tap-ping his own chest, his face flushed) What do you think I am, some pot-bellied pie-can

with a million of money? It's people like you who make me a statue, people like you and Edgar. What about all those stories he told you, about rides in the Park and royal processions? They're not true, I tell you, they're not true.

Sangson glanced at him diffidently and they sat in silence. Suddenly Hellebore smiled and jumped up.

Hellebore: (briskly) Let's go out, young man. Let's find somewhere warm. I'm wide-awake and I'm hungry. You know Paris. Take me somewhere.

Sangson: (astonished by this) But surely you must sleep now.

Hellebore: (walking towards his bedroom) Come and talk to me while I change.

Sangson followed him into the bedroom, and Hellebore took his evening clothes out of the wardrobe.

Hellebore: (excitedly) I haven't done this, I haven't gone out at this hour of the morning for the best part of five years.

He began changing while Sangson stood at the door, watching him.

Hellebore: Are you always thinking about the War?

Sangson: Yes.

Hellebore: It seems to have got into your blood.

Sangson: Yes, I suppose I belong to the War. I feel

I shall never be able to tear myself away from it. It won't let me live properly. Before it happened I felt I belonged to a few friends and a small town in Somerset, but now I don't belong to anything, - except to War. When you fight in a war you root yourself like a plant into another world, - a world of murder. Whereas once you helped people into chairs and smiled at them, now you set mines for them to fall on, and you run your bayonet through them. And these are things you can't forget.

*[Handwritten scribbles]*  
 I ought to have been killed, like Edgar. That would have been logical.

Hellebore drew his chair nearer the mirror to tie his bow.

Hellebore: Go about the world as if you didn't have a past, it can be done. (Turning from the mirror to face him) What's your work?

Sangson: I work in a jeweller's shop.

Hellebore: In a shop? An educated young fellow like yourself?

Sangson: (nodding resignedly) Exactly. The work has no meaning for me.

Hellebore: Why do it, then? Are you free to leave it? Could you leave Paris if you wanted to?

Sangson: Yes.

Hellebore: Well, then, why don't you?

Sangson: I'm well looked after here. I've nothing to go away to.

Hellebore: And suppose there had never been a war, - what would you have done?

Sangson: I had work as a solicitor's clerk when I was fifteen, and I would have saved money from that and used it to take a teachers' certificate when I was nineteen.

Hellebore: (staring at him) And here you are selling jewels in a Paris shop.

Sangson: I refused to go back to England because my childhood was finished. In the War I met a man called Celida. We became friends, and he invited me to his house here in Paris. Then he offered me a job in one of his shops. He is a rich man, and his wife is devoted to me. He has a large house, and servants.

Hellebore: But how is it you can do work that bores you?

Sangson: Oh, I think while I'm doing it.

Hellebore got up to put his jacket and overcoat on.

Hellebore: War took away all your hope. But we've got to get used to death.

Sangson: (shaking his head) I never did, and I never will.

Hellebore: But mustn't you try and forget these things?

Sangson: Have you ever seen a dead man?

Hellebore stared at him.

Hellebore: No.

Sangson: You came upon him suddenly. There he was, blind and mute, exactly as trees are. You sometimes felt him watching you. A moment before, perhaps, you heard his voice, but now you were alone. He was still there, yet you were alone. That's the petrifying thing that happens when you come across a dead man: you become alone in a universe of mute, eternal things. And you can't get used to that. No man can get used to that.

Hellebore buttoned his overcoat, then took his hat and can from the dressing-table.

Sangson: (watching him put on white gloves) I've been an evil visitation to-night.

Hellebore walked into the sitting room. As he passed Sangson he pinched his cheek lightly with his gloved

hand.

Hellebore: But suppose you had never come? I should have gone on living like an orchid on other people's dresses. (With a glance at the dying ashes in the fireplace) I shall move tomorrow. This room feels like an undertaker's. Well, I'm ready to make a night of it. Where shall it be?

Sangson: I know a <sup>place</sup> club called Les Anges. It's the only place I can recommend after midnight.

Hellebore: Is it far?

Sangson: No. It's in the Rue St. Honoré.

Hellebore went across to a small table between the windows and took a rose from the bowl. He put it in his button-hole and smiled at Sangson.

Hellebore: One for you?

He looked at Sangson in silence, waiting for an answer, smiling.

Sangson: You see, when I say you helped to kill Edgar I really mean you helped to kill me.

III

\*\*\*\*\*

Scene 1: Les Anges, a casino at the fashionable end of the Rue St. Honoré, soon after one o'clock in the morning.

The entrance hall of Les Anges had high columns and tapestried walls on either side. At the top of a wide stone staircase was the corridor leading into the club-rooms themselves. The lustres in this entrance hall were not alight, and only a bare arc-lamp shone down onto the stair-case from the third landing.

~~He walked behind Sangson down the narrow corridor to the curtained doors of the dining room. Sangson pulled aside one of the curtains and went in. The orchestra could be heard from their right playing a quick waltz.~~

He walked behind Sangson down the narrow corridor to the curtained doors of the dining room. Sangson pulled aside one of the curtains and went in. The orchestra could be heard from their right playing a quick waltz.

*He walked*

~~The ceiling was made of frosted glass with robed figures engraved across it. Being illuminated from behind, this glass had the appearance of being a huge, solid block of~~

The ceiling was made of frosted glass with robed figures engraved across it. Being illuminated from behind, this glass had the appearance of being a huge, solid block of

light. ←

Some people in fancy dress were throwing long paper streamers over the heads of the dancers in the ballroom. One after another the streamers flew across the room, falling onto the shoulders of the dancers, then gradually floating down until they were split and trodden underfoot. The throwers laughed loudly, and one of them clapped his hands at a waiter nearby and imitated a man thirstily drinking.

In these walls there were arched niches each containing small plaster casts of classical sculpture illuminated by violet, blue and yellow lights.


Hellebore and Sausage went up to a table at the very back of the room, almost under the minstrel's gallery.

Hellebore: Who owns it?

Sangson: A wealthy silk-merchant. He bought it in the last year of the War, and it was only opened six months' ago.

Hellebore: He bought the entire house?

Sangson: No, only this small wing of it. The house was built in the middle of the seventeenth century and it was called the Hôtel de Serabini. Then twenty years ago it became a consulate, and the consulate released this wing in the last year of the War. The entrance hall downstairs still belongs to



them. It used to be their grand reception hall. (Leaning back with a smile) This is what happens when a manufacturer from Lyons decides to buy a club. He thought he was going to get a fashionable clientèle, but all he got were people much like himself.

Hellebore(quietly, still watching the ballroom): What are you doing here, then, as a member? There aren't any young people here. It's a club for middle-aged people. None of these people have ever been young. You can see that by the look on their faces.

Sangson: The Italians I share house with brought me here.

Hellebore: Has the War taken all the go out of you, then?

Sangson (puzzled): Why?

Hellebore: Well, I thought any other young man would have found a club of his own. You don't seem to know Paris. You don't know where to eat and have a good time. You come here where everybody is middle-aged.

The waltz ended, and two or three couples ascended from the ballroom to the dining room.

Sangson: But you wanted supper (Rising) By the way, I shall have to introduce you to my benefactor!

They're here.

Hellebore: To who?

Sangson: To the Italian couple I told you about this evening; the Celida<sup>s</sup>, the people I share house with. I saw them as I came in.

Hellebore: Yes, you must tell me about them.

Sangson left the table, spoke to a waiter on his way down the steps to the second tier, then he turned left into a corridor.

A new dance began, and Hellebore watched a man and woman from the table nearest him go down to the second tier of the dining room, then into the ballroom. The streamers were now all in fragments on the dance-floor and their rustling could be heard from the dining room as the couples swept them forward with their feet.

While Sangson was away a waiter brought two glasses of Italian Vermouth to the table, then laid the cutlery for a meal. Hellebore sipped his drink, and a few moments later Sangson returned.

Hellebore: They only seem to do the old dances. I've been waiting for the one-step. ~~and the one-step~~

~~Abba~~

Sangson: No, they don't play ragtime here. The band does <sup>Sir</sup> ~~the~~ Roger de Coverley and the Lancers if you ask them. You have to put in a

Sir /

request with one of the waiters.

Sir /  
 Hellebore: But do these French people know how to dance  
~~the~~ <sup>Sir</sup> Roger de Coverley and the Lancers?

Sangson: Some do.

Hellebore continued to stare down into the ballroom with a frown. They were silent. Sangson sipped his drink shyly, watching Hellebore.

Sangson: Do you prefer the new dances, then?

Hellebore: No, I like the old tunes. But I'd give anything to see young people dancing round that floor and enjoying themselves. I like the one-step ~~and the two-step~~ because young people do it.

Again they sat in silence, listening to the orchestra.

Sangson: Have I made you miserable this evening? I'm sorry I used those words about your killing me. I don't know why I said it or what I meant.

Hellebore: No, but the fact is you said it.

He turned towards Sangson slowly.

Hellebore: Listen to me, Sangson. You went out to Flanders because you wanted to. I didn't ask you to go. And in your place I'd never have gone. In your place I'd never have

joined up. My work comes first with me, and it always has done. I don't care if Jerry had won the War and then burnt my theatre down, my work still comes first. You'd never have caught me taking the trip to Flanders. If Edgar wanted to go out and risk his life, that was his business. I didn't ask either of you to go, and I don't owe you any thanks for winning the War.

Sangson (uncomfortably): We weren't fighting for you or anyone else. We weren't even fighting for our country.

Hellebore: You went out to cut fine figures, though.

Sangson: Well, that may be true.

Hellebore: If he'd come to me and asked me what to do, I should have said, do what you want to do - if you do that you'll only have yourself to blame. When I was fourteen years old I wanted to be a clown and get a first turn, and I became a clown and I got a first turn. I'm the sort that gets what he wants. You've only got to look at my chin - it belongs to a man who gets what he wants. (Putting his hands on the table) And the same with my hands. I never came along and asked you to

live my life for me, and I'm not going to live yours for you. Every man's free to do what he can in this world.

He watched Sangson in silence.

Hellebore: You let the War Office push you about, and you've only yourself to blame. If you didn't like the War you ought to have been a conchy. It's no good being a conchy afterwards.

Sangson: It wasn't against my conscience to kill Germans. I volunteered to do it. I wanted to do it.

Hellebore: Why?

Sangson: I think I volunteered to see men die, to see their blood and hear them scream. I only volunteered when I knew what kind of war it was, when I heard about the explosives and the casualty rate. I couldn't bear that there should be so much suffering and ~~me~~<sup>me</sup> not there. I wanted to suffer.

me /  
s / Hellebore (shaking his head in wonder): I can't understand it. What made you want to suffer? I can't understand it. Why go and throw away your life? - a decent young man like you?

Sangson (with a shrug): Oh, well, I would have had to go anyway.

Hellebore: But I can't understand it. Here you are working in Paris in a jewellers' shop when you could go back to England to-morrow if you wanted to and live a life of your own.

Sangson: No, the War killed my faith in - , well, it simply killed my faith.

Hellebore: How did it do that?

Sangson (after a pause): It taught me that at any minute the worst can happen. It seemed to kill my sense of having a future before me. After the War the world became a cold and desolate place for me. I needed protecting against it. And my work at the jeweller's shop does protect me. It's so simple. It needs no thought whatsoever.

Hellebore: (staring at him) How does it protect you?

Sangson: It gives my life a fixed order. I go to the shop soon after nine in the morning, I call on Signor Celida for lunch at half-past noon, and then I return home for a bath and aperitifs soon after five o'clock in the evening. I daren't live otherwise. I couldn't bear to have all day in which to remember my past. I couldn't bear freedom. I've become terrified of thinking, I suppose.

Hellebore: Then the War turned you into a child. Yes, you've got the look of a frightened child sometimes. What do you think about at your work, then?

Sangson (glancing away): Oh, I daydream.

Hellebore: But don't you ever want to do something else?

Sangson: Yes, I do, very often. But as far as ambition goes I'm like a man who worships the dawn and always sleeps through it.

He looked down at the second tier of the dining-room and watched a man and woman rise from their table and go towards the archway.

Sangson: Look. Those are my friends.

Hellebore: The Italian couple?

Sangson: Yes.

Hellebore watched them go down the staircase to the ballroom and begin dancing. The woman was dark and well-built, and she appeared to be in her late thirties. Her husband was a small, slim man with a pale face and hair grey at the edges. His clothes were very neat, and he moved deftly.

Sangson: They've been kind to me. Without them I shouldn't be living in Paris. Giordano and I met in Belgium in 1916, and we became friends. Then we met again in the last few

months of the War and he invited me here. They have a large house in the Rue du Bois de Boulogne.

Hellebore: She's a fine-looking young woman.

Sangson: They're not a happy couple. (With a quick glance at Hellebore) They both want a child, and he can't give her one.

Hellebore: Can't?

Sangson: No. He'll never be able to.

Hellebore: Did he have an accident in the War, then?

Sangson (shyly): No. He has been to the doctors, and it's true he's sterile. No doubt there are explanations. It isn't merely that they'd like a child: they feel they must have one. She yearns for a child every day. And in a few years' time she'll be too old. Her body cries out for a child, the more so because she feels she might never have one. And of course the idea of his being sterile horrifies Giordano. He'd be willing to let her sleep with someone else just to get the child.

Hellebore: (quietly) Well, then, there's the solution. Why doesn't she go and sleep with someone else?

Sangson: It's so difficult for them.....

He turned and watched the couple dancing.

Sangson: She has her religion, and sleeping with someone else is a mortal sin.

Hellebore (with a shrug): It depends how badly she needs the child.

Sangson: She doesn't want to hurt Giordano. She insists they choose a father together. They've waited too long, I think. She has dreamed about it too much. They've talked it over too much. Giordano knew he was sterile five years ago. They've waited all this time, presumably for the right father... Oh, it's a very miserable business, believe me. The more they wait for the right man the less likely are they to find him.

Hellebore: What about yourself? You could have slept with her. You aren't sterile. You're decent-looking.

Sangson (a little taken aback): It would seem like incest, I suppose. I live in the same house, and ever since I came to Paris Maria has treated me like a son. (With a smile) Perhaps I sometimes look to them like a frightened child, as I do to you. When I came to Paris I needed a little nursing. No: perhaps

they'll never be able to choose. She may be incapable of being unfaithful to him, and he of allowing it. I often wonder whether they are too devoted to each other.

A waiter brought champagne and an ice-box to the side of their table.

Hellebore (nodding slowly): Yes. It's a miserable business.

The dance ended. Most of the couples went to the velvet seats at the side of the ballroom, and three or four waiters clad in white hurried down from the dining room to take their orders. As Maria Celida returned to her table she looked towards the minstrel's gallery and noticed Sangson. She waved her hand, then pointed him out to her husband. He bowed and smiled.

Hellebore: (watching them) They seem out of place here.

Sangson: Yes, they look as though they are thinking something out between themselves. Yet they're rich shopkeepers like all the other people here.

Hellebore: They must have confided in you a lot.

Sangson: Yes, they've been honest with me.

Hellebore: But they're very fond of you. They trust you. I can see that.

Sangson: (gazing down at the Celida's) We've laid our

sufferings honestly before each other.

Perhaps that's why.

The waiter drew their champagne from the ice and turned away from the table. He crouched with the bottle between his knees and opened it. Hellebore yawned.

Sangson: Are you tired?

Hellebore: A little. But I'm not going back to that room of mine in a hurry. It reminds me of death, after all your talk. A young fellow like you ought to have something better to talk about. (Taking up his champagne, sipping it). But I like hearing you talk. None has talked to me like that since I left the circus seventeen years ago. We used to sit and talk in the caravans at night.

Another waiter brought the first course of their dinner, and they began eating.

Sangson: I saw the rosary in your room. Are you religious?

Hellebore: No. That was a present from Albert Lorraine. (With respect) He's very superstitious.

Sangson: Who's Lorraine?

Hellebore: My manager for continental tours. No, I've never been in need of religion myself.

Sangson filled Hellebore's glass with champagne.

Hellebore: You must meet some of these people. (Struck by the idea). You must meet Lorraine for one thing, then Eliza. They'd like you. Come along to the theatre tomorrow afternoon and we'll meet a few of them.

Sangson (a little awkwardly): But Mademoiselle Berger...

Hellebore: Ah, of course, you know Francine.

Sangson: She tells me the rehearsals are going to be rushed. Perhaps I ought to come next week.

Hellebore: Yes, it's true the rehearsals are going to be rushed. (Excitedly) I've come from England with only a day to spare. I wanted to slip into the show at the last minute. My dress-rehearsal is tomorrow afternoon. I didn't want to break the spell. I would rather have begun my rehearsal tonight as soon as I arrived. Those five years off the stage made me very impatient. (Looking up at Sangson<sup>n</sup>) But that won't prevent us having a cup of tea together in the dressing room. No, let's meet in the Crimson Tower. That's behind the Dress Circle. It's a crimson room we use for rehearsals. Call at the Box Office first and find out whether I've left a message for you. I'll have

finished my dress rehearsal by five o'clock.

Come at four o'clock.

Sangson (politely): Very well, then. I shall look forward to that.

Hellebore: Lorraine is the son of an American businessman. I think he's going to like you. His mother was French, a very religious woman. She brought him back to France when he was fourteen. Then he came into his father's money when he was a young man and invested some of it in a theatre. In 1889 he built his own theatre, and that's where I'm going to perform tomorrow night, - the Théâtre de la Fête. Of course, nowadays he owns four or five theatres in Paris, but that's his favourite. He puts on all the biggest shows at the Théâtre de la Fête. He's putting six hundred thousand francs into this show of mine tomorrow night, and I doubt whether he has spent more on a single show in his life. Yet I haven't been near a professional stage for five years. (Drinking back his champagne) He's one of the richest men in France, but he'll never miss going to Church.

I think he worries too much. But that's because he isn't married. He needs a woman behind him, though I should think a woman would find him a little too fussy. He likes his two baths every day, and his fingernails are always just so. I've never seen a crease in his suit. He's terrified of being ill, and of course he never is ill. He takes good care to look after himself.

Sangson: Who was the other person you mentioned? A young woman.

Hellebore: Eliza. You'll like her. She's a special friend of mine. Now Lorraine's keen on her. She has a scar down one side of her face which I think makes her look all the prettier. Have you ever heard of Nidok?

Sangson: Who?

Hellebore: Nidok the Illusionist.

Sangson: No.

Hellebore: Well, he's in the show tomorrow night. And Eliza is one of his assistants. She gets sawn in half, and that sort of thing. She's a fine, sturdy girl. You ought to see her among the tigers. She can do anything with them.

Sangson: The tigers?

Hellebore: Yes, Nidok's tigers. They are part of his act. That's how she got the scar. She was mauled during a performance about twelve years ago, when she was a girl of twenty-two. All the tigers were on their perches, and one of them got angry with Nidok. He had his back turned and the tiger tried to claw at his shoulder. It missed and then looked as though it was going to leap on Nidok from behind. Eliza ran across and gave it a smack on the mouth with her whip. At the same time she shouted, and Nidok jumped out of the way. The tiger turned on her. It knocked the whip out of her hand and caught her on the right cheek with one of its claws.

Sangson: How horrible!

Hellebore: Now that tiger never gave any trouble before and it has never given any trouble since. Every day it watches Eliza come into the cage, and it never stirs. She can do what she likes with that animal. It licks her hand and lets her tickle its ears. Animals can be funny like that. This one was born in captivity, and they're always more dangerous than the

wild ones. They suddenly turn. The wildness comes out of them, and then it's all over. If you saw that tiger now you'd call her a docile animal. She'll be on that stage tomorrow night. I wonder if she remembers turning on Eliza like that?

He took the champagne and filled Sangson's glass, then his own.

Sangson: Have you ever had an accident in the circus?

Hellebore: Yes, I've had a good many little falls. But the worst accident I ever had was when I was doing an act called The Fins with my wife. Now I had that accident because I was unhappy. There was no other reason. I wasn't giving myself to the work. It was stilted work. There was nothing versatile in it. I always say a man's work is what he needs to do, not what he's got to do. This was plain acrobatics and trapeze-work. My heart wasn't in it. I fell and broke my leg. I was half-way up the rope ladder to the high-wire and I slipped. My right foot went between the rung I lost my grip and fell backwards. The ladder swung out a foot or two into the ring, otherwise I should have fallen straight into

the audience. I fell on one leg about twelve feet. (Leaning forward eagerly.) You see, I was angry with my work. I was ashamed of it. I used to sulk for hours on end. I was like a prisoner to this woman. She thought I was in the circus for a job of work. She didn't understand the circus was my life. Now since I've been a clown with an act of my own I've hardly had a fall to speak of. I never have to think what I'm doing. My body wants the work, and therefore it obeys me all the time. When I was working with her I couldn't look people in the eyes. I remember that. I was ashamed of myself, you see. It wasn't my work. Yet another man would say the same about clowning. He'd say it was dirty work. Well, it is sometimes.

He looked to his left at the table where the Celida's were sitting, on the lower tier.

Hellebore: Do they come here often?

Sangson: Who?

Hellebore: Your Italian friends.

Sangson: Oh, yes, they consider it the fashionable thing to do. They come here twice or three times a week. They'd look on themselves as

dull people if they didn't. (Looking about at the other members) You'd be surprised what illegal business goes on between some of these people. Giordano has done a bit of smuggling in his time across the Italian border. Most of them deserve a prison sentence.

Hellebore: I can well believe it.

Sangson: Paris is no place for Maria. Her father was a small farmer in Tuscany. She was born and brought up there. You can see by the way she danced just now that she's a country woman. She doesn't try to dance elegantly like the other women here.

Sangson sipped his champagne slowly, and Hellebore watched him as he did so.

Hellebore: Are you fond of the drink?

Sangson: (pointing to his glass) This, you mean?

Hellebore: No. I mean, do you drink a lot?

Sangson: No. I very rarely have more than a few glasses of wine.

Hellebore: My father took to drink. He was finished for the circus after that. He tried his luck at the stagedoor<sup>s</sup> selling songs at a dollar a number, but no good came of it.

s/

a / t /

That was when I was fourteen. He used to be a fine acrobat in his day. Of course, those were the days when the circus used to ride through your town in a long procession, and the day when the circus turned up was a real holiday. The band used to go in front, then the horses and ponies and elephants all spruced up. There used to be big golden tableaux on the carts with the trapeze-girls on top, and you could see the lions in their cages. The clowns used to walk alongside; they used to fool about and give sweets to the kiddies. You don't see that kind of thing nowadays. The circus my father was in went round the same circuit for thirty years, between 1862 and 1892. It was always the same circuit up to Leeds and back again. The circus could be a rough life, you know. We had to be careful of the gangs. Sometimes they'd try to burn the tents down.

Three or four waiters went across the ballroom gathering up the paper streamers. The plush seats on either side were now crowded with people waiting for the next dance. When the floor was again clear the orchestra struck up into a polka, and most of them moved down to dance.

Hellebore watched the dance closely, tapping his feet to the music. When they had eaten Sangson called a wine-waiter to the table and ordered cognac. Hellebore leaned back with a smile.

Hellebore: I've eaten like a trooper. It shows you I couldn't have eaten much at the hotel tonight. I was nervous. They asked me to give a little speech. I didn't feel at home. I expected something quite different when I got off the boat.

Sangson: Well, now we've eaten I ought to ask Maria and Giordano to join us here. What do you think?

Hellebore: I should be delighted. How's the time?

Sangson: A little after two o'clock. (Looking into his eyes) Would you rather go back now?

Hellebore (emphatically): No, no. Let me meet your friends.

Sangson rose and was just about to leave the table when a waiter came with cognac. He drank it standing in one gulp. Hellebore watched him, then did the same. They put their glasses back on the table simultaneously, and as they did so they glanced at each other and laughed.

Sangson went down to the second tier and spoke to Maria and Giordano Celida. They turned and looked up with

surprise at Hellebore. Giordano Celida peered at him and smiled as Sangson talked to them. Then he nodded and rose, and all three came up the narrow gangway towards Hellebore's table. Hellebore was still laughing a little to himself. He got up and pushed his chair back noisily, then went a little way to meet them, his hand outstretched.

Sangson introduced them, and a waiter brought two more chairs to the table.

Giordano (genially): We have a box for tomorrow night, Monsieur.

Hellebore: I'm delighted.

Maria (with a smile): Tonight, my dear.

Giordano: Of course! (Neatly pulling back his sleeve and glancing at his watch) In eighteen hours' time.

Hellebore: Don't remind me.

Maria and Giordano laughed politely.

Giordano turned and beckoned to one of the waiters who was standing on the lower tier.

Giordano: I saw one of your performances in Italy.

Hellebore: Where would that have been?

Giordano: Ah, of course, you don't remember it. It was a long time ago, eleven years ago, in Rimini.

Hellebore: But I do remember. (Turning to Sangson) That was my first continental tour.

A waiter stood at Giordano Celida's side, bowing respectfully.

Giordano: Now we shall celebrate this honour. (Laying his hand on Hellebore's arm) Because you understand it is an honour meeting you here. I always thought you were a little...a little magical. But here you are in the flesh. So - (taking a wine-list from the waiter) - we shall celebrate. (With a quick, methodical glance at Hellebore) You like champagne?

Hellebore nodded, watching him. Giordano selected a vintage, and the waiter left hurriedly.

Hellebore: Have you always lived in Paris?

Giordano: No, Monsieur. We came away from Italy in 1904.

Hellebore: What made you want to leave?

Giordano (moving closer to him): There wasn't a big enough living to be had. Both of us love our country but - (rubbing his thumb and forefinger together) - it was a question of bread and butter, you understand. My idea was to go to America. I had just enough money. We were both young. Maria was just turned twenty-one. But there! Maria - well, you know what women are!

Maria: I hated the thought of going to America.

is /

Giordano (smiling at her): She <sup>is</sup> the daughter of a Tuscan farmer, and it was all I could do to get her here. We had ten years in Toulouse. We were in partnership with another Italian, - not a very successful partnership. Then we came to Paris a few months before War broke out. I managed to put the business on its feet in the first year of the War, - though I don't know how.

Maria (to Hellebore): By working very hard, believe me.

Giordano: It went well during the War, and now we have a very fashionable little business. And one of our clients is a gentleman called Monsieur Albert Lorraine who (with a little bow) I believe is known to you.

Hellebore: Of course, of course.

Giordano: (flattered) He often visits us... Yes, I saw you perform in Rimini eleven years ago. I remember your name outside the theatre: ELLEBORO. But I never thought I would ever come face to face with you. (To Sangson) You called at Mr. Finstanley's hotel, then?

Sangson: Yes.

Maria: You should have told me before. Then we could all have had dinner at home.

A waiter brought champagne and fresh glasses to their table.

Maria (to Sangson): We were so surprised to see you.

Did you walk down?

Sangson: Yes. I left the house soon after eleven and walked down to the Rue de Rivoli.

Maria: You could have borrowed the car. We could quite easily have left it.

The waiter poured the champagne, and Giordano raised his glass.

Giordano (to Hellebore): A health, then.

Maria and Sangson raised their glasses.

Giordano: In honour of Hellebore, wishing him success tomorrow night - (correcting himself with a smile) - tonight.

Hellebore raised his glass first to Maria, then to Giordano, and they all drank.

Hellebore: Thank you both.

The polka came to an end and there was the sound of applause from the ballroom. Maria and Giordano turned. All the couples who had been dancing remained on the floor to applaud the orchestra.

Maria (with a laugh, to Hellebore): They want it again!

Giordano: She tires me out dancing.

Silence fell in the ballroom, and then the crowd

sighed. The conductor raised his baton under a yellow spotlight from the minstrel's gallery, and the orchestra struck up into a second polka.

Maria (eagerly): It's another one!

Giordano and Sangson laughed at her, and, seeing them laugh, she put her hand over her mouth. There were now many couples on the dance-floor, and the light stamping of their feet could be heard above the orchestra.

Giordano (laying his hand on Hellebore's arm): Dance with my wife. Please. Show her how you dance.

Hellebore: I should be delighted.

S/  
He got up and bowed to Maria. Together they went down to the crowded ballroom. Giordano and Sangson watched them as they took up the dance.

Giordano: What made you call on him?

Sangson: (still watching Hellebore): I don't know why I went, Giordano. I'd already gone to bed. I got up again just after eleven and walked down to the hotel. Francine told me which hotel it would be.

Giordano: Does he know about her?

Sangson: Know what?

Giordano: I mean, what did you tell him about her?

Sangson (understanding): Oh, I said we were friends, - no more.

Giordano: And you talked about Edgar?

Sangson nodded sadly.

Giordano: I expect he was glad to see his son's only friend.

Sangson: He seemed to have forgotten a lot about Edgar.

Giordano: Well, three years is time enough to forget. I expect you made him feel a little miserable. But I'm glad you saw him. Maria thinks it must be a relief to you.. You needed to talk these things over, though I sometimes wonder whether it was wise to go back over the past like that. (Sipping his champagne) You look very tired, my dear boy.

Sangson: Yes, I worked hard today. I stayed at the shop until after seven.

Giordano: Oh, by the way, did the assignment for Udine go?

Sangson: Yes. They ought to be there by Thursday of next week. I expect they'll go by aeroplane.

Giordano: And you included my little personal message?

Sangson nodded.

Giordano: Good. One never knows, - I may be going to Italy soon.

He turned and gazed at Hellebore and Maria as they danced.

Giordano: That's how I like to see a man dance, with

his shoulders firm and straight. Look, he's as light as a feather. (Glancing at Sangson) He's shorter than I would have thought. He looks taller on the stage, - at least as I remember him, though that was eleven years ago. Perhaps it's due to the floppy clothes he wears on the stage. He doesn't look sad now, does he?

Hellebore was laughing as he danced, and at every fourth beat he hopped particularly high.

Sangson: This is the first time he has left England since the War broke out.

Giordano (gazing down at Hellebore with a smile): Then I expect he means to enjoy himself.

As soon as the dance came to an end Hellebore and Maria returned to the table, laughing and breathless.

Maria (to Giordano): Hadn't we better go back to the table, if only for a few minutes?

Giordano glanced down at the table on the lower tier where they had been sitting.

Giordano: Not yet, my dear. We'll have a little more champagne, then go. (To Hellebore) We have three or four friends down there. We mustn't neglect them altogether.

He took the bottle of champagne and filled Maria's

glass. He then offered it to Hellebore, who shook his head.

Hellebore: No, thank you. I'm merry enough, thank you.

Giordano chuckled and held the bottle up to the light, squinting at it. It was a quarter full.

Giordano: Come, you must have another glass. We must finish the bottle before we go back to our own table. Yes? Of course!

He filled Hellebore's glass. Then they all touched glasses and drank.

Giordano (to Maria): The next dance ought to be for Henry.

He looks so lonely sitting there.

Maria (with a tender glance at Sangson): Yes, I shall take him down to the ballroom and whirl him round. He looks so sad.

Sangson: I'm only feeling a little tired.

Giordano: He stayed at the shop until after seven this evening. (Glancing first at Maria, then at Hellebore) And a little more champagne would do you both good. You look hot, both of you. Yes, I think so.

He beckoned to one of the waiters and ordered more champagne.

Maria: Mr. Finstanley has already refused it, Giordano.

Giordano: Oh, mere politeness! Do you want to be

off home, then?

Maria: No, please! Let's make a night of it!

Giordano (triumphantly, to Hellebore and Sangson): Shall we, then?

Maria: We can all go back to the house together for an early breakfast at dawn!

Giordano (to Hellebore): Does that suit you?

Hellebore (nodding): You are both very kind.

The orchestra began a slow waltz, and Maria got up. She touched Sangson's hair lightly, putting it back from his forehead, and together they went down into the ballroom. A waiter brought the second bottle of champagne, and Giordano moved to a chair at Hellebore's side. He filled their glasses.

Hellebore: You came to know Sangson during the War, I believe?

Giordano: Yes, my friend. Has he made you feel sad? Has he brought back the past?

Hellebore (with a shrug, staring down at the table): He has suffered too much. It isn't right.

Giordano: Yes, he did suffer. I feel like a father towards him, you know, just as you must have felt towards Edgar. I met him first in 1916, and we made friends very quickly. Then I met him again towards the end of the War after

your son's death, and he was a different young man altogether, - helpless, quite helpless. He said he would never go back to England, I don't know why. I wanted to give him a home, and I knew Maria and I could give him a home. So I invited him to this house of mine in Paris. We have no children of our own, you see. I felt he needed a home more than anything else. We gave him a couple of rooms, and I found him a little work in one of our shops. (Watching Sangson and Maria in the ballroom) He is so very polite, you know. I can send him to talk trade with business agents from all over the world, and I can always be confident that he'll give a better impression than I ever could. (With a glance at Hellebore) He's an educated young man. I'm a shopkeeper. An education counts for a great deal these days.

Hellebore: I like listening to him talk.

Giordano: Yes, he can talk well.

They gazed down into the ballroom in silence.

Giordano: He liked war, you know.

Hellebore: Liked it?

Giordano: Yes. He liked the fighting. I think he was a good fighter. He's lost now the War's over.

Hellebore: Yes, he talks like a lost man.

Giordano (with a sigh): All the War meant for me was my separation from Maria. We were too much in love with each other, perhaps. I used to yearn to be with her until I was almost mad. I was in the French army for three years. I lost weight. I had skin-trouble. I caught malaria, and one thing after another. I'm not a fighter. War isn't for people like myself.. War is for young men with nothing to lose.

Hellebore: Was Sangson like that?

Giordano: Well, what had he got to lose?

Hellebore nodded slowly, then glanced up at Giordano.

Hellebore: Did you ever meet my son?

Giordano: No, my friend.

Maria and Sangson returned to the table before the dance ended, and Giordano got up.

Giordano (to Maria): Now we really must go back to our table. (To Hellebore) For a few minutes, - would you mind?

Hellebore (rising): Not at all. (To Maria) But we must have another dance or two before dawn.

Maria laughed shyly.

Giordano: The champagne is there for you to drink.

They returned to their table, which was at the moment empty.

Maria: (looking into the ballroom) The others are dancing.

I can see them.

Giordano: Would you prefer the lounge?

Maria (sitting down): Oh no, my dear. I like to watch the dancing. (Glancing back at Hellebore's table)

Is he as you remember him?

Giordano: Well, of course, they have their faces painted. He's shorter than I would have expected.

Maria: Who is this Lorraine you mentioned?

Giordano: His manager. He often comes to the shop, though I've never seen him myself. Perhaps you remember that fine little crucifix I picked up last year, - a gold frame inset with rubies. He bought it and had it clipped onto one of his rosaries. He's a shrewd man, I believe. He certainly knows the value of money. And his house is full of the most fabulous things, - so they say in the trade.

Maria: Is he richer than Mr. Finstanley, then?

Giordano: But of course. I should think Mr. Finstanley is a good deal poorer than I am.

He gazed at Maria thoughtfully.

Giordano: Yet on the whole perhaps he 's the richer man. He doesn't have to keep on the right side of

people to make his profits, as I do. He doesn't have to entertain people he dislikes. He doesn't have to serve rude customers. Lorraine does all the scrambling for him, - all the investing and worrying and speculating. It must be wonderful, my dear, not to have to think about money all the time. Imagine what it must be like to feel the money piling up while you walk the streets or go to rehearsal!

Maria (a little pained by this): But aren't you proud of your work? You chose it yourself. Nobody forced you into it.

Giordano: Yes, I chose my work and I enjoy doing it. But I have to be thinking about money all the time. We live very lavishly, you know. The money doesn't come of its own accord, though sometimes you behave as though it does. I have to be watching the market all the time and exchanging this investment for that. I have to keep an eye on the rival firms, and I have to open up new contacts in foreign countries. It seems to me I never have a moment's peace from money, even when we come out to enjoy ourselves. You wouldn't believe me if I told you how much we spend on enter-

taining people, on dinner-parties and visit to the theatre and cocktails and trips to the country, from one end of the year to the other. But I can tell you it gives me quite a headache now and again.

Maria:

But Mr. Finstanley has a lot of business, too. There must be contracts to sign, for one thing. And don't you remember Henry telling us how lavishly he used to live before the War, how he used to build houses and then get tired of them as soon as they were finished? Well, there are your mortgages and loans and investments.

Giordano:

Yes, but it isn't the same. He could entertain all the most influential people in Europe, but that wouldn't help him give a better performance on the stage. He isn't obliged to think about money all the time.

Maria:

Well, someone has to do the thinking, otherwise there wouldn't be such a thing as trade, and where would his food and costumes and houses come from?

Giordano (with a smile): I agree with you, my dear. I'm only saying I envy him a little. I envy him his powers, you see.

Maria:

Well, you've made a success of your work, -

that's one thing.

Giordano: But sometimes I do get tired of it. I admire a man who isn't on the make all the time.

The slow waltz came to an end, and Hellebore turned to Sangson.

Hellebore: This is my real welcome back to Paris. I'm beginning to feel among friends. I didn't feel among friends at the dinner party this evening. Most of them were tired. They had left the theatre in the middle of rehearsals, and most of them had gone without a bite to eat since the early afternoon. That was Lorraine's doing, of course. He wanted something dignified. He wanted it described in all the newspapers. I like your friends. They're easy to get on with.

Sangson held the champagne bottle up to the light.

Hellebore: Empty.

Sangson (calling to one of the waiters): Deux cognacs!

Hellebore: In the old days we used to take hansom cabs round the West End after the show. We used to talk and sing in each others' bedrooms until the dawn came through. We used to have suppers on the stage with our make-up on. We used to play tricks on each other during the show. I wonder whether it'll ever be the

same again? While the War was on I never went near the stage. I had no managers and no cronies. I used to see a few friends now and again, but somehow the real old-time artistes disappeared during the War. All I wanted to do was to keep away from the theatre; I didn't want to go near London. I felt too sad. None of my old pals were there. No, I didn't feel comfortable at the hotel tonight, except with Eliza. Perhaps when we've all worked together again things will be like they used to be.

A waiter brought their cognac. They touched glasses and drank it in one gulp.

Hellebore: That's one for old times.

He reeled a little in his chair and gripped the table firmly with both hands.

Hellebore: (with a loose smile) I did murder Edgar.

Sangson: (startling) Are you drunk? Your eyes are very bloodshot.

Hellebore: (vehemently) I murdered him.

He stared at Sangson for a moment, then took his hands from the table and leaned back with a smile.

Hellebore (quietly): I'm drunk. I'm not used to all this. I never touch it.

Sangson: Do you feel sick?

Hellebore: No.

Sangson: Do you feel you might fall?

Hellebore: I feel dizzy, and very sleepy.

Sangson looked down at the second tier where the Celidas were sitting. They had now been joined by their guests, and one of them was watching Hellebore.

Sangson: You must sit still. You must try and sit still, and talk as little as possible.

Hellebore frowned and stared at the table. He swayed a little and tried to look at Sangson.

Hellebore: Why?

Sangson: People are watching you. I'll get you some tonic water and a cachet. (Speaking very distinctly) But meanwhile you must try and sit very still. Try not to fall.

Hellebore: Who's watching me?

Sangson: Maria's friends. They all know who you are by now.

Hellebore: There you are, I'm still a statue. Wherever I go they treat me like a statue. You can see for yourself. It's their fault. It isn't my fault. I'll be alright. (Leaning across the table and grasping Sangson's arm) I'll be alright. It was that brandy. Click.

Sangson (rising): I'll get the tonic water. Then we must go straight back to the hotel. You've got

to sleep. I can take Giordano's car.

Hellebore (shaking his head very slowly): No. I won't go back, because I wouldn't sleep. I'm going to dance with that woman. I said I was going to dance with that woman and I'm going to.

Sangson (with a sigh): Let me get you the tonic water, then.

He went down to the second tier. As he turned left towards the lounge Maria called and beckoned to him. He went to her table and bowed to the other guests.

Hellebore watched him, his eyes narrowed. Maria said something to Sangson, and he nodded awkwardly.

Some minutes later he returned to Hellebore's table with a waiter.

Sangson (in Hellebore's ear): Luckily you don't look very drunk.

The waiter put a glass of tonic water before Hellebore and departed.

Sangson (sitting down again): Maria wants me to get her wrap.

She left it at home. So I shall be taking the car. (Hesitantly) She wants you to join their little party while I'm gone. Will you?

Hellebore nodded and sipped the tonic water.

Sangson: Or should I take you back to the hotel?

Hellebore: No, I'll be alright. It's just a turn.

Sangson: Your eyes are so bloodshot. (Giving Hellebore a tablet). Swallow that with the water. It won't make you sick?

Hellebore: No, I don't feel sick. I feel dizzy.

Sangson: I'll wait until you're better. Then you must go to the lavatory and smarten yourself up. You've spilt champagne down your shirt-front, and your hair needs combing. When you join Maria's party refuse the first dance or two, until you are feeling really well.

Hellebore (watching him with a smile): You look like a school-teacher.

Scene 2: The same, two hours later.

The dining-room was now deserted. A few couples were dancing, but most of them were sitting talking and drinking on the seats at the side. All the lights were lower than before.

Sangson stood with Maria's fur wrap over his arm looking down into the ballroom. He stared in astonishment at Maria and Hellebore as they danced swiftly round the floor, faster than any of the other couples and more reckless. Hellebore whirled her round and round on the same spot (as the dance ended.) Maria fell back giddily, but he caught her in time with a laugh.

They turned, and Maria waved to Sangson. She came up the staircase, smiling at him. Hellebore came after her, sweating and panting.

Maria (taking the wrap): Thank you, my dear. We've been dancing all this time.

She kissed him lightly on the cheek.

Sangson: Where's Giordano?

Maria: He went back home.

Sangson: How long ago?

Maria: About an hour ago.

Sangson: He must have walked, then, because I had the car.

Maria ; No, he took a cab. (Taking his hand and

squeezing it) You mustn't worry about thing  
my dear.

He shrugged, and she went towards the lounge.

He drew Hellebore to one of the tables near the white arch,  
and they sat down.

Sangson (in a soft voice): You've won her, then.

Hellebore: What do you mean?

Sangson: She has chosen you.

Hellebore shook his head with a smile.

Hellebore: We had a dance or two. We had a good time.  
She's a lovely little dancer. That doesn't  
mean anything. Giordano went home of his  
own free will.

Sangson: She has chosen you as the father of her child.  
I know her better than you do.

Hellebore looked at him thoughtfully, wiping his  
brow.

Sangson: She'll ask you about it tonight or tomorrow.  
Or perhaps Giordano will.

Hellebore: To give her a child?

Sangson: As soon as I told her you were coming to  
Paris she began asking me questions about you.  
(With a smile) Well, you're a famous man,  
so it'll be a kind of immaculate conception,  
which is what she's after. Would you do it?

Hellebore (avoiding his gaze): Anybody with a heart would.

She's a pretty woman. And I expect she knows a trick or two.

Sangson: Would you do it, then?

Hellebore: Yes. But I wonder what it would be like, in cold blood like that...

Sangson: Has she mentioned anything of the kind to you?

Hellebore: No. We've been dancing. We've hardly said a word to each other.

Sangson: There you are, then. The blood wasn't cold while you danced, was it? Why should it be at any other time?

A waiter came to the table and put two glass of cognac before them.

Sangson: Did you order this?

Hellebore: No. Maria said she'd send something in.

Hellebore drank his cognac and got up. He swayed a little at the edge of the table, then steadied himself against the arch.

Hellebore: Excuse me.

Sangson: Are you alright?

Hellebore: Yes. I'm only going for my coat and hat.

He went to the door leading out of the dining-room on the second tier. He turned in the half-light and waved to Sangson, then went out.

Another dance began, and Maria returned from the lounge.

Sangson (rising): He'll be back soon, I expect.

Maria: Shall we dance while he's gone?

Sangson (impatiently): No, Maria. I'm sick of this place. I want a walk. Come for a walk.

He took her arm and tried to bring her away from the table.

e/  
Maria: No, Henry! What about H<sup>e</sup>lillebore?

Sangson: We'll come back for him. I only want a short walk. But I shall be sick otherwise.

Maria: No, I'll wait here. You go, and we'll wait for you here.

Sangson (with a sigh): Alright, then!

Maria (seeing his expression): No, I'll come, if it's a very short walk, and if you really want me to.

Sangson: I do.

He drew the wrap round her shoulders and they left the club.

Scene 3: The streets of Paris, a little later.

There were low, dark clouds, and the street-lamps were still alight. One side of the sky was clearer, where the dawn was coming, and a chill wind was beginning to blow. The streets were deserted and quiet, apart from a hansom cab here and there.

Sangson and Maria walked slowly down the Rue St. Honoré towards the Place Vendôme, arm in arm.

Sangson: You sent me home for the wrap so that you could be alone with him.

Maria: No, I didn't. I really wanted the wrap. I began to feel cold between the dances.

Sangson: Anyway, you got what you were after. Why can't you leave my friends alone? We went there for a quiet meal together. I was afraid you'd do this.

Maria: But what have I done? I got tired of Giordano's friends. They were all pigs, and Hellebore is a wonderful dancer.

Sangson: But you've chosen him, haven't you?

Maria: Chosen him?

Sangson: Yes. You've chosen him to give you a child, haven't you?

Maria: I don't know, I don't know.

Sangson: You've chosen him because he has a famous

name, - the cheapest possible reason. You chose him immediately you saw him in the flesh. In fact, you were astounded to find that he'd got flesh at all!

Maria (half stopping, in tears): That isn't true. Why are you so angry?

Sangson: You've chosen him, haven't you? You're going to ask him to give you a child, aren't you? (frantically, gripping her arm) Tell me, Maria!

Maria: I can't answer you. I haven't thought about it!

Sangson: Well, why have you waited all this time? You've been waiting five years, and soon you'll be too old. Why don't you let me do it, Maria? Let me give you a child, Maria!

He took her by the shoulders and tried to pull her towards him. They swayed together on the pavement.

Maria: Henry! Henry! What's the matter? For God's sake tell me!

Sangson (his head bent forward, sobbing and screaming):

I could do it! I could do it, Maria!

Hellebore turned into the Champs Elysees and went to the middle of the ~~road~~ <sup>huge, deserted avenue.</sup> He carried his top hat, and his black overcoat was open. He lifted his feet high,

huge, deserted/  
avenue.

as if there were steps to mount in front of him. He stood still, swaying a little, with a frown. ~~He~~  
~~He~~

He reeled, then ran forward in a helpless, headlong rush, trying to stop himself falling. His top hat slipped out of his hand onto the road and rolled over on its brim. He bent down and moved towards it, his arm stretched out. He fell forward onto his knees and crawled to the hat. He put it on the back of his head and slowly lifted himself up. He began walking towards the Arc de Triomphe.

As he walked he closed his eyes and smiled, and began singing at the top of his voice:

Bon soir, old thing, cheerio, chin-chin,  
Na-poo, toodleoo, goodbye-ee!

IV

\*\*\*\*\*

^/c 1  
Scene 1: Hellebore's apartment at the Hôtel de la Reine on the morning of Easter Saturday, 1920. About fifteen minutes to ten.

The curtains were still drawn in Hellebore's bedroom, and he lay asleep on his bed. He was still fully dressed, and his overcoat was torn from the shoulder down to the middle of his back. He lay on his stomach, breathing very deeply. On the floor, at the foot of the bed, was an eiderdown.

Albert Lorraine entered the drawing room and looked about him. He wore a dark morning suit with a carnation in his button-hole. He called out "Jack!" then went across to the bedroom. He opened the door and gasped with surprise when he caught sight of Hellebore in the darkness. He quickly pulled the curtains back and sat down on the bed at Hellebore's side. He bent forward to have a better look at his face. He noticed the torn overcoat and gazed at it with horror. He then went into the bathroom and returned with a tumbler of water. He flicked the water gently into Hellebore's eyes, and after a few moments Hellebore started up and stared about him., almost knocking the tumbler out of his hand.

Lorraine (in a soft voice): Shall I call the nurse?

Hellebore shook his head.

Lorraine: Our own, I mean.

Hellebore: No, Albert.

Lorraine gave him a towel for his face. He pulled up the eiderdown from the floor and put it round Hellebore's shoulders.

Lorraine: The hall porter rang me last night and told me you'd left the hotel. You look very ill, Jack.

Hellebore lay back on his pillow with a frown and put his hand to his head.

Hellebore: Did the porter see me?

Lorraine: Yes, he saw you go out.

Hellebore (irritated): No. Did he see me come back?

Lorraine: No. You must have been very drunk. Look at your overcoat.

He lifted a piece of the torn overcoat which lay under Hellebore's shoulder.

Hellebore (peering at Lorraine): Look at you, with your flower. You look like a tallyman's ink-bottle.

Lorraine: Well, I had this morning planned. But now we shall have to postpone.

Hellebore: Have you any tablets for my head?

Lorraine: I want to see you in a bath, Jack, then we must go to the theatre. Postponements are complicated. There is a great deal to be

done. Conferences have got to be called, and contracts prolonged, and a new show has got to be rehearsed at short notice.

Hellebore: Help me down, then.

He put one foot over the side of the bed, then the other. He sat for a moment on the edge with his head in his hands.

Lorraine: A postponement of two weeks would be fair.  
Let me help you to the bathroom.

Hellebore put an arm round his shoulder and together they went to the bathroom.

Lorraine: Now you must tell me what happened.

Hellebore sat huddled at the side of the bath, and Lorraine ran the hot water.

Hellebore: A young fellow called. I was just hopping into bed. His name was Sangson. Have you heard about him? He's a friend of my son's.  
(Glancing up drowsily) Do I look drunk?

Lorraine: Your eyes are very bloodshot, and you look paler than I've ever seen you. I ought to call a nurse, I really ought to.

Hellebore: No, I shall be alright.

Lorraine: Where did you go?

Hellebore: Where what?

Lorraine: Where were you off to when the porter saw you?

Hellebore: A club called Les Anges in the Rue St.Honoré.

Lorraine: I know it. Business people go there.  
Is your young friend in commerce, then?

Hellebore: No, he's a jeweller's assistant.

Lorraine: Shall I help you in?

Hellebore shook his head and began taking off his clothes. When he was naked he leaned onto the side of the bath. He stayed there for a moment with his eyes closed, then he got into the water.

Hellebore: I met an Italian jeweller and his wife.  
Giordano and Maria were their names. I  
forget their surnames.

Lorraine: (watching him closely) How long have you known  
this young man?

Hellebore took a sponge and pressed some water over  
his forehead.

Hellebore: Is there a towel handy?

Lorraine put a towel into his outstretched hand.

Lorraine: How long have you known him?

Hellebore: I told you. I saw him for the first time  
last night. I've never seen him before in  
my life.

Lorraine (a little disturbed by this): But you said he  
was a friend of your son's.

Hellebore: So he was. They were soldiers together.

Lorraine: But I thought you meant he was a friend of  
the family.

Hellebore:      What family?

Lorraine (at a loss):  A friend of Jeanne's, perhaps.

                  But why did he come last night?

Hellebore:      I don't know.    He talked about the War.

                  That's all I remember.    He's a good talker.

                  Lorraine watched him in silence while he washed.

After a few minutes Hellebore lay back in the bath, exhausted

He closed his eyes.

Hellebore:      It's lovely here.

Lorraine (glancing at his watch):  You ought to jump out now.

Hellebore:      Jump.    Listen to that.

                  He sat up, put his hands on the bottom of the bath  
knuckles downwards and heaved himself up to a kneeling  
position.    Lorraine laid the bath-mat across the floor and  
went to stand in the doorway.    Hellebore drew one of the  
chairs nearer to the bath.    With one hand he clung to the  
rim of the bath and with the other he held the chair.    He  
lifted himself up, but as he did so the chair slipped back,  
he lost his grip and fell downwards, hitting his chin on  
the side of the bath.    The water splashed across the room,  
and there was a booming noise from the bath as he struck it.  
Instantly Lorraine ran forward and took him by the arm.  
Hellebore clung to his shoulder and gradually pulled himself  
out of the bath.    As he did so he drenched Lorraine's  
jacket.

Lorraine:      Oh, my goodness, look.

He staved at his wet sleeve and went into Hellebore's bedroom. With a look of distaste he took the jacket off and laid it over the hot water pipes.

Hellebore dried himself and came into the bedroom to dress.

Lorraine: Where do they all live?

Hellebore: Who?

Lorraine: This young man and these jewellery people.

Hellebore: I've no idea.

Lorraine: Isn't that an odd hour to call?

Hellebore: He happened to hear about your dinner-party -

Lorraine: Who from?

Hellebore: Oh, these things get around Paris.

Lorraine: How is it the hall-porter failed to see him?

Hellebore: Perhaps he did see him.

Lorraine: No, he didn't. He has instructions to  
'phone me if you receive strange visitors.

Avenue des/

Scene 2. The Théâtre de la Fête in the <sup>Avenue</sup> ~~Place~~ des Champs  
Elysées, an hour later.

Behind the dress circle of the Theatre de la Fete a door led into a wide lounge with mirror-panelled walls. It was customary for the artistes to use this room during rehearsals, and among them it was known as the Crimson Tower, because its balustrade skirted an immense dome of stained glass over the foyer. Lorraine and Hellebore sat drinking coffee by one of the windows.

Hellebore: When am I seeing Bénédicte?

Lorraine: Seeing Bénédicte for what?

Hellebore: For the rehearsals.

Lorraine stared at Hellebore.

Hellebore: Well?

Lorraine: Which rehearsals?

Hellebore: The rehearsals this morning, - what's the matter with you? The rehearsals for to-night's performance.

Lorraine (quietly and deliberately): But I am postponing, Jack. I told you I was postponing. I thought we agreed. I am postponing.

Hellebore: You are not.

Lorraine: I thought all our difficulties were over, and that for once we had agreed with each other. Why must you open the question up again?

Hellebore: Because tonight is First Night, and we are not postponing.

Lorraine: Look at you, Jack, with your head in your hands - you won't be fit for a First Night before the end of next week. I have everything ready for a postponement. You heard me tell you I was postponing at the hotel and you said not a word. Why open the question up again?

Hellebore: I felt ill. Now I feel better.

Lorraine: You look, if anything, worse.

Hellebore: That won't show under powder and a wig.

Lorraine: It will show in your movements. I won't have you falling off the wire simply to gratify your pride. I shall call a conference at half-past eleven, and there'll be no performance tonight. I have made up my mind.

Hellebore: You are going to turn a couple of thousand people away from the door tonight?

Lorraine: Oh yes, and more if you wish. But I won't have you throwing away your career, and also my money. I shall call a conference at half-past eleven, and meanwhile I shall show you round the new wing. You have all the time in the world. I am the one who'll be busy

today. Sit here and rest for half-an-hour if you wish. Or let me take you round the new wing. Do whichever you want.

Hellebore (with a yawn, rubbing his eyes): I shall see Bénédict.

Lorraine: We shall all see Bénédict at half-past eleven. Shall I show you round the new wing?

Hellebore: Show me my dressing room. That's all I want to see. I want to see my paints and costumes and the Virgin; and I want to be left alone with them. Call a conference if you like, Albert, call a dozen, but we won't postpone.

Lorraine: I have made my mind up.

Hellebore: And I have made up mine.

They left the lounge and walked along a carpetted gallery under the glass dome, then down the foyer staircase to one of the entrance doors of the auditorium. A corridor went from the back of the pit along the whole length of the theatre to the dressing-rooms, passing underneath the stage.

Outside the dressing-room Lorraine took Hellebore's arm and drew him back.

Lorraine: Look. I just want you to see that.

Hellebore looked up and above the framed door saw in gilt and flourished letters the words: Le Salon Hellebore.

Hellebore: Was that your idea?

Lorraine: Yes.

Hellebore: What are you going to do now, scrub it out?

Lorraine: No, that won't be necessary.

Hellebore: You'd better scrub it out.

Lorraine: Why?

Hellebore: Because you don't think I am worthy of it.

Lorraine: Oh, you'll be worthy of it and more in a week, provided you are sensible.

Hellebore: Get a man up to scrub it out, then. Shall we go in?

Lorraine opened the wide double doors and they went in. It was a long room, its ceiling high and carved: much more a drawing-room than a dressing-room. Two wall-length windows faced the door, and between them stood Hellebore's dressing-table. On the left, behind a table, there was a wide couch which could serve as a bed, and beyond it a curtain drawn to conceal one corner of the room, on the right there was a tapestried screen and beyond this wardrobe furniture, a sewing table and a wicker chair. On the walls there were ink portraits of the two Grimaldi's.

~~and~~  
Hellebore: All this is new. Was it your idea again?

Lorraine: No, this time Charpentier helped me in the design. We spent many hours together over it.

Hellebore: When I was last here I had a room fifteen feet by ten; this is a change from that.

It must have cost you money.

Lorraine (casually): Oh, money...

Hellebore walked towards his dressing-table but then stopped in the middle of the room and stared before him.

Hellebore: Albert. I want to be sick.

Lorraine: You what?

Hellebore: I want to be sick.

Lorraine: There's a sink, then, quickly!

Lorraine ran to the corner of the room on the left of Hellebore's dressing-table and pulled back the curtain; behind it was a wash-basin and a mirror. Hellebore went to it, his hand over his mouth. Lorraine turned away as he vomited thickly into the basin. He retched three or four times, then turned both taps on. He leaned over the basin with his eyes closed, and Lorraine supported his brow with the palm of his hand.

Lorraine: Look, that's only for a quick wash. I'll show you the bathroom and lavatory.

He led Hellebore to the opposite side of the room and showed him a door behind the screen and wardrobe furniture.

Lorraine: I expect you could use it.

Hellebore shook his head and turned back into the room again.

Lorraine: May I use the telephone on your table?

Hellebore (hoarsely) I didn't know I had one.

Lorraine: I want to call the conference. You'll be well enough by that time, no doubt.

Hellebore: Go to hell with your conferences. Help me to get better.

Lorraine: Lie down on the couch, Jack. Don't talk. Lie back. Put your head back - (as Hellebore lay down) that's right. My God, you look washed right out. I'll call the Virgin up.

Hellebore (with effort): No, leave her alone. I want to get rid of this burning in my throat.

Lorraine took a white handkerchief from one of the drawers in the dressing-table, sprinkled Eau de Cologne over it and took it to Hellebore; he laid it across his brow, and Hellebore closed his eyes.

Hellebore (almost inaudibly): I'm sick to death of all this. I want to go away. I'm sick of the job.

Lorraine (turning swiftly): What's that?

Hellebore: I'm sick of the job. I want to go away.

Lorraine: Well, exactly, so would anyone in the world, and that's why I decided to postpone.

Hellebore: I want to go away for good. To hell with your postponements.

Lorraine: I simply don't understand you.

Hellebore: I'd like to break all these walls down, all these thick walls. I'd like to set fire to

them and go away for good.

Lorraine: Would you include this room, Jack?

Hellebore: Yes; oh, I'd include this room, I'd start with it. I'd smash the mirrors first -

Lorraine (with distaste): The ones over the dressing table?

Hellebore: Yes.

Lorraine: Well, that would be a good beginning, they are worth quite a little fortune in themselves. What else?

Hellebore: Oh, I'd set a match to the curtains. That screen -

Lorraine: I thought you'd go for that screen. The tapestry is one of the rarest things in this theatre.

Hellebore: Burn it, burn it. I'm sick to death of it all. You can't keep me walled up in this place. I've finished with everything, and I'm glad I've finished.

Lorraine: I don't understand that. Whoever wants to keep you walled up? That's the talk of a sick man.

Hellebore: I'm glad, then, glad.

Lorraine: Glad about what?

Hellebore: Well, it's all over. I've been sick down the sink, and that's the end of Hellebore.

Lorraine: Why should that be the end of Hellebore?

Hellebore: Why, why... Hellebore was only a dead carcass, anyway, so good riddance.

Lorraine: Listen to me, Jack. You are a sick man, and you hardly know what you are saying. I shall postpone the show for a week, and then you'll have your First Night, and the best one of your career.

Hellebore: Do you think I don't mean what I say?

Lorraine: You mean it, my dear fellow, but tomorrow you will mean something different. Meanwhile I shall call a conference and postpone the show.

Hellebore: Shall I tell you what we'll do? We'll cancel the show, we'll tear the contract up - this morning. I said I've finished with everything.

Lorraine: What?

Hellebore raised himself and leaned forward on his elbow, opening his eyes.

Hellebore: There, that's what I mean. And that's what I say.

Lorraine (turning away): No, no.

Hellebore: I am finished, I am not fit to go on a stage again. That's the bare truth of the matter. Your instincts were right last night; I'm not fit to go on a stage again. So let me

go away. I've finished with Hellebore.  
Bring the contract here and we'll tear it  
up, go on.

Lorraine (awed and pale): This is a different tune, Jack.

Hellebore: I tell you, Hellebore is finished, so see  
him decently buried.

Lorraine (with compassion): What have these people been  
doing to you?

Hellebore: What people?

Lorraine: These jewellers and this young man of yours.

Hellebore: Oh, I'm old enough to look after myself.  
Didn't I cancel the contract out of my own  
free will last night?

Lorraine: How?

Hellebore: I walked out of the hotel after midnight  
and there wasn't a war or revolution on.  
That was a breach of contract, wasn't it?

Lorraine shrugged his shoulders and pouted glumly.

Lorraine: These are very serious words, Jack.

Hellebore: The whole world's changed. I can't find  
a footing again...

Lorraine: I shall postpone the show for a week, and  
I'll leave you to think<sup>the</sup>/rest over. It can't  
be true. Those are very serious words,  
Jack. They mean the end of a career, and

the /

I won't allow it.

Hellebore: They are true. Hellebore's dead, so give him a decent burial.

Lorraine (Stupefied): Are they true?

Hellebore: Yes.

Lorraine: My poor, dear old fellow. What a sight you are, lying there. I could never have predicted it. What I said last night was due to bad nerves -

Hellebore: Bah -

Lorraine: It was due to bad nerves.

Hellebore still leaning forward on one elbow, groped in his pocket for something.

Hellebore: Here, take this bloody souvenir away.

He drew Lorraine's rosary from his pocket and threw it violently at Lorraine's feet. It clattered against the leg of his chair.

Lorraine: I've seen them behave like this before.

Hellebore: Them? Them? What do you mean, - them?

Lorraine: The celebrities like yourself. It's a form of hysteria that comes with middle-age.

You are forty-five, aren't you?

Hellebore: My name is Jack Finstanley. Aren't I more to you than them?

Lorraine: You appal me.

Lorraine, pale and trembling, bent down and picked

up his rosary from the floor. He then rose and walked to the door without glancing at the couch. Having opened the door, he turned.

Lorraine (deliberately): Very well, I shall cancel the contract.

He left the room and Hellebore lay back on the couch again with a long sigh.

Lorraine went swiftly to his own office. This was on the floor above the dressing rooms. One of its doors communicated with a wooden gallery running across the stage high above it in the flies; its windows overlooked a small park which adjoined the theatre at the rear wall, behind the stage.

He slammed the door and went straight to his desk, his lips pressed together and his eyes narrowed.

Charpentier rose from an armchair by one of the windows.

Charpentier: The entire theatre has been ringing you for the last hour. You look troubled.

Lorraine: I have just come from Jack. Something very nasty has been going on.

Charpentier: Where is he, then?

Lorraine: Where is Jack Finstanley? I'll tell you where Jack Finstanley is. He is lying on his backside in his dressing room: his face is green and he has been behaving like a madman.

Charpentier: No.

Lorraine: He has been most dreadfully sick. Some young adventurer came up to his room at midnight and the worst happened: they filled him with drink and sent him back at five in the morning.

Charpentier: Who?

Lorraine: I have my suspicions, but no more. Listen to me, Bernard: I shall need your help, because I think this will be our busiest day since the Armistice.

Charpentier: Why?

Lorraine: Listen to me, Bernard: I am going to run an entirely new show. I am cancelling tonight's performance. And I am tearing up Jack's contract.

Charpentier (with a laugh): Oh, Albert, come, come!

Lorraine: I am going to tear up his contract. All that will take time.

Charpentier: You can't tear up a contract signed by Hellebore. Any manager who tears up a contract signed by Hellebore is a fool or a madman: which are you?

Lorraine: But, Bernard, I have just come from his dressing room. For the last five minutes I have been listening to him telling me that he

is finished for good, that he wants to leave Paris and that he would like to burn his dressing room and then the entire theatre down; and I know when Jack is in earnest.

Charpentier: He got drunk, I suppose?

Lorraine: Drunk? I found him lying on his bed with all his clothes on, and the shoulder of his jacket torn. He had two hours' sleep.

Charpentier: *Charpentier shrugged, and quietly took Lorraine's hand down* ~~(with a shrug)~~: "It doesn't sound like the end of the theatrical world to me," he said.

Lorraine: "His eyes are bloodshot. His hair's all over the place. His face is swollen, there's a bruise the size of your finger on his chin, his hands are trembling. If that is the Jack Finstanley I knew yesterday and the Jack Finstanley I signed up a month ago then I have nothing more to say: but it isn't. He could no more play Hellebore tonight than you or I could. And he realises that. He sees it very clearly. He said it very slowly and plainly to me, I am finished, he said, Hellebore is finished. And he asked me to give him a decent burial by tearing the contract up."

Charpentier: "Get him down onto the stage and see how he shapes; postpone the show until next week -."

Lorraine: No, I can't have dealings with the fellow. I have other shows waiting to see the light of day.

Charpentier: It may be that he's only trying out your loyalty, and it may be that after a little rest he'll be himself again.

Lorraine: And it may be that he is, as he himself says, finished.

Charpentier: Well, it would be most amusing if you tore up his contract and he then recovered and fell straight into the arms of another manager. It would be most amusing to see him sign up with another manager.

Lorraine: Oh, that can't be helped.

Charpentier: Still, it would be amusing.


Lorraine went to the window and looked down at the park in silence.

Lorraine: Would you back him with your last franc in his present state?

Charpentier: Yes. You see, Albert, if you intend to destroy Jack you won't do it by tearing his contract up.

Lorraine: Why should I want to destroy him?

Charpentier: If you refuse to sign him up you are obliged to destroy him, or at least to try. How can you afford to let him strike bargains with other managers in France? You must know that quite half of all business enterprise consists in thwarting other people's. You can't destroy him by tearing his contract up. But you can destroy him by letting him go on the stage tonight and deserve his cat-calls. In that case he will be his own enemy; he will destroy himself.



And that is the best you can hope  
for: that he will destroy himself.  
In that case not another manager  
between here and Tokyo would touch  
him.

And should he recover: suppose  
this First Night were his best?  
Who would be the gainer then?

Lorraine: I can't forget those bloodshot eyes.

Charpentier: Send him a message that Bénédict is waiting for him on the stage.

Lorraine: No, I must think about it.

Charpentier: Well, the time is already sixteen minutes past eleven.

Lorraine: And I already feel worn out.

Francine Berger, dressed in a white surgical overall, knocked on the door of Hellebore's dressing room and walked in. She drew back the moment she saw him. One of his arms hung down at the side of the couch, his eyes were closed and his mouth open; across his chin was a dark blue bruise. She closed the door and went to him; she knelt and listened to his breathing. Then she pulled him by both armpits further onto the couch so that he would lie more securely. He gasped and shook his head limply as she moved him.

Hellebore: What's the matter?

Francine: You are in your dressing room.

Hellebore: I know. What's the matter with you, I mean? What do you want to move me for?

Francine: I thought you looked uncomfortable. When I came in I thought there had been a tragedy. I thought someone had killed you. May I get something to cool your head? You look so ill.

She went to the wash-basin and made up a strip of wet flannel.

Francine: Tell me what happened.

Hellebore: I think I was struck last night, but I'm not sure what happened. I was sick a little while ago, so I feel better than I did.

Francine: What about the bruise on your chin? You must have had an accident.

Hellebore: I hit it on the side of the bath this morning. This is an unlucky day.

Francine: Oh, don't say that. Remember tonight.

She laid the strip of cold wet flannel across his brow.

Francine: I have been waiting in my room since ten o'clock. Everyone was looking for Lorraine. Has he seen you?

Hellebore: Oh, yes, we've seen each other. We've certainly seen each other.

Francine: I cannot remember you drunk at the hotel last night.

Hellebore: No. Someone called on me shortly before midnight. We went out together.

Francine: This was a friend of yours, I suppose?

She took from one of her pockets a bottle of smelling salts and held it under his nose.

Hellebore: No, a stranger.

Francine: What was his name?

Hellebore: Sangson.

She became quite still and stared at him in silence. She then replaced the smelling salts in her pocket and rose.

Francine: What are we to do, then? It is so odd, you lying there at this time. You are usually up on the stage.

Hellebore: I shall be going up soon. I want you to leave me here to rest a little. Just leave me a little and I shall give you a ring when I'm ready.

Francine: Shall I draw the curtains? Will that help?

Hellebore: Yes.

Francine: You must not get drunk on important occasions.

She took the wet flannel from his forehead and wrung it out in the basin. She then drew the curtains across both windows and left the room.

Hellebore slept again, then stirred and looked about him. The room was in half darkness. There was not a sound from the stage or the other dressing-rooms.

He pushed himself lower down the couch so that his head would lie at the same level as his body. He lay absolutely straight, with his arms firmly at his side: he began breathing deeply and regularly, expanding his chest to the utmost each time. He continued this exercise

for some minutes. Then he turned himself to a position at right angles with the length of the couch, so that only his trunk lay across it, while the calves<sup>of</sup> of his legs on one side and his head on the other were unsupported. He raised his arms and drew them in a circle over his head so that they touched the floor under him palm downwards; then gradually he began lowering his head and shoulders to bring them nearer the floor. At the same time he strained upwards with his hips and thighs. He trembled, he began to sweat, but gradually his legs came up. When they were clear of the couch he swung himself up into a vertical hand-stand. But the instant he was there, balanced on his head and the palms of his hands, a pain seemed to strike his middle, and he flung his legs down to find a sitting position. As his right leg descended it caught the side of his dressing table, and a glass jar fell and smashed on the floor.

He went to the dressing table and sat down before the mirrors. He leaned close to the mirrors in the half darkness and peered hard into them. He dabbed rose-water on his temples and along his upper lip. He widened first one eye and then the other by holding back the lids. He took a pair of nail scissors from the table and carefully cut the hairs in his nose, drawing his upper lip down over his teeth. He rubbed cold cream into the bruise on his chin, and combed his hair. He then went behind the screen;

from the chest of drawers he took a silk blouse, a pair of cloth trousers secured with elastic at the ankle, and a pair of slippers.

He changed into these and left the room.

Eliza Manning entered Lorraine's office just as Charpentier rose from his chair.

Eliza:           Hullo, what's the matter with everyone?  
                  Bénédict has been down on the stage for the  
                  last hour.

Charpentier:   Albert will tell you everything.   I'm off  
                  to see Jack.

Charpentier left the room.   Eliza Manning went across to Lorraine and kissed him lightly on the forehead.

Eliza:           Well, what's the matter?   You look nervous  
                  again.

Lorraine (averting his gaze): Oh, Jack's been playing the fool.   But I refuse to talk about it now.  
                  Sit down.

He indicated a chair next to his own.

Lorraine:       We had a little disagreement, and I want to forget about it.   I promised to see you at ten o'clock, my treasure, and I wasn't here. That was due to Jack.   I am sorry.   Let me kiss your hand.

He drew her hand across the arm of his chair,

smiled at her sadly and gently kissed it.

Lorraine: You looked pert and handsome last night.

I would have Eiselheim on permanent contract if I could, just to keep you in Paris...Did I disgust you by talking about death?

Eliza: You must never worry about what I think.

Lorraine: Do I disgust you?

Eliza: No, my dear.

He looked at her for a few moments, then sighed.

Lorraine: You understand my faith in Michelon don't you?

Eliza: Yes.

Lorraine: You don't think it's laughable?

Eliza: No, Albert.

Lorraine: Well, I wrote to him about that very question of death some weeks ago. Would you like to see what he wrote back? I've never shown you one of his letters. Would you like to see it?

He opened one of the drawers in his desk and took from it a sheaf of papers secured by a clip onto an oblong piece of three-ply wood. All these papers were numbered, beginning with number one at the top. On the wooden board itself there was a subject-index. He pushed back the sheaf of papers and ran his fingers down this index until he found under the letter D the word Death, No. 57.

He turned to No. 57 of the <sup>\*</sup> papers and withdrew it from the sheaf. He handed it to Eliza.

Eliza: How careful you are with your things.  
Fancy keeping an index.

Lorraine: Is that foolish?

Eliza: No, it's clever.

She read the letter while Lorraine looked over her shoulder:

"How miserable a life everlasting on earth would be. Death is not your melancholic thoughts about it. It is not drab, empty, dark, loathsome. It is peace. It is the door by which you go out. Try to cast away these memories of funerals, those devils of the mind: they have to do only with the living death, with the hell that is inside us now, not with the real death, that is everlasting peace. Every melancholic thought you have is a temptation from the devil, and you must treat it as such. Do not pity yourself. Be heartless to yourself, and in this you will be heartless to the devil. Self-pity is a pleasure indulged most by melancholic people: it is their sin and shame, and it is no more forgivable than the most heinous crime.

In Jesus Christ,

Father Michelon."

Hellebore entered the pit by a door at the side of the stalls. Grey dust sheets covered all the seats. The curtain was up and there were noises of hammering and shouting in the wings. Only a dim blue light came from the stage. Subdued red stars were alight in the domed ceiling of the auditorium, twenty or thirty in number, and from the centre of this dome hung a huge silver chandelier. In the pit itself, where Hellebore stood, the air was hot, but now and then a swift cold wind blew down from the wings. There were only cables, ropes, ladders and chairs on the stage, and no backcloth, so that the dark brick wall behind it was visible.

Someone in the wings shouted "Voilà!" and two powerful arc-lamps were switched on. Hellebore turned away, for the moment blinded. He watched Bénédict Amurrat walk across the stage, then he went up the centre gangway to the back of the pit. He pushed open one of the doors marked SORTIE and peeped into the wide carpeted foyer; this was the same door through which Lorraine had led him on their way from the Crimson Tower to the dressing room. Someone passed across the foyer outside: Hellebore quickly took his hand from the door and returned down the gangway. He stood behind the conductors' rostrum and waited. The arc-lamps were switched down and the auditorium was once more in darkness.

Nidok came into the foyer from the street. He wore a black overcoat with a fur collar. He was a tall, slim man, with a dark moustache and watchful eyes. He stood still in the foyer for a moment, listening. There were footsteps along one of the corridors above, and they were coming nearer the foyer. He walked swiftly behind one of the pillars near the entrance and waited. The footsteps died away. He walked out into the foyer again, listened, then entered the dark auditorium.

Francine Berger returned to Hellebore's dressing-room and after glancing at the couch pulled the curtains back. She immediately caught sight of the smashed glass and powder at the foot of his dressing-table. She paused over it with a frown, then went to the couch and tidied the cover. She stood listening for a moment; then she went to the door, opened it, took the key from the outside, closed the door again and locked it. She went straight to the dressing-table and sat down before his mirrors. She pulled out all the drawers of this table one by one, and she scrutinised closely every article and scrap of paper within them.

She replaced the things with a sigh and opened the door again. She then went behind the screen and began laying out Hellebore's costumes one by one.

Hellebore put one hand on the conductor's rostrum to support himself and closed his eyes.

Eliza: ...death soon enough!

Hellebore: (starting back) Eliza!

Eliza: It's Jack!

Lorraine (Behind her in the darkness): Jack?

Eliza: What on earth are you standing here for?

Lorraine: Ah, so you got my message. We've just come down from the office.

Hellebore: What message?

a/ Lorraine: To say that Bénédict was <sup>a</sup>writing on the stage for you. Bernard went down to tell you.

Hellebore: No, I never had it.

Lorraine: Then you got into tights - ? (Peering) Those are tights, aren't they?

Hellebore: Yes, I'm in tights.

Lorraine: Well, I've never known such behaviour. First you will never go on the stage again and then you jump into a pair of tights.

Hellebore: Wait and see, perhaps I am finished.

Lorraine: What were you doing, - trying me out?

Hellebore: No. I spoke my mind.

Lorraine: But you have changed it now.

Hellebore: No, I haven't.

Lorraine: Why are you in tights, then?

Hellebore: Out of habit.

Lorraine (scoffingly): Habit...

Eliza: What has been the trouble, Jack? Albert  
won't tell me.

Hellebore: Oh, I was drunk last night.

Eliza: What, in the lounge during the party?

Hellebore: No, afterwards.

Eliza: Well, that isn't a crime, Albert, is it?

Lorraine: Ah, wait until you see his face. That is.  
He went off with a bunch of ne'er-do-wells.  
They released him at five o'clock this morning.

Hellebore: Released...

Eliza: Stop biting at each other.

Hellebore: Take him for a walk, Eliza. Make him say  
his beads.

Just as Francine Berger laid Hellebore's sequin  
suit across the table Charpentier entered. He glanced at  
the couch.

Francine (turning): I suppose you are looking for Jack?

Charpentier: Yes, and the bird appears to have flown.

Francine: He must have gone up to the stage, but God  
knows what he has been doing with himself.

Charpentier: Have you seen him, then?

Francine: Yes, and he needs looking after. He is  
really ill.

Charpentier: Oh, he was only a little drunk last night.

Francine: I came back just now and found one of his powder-jars on the floor.

Charpentier: Broken, you mean? How?

Francine: Perhaps he fell against the table. That corner smells of vomit. What chance will he stand this evening?

Charpentier: Only he himself knows.

<sup>Francine</sup>  
~~Virginia~~ went behind the screen to her sewing table.

Charpentier: Ah, so these are the legendary accoutrements!  
 He approached the table where Hellebore's costumes lay.

Charpentier: Let me touch them. May I?

Francine (from behind the screen): By all means.

Charpentier: (lifting a pierrot's dress with awe) It is like touching ancient parchments. I can already see them as museum exhibits. I remember these pom-poms and neck-frill - what will he use this pierrot's dress for, Francine?

Francine: He always used it for his entrance, but I don't know what he means to do with it tonight.

Charpentier: Yes, I remember those sudden entrances in white.

Francine: On to an empty stage.

Charpentier: Yes.

Francine (joining him): Haven't you seen his stuff before?

Charpentier: From the pit, yes, but never backstage, to touch with my own fingers. When does he wear this sequin jacket? Remind me.

Francine: I don't think he used it for his last two shows in Paris, but before then he did his trapeze work in it.

Charpentier: It used to make those flashes, - of course. And the big shoes - I remember them well. (Taking one of them up) It must be two feet long?

Francine: ~~What exactly how long they are in French~~ <sup>Yes.</sup> ~~What is the name of the jacket?~~ All that part (pointing out the toe) is very lightly made - so that it can flap up and down. It makes a smacking noise when he walks.

Charpentier: And where are the removable tails?

Francine: Here, look.

She brought up the tails of a morning jacket from under the sequin suit, then the jacket itself - like a <sup>S</sup>panish jacket - onto which the tails clipped.

Charpentier: Yes, yes, I remember that clearly. I remember him tumbling over and over.

Francine: Feel for the little water-tank. Can you feel it?

Yes. /

Spanish /

She handed him a pair of black trousers, and he felt in the right hand pocket.

Charpentier: Yes, I can feel it. Those are his tears?

Francine: Yes.

Charpentier: And I can remember the outsize check suit. He used it for the shooting parties. But no gun. No gun this year?

Francine: No. Perhaps he won't use it this season.

Charpentier: And why the bowler-hat and this horse-whip?

He lifted up first a tiny bowler-hat, no more than six inches wide, and then a long horse-whip of the type used in circuses.

Francine: I have never seen them before. But there they were, among his other costumes. It is something new, I dare say.

Charpentier: But I know what these are for. Don't you?

He took from a deep box on the table two or three white china eggs.

Francine (with a nod): So does Eiselheim, I fear.

Charpentier: Yes, there may be a little trouble about that. Where are the kerchiefs, the top-hat and the other incriminating articles?

Francine: In the cupboard. I dare not put them out on the table lest Eiselheim or Helen should come in.

Charpentier: Eliza would love the idea, of course.

Francine: Oh, Eliza - she is disloyal.

Charpentier: Do you think so? (Replac~~ing~~ing the china eggs  
slowly, then going towards the door) Your  
English is remarkably fluent now. Where did  
you learn it?

Francine: That is my secret.

Charpentier: You are a relentless woman... Adieu.

The chorus of fifteen girls filed onto the stage,  
and Jaques, the dancing master, was behind them. He trotted  
nimblely downstage and stood with his back to the footlights:  
he was a small man, quick and loud-voiced. He made a  
peremptory signal with his hand, and his girls moved quickly  
into line before him. He told them in French, pronouncing  
his words slowly and clearly, to keep their heads up, their  
backs straight and their eyes level. He told them to keep  
their eyes fixed on the lowest part visible to them of the  
<sup>d</sup>ress <sup>c</sup>ircle, and to smile within as well as without, not  
mechanically.

Lorraine was standing with Eliza by one of the arc-  
lamps in the wings, while Hellebore was still behind the  
conductor's rostrum and visible from the stage. Jaques  
continually glanced obsequiously to his right, at Lorraine,  
then to his rear, at Hellebore; as he talked he made secret  
little signs to his chorus - his eyebrows raised urgently -

- so that they should impress this special audience.

The dance began and Jaques clapped his hands to the rhythm of the piano. He went among the girls as they danced; he pressed one girl's head further down as she bent forward, and lifted higher another girl's <sup>leg</sup> ~~head~~ as she danced on one foot. Continually throughout the dance he cried out, to the rhythm of the music: "Heads up, backs straight, eyes level"; <sup>if</sup> a girl glanced down at the floor or the footlights, he ran forward and scolded her.

During the dance Bénédict Amurrat entered the stage, peered down into the pit, saw Hellebore and then descended. Hellebore walked along the gangway to meet him and they shook hands.

Nidok watched Eliza from the other side of the stage, then walked behind the chorus to where she stood with Lorraine. As he passed her he turned shyly to speak, after the briefest smile at Lorraine.

Nidok: Do you happen to know where Helen is?

Eliza (rudely): Don't you? Surely you know?

He immediately drew back in surprise; he looked at her appalled for a moment, then smiled.

Nidok: No. I am afraid I do not.

He bowed slightly to them both and left the stage. Lorraine put his arm in Eliza's and drew her closer to him.

Lorraine: Now, Eliza, now...

Eliza: Now what?

Lorraine: You are so rude to him, my dear.

Eliza: I can't hear a thing with this piano!

Lorraine (in her ear): Why are you so rude to Eiselheim?  
He hasn't the right nature to deal with your rudeness. Why do you do it?

Eliza: Well, why do you quarrel with Jack?

Lorraine: Yes, I suppose we all have our reasons.

Eliza: What has been the trouble between you? I still want to know, and I shall worry you until you tell me.

Lorraine: There are always disagreements in the first week, Eliza. They are a form of First Night nerves. They help to brace one up -

Eliza: Tell me the truth. (Fixing her eyes on him)  
Have you been talking to him about postponement again this morning?

Lorraine (uncomfortably): No. Not yet.

Eliza: Have you?

Lorraine: We talked about cancelling his contract, you see.

Eliza: Cancelling? You have both gone mad.

Lorraine: But he is in no fit state to give a performance today or even tomorrow. You saw his face yourself, didn't you, when the lights came on again?

Eliza: Then I can't understand why the rehearsals are going on. Look at the time, it's already half-past eleven. You should be at work now if you want to postpone.

Lorraine: We shall have to see how he goes this morning.

Eliza: By the time you have discussed that it will be too late to do anything. (Shaking Lorraine's arm): What do you intend to do?

Lorraine (passively): I don't know, I simply don't know. (Kissing her lightly on the temple) I must leave you now.

Lorraine went to the very back of the stage and climbed the steep wooden stairs which led to his gallery in the flies: he leaned over the rail of the gallery and waved to Eliza far below, then he turned and entered his office. He was about to go to his desk when he heard someone knock on the door which communicated with the corridor in the new wing. He opened it and saw Jean Duloi-Bordeau. He did not invite Duloi-Bordeau into the office but walked into the corridor and closed the door behind him.

t/ Jean Duloi-Bordeau: I tried to see you alone all day yesterday. The <sup>c</sup>troupe's tired, Albert, and we would like to know whether you could drop us out of the next show, when Jack goes

to Spain. It will only be for a fortnight, and we should be fresher for it.

Lorraine smiled and patted Duloi-Bordeau's shoulder.

s/ Lorraine: The <sup>s</sup>season will be finished in a couple of months.

Duloi-Bordeau: But we must have a rest. We are tired.

Lorraine: Listen, my dear fellow, I am not your family doctor, I am your manager. If you want to be somebody in the theatre you must be prepared to fight out your problems alone. I am alone, Jack is alone, Eiselheim is alone, you are alone - and the Théâtre de la Fête would collapse in a ruin tomorrow if we all tried to lean on each other's shoulders. If you want to drop out of the contract, come and tell me so, but that will be your last chance to sign up with me, or indeed with any manager of my standing in France or England. I told you at the beginning - didn't I? - how horrible success can be.

Duloi-Bordeau: My sister is a sick woman. She has to go on every night with that ulcer of hers...

Lorraine (with a gentle shrug): I am in love with a young lady, Jean, and that young lady refuses to take me as a husband. What will you do about

that? What could you do about that? And the audience doesn't care one way or the other.

He gazed into Duloi-Bordeau's eyes, then returned to his office and closed the door, while Duloi-Bordeau remained standing in the corridor.

Eliza and Charpentier met in the corridor not far from Hellebore's dressing room, on the ground floor of the new wing.

Charpentier: Have you seen Jack, my dear?

Eliza: Yes, I saw him standing in the stalls just now. What has been the trouble, - you must tell me, Bernard.

Charpentier: All I know is what Albert told me, that Jack was drunk last night and sick this morning. He suspects a plot, an attempt at blackmail or larceny or some such thing, but then he usually does the day before an opening.

Eliza: What was this about cancelling the show?

Charpentier: Cancelling the contract, dearest, not just the show. That was Albert at the end of his patience. I pleaded for Jack, and he agreed to give him a few hours' grace.

Eliza: But how can you cancel a contract just before the tabs are due to go up?

Charpentier: Well, of course, Albert is quite helpless.

So you have seen Jack: how does he look?

Eliza: Dreadful, the poor dear. His face has swollen in all the wrong places.

Charpentier: I've just come from his dressing-room. He fell onto his table and smashed a glass jar while the Virgin was away.

Eliza: Has she been nursing him, then?

Charpentier: She has been trying, but he evades her.

Eliza: Who wouldn't?

Charpentier: Exactly.

Eliza: The first thing Albert talked about in the office this morning was Michelin. He showed me one of his letters on death. Did you know that Albert keeps all those letters clipped together into a board, with a neat index of all the subject<sup>s</sup>?

Charpentier: No, he rarely mentions Michelin to me.

Eliza: I was astonished; it showed me another side of his character altogether.

Charpentier: (with a chuckle) What Albert will never confess to Michelin is that he finds doing good tedious, and evil both exciting and lucrative.

Bénédict Amurrat pulled back the grey dust-sheet from the first row of seats in the stalls, and with Helle-

-bore he sat down. While Hellebore talked Amurrat made notes in a long green file, and when the dancing of the chorus was over they went up to the stage. Two scene-shifters wheeled <sup>the</sup> ~~one piano~~ <sup>which had been used for the chorus</sup> ~~off the stage and another in~~ <sup>from the wings:</sup> ~~from the wings:~~ <sup>to make room for another one, a ramshackle</sup> ~~grand piano~~ <sup>with the paint varnish cracked and flaking, the boards</sup> ~~on the boards by Amurrat and the stage manager.~~ <sup>on the boards by Amurrat and the stage manager.</sup> Hellebore ~~leap cracked and bound up with rope and rags,~~ <sup>leap cracked and bound up with rope and rags,</sup> the lid ~~split into several parts so that it hung over the~~ <sup>split into several parts so that it hung over the</sup> ~~of the piano and the keyboard lid fell with a bang.~~ <sup>of the piano and the keyboard lid fell with a bang.</sup> He ~~struggled when lifted like a number of planks insecurely tied~~ <sup>struggled when lifted like a number of planks insecurely tied</sup> ~~together, and the keys yellow with age.~~ <sup>together, and the keys yellow with age.</sup> ~~Thus the scene-shifters~~ <sup>aligned...</sup> ~~into the wings.~~ <sup>aligned...</sup> He turned to Amurrat.

Hellebore: I forgot to ask the Virgin for my bowler hat.

Amurrat: Look out a moment.

He drew Hellebore by the sleeve further upstage, and they both looked up as a trapeze descended slowly from the flies at the point where Hellebore had been standing. When the lowest bar was at a level with Hellebore's middle it stopped. He poised himself and made a leap forward onto it, so that he lay across its bar as if he had fallen there. He nodded to Amurrat, and Amurrat waved his hand at the operator in the flies: the trapeze promptly ascended again with Hellebore lying across it, - slumped forward. But suddenly he was no longer firm. He yelled out and the trapeze stopped just in time, nine feet above the boards, to prevent him falling from it head first. The trapeze returned to the stage and he jumped off, perspiring and shivering. Amurrat patted him on the shoulder, and the

operator in the flies shouted down: "Qu'y a-t-il?"

Hellebore: That would have been a nice fall. Let me try again. I'll have it still this time.

Amurrat shouted up Hellebore's instructions in French to the flies, and Hellebore once more jumped forward onto the trapeze. He sat himself firmly on the cross-bar, turning this way and that to make sure of his balance. He nodded to Amurrat, and Amurrat shouted up: "Vas-y!" The trapeze went swiftly up behind the proscenium arch with Hellebore secure on it: then it returned to the stage and he jumped off with a smile.

*Francine /*  
 In the wings <sup>Francine</sup> ~~Virginie~~ handed the stage manager a tiny bowler-hat, then departed. He brought it onto the stage and attached it to a scarcely visible thread which had been lowered from the flies. The producer made a signal to someone on the wooden gallery above and the bowler-hat swung into the air: he pointed to the right and it swung to the right, then to the left and it swung to the left, upwards and it soared upwards, to the boards and it came to rest. He consulted with Hellebore and then mounted the steps up to the wooden gallery. He called down to Hellebore when he was ready. Hellebore stood a few paces from the bowler-hat. He contemplated it and then approached it stealthily, and immediately it moved away from him, as if of its own accord. He tried to grasp it, but immediately it

swung upwards and away from him. It came to rest and again he plunged forward and made as if to grab it. Amurrat operated the thread from one side to the other, and with quickening impatience Hellebore chased it across and around the stage. Then he held up his hand and the hat came to a halt: it was pulled back into the flies and Hellebore, panting heavily, found a small arm-chair in the wings under the electrical switchboard.

While he sat there the producer and the stage manager supervised the erection on the stage of a taut steel wire nine or ten feet from the ground, supported between steel stays on either side of the stage and out of view to the auditorium. Each stay had a ladder, and at the top of these ladders were little square platforms leading onto the wire. <sup>the wire</sup> When it had been tightened sufficiently by the stagehands Hellebore mounted <sup>one of the</sup> ~~the~~ ladders ~~on the right hand-~~ ~~side and then,~~ <sup>he</sup> standing on the platform, <sup>he</sup> began chalking the soles of his slippers. He <sup>then</sup> leaned back against the platform-rest for a moment, <sup>He</sup> and held his head as though it hurt him, <sup>but soon</sup> ~~then~~ he stepped forward and slid his right foot along the wire. Without hesitation <sup>ing</sup> he walked quickly onto the wire and with tiny steps <sup>reached</sup> attained the other side of the stage. There he jumped straight down from the platform. He murmured to Amurrat: "Too loose", and Amurrat instructed two of the stagehands to tighten the wire further.

Jack.

Amurrat: You're trembling, / Is that alright?

Hellebore: Well, it will be.

~~This time~~ <sup>Duce was</sup> he mounted the platform ~~on the left hand~~ <sup>and</sup> side. ~~Again~~ <sup>Again</sup> he slid his right foot onto the wire ~~and again~~ <sup>towards the other side of the stage, rising and</sup> he walked swiftly along it. ~~But this time he stopped in~~ <sup>falling smoothly with each step.</sup> the middle, poised himself and jumped directly upwards with his arms outstretched. He landed back on the wire with his feet splayed outwards, so that the wire went across his insteps. Several times he repeated this, his hands on his hips, each time jumping higher, testing the wire for tautness. Then he leapt from the wire, and the stagehands began dismantling the stays.

A garlanded staircase, ending in a vertical drop at the highest step, was next wheeled onto the stage. Its exact place was decided between Hellebore and Amurrat. Hellebore ran quickly up and down it. He went to the top and made a jumping somersault backwards to land upright on the fourth step down.

While it was being wheeled backstage again he performed two or three cartwheels near the footlights, looked at the palms of his hands, rubbed his calf-muscles and, with his hands on his hips, took deep and long breaths. The piano was now wheeled back onto the left-hand side of the stage, and the producer called him over.

Hellebore: I shall want ten seconds.

Amurrat took out a stop-watch. Hellebore stood

in front of the piano and at a signal from Amurrat bent his trunk forward, hit the keys with the palms of both hands to make a hideous discordance, then began playing wildly and furiously snatches of several tunes. At the tenth second Amurrat raised his hand and Hellebore ceased playing.

Producer: Ten seconds. Bang. Good.

Two sceneshifters brought a small box from the wings with a wire attached to it. This they inserted under the ledge of the piano above the keyboard, then they ran its wire along the ledge, down a leg of the piano and thus out of sight to a detonator mechanism operated in the wings. Hellebore and Amurrat walked across the other side of the stage. An electrician in the wings pressed a detonator button and instantly there was a loud report and a cloud of white smoke burst from the key-board and enveloped the piano, rolling and turning across the stage. The producer jumped down into the pit and when the piano was once more visible to him he pressed his stop-watch.

Amurrat: That was twenty.

Hellebore: Ample, ample. We'll try it.

An electrician dismantled the burnt box from under the piano ledge and inserted a new one. Again Hellebore went to the piano and again at a sign from Amurrat he began playing wildly. At the tenth second Amurrat nodded to an electrician in the wings, and again there was a loud report:

the piano and Hellebore were enveloped in the white smoke, and his playing ceased abruptly. Out of sight from the auditorium he jumped quickly to the back of the piano near the wings and went through several actions in mime: he went through the actions of taking off his shoes, his trousers and his jacket, then of receiving from a stage-hand in the wings another jacket and pair of trousers, then of tugging something from his right temple - all in the course of a few seconds. Now he reeled and stumbled across the stage through the smoke-cloud until he was once more in view from the auditorium: the moment he saw Amurrat in the pit below he ceased miming, and Amurrat pressed his stop-watch again.

Amurrat: You had ten seconds to spare. So there should be no trouble about that.

Hellebore: It's the trousers will be the trouble.

Amurrat: Perhaps you could leave the others on after all.

Hellebore: No. I must have the torn ones.

Nidok went to one of the windows in Lorraine's office and gazed down at the park, quite still.

Lorraine: Are you sure?

Nidok: Quite sure. There are very seldom misunderstandings between us. She has a headstrong nature, but I accept it.

Lorraine: I was thinking, you see, of asking her to take some permanent work in this theatre.

Nidok: Yes, but she isn't unhappy with me. You must allow for her temperament: suddenly she will turn on someone, - then it is all over. Believe me. I have known her many years.

Lorraine: Well, she did talk last night as if she were a little discontented.

Nidok: But do you think it is safe to judge any woman by her words?

Lorraine: She is usually sincere with me.

Nidok: Try, then. Ask her to take some permanent work here. But I don't think she will hear of it.

Lorraine: Would you be willing to let her go if she did agree?

Nidok: Yes, certainly. But I know she won't hear of it. (Lowering his gaze) Of course, I do understand your concern for Eliza. I am not trying to interfere with that.

Lorraine: Of course not.

They said no more to each other for some time.

Then Nidok turned from the window and faced Lorraine.

Nidok (secretively): How is Mr. Finstanley this morning?

Lorraine looked down quickly and blinked, with

Nidok's dark, narrow eyes upon him.

Lorraine: We must give him time to find his feet again, you know.

Nidok: I saw him slip on the trapeze this morning. I thought that was unusual.

There was a knock on the door and Charpentier entered.

Charpentier: Jack has been rehearsing for the last half-hour. Good morning, Heinrich.

Nidok (without a smile): Good morning, Mr. Charpentier.

Lorraine (watching Nidok as he rose): We'll go down together then, and have a look at him.

The conductor played several dances on the piano and during each of them Hellebore danced a few steps so that between them they could determine the speed at which the music should be taken. The conductor marked his score according to Hellebore's instructions.

Nidok left Lorraine and Charpentier in the corridors; they walked together down to the stage and crossed it while Hellebore was leaning over the conductor's shoulder to look at a score. They found Amurrat with an electrician in the wings, and all three descended to the first row of the stalls.

Lorraine: I heard he slipped on the trapeze.

Amurrat: Oh, that was nothing to speak of. But he does seem to be trembling a great deal this

morning.

Lorraine (tetchily): How is everything going to be co-ordinated at such short notice? What are the chances of an utter fiasco tonight?

Amurrat (with surprise): Well, only Jack is under-rehearsed, everything else is all right.

Lorraine: Only Jack! Only the heart and purpose of the entire show!

Amurrat: You misunderstand me. I meant that everything in the show apart from Jack was well rehearsed and co-ordinated, and that as for Jack he could be depended on to look after himself.

Lorraine: Do you think so?

Amurrat (impatiently): Bernard, what is the matter with our manager this morning?

Charpentier: First Night nerves, my dear chap. He hears your words but not your meaning.

Lorraine: All I am asking is whether anybody, anybody in the world, can expect to give a performance on half-a-day's rehearsal which looks to the audience neither patched-up nor improvised. Remember this, Bénédict: that Jack hasn't seen a theatre this size for five years.

Amurrat (perplexed): Of course, that is a consideration.

but a consideration for you, not for me. You sign the people up, I don't. And you yourself laid this plan before me a month ago. You called me into your office and told me that everything else in the show must be prepared in such a way that Jack could slip into it with perfect ease on the very day of the opening performance. Do you deny it? Do you deny that what you are witnessing this morning is the unfolding of your own plan as you laid it before me a month ago?

Lorraine:

I am denying nothing, and I am not apportioning blame. I am asking a question. What are the chances of a fiasco tonight?

Amurrat:

And all I can say is what I have said, that the show apart from Jack is thoroughly co-ordinated and rehearsed. Its success now rests with one man, and that man is Jack. I know my tasks, the stage manager knows his, the conductor knows his, and so do the electricians and the stagehands. The chorus dances better than it has ever done before; Nidok is in fine fettle; the Duloi-Bordeau's have rehearsed until now they can barely stand up. But for Hellebore I cannot vouch: I can only

vouch for my own faith in him and my own quiet private expectations. Everything has been prepared for him, and the success of the show is now between himself and the gods. Perhaps he is under-rehearsed, perhaps not: but only he is the judge of that. Such men defy prediction. For my part I can do no more than what I have done: from now on our eyes are on him alone. What happens in this theatre tonight only he can decide. From beginning to end he is his own master. All I can do is to prepare the way for him and give him help when he asks for it.

Lorraine: Has he been on the wire yet?

Amurrat: Yes, about twenty minutes ago.

Lorraine: He didn't slip - he only slipped on the trapeze, I understand?

Amurrat: On the wire he was perfectly steady, though, as I say, he has been trembling rather strangely this morning. But try as you may you won't be able to predict his performance tonight from his rehearsals this morning: it can never be done. All you have to go on are your own premonitions.

Charpentier: For the Lord's sake don't leave him alone with those, Bénédict! They are notoriously dismal.

A voice in the wings called out for Amurrat and he returned to the stage. Lorraine and Charpentier walked slowly up the centre gangway.

Charpentier: Are you persuaded yet that he isn't after all finished?

Lorraine: Almost, yes, but I find it difficult to forget his own words. You know I shall blame you if anything goes wrong tonight, don't you?

Charpentier (with a smile): Of course, my dear Albert, you are a master of retort and recrimination.

Lorraine: Well, forewarned is forearmed.

Charpentier: When are we meeting for our traditional little conference?

Lorraine (uncomfortably): Which conference?

Charpentier: Oh, not the conference you were going to call this morning. Divine providence took charge of that. No, I mean the one we always have - you, Jack and myself - on the day of the opening performance.

Lorraine: At three o'clock this afternoon.

They turned and looked at the stage.

Charpentier: There you are, look at that. He's still a showman.

Hellebore performed a number of very fast cartwheels, flinging his body over with an immense force.

Lorraine: When they reach that age - Now you look at that.

On the rebound from his last cartwheel Hellebore slipped backwards: he managed to right himself, but not without pulling one of his calf-muscles painfully. He limped to the armchair in the wings and sat down.

Lorraine: This is an exact repetition of my most fearful dream, even to the point of the strange intruder in the dead of night. Even I was not superstitious enough to believe that my worst fears could materialise in such close detail. In future I shall pay more attention to those foolish fears of mine; apparently there is less folly in them than you or I or anybody else thought.

Charpentier: But I'm afraid that if you begin taking note of your fears and premonitions, Albert, you will never float another show or take another business risk as long as you live, and you will end a pauper.

Scene 3: The same, two hours later.

At noon each day during rehearsals the Crimson Tower became a dining-room for the artistes and members of the orchestra: the armchairs and cocktail-tables were moved back to the walls, and round mahogany tables and stiff-backed chairs were brought in.

Hellebore, Eliza and Helen Eugenie sat near one of the windows, talking after their lunch. Hellebore was dressed in a light country-tweed suit. Helen Eugenie, Nidok's second stage assistant, was taller and older than Eliza; she was sombre, her hands were long. She was dressed in black, with a black lace collar high at her neck.

The clouds were still low, but now and again there was a sharp ray of sunlight from between them which lit up the lounge suddenly and then died quickly down.

Helen: You haven't said a kind word to him since we arrived in Paris, and goodness knows what you've been saying behind his back. If he makes you so unhappy why don't you leave him and find other work?

Eliza: What other work?

Helen: Oh, my dear girl, Lorraine would surely find something for you.

Eliza: Yes, with certain conditions attached.

Helen: Still, it might make you see Heinrich in a

better light. Never has he once done you an unkindness. Never once has he even snapped at you..

Eliza (bitterly): No. He never talks, that's why. It's the silence I can't bear.

Helen: Well, I should try noisier work if I were you, and then perhaps you'd call his silence peace of mind, and run back to it like a naughty child. I suppose you have noticed that he never answers your rudeness.

Eliza: Yes, but I wish he would answer me just once: I wish he's smack my face or call me a slovenly little bitch. Imagine Heinrich calling me a slovenly little bitch, Jack!

Helen: I dare say you could find cruel and foul-mouthed employers enough; there are plenty of them in our profession. Why don't you go out and look for one?

Eliza: Because I am lazy and stupid. I want a husband and I want children. There is nothing Heinrich can do about that, but you'd think that if he were as holy as you say he is he would try to give me a little comfort. A little comfort, I don't know what, but a holy man would know, - so you would think, wouldn't

she/

you? Yes, Jack, ~~she~~<sup>she</sup> called him holy the other day. She worships him.

Hellebore (shyly, to Helen): Do you think I ought to have a word with him about Eliza? She isn't happy -

Eliza: Yes, tell him I've been in love with you for the last ten years; what could his holiness do about that?

Helen (perhaps a little panic-stricken by Hellebore's proposal): It wouldn't be wise, Jack. You would only hurt him and achieve nothing for Eliza.

Hellebore: How could I hurt him?

Helen (with difficulty): You wouldn't be able to get a word out of him. All I can tell you is that he would become quite silent. He would stand there as if he were paralysed and dumb. At the best of times he is shy with men - whereas with women he relies on his instincts. How can I explain it? He hates putting his feelings into words. They seem insufficient to him; they always belie his feelings and get him into trouble. Words hurt him. He told me once he would like to go through life in an unbroken silence; all his communications with

other people would be in silence. That is why he has never once uttered a word during one of his acts since he first went on the stage thirty-four years ago. He loves silence; I have seen him stand in some of those Bavarian valleys as if he were listening to their silence. I know exactly how he would feel if you tried to talk to him, - you must trust my knowledge of him. He would be shy and tongue-tied; he would feel as if he were stuck fast in a terrible mire and being sucked down. His only thought would be to get himself free, to find himself again in silence and solitude. He would be like a caught animal, and your own pity and compassion would make you set him free again. You would see for yourself what I mean, but I want you to trust what I say and not even try to see him; I do my best to protect him, you see, Jack. When he is allowed to be alone for hours on end and to go through the day without a lot of words, he feels free and clean and wholesome; his eyes look rested and calm, and one feels very secure in his company. But I know exactly when he has been troubled by conversations with people, because his eyes are

no longer clear, he looks a little feverish, his walk is uncertain, his mouth is less resolved, he moves his arms about awkwardly, - he is no longer master of himself; a ghastly fever has got the better of him.

Eliza: But in any case he hates Jack.

Helen: Oh, Eliza... You say these rash things, but do you think whether they are true or not?

Eliza: I know that's true. I can use my own eyes.

(Turning to Hellebore) They both hate you.

If she could put an end to your career tomorrow she'd do it, for Heinrich's sake. She'd lay the whole world waste for Heinrich's sake.

Everything she does is for Heinrich -

Helen (near tears): No, Eliza, no!

Eliza: She goes everywhere with that horrible set smile of hers; it means she's thinking about Heinrich. Dear Heinrich -

Hellebore (disgusted): Oh, shut up. What the hell's it got to do with me? Wine?

He held the wine bottle diagonally before Helen, and she shook her head. He held it before Eliza, and she merely averted her eyes without uttering a word. He filled his own glass and laid the bottle down meditatively.

Helen (to Hellebore): Forgive her. She is only acting out

her little melodrama.

Hellebore: No, she isn't acting anything.

Helen: He's so considerate, Jack; she has nothing at all to complain of.

Hellebore: I think she is fond of him, Helen, but there, he never addresses a word to her...

Helen: That's his nature, which God gave him. I'm used to it, because I've taken the trouble to know and understand him. She would never take that trouble.

Hellebore: She isn't the silent kind. She enjoys talking. She behaves very naturally. The two of you are driving her out of her mind. I must say I wouldn't like to spend my life with people who sat and stared at me and never said a word. You've aged her in the last five years. I can see that, having been away for five years. She's so touchy now.

Helen: You say "the two of you" as if Heinrich and I were in a conspiracy together.

Eliza (quietly, her eyes lovingly on Hellebore): You are, I'm sure you do horrible things together, like putting spells on people.

Helen (with pity): You don't believe that, do you, Eliza?

Eliza: Yes, I do; you told me yourself that you believed in his spells.

Helen (devoutly): I believe in a certain power he has to change natural events. I believe some very rare and extraordinary human beings have that power.

Eliza: Well, then, I say he tries to practice spells on people, and with your help. When he looks at me sometimes with those holy eyes of his which never move he terrifies me. I'm not saying ~~that~~ I believe in his powers or take his spells seriously, but - yes, that's the right word, you two are in a conspiracy. If you could do it by spells you'd murder Jack in his bed.

Helen: Do you think Heinrich is professionally so incompetent that he would have to ~~resort to those methods~~ ~~with you~~ resort to those methods?

Eliza: It always hurts him to think of Jack's position in the theatre.

Helen (with calm logic): Why does he accept a contract in one of Jack's most important shows?

Eliza: Because Jack fascinates him. I can feel him watching Jack all the time, trying to discover his secret, measuring him with that holy coolness of his.

Helen: Isn't it possible that he admires Jack, and

watches him with awe?

Eliza: Don't degrade yourself, Helen! Watch him with awe! Why, whenever I mention Jack in his company he jumps out of his shoes.

Helen: Well, I'm glad you say all this to me and not to his face. If only you'd take the trouble to understand him, as I have...

Eliza: I'm even tired of talking about him. You can give me some wine now, Jack.

Hellebore filled her glass and winked at her: she took a sip of her wine, looked pained, as if the taste displeased her, then set her glass down again.

Eliza: I don't know why I drink this yellow piss. I loved Campeachy Bay last year because they had all those beautiful fruit drinks. You can keep your vintage wine.

Helen: You can't forgive Heinrich his strangeness, can you? You want everyone to be hail-fellow-well-met.

Eliza (with bitter gaiety): Yes, I do.

Helen: But since you spend so much time with him don't you think you ought to try and understand him?

Eliza: Does he try and understand me?

Helen: He knows you as a mother knows the fruit of her own womb. You hate his strangeness, but he has always been strange. (Coolly determined)

to vindicate Eiselheim) He even believes in fairies, like a child. Why don't you laugh?

Eliza: I don't want to laugh.

Helen: Most people would, and I thought you preferred most people to one so unique and strange. Yes, he believes in fairies, and he adores birds. (Her eyes fixed on Eliza) I have seen him talking to birds in the Piazza Cataluna in Barcelona, with all the Spaniards staring at him. He can speak to birds, you know, and make them understand. And shall I tell you something about his childhood? He was the son of an officer in the Prussian army. He never knew family life in the proper sense. His father was killed when he was five, and before that he had only seen him three or four times. With his mother he travelled from one town to another and one country to another incessantly year after year. He was a dreaming child, and his dreams were what he could carry from one place to another without damaging them. He spent his childhood among the women friends of his mother, most of them officers' wives. These women were restless. They would do anything to kill time. They played games of hypnosis with professional hypnotisers, they



children playing in the park below, then he returned with a sigh to his desk. He rubbed his right ear and shifted in his chair. There was not a sound in the office. He put his hand on the telephone receiver but immediately withdrew it. He took a memorandum book from the edge of his desk and began writing: "You said that everything in the world was my responsibility so long as I thought about it, and that the more I think about the more I am responsible for, I must have this clear. When I am face to face with you I feel empty. I want the strength to say what is in my mind, or rather the strength to bring back to my mind the thoughts which your presence frightened away. I have a lot to tell you about pride. You said that a man can also sin by failing to do good. What did I fail to do? What am I failing to do now?"

He went to the window and looked out again. The three children were no longer visible. The telephone bell rang and he disregarded it. He returned to his desk and wrote the following words: "If only I could be granted a moment of innocence."

Francine Berger's private room was on the ground floor of the new wing, behind the stage and at the very back of the theatre. Its one window gave out onto the park, the same area of park that could be seen, two floors above, from the windows of Albert Lorraine's office. It

was a very small room, and an elm-tree immediately outside the window made it dark at all times of the day.

Most of the furniture had clearly been stage properties at one time. Under the window there was a violet divan with satin-covered cushions, and against the wall near the door there was a dressing-table with an ebony-inlaid top. In the middle of the room, on a fragment of rich Persian carpet, stood a light crimson pouf. Nailed onto the wall were trinkets, gold-framed medallions bearing the portraits of past actors and actresses, cuttings from old newspapers, a silver-plated crucifix, visiting cards with signatures on them, and, over the dressing-table, a long polished cutlass with a blue ribbon and tassel at its handle. In the hearth there was a gas-fire, and at this moment it was alight.

Francine Berger lay naked on the divan, and in the armchair next to the gas-fire, facing the window and the divan, sat Henry Sangson, also naked. | Francine (turning her head towards the window, gazing at the elm-tree) You

killed people when you were a soldier, and now you're ashamed of it.

That's why you are always talking about murder, because you yourself are a murderer.

Sangson: Yes, perhaps you are right.

He leaned forward to warm himself at the gas-fire.

Neither spoke for a few moments.

Francine: What made you go and see him?

Sangson: Edgar Finstanley asked me to. And I wanted to on my own account.

Francine: But why?

Sangson: Well, I told you long ago how important he was to both of us. We lived among the dead, and death seemed the most either of us could look forward to. We lived among dead things, everything we touched was dead, every noise denoted the nearness of death. In our world the worst always happened. We were young. I still am young. (Bitterly) Naturally, I wanted to see Hellebore. I needed to see him. I wanted to get back a little warmth into my fingers.

Francine: But you made him ill. Did that make you feel warmer? This morning he was sick, and this evening he'll be unfit to go on the stage. If he makes a mess of it you'll be to blame. (Leaning forward on her elbows, frowning at him) what made you call on him so late at night? What made you take him along to that club?

Sangson (lowering his eyes): You told me he kept late

hours, and I expected to find him with his guests.

s/ Francine (lying back angrily): Well, he needs<sup>S</sup> protecting against people like you. I don't know how he can possibly get through his act tonight; I've never seen him look so ill. You're a fine one to talk about murder.

Her cheeks were a little flushed as she spoke.

Sangson looked at her in silence. He suddenly ~~seems to realise something and looked across at her with clear eyes.~~

Sangson: "You feel warmer towards him than you do towards me," <sup>he said.</sup> "I can see that."

Francine (losing her patience): <sup>Now she seemed to lose her patience, picking at the blanket</sup> "But you're thinking about yourself all the time!" <sup>he cried</sup> "You called on him to get back a little warmth into your fingers - into your fingers. And now you are wanting more warmth out of me."

Sangson (disturbed): "No, I didn't mean that. I think you are right to feel more warmly towards him. I wasn't asking for pity." <sup>he smiled</sup> (With a smile) "If you think I was, you aren't a good judge of men."

Francine (more agreeably): "But you were wrong to go there at midnight and upset him, my dear." <sup>he was not agreeable now</sup> "You make the mistake of talking too plainly to people. You don't realise how all this

miserable talk about murder and death and emptiness may affect some of them. You shouldn't have called on him at midnight, and you shouldn't have talked to him about his own son." <sup>She shook</sup> (Shaking her head in perplexity) "I don't know, - you seem to go along like a blind man. You behave sometimes as if you were soft in the head. Even now you don't seem to realise what you did last night: you don't seem to realise that Jack may make a mess of everything tonight just because of you. You don't seem to realise you may have murdered a great career.

Sangson (warming his hands again): Perhaps I don't think I have murdered a great career.

Francine: We shall see tonight. Look at you, - even now you don't seem to be grasping what I say.

Sangson shrugged his shoulders, and they said nothing for some time.

Francine (coldly): If you were a self-sufficient person you would never have called on him and upset him like that. You only did it because you can't stand on your own feet. You have to suck other people to death in order to live. You aren't self-sufficient, not as Jack must

have been when he was your age.

Sangson (with resignation): Oh, come, - you're only trying to be cruel.

Francine: Your job is jewel-cutting, but you aren't interested in it as other men are interested in their work. You aren't capable of leading your own life: that's why you called on Jack last night. During the War you killed people like every other soldier, but now you won't forget it, and you won't let other people forget it. (With sudden anger): Why couldn't you have gone off to war and done your job like everybody else, and then come back without all this fuss and bother?

Sangson: Don't the others make any fuss?

Francine: No.

Sangson: The fools don't, I agree.

Francine: Well, where does your wisdom get you? No further than a jeweller's shop. (Turning her head towards him) Suppose there had never been a war? What would have happened to you?

Sangson: I think I would have taken up a teachers' certificate and taught in a country school. I would have married, no doubt. And I would have joined an archaeological society. But

the point is I shouldn't have watched myself living, as I do now. The War taught me to do that.

Francine: You haven't found your proper friends, - that's all you mean. You are with the wrong people. The Celida's aren't your kind, nor am I, really.

Sangson: But where are the right people? Nowhere.

Francine: Exactly. You aren't self-sufficient.

She drew a blanket over her legs and hips.

Sangson: Are you the wrong person for me, then?

Francine: Well, you don't love me. You only need me sometimes. You've just made love to me, but we don't know each other any better for it. You're alone all the time, even when you make love to me.

Sangson: But so are you in a different way.

Francine (angrily): Well, I've told you before. You must treat me like a cripple. You must try to give me the sympathy you'd give to a cripple. But all your talk won't make me enjoy it more.

Sangson (staring at her): But you do believe that making love is horrible.

Francine: I've never said that.

Sangson: And you are right. It is horrible. It is sex.

✓  
 e/

The word itself is horrible. It is sharp, merciless, brief, metallic. Secare is the Latin for divide or cut. That's where the word sex comes from. But love, Francine, is from Subet: it pleases. The love is disappearing from our world, Francine, and instead of men and women there are everywhere creatures alone with their own flesh, dying for lack of blood and warmth, cut off from each other, just as you and I are cut off from each other. In sex we are only two persons fumbling with each other like monsters. I hate and despise sex. It is a twentieth century invention, like the shrapnel bullet. An act of sex is an act of murder. It is two people joined together in a conspiracy of murder.

Francine: (quietly) Have we just committed an act of murder, then? Is everything in the world murder?

Sangson: We are too secretive about each other, Francine. We must let other people see us together. Even Giordano and Maria don't know about us. I ought to feel free in this theatre. We musn't hide away as if it were a crime we were committing.

Francine: But suppose there really is no love between us? Suppose we really never can please each other?

Sangson: Well, in future, when people ask me whether I know you I shall say, yes, I'm her lover. I shall force myself into the open.

Francine (despondently): But you will still be alone. I don't think we shall ever be able to break through to each other.

Sangson: We can try. The will is there.

Francine: But you're secretive about everything you're really interested in. You asked me all those questions about where Jack was going to stay and when he would be arriving in Paris, but you never said you might call on him. And I don't expect I should ever have known about last night if he hadn't told me himself.

Sangson: I had nothing in mind when I asked you those questions.

Francine: I don't believe it. You must have played with the idea of visiting Jack, because Edgar asked you to do so. No, we shall never be lovers in the true sense.

She lay staring up at the ceiling in silence.

Sangson rose and went to the window. He stood at the end of her divan. He looked across the lawn of the park.

Francine: Be careful. Someone might see you.

He drew back a little from the window.

Sangson: You must try to understand what I tell you. War was a kind of religious experience for me; it is holy for me. I went out to Flanders to suffer, not to kill people. I went to die rather than to kill. War was a crucifixion for me. I went out to be crucified.

(Looking down at her) And somehow - I can't tell you why - I expected to suffer my crucifixion without dying. And that was my horrible error, to believe that I was inviolate. How did I expect to survive? How did I expect to be nailed to the cross and have my side pierced, and yet survive? How did I expect to survive just the exposure and the loss of blood? But of course I had to die. And now I can no longer feel the life in my fingers, as I am always telling you. So you mustn't begrudge me my little midnight adventure.

Nidok walked swiftly across the stage towards the wings. Only a part of a battery of lights in the flies was switched on, so that the light was weak. Just as he reached the centre of the stage he seemed to hear something and stopped. He turned and peered at some flats close to the rear wall of the stage, where at present the light was

weakest. Standing by these flats in the darkness were Hellebore and Eliza Manning. Nidok stepped back in his astonishment. They were talking to each other, but what they said was made inaudible from the front of the stage by the heavy flats behind them. Hellebore nodded to her, then put his arm on her shoulder and kissed her brow gently. She smiled and seemed from the distance to look deep into his eyes. Hellebore went towards the staircase leading up to Lorraine's office, and Eliza turned towards the wings on the right hand side.

Nidok walked into the darkness on his left and leaned against the proscenium arch. He closed his eyes and sighed.

*It was as if he had suffered some shock, for he was breathing heavily and his head was bowed.*

Lorraine put down his pen and switched on the desk-lamp. Outside the clouds were dark and low, and a violent wind was now blowing across the park. He sealed an envelope and wrote the words "Father Michelin" on it. Nothing could be heard from the stage below.

There was a knock on the door, and Hellebore entered by the gallery-door. Lorraine looked up, then rose with a smile and went towards him.

Hellebore: I just wanted to see how you were.

Lorraine nodded and took his arm, then led him to a chair in silence.

Lorraine: I had to put the light on. Were you caught in the storm?

Hellebore: No, I was in the Crimson Tower.

Lorraine sat down and put the envelope in one of the top drawers of his desk.

Lorraine: I was frightened this morning. You looked very ill, Jack. I thought that was the end of tonight's show.

Hellebore: Yes, I was still shaking like a leaf during rehearsals. But I had a good lay-down afterwards, and I feel steady enough now. Have you anything to drink here? I'm parched.

Lorraine (rising and taking a key from his waistcoat pocket)

By all means. What shall I give you?

Hellebore: Anything as long as it isn't cognac.

Lorraine (with a smile): Will water do?

Hellebore: I prefer it.

Lorraine unlocked a corner cupboard behind his desk and took out a tumbler. He bent down and looked along the bottom shelf, then brought out an earthenware flagon, which he put down on the desk. He broke its seal with a heavy paper-knife and drew out the cork. Hellebore watched him closely.

Hellebore: Is that water?

Lorraine: Yes.

Hellebore: What's it doing in there, then?

Lorraine: It's Lourdes water.

Hellebore: What, - a kind of spa water?

Lorraine: No, no, - holy water. (With a shy smile) I wanted God to be on your side tonight.

Hellebore (playfully) Well, I hope it does me good.

Lorraine: It comes from the holy spring at Lourdes.

He filled the tumbler and handed it to Hellebore.

Lorraine looked out of the window at the park. It was now in half-darkness; raindrops were flying against the window-panes, and occasionally the window rattled. The elm-trees close to the theatre wall were no longer visible.

Lorraine: Where did you eat?

Hellebore: In the Crimson Tower, with Helen and Eliza.

Lorraine: How was Eliza?

Hellebore: She certainly isn't happy, you know.

Lorraine (with a sigh): No, I'm anxious about her. I don't think Eiselheim understands her well enough.

Of course, she's still in love with you.

Hellebore: She'd like me to marry her, but I don't think it amounts to more than that, though it did before the War.

Lorraine (quietly, with assurance): Oh, yes, it amounts to very much more than that.

The wind suddenly dropped and, for a moment not a sound could be heard. It gradually started up again and the rain grew heavier.

Hellebore: Will you be coming down this afternoon?

Lorraine: Yes, I shall be down. I'm only sitting here now because I feel so sleepy. This is the time of day when I feel a sleepless night most. And I usually feel sad at this time of day. I prefer the evenings. I find them exciting.

He took the tumbler and earthenware flagon, and without rising from his chair he put them back in the cupboard behind him. He did this slowly and thoughtfully.

Lorraine: I'm glad we let things take their course. We shall see a fine performance from you tonight. (Glancing at Hellebore hesitantly) Suppose we'd cancelled your contract?

They smiled at each other.

Hellebore: We could have drawn up another one.

Hellebore rose and went towards the door.

Hellebore: Well, thank you for the holy water. I'm going down to change. I told <sup>Benedict</sup> ~~Leuis~~ Amurrat two-fifteen.

Lorraine: Can you manage our little conference with Bernard at three?

Hellebore: Yes, I'll slip in at three.

Lorraine: I shall be down at the stage in a few minutes. I'm very anxious to see the new stuff, Jack.

Hellebore: I think it will please you.

Hellebore left the office and returned to his own dressing-room. From the stage there was the sound of hammering and shouting.

On his dressing-table, pinned to the white cover, there was a letter addressed to "Monsieur Finstanley (Hellebore\*)". He switched on the mirror lights and read it.

"Please come without fail to Les Anges this evening at seven o'clock. I shall keep you only for a very few minutes. I should be happier if Sangson were were not told about this. Forgive the scribble.

Maria Celida."

He screwed the letter up and walked towards the hearth. He was about to throw it onto the flames, but he stopped and opened it out again. He looked at it closely a second time, then bent down and set light to it.

The stage was now brightly lit, and stagehands were hurriedly clearing ladders, cables and flats from the back. The garlanded staircase was brought in well upstage, and a section of the stage was raised to a height of ten or fifteen feet to make a first landing. A plain light blue curtain was then lowered in front of this structure, concealing it from the stalls and leaving the front part of the stage empty.

Three sceneshifters wheeled in the ramshackle piano from the left, and simultaneously side-curtains were lowered to conceal the wings. A trapeze was lowered from the flies so that it hung half-way between the boards and the proscenium arch, and a chest of drawers was placed on the right near the footlights. The tiny bowler-hat descended from the flies, and a sceneshifter guided it towards the top of the chest of drawers, where it remained. Meanwhile the steel wire was drawn taut between the stays, which were off-stage. A white skipping-rope was laid on the piano, and two chairs were placed near the back-drop curtains.

Two arc-lamps were switched on from each side, and the front curtain was swiftly lowered and raised again.

Hellebore left his dressing-room and went up to the stage. He wore his white pierrots' costume with the pom-pom buttons, but no wig or make-up. <sup>Benedict</sup> ~~Louis~~ Amurrat was standing in the wings, and Hellebore went to his side.

He glanced across the stage at the light blue curtain.

Hellebore: Where's my own backdrop?

Amurrat: You'll see it tonight, Jack. This one came from the old stage. I believe you used it in 1912.

Hellebore nodded and walked on to the stage. He somersaulted to the centre, just as the last sceneshifters were going into the wings. He stood on the tips of his toes for a moment, then cartwheeled rapidly towards the footlights. He seemed out of breath when he rose. He threw himself onto his hands and hand-walked from one side of the stage to the other, his legs curled over so that the soles of his feet were parallel with the floor.

The orchestra began taking their places and tuning up, and a faint light was turned on at the conductor's rostrum.

Two electricians brought on a fresh smoke-box and fixed it to the piano.

<sup>8th</sup> Louis Comte went over to Hellebore, who was standing upstage with his hands on his hips, breathing heavily.

Comte: Albert Lorraine would like to see you down in the stalls.

Hellebore: Is he there now?

Comte: He was on his way there when I saw him.

Hellebore: We ought to be away by now. The orchestra was late. What's the time?

Comte: Nineteen minutes past two.

Hellebore: Yes, well I was down here by two-fifteen.

He went between the footlights and the proscenium arch to the wooden steps leading down to the stalls. The dust-covers had now been removed, and Lorraine was sitting in the front row, alone. He called to Hellebore as he came down.

Hellebore: (sitting at Lorraine's side) Is the storm over?

Lorraine: The wind has dropped, but it's still raining.

*L. glanced at H's wife* I like seeing you in that costume again.

*do not touch me the buttons on his chest* (Glancing at him) But your breathing is still none too good.

The conductor climbed to his rostrum and sat down. The curtain was lowered, and now only the footlights remained to illuminate the stalls where Lorraine and Hellebore sat.

Lorraine: You feel safe now, do you?

Hellebore: Safe?

Lorraine: I mean, you'll be giving all your mind to the work from now on, will you? This morning in the dressing-room you said you were sick of the work. (Uncomfortably) I wanted to know if you are still even a very little sick of it.

Lorraine gazed at the curtain, waiting for an answer. For a few moments Hellebore did not speak.

At last he said:

Hellebore: My arms ache, my legs ache, every step I take on that stage I have to think about. I can't get my breath properly. I was never like this before the War. And I'm not an old man.

Lorraine: <sup>stared at</sup> <sup>he</sup> <sup>th</sup> (watching him alertly in the shadows) What's the trouble, Jack? I thought you were back in the old style thirty minutes ago.

Hellebore (quietly): I am sick of the work.

Lorraine (<sup>how dare</sup> frightened): <sup>spoke in a sterted, breathless voice:</sup> But I can't postpone or cancel now, Jack. It's too late. You ought to have spoken sooner. I don't believe it: I don't believe a man like you can get sick of his work. You wait until you're up on the stage.

Hellebore: I've just been up on the stage.

Lorraine: But this morning you insisted on getting into your tights, - what has come over you since then? Amurrat told me you were your old self during rehearsals this morning, and I believe your act is full of new and solid stuff.

He leaned back in his seat, frowning. The conductor tapped the music-stand lightly with his baton, and the orchestra ceased tuning up.

Lorraine: Are you seeing that young man this afternoon?

Hellebore: Yes, at four o'clock, in my dressing-room.

Lorraine: Has he brought you all this misery? Is it him?

The orchestra struck up into a quick waltz.

Lorraine (shouting above the music, moving closer to Hellebore): I've never seen you like this before, Jack!

Hellebore sat low in his seat, staring at his outstretched legs. He did not speak until the music was over and the auditorium once more silent.

Hellebore: I should have answered my son's letters. He wrote me letters during the War, and to me they were much like all the other begging letters I got. It was in my hands to save his life.

Lorraine (sceptically): How?

Hellebore: These things happen to bits of kids because of people like me, I suppose.

Lorraine: What things?

Hellebore: Oh, war, war... He turned my room into an undertakers' with all his talk about war. He blamed me.

Lorraine (perplexed): But what could you have done? What were these letters you should have answered? What was it you did wrong to your son?

Hellebore: It's too long a story, Albert.

Lorraine: But what does this young man complain about?

(Watching Hellebore suspiciously): I want you to tell me, Jack, - what was he after? Why did he call you up so late? Why did he take you out to a club and introduce you to the Italian couple? Tell me what you think his motives were, because it's him who has got under your skin. I've never seen you worry like this before. Until now I never thought you had a conscience for anything outside your work.

Hellebore: He just wanted to see me, and cheer himself up a bit. He's finished. The War finished him. He's a boy without a future. He really didn't survive the War at all. (Turning to Lorraine) I want to help him. I could take him on tour, you know, like my own son.

The orchestra began its second tune, - a loud military two-step.

Hellebore (shouting above the music): I wish to God I could go back to that hotel now and forget this dress-rehearsal! I don't want other people watching me.

Lorraine stared at him in astonishment.

Lorraine: Don't see anything more of these people, Jack

Hellebore (bitterly): I shall see Sangson at four o'clock

this afternoon, and this evening I shall see the Italian woman at Les Anges.

Lorraine: Not just before the performance?

Hellebore: Yes, at seven o'clock.

Lorraine (helplessly, touching Hellebore's white sleeve):

What are they up to, - these people? What are they up to?

Bénédict Amurrat pulled back the curtain and peered down into the dark stalls. The moment he saw Amurrat's head Hellebore rose.

Hellebore: We're ten minutes late starting.

He left Lorraine and returned to the stage. The music ended, and Lorraine remained sitting in the stalls, staring before him. Just as the curtain began to rise he jumped up and walked to a small door at the side of the stage.

He walked along a narrow corridor, then ascended some steps into the wings at the very back of the stage. He walked past the garlanded staircase and behind a silver backdrop to the stairs leading up to his own office. Just as he reached the gallery outside his door there was a smart explosion from the stage below and he turned nervously and looked down. A cloud of white smoke issued from the grand piano, and he watched it move slowly from right to left of the stage. He looked at the taut steel wire and the hanging trapeze, then he entered the office.

He took up the telephone.

Lorraine (into the mouthpiece): Get me Monsieur Charpentier.

(A pause, until Charpentier answered) Bernard,  
postpone our little conference until four o'-  
clock.... Well, a number of things.... Four  
o'clock, then.

The sky was no longer dark, though it was still raining. He leaned across his desk and switched off the lamp, then picked the telephone up again.

Lorraine (into the mouthpiece): Get me Monsieur Jean Duloi-

Bordeau... (Listening) His dressing-room I think. (Listening) Hullo, Jean. Listen to me. I want you to come up to the office immediately. (Listening) Albert Lorraine... And, Jean, I want you to bring your brother. But you must both come immediately.

He walked across to the gallery-door, then out onto the gallery. As he opened the door a ~~b~~ass-drum sounded out from the stage below, then a clown's yell of dismay. He looked down. Hellebore had just fallen onto his back near the chest-of-drawers, and one of the drawers was open. His white pierrot's costume was in rags, and his vest and combinations were now visible. Lorraine leaned on the gallery-bannisters, gazing at a battery of lights above the stage and at the top of the proscenium arch, his lips pursed. He

remained there until, a few minutes later, there was a knock on the other door of his office. He went quickly back and closed the gallery-door, then admitted Jean and Pierre Duloi-Bordeau.

Jean wore a dark suit with a high starched collar of the kind no longer in vogue, while Pierre was in tights and blouse. Pierre Duloi-Bordeau was taller and thinner than his brother; he moved about awkwardly, and in deference to the others he took a chair near the window, a little apart from them.

Lorraine (quietly, his eyes on the desk): A young man is going to visit Jack this afternoon whom I suspect of trying to blackmail him. Have you noticed anything wrong with Jack today?

Jean (a little startled): No.

Lorraine: Did you watch this morning's rehearsal?

Jean (thinking slowly, with effort): Yes. I saw Jack rehearse. I thought he was a bit slow off the mark, but I'd no idea he was in trouble.

Lorraine: He was a sick man. He vomit~~ed~~ed in his dressing-room, and I don't think he had more than a couple of hours' sleep last night. I found him on his bed with his jacket torn: that was after nine this morning.

Pierre leaned forward inquisitively.

Jean: What had happened?

Lorraine: A young man called on him at midnight. They left the hotel together and went to a club. At the club they were joined by an Italian couple. Jack came back to the hotel at five o'clock this morning, and he was very drunk and ill. And these people have dispirited him. Somehow they have broken his will. (Glancing up at Jean) He's sick at heart. He lost a son during the War, - I believe it all has something to do with that. Somehow these people have played on his compassion. I've no grounds for saying they intend blackmail; I simply don't know what they are up to. All I can tell you is that today Jack is a miserable, listless, sick man, whereas last night, before these people came on the scene, he was happy enough. You talked to him last night, didn't you?

Jean: Yes. He was his old self.

Lorraine: Exactly.

He leaned back in his chair, still gazing at the desk.

Lorraine: In any case, whether they are up to mischief or not, we mustn't take risks. I am determined to stop that young man visiting Jack this afternoon.

after-noon. I simply cannot afford to take a risk;

He glanced at Pierre, then at Jean.

Lorraine: I want your help, you understand. I want you to prevent that young man entering this theatre. All I can tell you is that he's an Englishman. He has arranged to see Jack in this theatre at four o'clock this afternoon. One of you must wait for him in the foyer, the other at the stage door. You must tell him that Jack's dress rehearsal has been cancelled and that he wishes to see the young man at his hotel. You will have my car, but not the chauffeur. You must then offer to drive him down to Jack's hotel. Drop him there and tell him to await Jack in the lounge. But he must be kept away from this theatre. Of course, it's possible that this is a harmless young man. It's possible that Jack wanted a night out last night and took more than was good for him. But I'm not prepared to take a risk: and if the young man offers you violence run him to the nearest police station and call me up immediately. Perhaps he did after all soldier with Jack's son, as he claims he did: but I'm not prepared to take any risk.

h/ Pierre (<sup>h</sup>slyly) I was watching Jack this morning from the wings, and he slipped once. But he seemed alright in himself.

Lorraine: We've got to be careful precisely because this immense show - it's the most important one in my career, perhaps in yours -

He raised his eyebrows and Jean Duloi-Bordeau nodded.

Lorraine: - depends on Jack being able to give his mind to his work. Now I don't want you to talk to anyone else about this.

He picked up the telephone.

Lorraine (into the mouthpiece): Get me the stage... Hullo.

I want Monsieur Amurrat and Monsieur Comte to visit me in my office immediately. Deliver that message, please...Monsieur Lorraine... Hullo...Yes...I'm not the slightest concerned about the dress rehearsal. I wish to see Bénédict and Louis at once. I shall keep them for as little time as possible. Tell them that... Thank you.

He replaced the receiver and once more turned to Jean and Pierre.

Lorraine: We are protecting Jack, you see, against people who want to break his will. (Rising) Very well, I shall call you up again at half-past

three.

He walked towards the door, and Jean and Pierre rose.

Lorraine: Please stay in your dressing-room until I call you again.

He held the door open for them, and they walked past him into the corridor. Jean still seemed a little startled, and in the corridor he turned, waiting for Lorraine to say something more. But Lorraine only nodded and smiled at him, then closed the door silently behind them.

He returned ~~to the desk~~ and took from one of his drawers the file containing Father Michelin's letters. He pushed back the sheaf of letters and looked at the subject-index. He turned to the fifth letter.

"You ask for innocence. But that is a very tall demand for a man over forty. It is an even taller demand for a business-man over forty. And how much taller a demand is it for a business-man over forty in the theatre!"

I shall come and see you."

Father Michelin."

He laid the file down and went to the window. He gazed out across the park for a moment, through the thick rain. Then he returned to the desk and took from a drawer the letter he had not long before addressed to Father Michelin. He sat down and drew the waste-paper basket nearer to him

then tore the letter up into tiny fragments.

There was a knock on the gallery-door, and Lorraine pushed the basket away from him. Louis Comte entered the room, and then Amurrat.

Amurrat: You wanted us?

Lorraine: Yes.

Amurrat: With the dress rehearsal on?

Lorraine (rising): Yes. The matter's urgent, you see.

He went across to the gallery-door, which Amurrat had left ajar, and closed it tight. The orchestra could be heard from the stage below playing slow, melancholy music. He returned to his desk and put the file containing Father Michelin's letters back into one of the drawers. Comte and Amurrat watched him in silence.

Lorraine (glancing up at Amurrat): How is Jack going?

Amurrat: He's a little slow, Albert. I noticed that this morning. But he'll pull back into his old style tonight.

Lorraine: You think so?

Amurrat: Yes. He's saving himself up perhaps.

Lorraine: I expect you noticed that he was a sick man this morning. He was trembling a little. You must have noticed that. I'm afraid, Bénédict, that he has got himself into a bit of trouble.

Both Amurrat and Comte looked at him in surprise.

Lorraine: I'm very anxious about him, and I'm afraid that a catastrophe tonight is possible. That's why I called you up here. I want you to arrange an alternative programme.

Amurrat (baffled by this): But he's down there performing now, Albert. Come and watch him yourself. He can't be so ill.

Lorraine (gloomily): I happen to know, Benedict, he was very reluctant to go on that stage this afternoon. And I happen to know there is someone in Paris - perhaps more than one person - whose object is to break his will. Believe me, he's not saving himself up for tonight, he's using every bit of strength in his body down on that stage at this moment. Naturally,

he looks slow, but he'll be slower to-  
night. I don't believe he will pull  
back into his old style, Benedict.

Amurrat:

Well, I didn't expect this.

(Turning to Comte)

Have you heard about it downstairs?

Comte:

No. Everyone knows he was on the loose,  
of course.

Lorraine:

I want you to arrange an alternative  
programme which can be used at a  
moment's notice. But arrange it as  
quietly as you can: I don't want to  
discourage Jack, and he'd never forgive  
me if he got word of it.

(Lowering his gaze) All the others  
need be told is that the time of his  
performance may be altered and that  
they must be ready to play out of schedule.  
I shall see Nidok myself later this  
afternoon, since he would be

the mainstay of any alternative programme.

He paused and touched the edge of his desk.

Lorraine: I don't see why Jack, Bernard or the Virgin should get to hear of this. (More briskly) But I do hope to God there isn't going to be trouble. My business rivals in Paris - and all over Europe - have a lot to gain if the show fails tonight. And I have many, many rivals. I don't expect either of you know much about my early days in the business when I bought my first theatre, but I haven't always been on top of the market and I haven't always been able to outbid my rivals. The show tonight is the biggest I've ever attempted, and I'm not prepared to take unnecessary risks. If the show goes down we all go down.

Amurrat (quietly): But an alternative programme wouldn't save the show. It means nothing without Jack.

Lorraine: Yes, Bénédic, but the least we can do is to save our faces, and an alternative programme would help us do that. (Rising) I won't keep you any longer because of the rehearsal. This will mean a very busy two hours before the curtain goes up, I'm afraid.

Amurrat got up thoughtfully and walked to the gallery-door. There he turned.

Amurrat: I hope you're not exaggerating.

Lorraine: Whether I am or not, we can't afford to take risks.

Amurrat: Well, I hope you're wrong. I've put a lot of blood into this show.

Lorraine nodded and patted him on the shoulder.

They all went out into the gallery.

Lorraine: I want you to visit me again at half-past four.

Comte: Me as well?

Lorraine (watching them descend the staircase): Yes, both of you.

The orchestra was playing a bold and loud march.

Lorraine looked down at the stage. Hellebore was now performing on the steel wire. He sprang higher and higher to the tune of the music, then rolled head over heels in the air and returned feet first to the wire; sprang higher and higher again, and rolled head over heels a second time. He now wore only his vest and combinations.

Lorraine returned to the office and closed the gallery-door. He sat behind his desk for several minutes, his eyes closed. The music ceased, and there was a noise from outside the gallery-door of ropes and pullies moving in the flies.

Scene 4: The same, at a few minutes before four o'clock.

Hellebore jumped clear of the grand piano, which the stagehands were wheeling off-stage, and ran towards the pass-door. He was dressed in his sequin costume, with white stockings to his knee, and his face and hair were saturated with sweat. He went straight to his dressing-room and began undressing behind the screen. A moment later Francine Berger entered, carrying his giant's shoes, his spotted cravat, his yellow shirt and his outsize tweed suit. While Hellebore took a bath she laid out his costumes side by side for the evening performance.

The orchestra was still rehearsing, but the stage was once more bare, lit only by one arc-lamp in the wings. None of the sceneshifters remained.

At ten minutes past four Hellebore left his dressing-room and went up to the Crimson Tower by means of a corridor which ran along by the amphitheatre. He was now in ordinary clothes. The Crimson Tower was empty and once more furnished as the circle lounge. He walked across to one of the French windows, opened it and stepped down onto the balcony which skirted the foyer dome. It was no longer raining, and the sky was thick with white cloud. He went to the edge of the balcony and looked down into the street. A hansom-cab and two motor-cars were standing outside the theatre doors, but there were no pedestrians near them.

c/

He went back into the Crimson Tower, then across the Dress Circle to the foyer-balus trade which led round to the amphitheatre and boxes. The foyer was empty and dark: none of the lustres were yet alight. He walked slowly down the wide carpetted staircase to the box office and knocked twice on the side-door. There was no reply. He knocked again, waited for a moment, then went to the glass doors leading into the street. He tried them one by one, and found the last one open. He walked out onto the pavement, frowning and very pale. He looked up and down the street, which was a little less deserted than before. The hansom-cab and motor-cars were still there. He waited until a number of people had passed by him, then he went back inside. He walked down the steps to the door leading into the pit. The light of the street had blinded him and he could not find his way down the <sup>c</sup>entre gangway to the stage. The front curtain was now down, and only a few of the footlights were on. The orchestra had departed, and nothing could be heard throughout the auditorium. He walked slowly down the centre gangway, his left arm extended, feeling for one of the pillars which supported the circle above. Half way down to the stage he quickened his pace and immediately stumbled. He slipped forward and hit his thigh, then his stomach, on one of the arm-rests on the left-hand side. He steadied himself by holding onto the back of a seat, then he sat down and rested. He waited until his eyes were

accustomed to the light, then he went slowly up to the stage, through the pass-door and back again to his dressing-room.

Francine turned and looked at him anxiously when he entered the room. He sighed and went to the divan, where he lay down. She walked across to him and looked down at him, then wiped the sweat from his nose and brow with a handkerchief.

Francine: You're still ill, aren't you?

Hellebore (his eyes closed): I can't keep steady on my feet. It's no good, I'll never be able to do it tonight.

She sat down at his side.

Francine: But what's the matter? Tell me what's the matter!

Hellebore (shaking his head): I'll come a cropper tonight; you see.

He opened his eyes drowsily and looked at her, then touched her chin with his hand.

Hellebore: Now you keep quiet about that, Judy.

The telephone bell rang, and Francine answered it.

Francine (listening): Very well... I shall tell him.

She laid the receiver down and turned to Hellebore.

Francine: Albert Lorraine asks you to go up immediately. You are twenty minutes late.

He sighed and rubbed his eyes. Francine brought over a small cloth saturated with Eau de Cologne and rubbed

it over his brow and neck, then he got up and went to the dressing table. He gazed at his face in the mirror, first at his drowsy, bloodshot eyes, then at his mouth. He raised his eyebrows and moved his mouth a little, so as to make his expression appear less gloomy. He was still pale. He went to the door and opened it.

Hellebore: (turning) Did anyone call while I was away just now?

Francine: <sup>2</sup>(Her face averted) No.

Hellebore: And there wasn't a phone message?

Francine: No.

Hellebore: How does the time stand?

Francine looked at the alarm clock on the chest-of-drawers behind the screen.

Francine: Twenty-five minutes past four.

Hellebore nodded sadly and left the room. He walked up to Lorraine's office and went in without knocking.

Bernard Charpentier sat behind <sup>the</sup> desk, and Lorraine himself was standing nervously by the window.

Charpentier held an empty glass in his right hand.

Charpentier: Come in, Jack Pudding. We are twenty-five minutes late, and I'm just off.

He gazed at Hellebore with a smile, his eyes half-closed.

Lorraine: He's been at it since four o'clock, Jack.

Hellebore (sitting down): What, this time of the afternoon?

Charpentier (rising and pulling his cloak round his shoulders):

f /  
Yes, hell in the belly, heaven in the head, -  
my eternal bifurcation, Jack.

He swayed a little, then put his empty glass  
on Lorraine's desk.

Charpentier: My headlines violate, Jack. They are a public  
indecenty. You look ill. And my kidneys <sup>hurt</sup> ~~just~~.  
I think it's my kidneys. (Standing near Hellebore,  
looking down at him) Well, you are now a French  
institution like the Bourse. The War has  
institutionalised you. We've decided that between  
us. It is not without significance that Hellebore  
has chosen Paris as the scene of his return to  
public life. He knows with what warmth he was  
always, ever since he left the circus in 1901,  
received in Paris. He remembers how, on one occasion  
in 1911, he received twelve curtains from a First  
Night audience. And he remembers the welcome  
accorded him at the opening of the new Cirque Blanc  
at Versailles. Albert Lorraine - in private life  
his intimate friend - promised the theatrical world  
at the beginning of the War that one day Hellebore  
would return to the stage of the Théâtre de la Fête,  
and it is entirely to him that we owe the present  
visit. This first show is in the nature of a send-

off for a long continental tour across Spain, Germany and perhaps Scandinavia, and it is to be hoped that, the tour once over, Mr. Finstanley will again visit Paris for a run at the same theatre, lasting at the very least six weeks. Later in the year Albert Lorraine will probably ask him to undertake a tour of French towns including Rouen, Amiens, Aube, Orleans, Bordeaux, Toulouse and Perpignan; of these towns only two - Rouen and Toulouse - will remember former visits from Hellebore, both of them in 1908. It was largely with Hellebore's visit in mind that a year ago Albert Lorraine made certain alterations in the structure of the Theatre de la Fete. The roof above the stage was lifted to make more flying space, and the stage itself was built back to give it twice the previous depth. More space is now available in the wings, the lighting system has been overhauled and brought up to date, and there are twenty new dressing-rooms and offices. There is now a modified revolving-stage system and twice as much space as hitherto in front and underneath the stage. These alterations favour the extravagant shows, and Albert Lorraine intends henceforward to use the Theatre de la Fete for pantomimes.

large-scale music-hall programmes from London, and for circuses. It will be remembered that he opened the theatre in its new state with Monty Brane's Circus: elephants, tigers, seals, horses, dogs, trapeze-artists and jugglers performed quite comfortably on this stage, though six years' before the same troupe found its run almost impossible for lack of amenities and space. The present show, like Monty Brane's Circus, takes every advantage of the alterations. Thus, Hellebore's visit is, as it were, a christening for the new Theatre de la Fete. There, that's what we've decided. And now I must rush.

He went towards the door.

Charpentier (stopping): You're quite certain, Jack, that nothing ought to be said about your retirement during the War?

Hellebore: No, leave that out of it.

Charpentier: It's a shame, Jack. I had a lot of little lies to tell about that. They'll be told in time, of course, - by the other journalists. (To Lorraine) I don't like Eisenheim, Albert. But I suppose I shall have to mention those packed houses at Brussels. I don't like these thin, silent men. They walk about like my conscience. They shame the infidel in me, - perhaps that's it.

Lorraine: Well, it could do with shaming.

Charpentier: I shall be there tonight in the second row of the stalls as usual, Jack, your acolyte. Thank you for the flames of hell, Albert. I feel excited: a good sign.

He bowed to each of them in turn and left the room.

Lorraine glanced hesitantly at Hellebore.

Lorraine: How did the rehearsal go?

Hellebore: I was steadier on my feet. (Non-committally) But you'd better ask Amurrat.

He got up and seemed about to leave the room, but then lingered.

Hellebore: I'm glad we agreed with each other in the end. You've been good to me, Albert. I won't let you down.

Lorraine looked at him wretchedly.

Lorraine (in embarrassment): How do you feel now?

Hellebore: Steadier, as I said.

He went to the door, and Lorraine followed him.

Lorraine: Is there anything I can do for you? I'll take you back to the hotel in my car. I'll call in at the dressing-room just before I leave. Shall I send the nurse up to your rooms this evening?

Hellebore: Why?

Lorraine: Just to have a look at your temperature.

Hellebore: Alright, then. I must go. I've got this appointment in the Crimson Tower.

Lorraine gazed at him helplessly, his mouth open, as he left the room. Immediately the door closed he went towards it quickly, as if to call Hellebore back, then he stopped and went slowly back to his desk.

Hellebore went down to the foyer again and found it empty. He again knocked at the box-office door, and there was no reply. He visited the Crimson Tower, and that also was empty. He returned to his dressing-room and looked in.

Hellebore: Has anybody been?

Francine: Not a soul, Jack.

He returned to Lorraine's office. Lorraine was again standing at the window.

Hellebore (in a low voice): He didn't come.

Lorraine (guiltily): Who?

Hellebore: Sangson. I must see him again, - what shall I do, Albert?

Lorraine walked towards him, his eyes on the floor.

Lorraine: Tell me, Jack. What makes you want to see him so badly?

Hellebore (eagerly): I feel sorry for him, - that's the trouble.

Lorraine: Yes, we're all at our weakest in our compassionate moments.

Hellebore: Sometimes a look came into his eyes as if he thought ~~he~~ <sup>was</sup> going to be cruel to him.  
(Seeing Lorraine's smile) I should have made a few sacrifices for Edgar, - at the right time.

Lorraine: Why not make a sacrifice of your whole career, - now? It looks to me as if that's what your young friend wants.

Hellebore shook his head, as if this were too absurd to think about.

Lorraine: After a life like yours, Jack, failure is going to be a very bitter thing. You could never survive it.

He gazed at Hellebore for a moment under his eyebrows.

Lorraine: He was afraid to come. He smelt a rat. I have had experience of such people.

Hellebore looked at him sleepily.

Hellebore: When all is said and done I did murder Edgar. You've never had a son. You're too selfish. You're too fussy to have a child of your own. You don't understand the young. You make them feel awkward, you make them go silent and shy. I've noticed it. All you think about is your business. You sit on your money like an old black beetle.

Lorraine (turning away): What a comfort your conversation is.

V

\*\*\*\*\*

Scene I: Les Anges at seven o'clock the same evening.

The dining-room was empty and all the tables were laid for dinner. There were no lights apart from those which illuminated the plaster statues in the niches.

Hellebore opened the door quietly. He stood still, growing accustomed to the darkness. He walked to the table on the higher tier where Sangson and he had sat the previous evening. He walked slowly, tapping his cane against the table-legs.

He laid his hat and cane down on the table and opened his overcoat, then walked back to the steps which led into the ballroom. He peered down into the deserted ballroom, listening. He snapped his fingers and coughed. There was silence again.

A few minutes later Maria entered and looked about her in the shadows. Hellebore immediately went towards her. He took her arm and slowly guided her up to the table on the second tier.

Maria: I haven't kept you waiting?

Hellebore: Not at all.

He pulled a chair out for her and they sat down.

Maria: We looked for you everywhere this morning.

Hellebore: Who did?

Maria: Henry and I. We walked up to the Place Vendôme, and then we went back to the club.

Hellebore: I don't remember leaving the club.

Maria: (peering at him in the darkness): Is that a bruise on your chin?

Hellebore: Yes. I fell on the side of the bath. I just slipped.

Maria: It hasn't swollen, luckily.

Hellebore gazed down into the dark ballroom.

Hellebore: Do you know where Sangson is?

Maria: He came into the house about an hour ago, but we didn't see each other.

Hellebore: I arranged to see him this afternoon. He didn't come, and I thought perhaps you knew why.

Maria: No, he went straight to his room.

They sat without speaking for some time.

Maria: He is sometimes strange like that.

Hellebore (quietly) He knows all about you, doesn't he?

Maria (a little startled) Did he tell you anything about me, then?

Hellebore: (glancing down at the table) He told me you wanted a child. And he said you'd chosen me as father. Is that true?

Maria (with a light gasp) Yes.

Hellebore: And you've come here to ask me to give you a child?

Maria: (her head bowed) Yes. But he had no right to tell

you anything.

Helledore: Well, he has saved you a lot of embarrassment. Asking me yourself would have taken some doing. (warmly). I shall give you your baby, Maria, because I loved you last night dancing round that floor.

Maria: Thank God, then!

Hellebore: But not in cold blood, only because we like each other. I want it to be natural. It musn't be too soon. Dancing with you made me feel I'd known you a long time. Dancing always does that. But try and forget you asked me. Let it happen naturally.

Maria: We must see each other very often. You must be a kind of husband to me. Giordano will go away.

Hellebore: Where was he last night?

Maria: He went home.

Hellebore: Alone?

Maria: Yes.

Hellebore: Will he mind?

Maria: He needs a child as much as I do, and we've waited so long.

Hellebore: But why have you waited all this time - a fine beautiful woman like you?

Maria: I wanted to wait until I chose someone spontaneously. I don't want anybody's child, you see. I want a certain kind of child. And I think you can give me that.

Hellebore (fascinated by this) What made you choose me, then?

Maria: Well, I simply chose you " as soon as I saw you.

Hellebore: Why?

Maria: Everybody knows who Hellebore is. I only had to see you in the flesh.

Hellebore: Does Giordano agree?

Maria: Yes. He knew I had made up my mind before I told him. (With a smile) He was cleverer than he normally is in these things.

Hellebore: And you never thought of Sangson as a Father?

Maria: He is so young. He is like my own son. I love his company, of course.

Hellebore: You are together a lot, I suppose.

Maria: Yes, we see each other every day. He is so different from Giordano's friends. He notices everything. He's so quiet.

Hellebore: And a wonderful talker.

Maria: Yes, he has been my refuge against all those commercial people since the War. (with a sigh) Well, I feel happier.

She glanced at the clock in the wall on her left, but it

was too dark to read the time.

Maria: Shouldn't we be walking towards the theatre?  
I've sent the car away. (Watching him) You  
seem so calm? Are you always like this before  
you go on?

Hellebore: I was sick this morning and I nearly fell off  
the trapeze. I'm tired. (Putting his hand to  
his brow) I'm not calm, I'm tired. Think of  
all those people watching me tonight.

He stared at her with a frown. She rose slowly and  
went to his side.

Maria: You'll feel better in your dressing-room. (As he  
got up) Don't forget your stick.

Scene 2: The Théâtre de la Fête a little later.

Francine Berger entered Hellebore's dressing-room. She went across to his table and began arranging his cream-pots, brushes, rouge-sticks, powder-puffs and scissors. Beside them she put a large napkin and an alarm clock.

Some minutes before eight o'clock Hellebore came in. He smiled at her, and she helped him off with his overcoat. He went behind the screen and took off his jacket, then he washed his face and hands. He sat down at the dressing-table and, with the napkin tucked round his neck, began creaming his face.

The telephone bell rang.

Francine (answering it): Yes, he has just this minute arrived. (Listening) He appears to be. (Listening) I shall ask him.

She put her hand over the mouthpiece and turned to him.

Francine: It's Albert Lorraine. He wishes to know if you'd like the nurse to come in and see you.

Hellebore (impatiently): No.

Francine (at the telephone): He says no, but thank you.

(Listening) Making up at the moment. Very well.

She put the receiver down, and Hellebore creamed his cheeks briskly.

Hellebore: What else did he have to say?

Francine: He asked what time it was when you arrived and whether you seemed well.

Hellebore: He has been a proper fidget-arse today. He has done nothing but worry.

Francine: Well, do you wonder at it? You were drunk last night and this morning you were too ill to move. It would make any manager in Europe worry: especially when you always used to be so good and reliable.

The foyer was empty and dimly lit. Two of the entrance doors were suddenly pushed open, and Jean and Pierre Duloi-Bordeau entered breathlessly from the street. They ran down the centre gangway of the stalls and made for the dressing-rooms. At the conductor's rostrum Jean suddenly stopped and turned about: he called to Pierre to go on, then he returned to the foyer. He walked across to the ~~Box~~ office and knocked on the side-door.

Lorraine turned the key in the office door and went back to his desk. He sat down beside Eliza, his own chair touching her's at the arm. She was dressed for the street in a black cloche hat and a simple coat with a collar of black fur. Nothing could be heard from the corridor outside or from the stage.

Lorraine laid his hand on her arm without turning his head.

Lorraine (Almost in a whisper): You aren't contented with

Eiselheim. You won't be young eternally. You are thirty-four, my dear, and you want children. You do want children, you need them, a strong and clean girl like yourself, Eliza. I'm so unbearably sad when you're away from me. I love just to be with you, simply to touch your arm like this. I want your smells, I want to feel you close to me, I want to look at you and look at you, I want to bathe and saturate myself in you. I wish I could be worthy of you, I wish I was better-looking. I wish I was cleverer with my tongue. (Persuasively) But you see, my dear Eliza, you'd change me. If you took me you'd give me a new life and will, whereas now I am helpless, I feel old, and I am always sad nowadays, and it seems to me I have no future, nothing new or warm for me between now and my death. You have the power to give me a future. Without you I'm so miserable, I enjoy nothing, except thinking about you. I yearn for you, Eliza, hour after hour, waking and sleeping, day after day. All my dreams are about you. I dream and dream and dream about loving you, and again and again I imagine to myself what I would tell

you and how I would touch your body if you took me. I dream of you lying in your bed and the dawn coming across the room. But if you refuse me what you really do is to condemn me to death, and I shall go through the rest of my life like a corpse; I shall be alone, a bachelor ministering to himself. I want to offer you everything I have, for you to destroy if you wish.

He clasped her arm tighter but still he did not glance towards her.

Lorraine: Help me, Eliza. I'm so deeply in love with you.

Eliza: I can't bear you to talk like that. It makes me feel so helpless. I never tried to make you fall in love with me? I didn't, did I?

Lorraine shook his head.

Eliza: I never tried to be with you more than with anyone else in this theatre. I haven't been more charming to you than to other people. I can't bear you to talk like that. It doesn't alter

either of us when you say these things. At the end of it we are still separate from each other, and I can still do nothing to help you. I wish with all my heart and soul I could help you, darling, because my pity for you is like a real pain. I could sleep with you, my dear, but that wouldn't make me love you: there is nothing anybody in the world could do to make me love you. Do you understand me?

Lorraine nodded.

Eliza: I'd marry you tomorrow if I didn't know quite well that it would make me wretched and miserable, and that you would realise my wretchedness and then blame yourself for causing it: That would be an insult to you, a beastly insult I could never undo, and you'd suffer worse than you are suffering now by my refusing you. It would make you hate yourself, or else you'd come to hate me, and I won't risk that.

Lorraine: We don't know that until we've tried... You may be wrong. You might grow to love me,

or does that sound absurd to you?

Eliza: No. I wish it could be true.

Lorraine: Perhaps a child would bring us love. You can't tell unless you take the plunge.

Eliza: I can tell. You must trust the woman to know.

He glanced at her.

Lorraine: Your mind is made up, isn't it?

Eliza: Yes.

Lorraine (wearily): So I need never ask you again.

Eliza: No, my dear.

Lorraine (in hopeless gloom): I thought you would have agreed. I truly thought this time that you'd agree. Of course, you are in love with Jack still.

Eliza: That was a dream I had ten years ago. Now and again it comes back. I can't forget him, that's true, but I have been without him so long that I take it for granted and I no longer worry him. The trouble he had with me was exactly the trouble I am having with you. He wanted to help me and couldn't, he loved me as a friend. So I do know what it is like to be you at this moment, and it's a torment for me knowing that I'm the cause of it and can do nothing about it.

She bent her head forward and sobbed, then with

helpless cries she began to weep. Lorraine moved his hand down to hers' and murmured: "Eliza, Eliza," his eyes averted from her and narrowed to prevent tears.

Francine: I must speak with you about tomorrow.

She took a light wicker chair from behind the screen and sat by the dressing-table, facing Hellebore. In her hand was a small appointment book.

Francine: When will you see the masseur?

Hellebore: I won't.

Francine (with surprise): He is expecting to come.

Hellebore: I don't need - (indicating her book impatiently) all that.

Francine: But you usually have the masseur.

Hellebore: Not tomorrow, though, or the next day.

Francine: Very well. (With a glance at her book) Also the doctor usually calls on the second morning.

Hellebore: I don't need a doctor. Cancel him.

Francine laid the book down on her knee and looked at him with a frown.

Francine: There are thirty appointments for you in this book. Are you going to cancel every one of them? What is the matter with you?

Hellebore continued to powder his face.

Hellebore: When I'm off the stage my time is my own.

Francine: It did not use to be.

Hellebore: I won't have a retinue of masseurs and doctors. They make me feel dead, they make me feel a prisoner.

Francine closed her book and smiled.

Francine: Very well. That will surprise some people.

Hellebore: Yes, a few people are going to catch a cold over that.

Francine: I thought a full appointment book made you feel proud.

Hellebore: It used to, sweetheart. But that was before the War.

Francine went behind the screen and Hellebore began painting in his immense red lips.

Hellebore: Listen to me, Francine. I shan't want to use this room again. This is the last time I dress in it.

Francine came to the edge of the screen and looked at him in silence for a moment.

Francine: Why is that?

Hellebore (leaning back from the mirror, studying his lips):

I don't feel at home here; I don't feel myself. It gives me nasty feelings. (Hunching his shoulders up as if cold) That sort of feeling. So you must tell Lorraine about my little fancy and then you must find me another dressing-room

before tomorrow night's performance. Otherwise I'll dress in the corridor.

Francine: But this is such a beautiful room.

Hellebore: Yes, it's like a mortuary.

Francine: Lorraine will be hurt.

Hellebore: It will teach him not to build me a mortuary and call it Le Salon Hellebore.

Francine (peering at him): You have changed, you know.

Hellebore (touching up his lips) I've had too much of it.

I built myself a gymnasium during the War, in the gardens of my house. I think I'll burn it down when I go back; that would give me pleasure, you know. I even had Japanese cherry trees planted along the sides of the path leading down from the house. And at night there were fairy lights hanging from them. Fairy lights...

Francine: Do you regret it now?

Hellebore: I no longer need it, so I say to hell with it. I told Lorraine this morning I'd like to burn this room down and I'd begin with the curtains.

Francine: They are the loveliest things in the room.

Hellebore: I'm going to travel from now on and I shall go on travelling until I wear myself out. But I'm not going to be stuffed alive by Lorraine or anybody else.

**Francine:** Your secretary arrived from England this afternoon. What about her?

**Hellebore:** I don't need her, sweetheart. What's the use of a secretary when there are no appointments to keep and no letters to write?

Someone knocked on the door of Lorraine's office, but neither he nor Eliza moved.

Lorraine:           Who is it?

A voice from the corridor answered: "Duloi-Bordeau."

Lorraine turned to Eliza and shrugged. There was still the trace of tears on ~~his~~<sup>her</sup> cheeks.

Eliza (rising): I must go. We can't sit here for ever. I'll go down by the other door.

Lorraine looked ill and distraught, and he rose heavily from his chair without a word. He accompanied her to the door which led ~~to~~<sup>into</sup> the wooden gallery. Just before she went out she leaned towards him and offered him her cheek to be kissed. But he shook his head with a sad smile and drew back a little, then took her hand in a formal handshake.

As he closed the door behind her Duloi-Bordeau knocked a second time. Staring before him, Lorraine walked across to the other door. He put his hand on the knob, but then he turned away and went towards his desk; half way there he stopped again, then walked to the gallery-door.

He leaned on the gallery-bannisters and gazed down at the stage. The curtain was down, and only a battery of dim russet lights was switched on at this moment.

Bénédict Amurrat walked from the wings on Lorraine's left to the centre of the stage where Louis Comte was standing. Lorraine watched them talking together. Then he raised himself and walked down the wooden stairs, his eyes still aghast. He held the rail tight as he walked. Amurrat turned and watched him. He called out "Bon soir!" but Lorraine failed to hear him. At the foot of the staircase he turned and caught sight of Comte and Amurrat. He nodded to them wretchedly. As he passed Amurrat he stopped.

Lorraine: Is Eiselheim about?

Amurrat: Who?

Lorraine: Eiselheim.

Amurrat: Yes, I saw him a few minutes ago outside his dressing room. I think I saw him.

Lorraine walked away before he finished speaking.

Just short of the stone steps leading from the stage to one of the property rooms, he met Helen Eugenie. He stopped and tried to smile at her.

Helen: What has been happening to you?

Lorraine: Why, - how do I look?

Helen: You look sick.

Lorraine: I'm a little tired. Is Eiselheim well?

Helen: Yes, very well.

Lorraine (absently): That's the style.

Helen:           There's something about him today, - I don't know what. It's as if he's going to do better tonight than he has ever done before. I can always tell when he feels sure of himself.

He nodded quickly to her and passed on. He went down into the properties room and across to a corridor leading into the new wing. He walked past Hellebore's dressing-room and ascended the stairs back to his own office.

Duloi-Bordeau was still standing outside the door. He seemed astonished to see Lorraine.

Duloi-Bordeau (staring at him): I could have sworn I heard your voice inside there.

Lorraine nodded, but did not look directly at him. He took a key from his pocket and opened the door. They entered the office.

Duloi-Bordeau: But I could have sworn it.

Lorraine (without interest): I went out by the other door.

Duloi-Bordeau (seating himself): I see, Yes, I'd forgotten that other door.

Lorraine stood by his desk in silence for several moments.

Duloi-Bordeau (hesitating to break this silence): Well, we saw him.

Lorraine made no reply.

Duloi-Bordeau (humbly): I've only ten minutes to dress in,  
you see.

Lorraine watched him.

Lorraine: Yes, tell me about it as quickly as you can.  
Where is he?

Duloi-Bordeau (earnestly): We let him go.

Lorraine (sharply): Why did you do that?

Duloi-Bordeau: Well, if appearances are anything to go by he  
was an honest young man. We asked him all the  
questions, and we told him to keep clear of  
the theatre tonight. We told him he was sus-  
pected of this and that, but we didn't say who  
suspected him. And what more could be done?  
We couldn't lay hands on a polite and educated  
young man like that.

Lorraine: When you told him about my suspicions was he  
alarmed?

Duloi-Bordeau: No, he said it was ridiculous, and he laughed.  
Then he said he could understand our point of  
view very well

Lorraine: Our? Who is we?

Duloi-Bordeau: Mine and Pierre's. You told me not to  
mention your name.

Lorraine: Was he well dressed?

Duloi-Bordeau: Most respectably. He took us to his house near the Bois de Boulogne for an aperitif.

Lorraine: Does he own a house?

Duloi-Bordeau: No, he shares house with Italian people called Celida.

Lorraine: Oh, yes, the jewellery people.

Duloi-Bordeau: We couldn't lay hands on a young English gentleman, could we? Where would that have ended?

Lorraine (with anxiety): But I don't feel safe. Suppose he came to the theatre tonight and caused trouble?

Duloi-Bordeau: We know what he looks like. And we know that a box has been reserved in the name of Celida for tonight.

Lorraine: Ah, you found that out, did you?

Duloi-Bordeau (with pride): Yes, I looked in at the box-office on my way up.

Lorraine: It might have been better to hold him....

Duloi-Bordeau: But that would be a criminal offence.

Lorraine (biting his lip): Even so.

Duloi-Bordeau: No, there would have been hell to pay for that.

Lorraine: He must know someone in this theatre.

Duloi-Bordeau: Oh, he does.

Lorraine (swiftly): who?

Duloi-Bordeau: Mademoiselle Berger. They're lovers.

Lorraine: Who told you that?

Duloi-Bordeau: He did.

Lorraine: Lovers! (With a shrug) Well, he told you that himself so perhaps it's all above board. That's the feeling you had in his presence, was it not? that he was above board?

Duloi-Bordeau: If appearances are anything to go by, yes.

Lorraine: You'd better go down and change, then. On your way tell the attendants at the stagedoor not to admit any personal visitors for Mr. Finstanley.

Duloi-Bordeau: I think you worry too much. Goodbye.

Just as Duloi-Bordeau left the room Lorraine picked up the telephone receiver.

Jacques clapped his hands and ushered the girls of the dancing chorus onto the stage. A powerful battery of yellow lights in the files was switched on, then two plain arc-lamps in the wings. The girls formed two lines in front of him, then following his example they began taking up one dancing posture after another without piano accompaniment.

They were dressed in blouses and short frilled skirts of black lace, with black stockings. On their right legs, just above their knee-caps, there was a single silver garter two or three inches in width.

Some yards behind one of the arc-lamps in the wings Nidok, in a yellow, black-edged dressing-gown, handed a stage-hand his two doves. The attendant held them over a basket; they fluttered down into it, and he closed the lid. At that moment a call-boy ran down from the wooden staircase and handed Nidok a message. Nidok read it, spoke a few words to the stagehand and went behind the back-drop to the wooden staircase. He went up to Lorraine's office.

Lorraine was sitting behind his desk, huddled up, resigned and silent. Nidok came across the room and shook his hand, but he barely moved.

Lorraine: They found Sangson, and it appears - I only say it appears - as if we made a mistake.

Nidok: So you didn't detain him?

Lorraine: No, they let him go.

Nidok: Wisely, I think. But why did we make a mistake?

Lorraine: It appears he behaved like any English gentleman.

Nidok ~~with a look of surprise~~: <sup>But</sup> they are sometimes the worst criminals, ~~as you know~~ you know.

But /  
you know /

Lorraine (peering at him): You aren't convinced, then?

Nidok: Convinced by what? You haven't told me anything. You haven't told me, for instance, why he called on Finstanley at such an odd hour last night.

Lorraine: No, I forgot to ask Duloi-Bordeau about that.

Nidok: I've no doubt he convinced Duloi-Bordeau, though.

Lorraine (with fresh anxiety): I wonder if there is going to be any trouble? I wish to God I knew what these people were up to. I've sent down a description of Sangson to the attendants at the stagedoor. But perhaps we ought to have held him, criminal offence or no criminal offence.

He sighed and shifted in his chair.

Lorraine: Something is going to happen. It doesn't matter what Duloi-Bordeau says. I can feel it. I've been feeling it all day: that something is going to happen tonight. This is the worst First Night I have ever known in my life. There is something in the air - I can feel it. I tell you, Eiselheim, I'm terrified of tonight. (Glancing at the door, then leaning

forward, lowering his voice) Jack's going to get the bird.

Nidok (abruptly): We can't tell that before he goes on the stage.

Lorraine: No. (With a reminiscent smile) All I have are my premonitions. (With sudden remorse) Why in the name of God am I letting him go on tonight at all? He's a sick man. I told him this morning I was postponing the performance - I had everything ready; what has happened between this morning and now to alter my plan? Why is he going on? I can't tell you. It's so obvious that he shouldn't be going on. What has happened during the day to alter my plan? I can't remember, Eiselheim. These last few hours have gone past like a sleep. (Fixing Nidok with his eyes) Can I stop him now? Such things have been done before.

Nidok: How can you turn away two thousand people? No, if Finstanley is about to end his career, let him do it in good style. Let everybody see it, let everybody know it for certain, - that Hellebore is finished once and for all. Then there'll be no question of further contracts.

There'll be no more worrying on future First Nights. Take him off the programme tonight, and tomorrow you'll be blaming yourself for having done it: you will feel that after all he may have done well if you'd let him go on. I believe in letting a man go to his ruin if that's what he wishes to do.

Eiselheim's lips were pursed as he spoke, and he gazed at Lorraine with clear, knowing eyes.

Françine, standing behind Hellebore at the dressing table, fitted a wig carefully over his head. It was a wig with ample ginger tufts at each side and a white bald patch between. As she pressed the edges down the telephone bell rang. She leaned forward over Hellebore, keeping one hand securely on his wig, and took the receiver.

Françine: Yes..... I shall come at once.

She replaced the receiver slowly and looked at Hellebore through the dressing-table mirror.

Hellebore: What's the matter?

Françine: Lorraine wants me to go up and see him at once.

Hellebore (brusquely): At once? No, you're needed here.

What's he up to?

Françine: He said he wouldn't keep me from you more than a few minutes, and it's urgent.

Hellebore: Run along, then.

She took off her smock and tidied her hair in his mirror, then left the room. He pressed at the wig in the nape of his neck and got up. He went behind the screen and took off his shirt. He sat down to undo his shoes, then held his white pierrot's costume with the pom-pom buttons up to the light.

There was a knock at the door and someone entered the room. Lorraine's voice called out, "Jack?"

Hellebore (recognizing Lorraine's voice): Hello, she's on the way up. She left just this minute.

Lorraine: Who?

Hellebore: The Virgin.

Lorraine: Oh, yes, but I thought I'd slip down and tell you the news.

Hellebore: You sound miserable. (Slipping the costume over his head) What news is this?

Lorraine: The Virgin and your young friend Sangson are lovers, Jack.

Hellebore (surprised by this): How do you know?

Lorraine: Birds. It makes it all the more suspicious to my mind.

Lorraine paused. He looked down at the powder-puff, rouge-stick and large ebony comb on Hellebore's table.

Lorraine: I have never trusted that girl. (Turning away to the door, in helpless misery) I shall sack her.

Hellebore (quietly): Don't you sack that girl, Albert.

Lorraine: I shall see you later. We must talk about it.

He left the room. On his way back to the office he buttoned up his jacket, re-arranged the carnation in his button-hole and smoothed back his hair. When he reached his office-door he drew himself up a little, then entered the room.

Françine Berger was already there, sitting between his desk and the window.

Françine: Good evening.

Lorraine: (tersely, going straight to his desk): You happen to be a close friend of a young man called Sangson. Do you mind telling me why he called on Jack Finstanley last night?

Françine stared at him as he sat down, her mouth a little open. She seemed about to reply, but said nothing.

Lorraine: You do know, don't you, that he called on Jack Finstanley last night at the hotel, and that Jack Finstanley was ill this morning - and perhaps unfit to perform tonight - because of that visit?

He spoke and looked as if he were suffering pain. He gazed not into her eyes but above her head at the wall behind her.

Francine: (in an awed whisper): I knew he went to the hotel.

But I don't know why he went.

Lorraine: What was the point of visiting him at midnight?

Francine (bewildered): I don't know.

Lorraine: And why talk to him about his son? Why make him feel that he had murdered his son? Wasn't there a better time for all this?

Francine: I knew nothing about his visit until this afternoon.

Lorraine: But presumably his intention was to break the man's heart, wasn't it?

Francine: (coldly, her anger rising): I don't know. I suppose he wanted to tell the truth, - ~~and~~ what he thought was the truth. But that's only my guess and my guess is no better than your's in this matter.

Lorraine: And by what right does one man tell another man the truth, by what right? Let him keep it to himself.

Francine: Sangson is a friend of mine, but I'm not responsible for what my friends do.

Lorraine: But in a way, you see, you are responsible. For instance, you told your friend where Jack Finstanley's hotel was, and you told him what hours he kept, and you told him when he would be arriving in Paris.

Françine: I didn't think he'd use what I told him.

Lorraine: No, I'm not suggesting you did think. But I'm suggesting you think now, and tell me by what right and with what intention this young man decided to put his nose into the affairs of this theatre.

Françine: I know nothing about his intentions.

Lorraine: What had Jack Finstanley done to deserve that talk about murder? He never harmed anyone during the War.

Françine: Sangson and Jack are grown men. They can look after themselves. You talk about them as if they were children in need of protection.

Lorraine: Yes, well, it strikes me that your young friend is a child and that other people like Jack Finstanley do need protecting against him. Like a child he doesn't know when to hold the truth inside him as a secret, and when to tell it. Like a child running to

father he runs to Finstanley with the news of his guilt. Had he been a religious child - as I was a religious child - he would have gone to confession, and that would have been the end of it. Instead, he used Finstanley as his priest, --- with consequences which I have to mend as best I can. And who was he to judge Finstanley? Whom is any man to judge another? A priest would have told him to cleanse himself before he set about trying to cleanse other people.

Françine: (with a shrug) Oh, I don't understand it.....

Lorraine (severely): But I want you to understand this: that I dislike the idea of any of my employees introducing meddlers - dangerous meddlers - to my best artistes. I have been thinking of asking you to leave this theatre for that reason.

Françine (shocked by this): I've nowhere else to go. My parents are dead.

Lorraine: Then it's all the more important that you understand me: I won't have my artistes interfered with. As you know, I'm rather a suspicious man, I have to be; and I feel your

Cont. P. 226.

young friend is up to something, though it isn't likely you'd tell me exactly what it is he's up to. (With sudden anger) Enormous fortunes depend on these artistes of mine, enormous fortunes and the careers of hundreds upon hundreds of people, and I won't have these - these boys coming forward and imputing crimes to men with a thousand times their distinction. That's all I have to say.

Françine rose, looked at him with curiosity for a moment, then left the room. He stared after her, pale and furious.

Lorraine (between his teeth): Des gosses, alors....

d/  
c/

The foyer and the wide balustrade behind the <sup>d</sup> Dress <sup>c</sup> Circle were now crowded. Silver and crimson lights, designed like five-pointed stars, shone from out of the glass dome above the foyer. The noise of cars and hansom cabs in the street could be heard whenever the entrance doors were opened.

Giordano and Maria Celida arrived ten minutes or so before the curtain was due to go up. They followed an attendant to the end of a long carpeted corridor which ran along the side of the auditorium, and there they were admitted to a box at the very edge of the stage. Giordano, slipped a few coins into the attendant's hand, then followed

his wife nervously to a seat. Maria Celida gazed without embarrassment at the stalls, which were now half full with people, but Giordano averted his eyes and coughed into his hand awkwardly.

Maria (watching a group of people take their seats below):

You are beginning to stoop when you walk, Giordano. I noticed it this evening for the first time. (Facing him suddenly) You are going to take it badly, aren't you?

Giordano (his eyes lowered): No, my dear. And even if I do, it's my choice, I shall have to go through with it.

Maria (watching his mouth): Yes, but it doesn't make me feel any more comfortable. I would far rather you went away - (with a vehement glance at him) right away for a week, or a month, so that you <sup>could</sup> put your mind to other things.

Giordano: Well, I am going away.

Maris: Yes, but you aren't anxious to go away. You want to stay with me till the last moment.

(with warm compassion) My poor Giordano, it doesn't do you any good to brood.

Giordano: I shan't brood once I am out of Paris.

Maria: Are you really going?

Giordano: Of course I'm going. I told you I was going. I have booked my seat on the train. Don't you believe me?

Maria: Oh, I thought you might find it too hard to leave me.

Giordano: Well, I've booked, as I say. The train leaves soon after eleven o'clock. I shall find it unpleasant, but I shall go.

L/ Maria: You look ill, my dear. (Laying her hand on his) Think of the child. Don't think of Hellebore.

Giordano withdrew his hand and nodded politely.

She continued to watch him.

Maria: Why do you torment yourself by coming here at all? There was no need. We shall see each other when you come back to Paris. We shall have a lovely holiday and we'll go everywhere together from morning to night. An hour or two makes no difference. Why do you want to come here and torment yourself with the sight of him?

Giordano: How do you know I shall be tormenting myself?

Maria (in a low voice): I think you will be.

Giordano: Yes, I suppose so. But I decided to go about everything as usual. I didn't tell anyone at

the shop I'd be leaving. That's a job for you tomorrow.

Maria: You are coming to the party, then?

Giordano: Yes. But I shall leave you there and go to the station alone.

Maria (anxiously): You're not going to brood, are you?

Giordano: No.

Maria: You look so ill, my dear. (Grasping his hand) Let's leave Paris together and go down into Italy and forget all about Hellebore, - if you want to. I'll come with you if you want me to!

e/  
Giordano: No, we must go through with it. I hate these delays.

Maria: But I can't bear to think of you brooding, my dear. If you want me to I'll leave this theatre now and we'll pack our things and go away from Paris and forget all about Hellebore and adopt a little child from an orphanage.

Giordano: No. I want the child to be your child.

He pushed her hands away lightly, as if to discourage her gesticulations. He turned half away from her

in his chair and looked at the audience below, calmer now.

Giordano: You get yourself a child. I'll look after myself.

Maria: You won't blame me for anything?

Giordano: No, of course not.

They gazed in silence at the members of the orchestra who were taking their places.

Giordano: Who'll be at the party?

Maria: Oh, theatre people.

Giordano: I've no right to ask fidelity of you, - at any time. I've taught myself to think that, ever since I married you. You're not obliged to be faithful to me because I'm not really your husband.

Maria (in a low voice): Yes, you are. My religion says you are.

Giordano (glancing up at the gallery and then at the chandelier over the auditorium): I shall worry about one thing while I'm away.

Maria: What?

Giordano: Suppose you no longer want me once you have slept with him?

Maria (bitterly): That's impossible.

Giordano: Why?

Maria: I don't know why.

Giordano: I'll tell you why it's possible: because a woman with any life in her at all feels a strong tie to the man who <sup>last</sup> takes her to bed, - especially to the man who ~~gives~~ gives her a child.

(With a cunning glance at her) What do you think?

Maria: I shall be doing it for the child, - and nothing else.

Giordano: But the child will be a tie. You'll see the father whenever you look at it.

Maria (with a sigh): Very well, then, we'll leave Paris together and we'll forget about him. This was your plan as well as mine, remember.

Giordano: No, we must go through with it. I only wanted to know what you think.

Maria: Well, I think you are talking nonsense.

She took a programme from a chair next to her and broke its paper seal. She opened it and laid it in front of her.

Maria: You seem to forget my religion. My religion wouldn't allow me to forsake you, it wouldn't allow me to stay with him, even if he wanted me to.

e /  
 Giordano: Yes, but it's small comfort knowing you'd only come back to me out of a <sup>e</sup>sense of duty towards God, or something. (With another cunning glance) Won't you be coming back to me out of a sense of love?

She looked at him in surprise, then turned to look at the curtain again.

Maria: I want you to believe in me, Giordano. Otherwise everything's finished, isn't it?

Bernard Charpentier took off his cloak in the foyer and handed it to one of the attendants. He went up to the balustrade behind the dress circle and leaned over the parapet. He gazed down at the groups of people in the foyer and watched the doors open and close.

Hellebore was dressed in his white pierrot's costume, and his feet were bare. His nose was now painted red; he had large red lips and thick semicircular eyebrows, and the rest of his face was chalk-white.

He went to the mirror and pressed a tiny contraption under his costume at his left thigh: he watched the ginger hair on his wig stand up on end, quiver, then fall back into place again. He did this twice more, watching his hair intently through the mirror.

He picked up his tweed suit from the table behind the screen, then his sequin costume, then his outsize shoes, then his morning suit with the detachable tails: he peered closely at each of these articles in turn.

Hellebore:       What about that tear in the sequin?

Françine came from the dressing table and took the sequin costume. She showed him a place under the left sleeve which had been perfectly repaired.

Hellebore (with a smile): How clever you are.

Françine:        Shall I do the neck-frill?

Hellebore nodded and sat down. She took a needle and white thread from a small mahogany work box behind him and began sewing up a little tear at the back of his goffered neck-frill.

Hellebore:       He upset you, didn't he?

Françine:        (Tossing the hair out of her eyes): He frightened me. I have nowhere else to go. He knows that. He knows he can frighten me.

Hellebore:       Don't worry. I wouldn't allow it. I could employ you myself.

Françine: (her eyes narrowed) But still, it makes me feel unsafe. I thought he liked me.

Hellebore:       He'll come round to you again. But you must give him time. Time is all he needs. (Biting

his lower lip) By the way, he said you were Sangson's lover:  
is that true?

Françine: Yes, but it must have been his own guess.

Hellebore: I don't want to interfere with you. I only  
asked out of curiosity. Are you going to  
marry him?

Françine (off her guard): We've never spoken to each other  
about it. (Pausing, with a frown) No, we  
shall never marry. We are drawn to each  
other, but against our wishes perhaps. We  
are never really intimate together, we are  
too strange to each other. We just explore  
each other.

Hellebore: Would you like to marry, - yourself?

Françine: No, I don't think so. I think I am happy alone.  
I have my work here, and I don't feel I need  
children.

Hellebore: Are you sure?

Françine: (flushing slightly) Yes, quite sure.

Hellebore: How did you get to know Sangson?

Françine: I met him, during the War, when I was a nurse.  
He came to my casualty station.

Hellebore: Was he wounded, then?

Françine: No. His nerve had broken. I remember when he came in he was shivering and staring like a man with acute frost-bite. In peacetime we should never have got to know each other; we are too different. But soon after he came the War ended and there was very little work for the nurses, so we talked to each other and then travelled to Paris together.

Hellebore: Why did his nerve break?

Françine: Oh, soldiers were always losing their nerve.  
(Reluctantly) But he put it down to your son's death.

She cut the white thread and put back her thimble and needle in the work-box.

Françine: There, I've finished.

Hellebore took from the table a pair of white socks and a pair of white slippers with a pom-pom on each.

Hellebore: He brought home Edgar's death to me last night, you know.

Françine: Yes, so I believe.

Hellebore: He frightened me, too. His words frightened me. He made me feel like a murderer. Well, I told Lorraine this evening: I am a murderer, I did kill my son. Until Sangson spoke to me last night I hardly realised I had a son. (Turning

suddenly to look at her) Do you think he's a clever young man?

Françine: (smiling at his expression) Yes, I think he's clever. Why do you ask?

Hellebore (thoughtfully): Well, I ask because I think an uneducated man - as I am uneducated - can sometimes have the wool pulled over his eyes. I have to be careful, you see; I meet so many educated people.

Nidok glanced through a peep-hole in the curtain at the audience and watched Bernard Charpentier take his place in the second row of the stalls.

Nidok

~~Charpentier~~ (with an ironical smile): Monsieur Gobe-Mouches, adors!

He touched Helen Eugenie's arm and pointed Charpentier out to her: she smiled, then mimicked Charpentier's frown, drawing herself up imperiously.

A red light above the switch-boards went on and off, and the orchestra struck up into a quick waltz. Two stagehands began sweeping the stage from the left to the right, and as they passed behind them Nidok and Eliza Manning walked slowly into the wings. Four flats descended slowly onto the stage, two at either side, and were pushed into position. A backdrop curtain coloured plain yellow was then lowered from

the flies. Several sceneshifters stood waiting for it, then steadied it as it approached the boards. Two cables were drawn out of sight, and a step-ladder was taken back stage. Louis Comte, standing under the switchboard, ordered the stage to be cleared.

Hellebore heard the orchestra strike up, and he started.

Hellebore: 'Blige me, what's the time?

Françine: I put the clock on the table.

Hellebore (turning): So you did.

He looked across at the alarm clock on his dressing table. The time was fifteen minutes past eight.

Hellebore: That band gave me a turn. I thought it was a good deal earlier.

Françine: Well, you're perfectly ready. How do you feel?

Hellebore: I can't feel anything at all. (Rising) Feel. Are they cold?

He laid his fingers on her cheek. She drew back.

Françine: They're so cold!

Hellebore: Well, I can't feel them.

Françine (also rising): But it's hot in here.

Hellebore went to his dressing-table.

Hellebore: Lorraine and Charpentier designed this room. But they forgot a simple thing like a clock. They could have had one fixed onto this table of mine. That would have been just the idea. I had a clock with green hands in my old room - d'you remember? I used to have a round table covered with signed photographs and old programmes pasted on the wall, if you remember. What happened to those things, - do you happen to know?

Françine: I think they were burned when the old dressing-rooms were demolished. But perhaps they are downstairs among the old junk.

For a moment the stage was empty. Jaques entered from the right hand side. He turned and impatiently clapped his hands to hurry his chorus girls forward from the wings. They entered the stage talking and laughing, passing Jaques without looking in his direction. They took up their places in two rows, and Jaques went among them tidying their frilled skirts. He then walked into the wings and nodded to Bénédicte Amurrat. The girls waited, patting their hair and talking to each other.

The orchestra ended its waltz. The chandelier in

the auditorium faded out and the footlights were switched on. The audience stirred and those who had been standing in the gangways took their seats. The wall lights, then the smaller single lights in the roof, faded out.

Louis Amurrat looked at his watch and turned to the electrician at his side. A long battery of red lights in the flies were switched on, so that the backdrop curtain instantly turned from yellow to a deep <sup>orange.</sup> ~~green~~ Two arc-lamps shone from the wings. The electrician pressed a switch at his side and the orchestra struck up into a quick ragtime tune. The red light above the switchboard switched on and off three times. The chorus girls stood ready, their heads lifted high. Jaques went forward from the wings and raised his hand. The moment he lowered it they joined arms and began the first dance, with smiles on their faces.

The curtain slowly rose and the chorus girls were dancing in two rows, their frilled skirts rising and falling as they kicked out their legs.

Jean and Pierre Duloi-Bordeau hurried down to the wings in their black dressing-gowns. The rest of their acrobatic troupe - two women and a young boy - came close behind them. They talked loudly to each other as they hurried along the stone corridor.

The dance ended a few minutes afterwards and the

curtain dropped rapidly to the boards. During the applause the orchestra struck up into a military march.

Jaques ushered the chorus girls off the stage, smiling and patting their shoulders as they passed. The yellow backdrop curtain rose swiftly up into the flies: the ladders, cables and chains behind it were cleared away. Again the stage was swept. Two trapezes were lowered to the level of the stage, and a ladder, a jumping-box, a steel see-saw and a tall structure with cross-bars and platforms for the acrobatic tableaux were brought on. A long mat was unrolled and a white back-drop, much further back than the previous one, was lowered.

The Duloi-Bordeau acrobatic troupe handed their black dressing-gowns to the attendants and ran together onto the stage. They cartwheeled, somersaulted and hand-walked along the mat, while the two women went straight to the trapeze and were lifted, seated on the cross-bars, to places just short of the proscenium arch.

The red light above the switchboard went on and off three times. Jean, Pierre and the boy stood ready on the mat, the women on their trapezes, smiling. The orchestra struck up again, and the curtain rose.

Hellebore put on his white slippers.

Hellebore (in a quiet voice): He said he'd be in the Crimson Tower at four o'clock this afternoon. But he didn't come.

Françine: You invited him?

Hellebore: Yes, at the club last night.

Françine: He said nothing to me about it. Perhaps he knew I would have forbidden it.

Hellebore (glancing at her sharply): Why?

Françine: Well, I thought he upset you last night. And he might have done the same again just before your performance. You can't deny that he did upset you.

Hellebore: Oh, yes, he upset me. (Eagerly) But I wanted another talk with him, Françine. I had a lot to tell him. He's a fine talker, you know. Why didn't he come?

Françine: I've no idea, Jack.

Hellebore: When did you last see him?

Françine: (after a little hesitation): This afternoon. He left my room about half-past two or three.

Hellebore: Where did he go?

Françine: To Signor Celida's shop in the Concorde.

Hellebore: Then why didn't he come? I invited him last night.

Françine (gazing at him calmly): Why are you so anxious about it?

He got up and walked towards his dressing table.

Hellebore: Oh, he's just the sort of young man who gets himself into harm.

Françine: But what sort of harm?

Hellebore: Well, an accident or - I don't know exactly what. He has a frightened look sometimes, don't you think so? (Puzzled) I feel responsible for him, - more than I ever did for Edgar. He needs someone to look after him. Do you take enough care of him?

She began needlessly rearranging the costumes.

Françine (sadly): He has enough care taken of him. He's got me, and Signora Celida, and now you. ~~But what's the use of that? He's got me, and Signora Celida, and now you. But what's the use of that? He's got me, and Signora Celida, and now you. But what's the use of that?~~

Hellebore: Is he in the audience tonight?

Françine: No.

Hellebore: Good.

Françine: Why?

Hellebore: I don't know why.

Françine: Do you think you're going to make a mess of it?

Hellebore: Oh, I don't know!

Françine: You won't make a mess of it. You're so calm, like you used to be before the War.

Hellebore: That's because I know I will make a mess of it. Another talk with Sangson tonight might have made me feel better. It was my fault Edgar died, you see! I wish I could go back into the past. I'm alone, Françine. There's nobody to help me. Things were different before the War. I could depend on other people. I trusted Lorraine. Everybody laughed more, they weren't so selfish and suspicious.

(Turning and staring at Françine). Everybody's waiting for me to do something wrong. They're all watching me. That's what it feels like. I've got no real friends.

Françine: You've only been in Paris a few hours, so how can you tell?

A muffled sound of applause came from the auditorium.

Françine: Listen to that. They aren't unfriendly. It's a good house tonight.

Hellebore (disconsolately): Well, if I get the bird I shan't try again. Once is enough for me.

There was a hushed roll of drums as Pierre Dulci-Bordeau put his hands on the soles of Jean's feet, leaned forward and then jumped swiftly up into a hand-stand. Jean was lying underneath him on his back, with his knees fully bent over his chest. When Pierre was quite steady the boy came forward with a short steel ladder. At its base were shoe-like attachments. Carrying the ladder, he put his right foot on one of Jean's knees and climbed slowly onto Pierre's shoulders. He then lifted the ladder so that Pierre could fit his feet into the shoes. When it was balanced at a slight angle he climbed further up until he had his foot on the first rung. The drum-roll ceased. There was silence, and the group remained quite still. Jean called out: "Allez!" and the boy began very slowly to climb the ladder. He reached the top rung and gripped it with both hands. There was another cry from Jean, and the boy raised himself slowly into a hand-stand. The bass-drum sounded out and amid the applause the orchestra started up again.

The trapeze-girls swung to the floor by means of ropes. The boy came down from the ladder, and Jean and Pierre jumped to their feet. The troupe bowed low and the curtain fell.

r /  
Hallebore sat before his mirror<sup>r</sup> again and put the finishing touches to his face.

There was a knock on the door and Lorraine entered the room, neater than before and in evening clothes. His lips were pursed and white with nervousness.

Françine came ~~in~~ from behind the screen, then immediately withdrew when she saw who it was. Hellebore lowered his head and glanced through the mirror<sup>†</sup>. He laughed.

Hellebore: Look at this, Françine: a call-boy in tails!

Françine went to the fireplace at the opposite end of the room. As she passed him Lorraine turned away, deliberately showing her his back.

Lorraine: (To Hellebore) How do you feel?

Hellebore (powdering his forehead, where the wig was fixed)

Better than you do, I dare say.

Lorraine sat down on the divan-bed and sighed, while Françine put fresh logs on the fire.

A muted bell in the wall behind the screen rang three times, and Françine went hurriedly to the door and held it open for Hellebore. As she did so an immense roar of applause sounded down the corridor from the wings above. Hellebore had a last look at his face, then rose.

A call-boy ran down from the stage to the dressing-room and was just about to call out to Hellebore when Lorraine got up from the divan and, without looking directly

at him, waved to him to go away. The boy stood still in the corridor for a moment, daunted and frightened, then ran back to the stage.

Hellebore left the dressing-room followed by Lorraine and Françine. The bell behind the screen rang again as they reached the stone steps leading to the pass-door. Hellebore walked slowly, his eyes on the ground; Lorraine seemed in pain, and there were large beads of sweat all over his brow. As Françine pushed open the pass-door a great hot breath of air rushed out to them from the wings.

The orchestra was playing again, and sceneshifters were running noisily to and fro, across the stage. One of the two trapezes used by the acrobatic troupe had been raised out of sight and the other moved a little more to the centre. The mat was rolled up, and the steel see-saw, the ladders and the jumping-box were quickly taken off into the wings. When the stage was clear the garlanded staircase for Hellebore's turn was brought on and a section of the stage raised against it to form a balustrade. Hellebore's backdrop was slowly lowered in front of it.

This backdrop curtain was black, and diagonally across it, from corner to corner, there was a huge Christmas rose with dark green mottled leaves and a very deep red bloom.

As Hellebore came into the wings the stagehands and electricians drew back to make way for him. They watched him as he walked towards the switchboard and stood there alone. Bénédicte Amurrat ran from the other side of the stage and shook hands with him. Hellebore smiled at him calmly, then looked about him, at the stagehands in the wings, then at the stage, as if the scene-changing deeply interested him. He stood quite still and spoke to no one.

The ramshackle piano was now wheeled on, and the wire was made taut between its stays on either side. Two stagehands brought on a chest-of-drawers, and the tiny bowler-hat was lowered from the flies.

The red light above the switchboard shone three times, and the orchestra played the final chords of its waltz. The last scene-shifters ran off the stage, and a great battery of lights up above was switched on, then the two arc-lamps on either side of the stage. The audience grew quiet, and the red light above the switchboard shone once more.

The stage was now empty and Amurrat turned with a smile to Hellebore. Throughout the auditorium there was utter silence, and the curtain slowly rose.

Hellebore continued to gaze at the stage, lost and half-smiling. A few seconds passed, and he remained there.

Amurrat ran to his side.

Amurrat (in an urgent whisper): The tabs are up, Jack.

Hellebore turned and stared at him sternly, as if he were trying to recognise his face. Then he nodded a little drowsily and went to the edge of one of the flats at the side of the stage. He carefully put his hand round its edge so that his fingers would be visible to the audience. Then he leaned forward and peered round the flat at the auditorium, so that now the fingers of his right hand, and the whole of his head were visible. There was a long sighing noise from the audience. He started, his ginger hair rose and fell quickly, and in an instant he withdrew his head and hand. Laughter went across the auditorium, from the stalls to the gallery, and died away.

Hellebore walked slowly onto the stage in his white pierret's costume. The audience clapped this entrance, but he did not look in their direction. As silence fell again he began strolling about the stage, staring casually at its furniture, - first at the piano, then up at the trapeze and the taut wire, then at the huge Christmas rose across the backdrop curtain, then at the chest of drawers and the bowler-hat. He stared at them inquisitively, but he seemed afraid to touch anything. The audience was watching him very close.

He went towards the piano and bent down to have a look at its legs. But in the act of doing this he seemed to become aware of the audience for the first time. He slowly raised himself up again and cast a quick side-glance at them. Then he turned his face in their direction, his jaw fell, his hair again rose and fell; he became rigid with panic and looked wildly behind him. He was just about to flee towards the black curtain when he seemed to grow calm again: he came towards the footlights with his former casual walk, staring down into the pit. Just short of the footlights he seemed to reel, and a light laugh came from the auditorium. He stood quite still, and the theatre was again in utter silence. For many seconds he did nothing, then seemed about to topple forward into the scorching footlights, but held himself back in time. The audience was not certain what he meant by this and continued to watch him closely, waiting for the laugh.

(He peered into it as if he were trying to make out the faces.) He stood still, legs astride, looking down into the pit. Then he seemed to shudder. There was the sound of whispering in the wings. Someone backstage shouted. Hellebore turned quickly to the left. The moment he did so he lost his balance. He began toppling forward. Suddenly his eyes closed and tears poured down his face. He collapsed

onto his left shoulder, then turned over onto his back. The audience was just about to laugh but the curtain fell rapidly, and the orchestra struck up into loud, gay music. The bottom of the curtain struck the boards only a few inches from Hellebore's head.

Stagehands and electricians ran onto the stage. Two of them lifted Hellebore clear of the drop-curtain, and Amurrat shouted for a stretcher. Hellebore was not unconscious. He leaned forward on his right elbow, weeping and shuddering. Amurrat tried to lift his head to look at his eyes, but he pushed him away. A stretcher was brought, and one of the men clasped him under the arm-pits. At this moment Hellebore opened his eyes again and, looking down, saw one of the hands. He watched it with an expression of terror. Then he looked up at the man's face.

Hellebore (deliriously, as he was laid on the stretcher):

There's blood on your fingers.

The man let go of Hellebore's shoulders. He stared down at his own hand, then at Hellebore suspiciously.

Comte:        It's all right, he's delirious.

The stagehands were about to carry him backstage when Lorraine ran in from the wings. He was in his shirt-sleeves. His arm-pits and the greater part of his sleeves were drenched with sweat. He pushed the stagehands aside

and went to the stretcher. Hellebore lay there with his eyes closed, breathing heavily. His powder was smudged, and there were red marks across his forehead. There were also stains on his neck-frill, and one of the pom-pom buttons on his costume was missing.

Lorraine (to Amurrat, shouting): What happened?

Amurrat: Nobody knows! He isn't hurt!

Lorraine (turning to a stagehand): Call the nurse! (To Comte) Get on, with the other programme.

Comte ran into the wings, and once more the scene-shifters began clearing the stage. The stretcher was laid down behind one of the flats on the left-hand side. Lorraine walked over to the stretcher-bearers, shouting to them as he came.

Lorraine: No! No! Take him straight down to the dressing-room!

But at this moment the nurse came onto the stage. She waved smelling salts under Hellebore's nose and laid a cold towel across his forehead. He was still sobbing and shuddering a little as he lay on the stretcher.

The trapeze was drawn out of sight, and the stage was once again clear. The chorus girls crowded together behind a flat on the other side of the stage, waiting to go

with the  
other  
programme.

en, and a few yards in front of Hellebore stagehands were dismantling the steel-wire.

The cold towel revived Hellebore, and he suddenly started forward in the nurse's arms. Amurrat bent down to him immediately.

Amurrat:           What happened, Jack?

The backdrop curtain with the Christmas rose left the stage end ascended slowly into the flies, and behind it Hellebore's garlanded staircase was being dismantled. He looked aghast at the rising backdrop, then at the chorus-girls and his stripped staircase.

Hellebore (with horrified astonishment) Stop them doing that.

Stop those girls coming on.

Amurrat:           It's the other programme. We mustn't waste time, Jack.

Hellebore pushed the nurse's arm away and jumped up. He stared at Amurrat.

Hellebore:        What happened?

Amurrat:        You just fell down.

Hellebore:       Well, get my stuff on the stage again.

Lorraine came forward from behind the stretcher and took Hellebore's arm. Hellebore turned.

Hellebore (wildly, looking from Amurrat to Lorraine) Who's running another programme?

Lorraine: You're ill, Jack. Look at you. (Hardly able to speak) I knew you'd do this.

Hellebore: I'm not ill! (Shaking his head violently) I don't know what happened, I don't know what happened!

He grasped the lapel of Lorraine's waistcoat.

Hellebore: Stop them.

Lorraine: No, I'm powerless to do that now.

Hellebore: Stop them.

Lorraine shook his head mutely. Hellebore watched his steel wire go loose and fall to the ground, then with his chin thrust forward, he strode across to the other side of the stage and shouted something to Jaques in English. Jaques drew back in fear, not understanding the English. His chorus girls were waiting together behind <sup>him</sup> ~~them~~, and the yellow backdrop for their turn was just about to be lowered. Hellebore pushed at Jaques wildly, and Jaques fell against one of the flats with a shrill cry.

Hellebore (to the girls) Allee! Allee!

He stretched out his arms and pushed against them, so that they moved back as a crowd. They screamed and shouted to Amurrat, and some of them fled through the pass-door. Lorraine and Amurrat ran up behind him and pulled him back. Most of the sceneshifters were now standing still

watching the group.

Hellebore: I'm going on again.

Lorraine: You've made that impossible, Jack.

Hellebore: Listen to me. I'm not leaving this stage tonight until I've done my turn. You can run another programme if you like, but I'm not leaving this stage. I'll go out in front of that curtain and do my turn in the pit, if you like. (To Comte, in the wings) Call the Virgin!

He turned and faced the stage. He looked at the sceneshifters who were dismantling his staircase and shouted up at them.

Hellebore (tapping his own chest) Hellebore! Hellebore!  
 (Pointing to the chorus girls on his right) Non la danse!  
 Amurrat (hesitantly): Are you going to let him try?

The sceneshifters watched Lorraine, waiting for a decision. The sweat was still pouring from his brow. He looked sad and troubled. At last he nodded. Some of the sceneshifters groaned with annoyance, and Lorraine walked back into the wings with Amurrat, shaking his head sadly.

Lorraine: We're finished, Bénédict. I knew he'd do this.

Amurrat: Suppose it goes wrong again?

Lorraine (with resignation): Oh, it will go wrong. But I'm going to let everybody see for themselves he's finished. I don't care what it costs me, but no one is going to tell me after this that I stopped him going on. If he wants to ruin himself in front of two thousand people, let him. Not a manager in Europe is going to touch him after this. That was Eiselheim's advice to me this morning: let everybody see for themselves he's finished. And it's going to cost me six hundred thousand francs.

Françine ran through the pass-door carrying rouge, a powder-puff, a brush and a mirror. Once more Hellebore's backdrop was lowered to the stage and the stays for his steel wire erected. A stagehand brought him a chair and placed it near the switchboard. He sat down and smiled, watching his scenery return. Françine quickly powdered and rouged his face again, too nervous to speak. She painted in his thick eyebrows and rubbed white powder into the stains on his neck-frill.

Lorraine left Amurrat and walked behind the scenery to the stairs leading up to his office. He climbed slowly up, in resigned despair. He stood still on the gallery

for a moment, panting heavily after his climb, then he went into the office and slammed the door. He sat down at his desk. He wiped his brow and closed his eyes.

Hellebore's scene was once more in place. The last stagehands ran off the stage, and the music came to an end as the red light shone three times. Hellebore stood behind one of the flats as before. The theatre was in silence again, and slowly the curtain rose.

Hellebore entered from the right and walked drowsily across the stage without looking at the audience. He strolled to the piano and deftly played a little tune with his right hand. Suddenly the lid fell smartly down on his fingers and he gave a terrified jump in the air. There was loud laughter, as if with relief. He ran to the centre of the stage sucking his fingers. Then he uttered a long, wild yell of pain. He stopped, and seemed surprised at his own voice. He yelled again, experimentally, and again listened to his own voice. Then he began to weep. The tears poured down onto his piemot's costume. They grew, until they were two thin sprays of water from the corners of his eyes. He stood still for a moment, and again there was utter silence throughout the theatre.

Suddenly he ran back to the piano, flung the lid up, and began playing furiously, jumping up and down as he

played. Then there was a deafening explosion, the piano-playing ceased, and neither he nor the piano could be seen for a great cloud of white smoke.

This cloud went slowly upwards, and after a few seconds he became visible at its edge, reeling and stumbling, his pierrot's costume in rags. One tuft of ginger hair hung down over his right ear, his slippers with the pom-pom buttons were missing, and beneath the rags of his dress, a red and yellow striped vest and yellow pants were now visible. Slowly he recovered his balance, and the smoke cleared away.

He glanced malevolently at the piano, then caught sight of the chest-of-drawers on the right hand side. Its top drawer was slightly open. He went towards it self-righteously and pushed the top-drawer home, but instantly the lower drawer came out. He stared down at it, and his one tuft of ginger hair rose and fell. He bent down, pushed the lower drawer home, and this time the second drawer struck him a blow on the head and he somersaulted backwards. He jumped up again and stood looking at the chest from a distance. He went towards it, kicked the middle drawer home with his foot and then ran wildly to the other side of the stage. There, behind the piano, he turned and looked

back. All the drawers were now shut.

He walked back again. He smiled, and pointed to the tiny bowler-hat. He took it and tried it on. He grinned shyly at the audience, then huddled up his shoulders and giggled. An idea struck him. He laid the hat down again and ran over to the piano. He opened the main lid and brought out a huge hand-mirror two or three feet in length. This he took over to the chest-of-drawers. He put the bowler hat on again, leaned against the top drawer and simpered in front of the mirror. Suddenly the top drawer came out and struck him smartly <sup>to</sup> on the shoulder. He yelled out with pain and fell straight on his back. The huge hand-mirror toppled to the ground as the bass-drum sounded out. He lay rigid for some time, then slowly, daunted and frightened, he got up. He looked about disconsolately for his hat and found it immediately in front of the lower drawer. He went to the side of the chest, with his back to the audience, and kicked the hat towards the back of the stage. Then he walked round behind the chest. Just as he was about to pick the hat up, it moved a little further towards the centre of the stage. He stared at it, his head on one side. Again he bent down, and again it moved away. He pondered, chin in hand. Then he walked round to the other side of the hat and again bent down. This time it came

towards him, he chuckled and gathered it like a hen into his hands. He put it back on his head and began strutting about the stage. But as he walked towards the footlights it rose into the air slowly and remained stationary three or four feet above his head. He continued to strut about, unaware of this. He walked round the chest-of-drawers and struck it vehemently with his foot as he passed. The more the audience laughed, the prouder he became. He bowed. He walked to the back of the stage, studied the Christmas rose on the back drop, then returned to the footlights. As he came down the stage he caught sight of the bowler hat in mid-air. He stopped short and again his one tuft of ginger hair rose and fell. Slowly he raised his hand to his head and found nothing there. He gazed bitterly at the hanging hat, then made an absurd effort to reach it by standing on his toes. He stamped his foot impatiently and turned his back on the audience. He walked away from the footlights, sighing deeply.

As he did so he caught sight of the steel wire. He stopped and gazed upwards. He turned to the audience again with a smile. He came to the footlights again. He pointed to himself, then to the steel wire, his eyebrows raised. He walked to one side of the proscenium arch and began taking off his torn costume fragment by fragment. He folded each piece and carefully laid it down in front of the footlights.

and at last he stood in his striped vest and long yellow pants. He went into the wings, and silence gradually fell on the theatre again.

The orchestra began playing quietly. Hellebore appeared on the wire at the right of the stage. He stepped forward, lost his footing, almost fell and ran back to his little platform with a loud cry. He stepped onto the wire again, and this time he ran precipitately to the middle. He jumped in the air and turned about, his feet turned slightly outwards. He jumped higher and higher in the air as the wire bounced up and down, and the orchestra took up his rhythm. He somersaulted forwards in the air, holding his knees. When he had reached a sufficient height he took two forward somersaults in the air above the wire. He jumped with reckless confidence, crying out at the top of his voice, his arms stretched sideways. Sometimes he landed on his feet, sometimes he landed at a sitting position. He moved his limbs in the air with a wonderful swiftness and ease. He took a backward somersault in the air, <sup>pretended to</sup> miss his footing on the wire and seemed about to fall straight down to the stage. The orchestra stopped playing instantly, there was a crash on the bass-drum, and Hellebore hung by his left arm on the wire, his confidence gone, tears pouring from his eyes, yelling out mournfully, his legs kicking wildly in space. He

pretended to /

tried several times to reach the wire with his right foot, but failed. He hung there by both hands, and at last he managed by swinging his body upwards to grip it between his feet. He pulled himself up, lay along the wire on his stomach, steadied himself, then lost his balance again and twisted round underneath it. Again he dangled in space. But this time he looked down and saw that he had no more than three feet or so to drop. He jumped lightly down and stared sulkily at the audience as they applauded him. He walked to the footlights and lifted his chin defiantly. He had lost his self-assurance. With sudden revengeful fury he threw himself over into a forward somersault. He threw himself onto his hands, then back onto his feet again, so that he seemed momentarily to bend like a rubber dummy. He hand-walked round the stage, taking long, rapid strides, and jumped to his feet with the orchestra's final chords. He bowed proudly, showing himself off. Quietly confident again, his lips pursed, he began putting on his pierrot's dress. He put on his left sleeve, then one of his trouser legs. He dressed himself with dignity, caring for every little torn fragment. A spotlight rested on him at the side of the stage as he delicately fingered his dress.

With grotesque dignity he walked back across the

stage. As he came towards it the tiny bowler-hat - which had remained in the air - fell a little lower and came to rest immediately in front of his head. He stopped and stared at it. He stepped to the right, but it moved with him. He walked forward and it slipped onto his head. He stopped, then walked on again, and it remained with him. He ran a few paces, and it was still there. He looked into the auditorium and smiled shrewdly. The curtain fell.

When it rose again the piano and the chest-of-drawers were no longer on the stage. There was now a card-table near the footlights, and on it were a top-hat, a small beer-barrel, a saw, a wand and an immense pack of cards.

Hellebore entered dressed in evening clothes that were stained and many sizes too big for him. He had a starched front, and there was a red flower dangling from his button-hole. He walked briskly to the table. He coughed into his hand. He picked up the immense pack of cards and began shuffling them with astonishing swiftness, throwing them up with one hand and catching them with the other. He put them together again and ran his thumb along the top of the pack, so that they made a loud smacking noise. He showed the Queen of Hearts to the audience and then leaned <sup>it</sup> against the beer-barrel with its blank side showing. He brought the

rest of the pack to the footlights and solemnly bent down. He crouched over the pack, raised himself, stretched out his arms, and the pack was gone. He turned round and walked back to the table. As he did so the cards fell loudly one after another from the tail of his jacket onto the floor. He stared down at them with horror, petrified in his tracks. He unhooked the tails of his jacket and began inspecting the pocket inside them for holes. Then he shrugged and threw them with the cards into the wings. He returned to the table a little glumly. An idea occurred to him, and he smiled. He picked up the card which was leaning against the barrel and showed it to the audience. It had changed to the King of Spades. He nodded persuasively as he showed it to them, and giggled.

He struck a match and lit a scrap of paper. He put this lighted paper into a small box and wrapped it round with a silk kerchief. He touched it lightly with his wand. He was about to untie the kerchief, fingering it gingerly, when thick smoke began to pour out of it. He hopped about, hollering and throwing the box from one hand to the other, then he ran to the side of the stage and threw it into the wings. He hastened back to the middle sucking his fingers. He bowed austerely.

He opened a small lid in the barrel and pulled out one coloured silk after another. He turned on the tap, and nothing came forth. He held up his finger shrewdly to the audience and took his wand from the table. He tapped the barrel twice with this wand. He turned the tap on again, and this time a red liquid flowed out. He took a large tumbler from one of his bulging pockets and held it for a moment under the tap. He raised it against the light and stared at it. He took a sip and immediately, with a contorted face, spat it out. He looked at the tumbler defiantly but took another sip. This time he nodded with a smile and swallowed the liquid.

He drew an egg from his left sleeve, held it up before him between his fingertips and then placed it on the table. He drew another from his right sleeve.

Nonchalantly he drew a number of eggs from his hair, his pocket and the ~~waist~~<sup>seat</sup> of his trousers.

He hiccupped. The hiccupped threw him forward a little, and another egg rolled out from under one of his trouser-legs. He stood still, gazing down at the egg with horror. He tried to smile at the audience. He waited, seeming to listen apprehensively, and there was silence. Again he hiccupped, and this time three or four eggs fell noisily from his collar, the cuff of his sleeve and one of his pockets. He remained standing in the same position,

with a troubled, pleading look. Again he waited, and again there was silence. He had his head bent sideways, listening. The moments passed and the hiccough did not come. He sighed with relief and smiled graciously. He returned to the table and drew himself up. But just as he was about to pick up his wand he hiccoughed again, and this time a huge spotted ostrich egg rolled quietly out of his trouser leg and came to rest a few feet from him.

He first looked defiant, then wept. He walked furiously to the centre of the stage. Then he turned suddenly. He went back to the table and began throwing his properties into the wings with an immense clatter. He pushed the barrel onto the floor, rolled it into the wings and then sent the table after it. He dusted his hands off and strolled ~~insouciantly~~ to the other side of the stage. He whistled crudely, his hands in his pockets. As he strolled about, bored and pondering, the lights began to fade, and in a few moments the stage was in utter darkness. His whistling gradually became less forthright, then ceased altogether.

The orchestra began softly playing a polka, and slowly the lights came on. He was standing in the same position as before, but the stage had now been transformed.

There were now tall pillars on either side, and where the black curtain with the Christmas rose had been there was now the wall of a large ballroom, with gilt tables and chairs. He stared all about him, turning round on his heels like a wondering child.

Invisible guests came to being on the stage, and he moved respectfully among them. He re-arranged the red flower in his button-hole and tried to smooth down the tufts of ginger hair with the tips of his fingers. He wiped the toes of his shoes surreptitiously on his trouser-legs as he walked, smiling to someone whenever he did so. He listened to a group of people gossiping, then he himself joined in. He gabbled silently, his head thrust forward, his lips moving with an extraordinary rapidity, his eyes darting this way and that. He found a partner, smiled to her and bowed. They began dancing together, and he became portly and solemn. He took rigid little jumps up and down in the polka, holding her hand high. A waltz followed, and this he danced alone. The music seemed to draw his limbs into movement, swooning and dying away, then lighting up again. He moved with wonderful sureness, delivered helplessly into the music. He danced the Lancers, taking long, soft strides round and round the stage, narrowly avoiding the other guests.

The orchestra stopped suddenly in the middle of a

chord, and he was struck still. He looked about him, the spell broken. The guests seemed to draw away. He became panic-stricken at the thought of their leaving him. He ran to the side of the stage to block their exit. He snapped his fingers at them, blew kisses at them, clapped his hands and pointed with pathetic gaiety onto the stage. But the orchestra remained silent. The pillars on either side rose slowly back into the flies. The ballroom wall gave place to the black curtain again, and the gilt chairs and tables sank underneath the stage by traps. Forlorn and sad, he walked to the footlights.

He took an invisible apple from his pocket and polished it on his sleeve. He took one bite, chewed it, then ate the whole apple with fierce voracity, twirling it round and round in his fingers.

He put his hands in his pockets again and walked to the middle of the stage, staring at the floor. There was silence. He whistled a snatch of one of the tunes to which he had danced. He danced a few steps and smiled to himself. He sighed nostalgically, and there were two or three very quick spurts of water from his eyes.

From somewhere behind him came the sound of soft idyllic music, full of bird-notes. He stopped and listened. He turned and as he did so the back-drop curtain rose into

the air. Behind it was a sunlit balustrade with a narrow flight of stairs leading up to it. There were three arches in the Gothic style, and these were covered with wild climbing roses and other blossoms in profusion. Above the three arches were written the words: "Le berceau de verdure enchanté." The branches of a willow-tree hung down onto the balustrade, behind the arches.

He walked slowly up the staircase, gazing at everything with his mouth open. At the top he began smelling the blossoms. He smelt them like a giraffe, long-necked, slender and inquisitive. He stood on tip-toe to smell a particularly full flower. The idyll music ceased. He smelt the flower, then wanted to pull it down. He grasped hold of it, then pulled. A flood of water instantly poured down all over him. He yelled out. It became a continuous down-pour. He tried to struggle back down the staircase but became entangled in the branches of the willow-tree. At last, drenched to the skin, he threw himself out of one of the arches, and in doing this he brought down with him to the stage all the wild climbing roses. He stood weeping and yelling among them, and the curtain fell.

There was a great roar of applause. Hellebore changed quickly into his sequin costume at the side of the stage. The trapeze was lowered, and he sat on the cross-bar.

He was lifted up into the flies, and the curtain rose again. There was a pause during which the stage was empty, then Hellebore came down from the flies on the trapeze in his sparkling sequin suit. The applause grew louder, and he waved his hand.

Lorraine opened his eyes and started in his chair. He picked up the telephone.

Lorraine:           Get me the stage...! Hullo... Hullo, yes....  
                          What the devil's that noise? (Listening) No!

He put the receiver back and stared before him. He got up and went to the gallery-door, and as he opened it the applause grew louder. He looked down at the stage. The curtain was at that moment up and the stage empty. Then Hellebore came cartwheeling from the wings in his sequin costume. He jumped to his feet just short of the footlights and bowed. The curtain came down again and Hellebore strolled to the side of the stage. He dabbed his neck with a handkerchief. Amurrat ran forward and shook him by the hand.

Lorraine went back to his desk and put his jacket on. Then he went down to the stage by the wooden staircase.

Hellebore took off his wig and slipped between the folds of the curtain which two attendants were holding back for him. The applause grew into a huge roar as he

appeared under the yellow spotlight in his sparkling sequin dress. He bowed low with the wig in his right hand.

Behind the curtain sceneshifters were putting up the cage for Nidok's act. Its walls were about ten feet high, with spikes at the top curving inwards. Nidok stood at the side in evening clothes and a top hat. He stood very still, watching the sceneshifters at work. Behind him stood Eliza and Helen in long Chinese tea-gowns and sandals, their hair shining with oil and gathered at the back into buns. Their eyes were painted to give the appearance of being narrow and slanted.

When the walls were up they were connected with a wire corridor in the wings along which the tigers would enter. Nidok's table was taken into the cage, then his other properties - a black chest, a number of coloured silk kerchiefs, two top hats, a large dice, a wand decorated with tinsel, a tiny barrel with a golden tap, a saw, a pack of cards, two chairs, a number of hoops and an imitation bass-drum.

After the eighth curtain Hellebore took his last bow. The yellow spotlight went out and the orchestra played again.

Nidok, Eliza and Helen went into the cage, and the door was locked behind them. At a signal from Nidok two sceneshifters raised the grating over the wire corridor by means of a chain, and others standing in the wings goaded the

feet / animals along with their pikes. The first tiger stopped two or three feet from the entrance and yawned. It looked about sleepily, then stared at the stage. It growled at an attendant's pike, then walked slowly forward, its teeth a little bared. Eliza waited at the entrance with a trainer's whip. Nidok called to the tiger and showed it a stool on the right hand side. Eliza trailed her whip along the floor towards the stool, coaxing it. The tiger stopped again. It stared first at Nidok, then at her. It walked past her whip and leapt softly onto the box, turning to growl at her as she went towards the entrance again.

When all five tigers were on their boxes the scene-shifters lowered the grating again, and the red light came on. Nidok stood behind his table, with Eliza and Helen on either side. Behind them the tigers waited on their boxes, watchful and drowsy. The curtain rose.

Lorraine shook hands with Hellebore fervently. He gazed into his eyes, nodding all the time, but saying nothing. He put his arm round his shoulder, and together they went towards the pass-door between an avenue of jostling people, all of whom were trying to congratulate Hellebore or present him with flowers.

The dressing-room door was open. Waiting inside were Bernard Charpentier, Françoise Berger and Jean and Pierre Duloi-Bordeau. On the right as Hellebore entered was a

great bank of ~~Charpentier's~~ roses shaped like a horse-shoe and as high as a man, with the letter H in white roses against a red background. He pointed to it with astonishment as he came in, and laughed. The men shook hands with him, and Françoise, tears in her eyes, came forward and kissed him on the cheek.

Lorraine took Charpentier aside just by the door. Lorraine (in a low voice): Take care of him, Bernard. I must slip upstairs for a minute or two.

Charpentier nodded, and Lorraine quietly left the room, closing the door behind him.

Hellebore: (turning) Where's he off to?

Charpentier shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

Lorraine returned to his office. He sat down at his desk again and put his left hand over his eyes.

Nidok took out one of the sides of the bass-drum and held it aloft. Eliza bent down and curled herself up inside the drum, and he put the side back, so that she could no longer be seen. He rolled the drum slowly from one side of the cage to the other, then he touched it several times with his wand. He again removed one of the sides, and Helen removed the other. The drum was now empty. He lifted up the drum-girdle and showed it to the

audience. He held the girdle over one of the tigers, and it leapt through it onto another box.

Nidok then looked about him with a frown. He went up to another of the tigers and spoke to it. The tiger raised itself up, slowly glanced from one side of the cage to the other, then leapt to the floor. It began prowling to and fro across the stage, and Nidok watched it closely. It went across to the black chest at the far side of the cage and growled there. Nidok followed it to the chest, then pulled open the lid, and Eliza stepped out with a smile.

Charpentier lay on the divan with his head against the cushions. Jean and Pierre Duloi-Bordeau sat on one side of the fire, Hellebore in an easy chair, on the other. Françoise sat on a low stool close to Hellebore. Her hair was now brushed straight down to her shoulders, and she was dressed in a white silk evening gown.

The dressing-table had now been cleared of Hellebore's paints and creams, and was covered from end to end with some fifty or sixty champagne glasses.

Hellebore: Well, what did you think was up, then?

Charpentier: I was puzzled, Jack, like everybody else. All your reeling about looked to me part of the act. So did your collapse. I was just going to burst out laughing and the curtain fell.

It was like having the door closed in one's face.

Hellebore: Did the lights go up?

Charpentier: Oh, yes.

Hellebore: I can't understand it. I went on that stage with real first night nerves, but the minute I got near the piano I felt all right. I was just steaming up nicely, then my legs went weak. No, first of all something seemed to get hold of me in the belly, the<sup>n</sup> I felt my legs go. I tried to stand still, but of course with everybody staring at me I lost my head.

Charpentier: Were you unconscious?

Hellebore: Everything went black for a few minutes, that's all. When I saw that curtain come down I could have wept.

Charpentier: You did weep, so Louis told me. And you told a stagehand that he had blood on his fingers. (Laughing) I should like to have seen his face! D'you remember saying that?

Hellebore (with a tired smile): Yes. Now I looked down at that hand and I could have sworn there was blood all over the fingers.

Charpentier: You were delirious, my dear chap. Anyway, I

I shall explain the whole thing in tomorrow morning's edition. It'll make a good story.

A hushed sigh of surprise came from the auditorium. Charpentier yawned, and Jean Duloi-Bordeau looked up at Françoise.

Jean:           What was so dangerous about your friend Henry Sangson?

Françoise started and glanced at Hellebore.

Hellebore (gazing at Jean through half-closed eyes): Why, what do you know about Sangson?

Jean:           We met him in the foyer this afternoon.

Hellebore:     Why?

Jean:           Lorraine told us to. He wanted him kept away from you this afternoon.

Hellebore (astonished): Where is he now, then?

Jean:           Oh, we didn't do him any harm.

Charpentier (to Hellebore): Is this the young man who called on you last night?

Hellebore (his eyes on Jean): Yes.

Charpentier:   And a friend of Françoise's?

Hellebore:     Yes. (To Jean) What was Lorraine's idea?

Jean:           He thought Sangson might be a blackmailer. He asked us to protect you against him, so of course we said yes right away.

Charpentier (chuckling): Poor Albert!

Jean (turning to him): Wasn't he right, then?

Hellebore: Of course, he wasn't.

Jean: Well, that's what I said. He was such a polite young man, and he told us he knew Françoise.

Hellebore: What happened in the foyer, then?

Jean: We told him your rehearsal had been cancelled and would he wait for you at the hotel. So we took him along to your hotel.

Hellebore: And there was I running all over this theatre trying to find him.

Jean: We're sorry, Jack.

Pierre: Yes.

Françoise (bitterly): Lorraine threatened to throw me out for encouraging intruders.

Charpentier: Oh, you mustn't take that to heart. You ought to know Lorraine by now, Françoise. Nothing can be done about his little nightmares. Only afterwards does he realise the truth, and then he suffers the most terrible remorse. So you needn't take his threat very seriously.

(Gazing at the ceiling) And I sometimes wonder whether his little nightmares aren't useful to us all.

They do keep us alert, And it's possible, Jack, that without this nightmare of his about your young friend we wouldn't be sitting here now waiting for your guests to come in and toast your health. Your young friend could have been up to some mischief. And how was Lorraine to know?

Hellebore: I could have told him.

Charpentier: Do you know, I believe he has suddenly become an old man, quite suddenly, in the last few days? He needs our sympathy, Jack.

Hellebore (laughing): Yes, we'll have an appeal fund. My friends are my friends, and I won't have Lorraine or anybody else interfering with them. First he runs a second programme, then he sets Jean and Pierre on a good friend of mine. One of these days he'll get himself into bad trouble. He'll end in the law-courts if he isn't careful. I know a thing or two about Lorraine that might interest the police. Then he'd turn to me for help. I met Lorraine long before you did, Bernard, and I'll give you a word of advice: when he looks old and sad,

watch out for yourself, he's up to something.

Charpentier (to Françoise): What was your friend's idea in calling on Jack last night, then?

Françoise (looking at him coldly): Lorraine asked me that.

How am I to know? I'm not responsible for what my friends do. Perhaps he called on Jack to see the father of someone he had served with during the War - and whom he buried.

Charpentier (politely): I see.

He smiled at her and got up from the divan.

Charpentier: Whenever you mention the War to me you sound a little harsh, Françoise. (Walking towards her)

Do you know what I did during your War?

Françoise (staring at his shoes): No.

Charpentier: I kept my head well down. (Ducking his head with a chuckle) Whereas you were positively up to your eyes in blood, weren't you? And by the look on your face you are going to ask me why I should have considered myself different from anybody else. But I won't let you say it, because it would be so boring. That's the trouble with heroes and heroines, isn't it? - they're so boring.

He teased her with a smile and she lowered her eyes.

Frangine: I wasn't going to say that, as a matter of fact

Charpentier: By the grace of God we <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~ spared it, then.

(Turning and going towards the door) I shall go up and see  
the old gentleman now, (With a glance at

Frangine) Try and pretend you're a human being, my dear.

The results might be interesting.

Hellebore laughed. He patted Frangine's arm, and  
Charpentier left the room.

Nidok took off his top hat. He collapsed it and  
opened it again. He twirled it round on his finger-tips,  
Then put it crown downwards on the table. Eliza brought him  
a large green kerchief, then an orange one, then a yellow  
one, and these he pushed down into the hat. Helen brought  
him a mauve kerchief, a violet and a purple. He turned the  
hat brim downward, with the silks inside. He tapped it  
twice with his wand. He then lifted it, and two doves flew <sup>out</sup>  
from underneath. ~~they~~

They flew up out of sight behind the proscenium  
arch. Nidok, Eliza and Helen gazed upwards, and after a  
pause the doves came fluttering down from the flies. One  
of them carried a green kerchief in its bill, the other a  
mauve. They settled on Nidok's shoulders. He thanked <sup>them</sup> ~~with~~  
a nod and took the kerchiefs from their bills. They flew  
up again and this time they brought an orange kerchief and  
a violet. They flew back for a third time and returned  
with the yellow and purple kerchiefs.

There was a little clapping.

Charpentier entered Lorraine's office. Lorraine indicated a chair and yawned.

Charpentier: You ought to be downstairs with Jack. He has just taken eight curtains and there you are sitting with your head in your hands. Did you even see the turn?

Lorraine: No, Bernard.

Charpentier sighed.

Charpentier: I've been hearing a strange account downstairs of how you sent the Duloi-Bordeau's to waylay a harmless young friend of Françoise's.

Lorraine: I wasn't to know he was harmless. Everything seemed different before the show. I felt so feverish.

Charpentier: But that sort of behaviour can get you into the law-courts.

16/ Lorraine (with a friendly smile): I<sup>ε</sup> wouldn't be for the first time.

Charpentier: You threatened Françoise with dismissal, I believe.

Lorraine: You know, Bernard, I thought that was the end of my career when I saw him lying on that

stage. I thought it was the end of all of us. (Yawning again) I feel so tired I could sleep the eternal sleep. How quiet everything is. Who's on?

Charpentier: Eiselheim.

Lorraine: Ah, that explains it.

He got up and went to the door leading out onto the gallery. Charpentier followed him, and together they looked down at the stage. Eliza was trying to coax one of the tigers back to its box. She was trailing her whip along the floor in front of the animal, her head and shoulders bent forward. The tiger watched her, its long body stretched out, and growled at the whip. Nidok stood at the table drawing off a dark liquid from the barrel into a wine-glass. Throughout the theatre there was utter silence, apart from the tiger's low growling.

Charpentier and Lorraine returned to the office and closed the door.

Hellebore leaned forward and warmed his hands at the fire.

Hellebore: What annoys me is when people try and stuff me alive. That's why I hate this room.

(Turning to Françoise) Have you told Lorraine about that?

Françine: No. I think it's a lovely room.

Hellebore looked about him and smiled. He glanced back at the dressing-table and the curtains behind it.

Hellebore: Well, it looks better than it did an hour ago.

Françine: It only needs to be lived in.

Hellebore (To Jean again): Who was he to protect me, as if I hadn't got a mind of my own. If I want to be robbed or kidnapped or blackmailed, that's my own business. I'm free. I could leave the stage tomorrow if I wanted to. I like being alone, standing on my own two feet. You never got a minute to yourself in the circus, but at least your boss never interfered with your friends.

There was a sudden hushed sound of applause from the auditorium below, and Lorraine's telephone rang.

Lorraine: Speaking. (Listening) Yes. I thought it looked a little slow. (Listening). It does sound subdued. I'll come down.

He put the receiver down and looked at Charpentier.

Lorraine: The boot's on the other foot. The audience went dead on Eiselheim. I thought it looked slow, didn't you? Well, one can never account

for these things.

Charpentier: Were there cat-calls?

Lorraine: No, they just went dead on him. He'll take it to heart, of course. He takes everything to heart. I'll go down.

Lorraine left the office by the gallery-door, Charpentier by the other one. Lorraine hurried down to the stage. He slipped between the running stagehands, jumped over one of Nidok's coloured boxes, bent to avoid a swinging flat and made for the right of the stage.

Eliza cracked her whip at one of the tigers who had stopped on its way along the wire passage. There were tears in her eyes. Lorraine called to her and she turned.

Lorraine (taking her hand): What went wrong, my dear?

Eliza (breathlessly, through her sobs): There was just no go in it tonight. He couldn't get anything out of them.

Lorraine: But did anything particular go wrong?

Eliza: No, that's what I can't understand. It's a beautiful act, Albert. He did the same turn in Brussels a fortnight ago and they wouldn't let him go off the stage. He seemed to hang fire tonight. He's broken-hearted about it.

He's going to ask you to cancel his contract:  
you won't do it, will you?

Lorraine (averting his face): Well, perhaps he does need a  
rest.

Eliza (shaking his arm): No, Albert! Once you cancel his  
contract he'll never try again. Look at me,  
dear. You won't cancel his contract, even if  
he pleads with you, will you?

He looked at her tenderly for a moment.

Lorraine: Very well, then.

The arc-lamps came on, and the stage was cleared for  
the chorus. The orchestra struck up again. Eliza and  
Lorraine walked behind the back-drop towards the wooden  
staircase.

Lorraine: Come up to the office, Eliza.

Eliza: No. I want to change now. I'll see you at  
Jack's party.

Lorraine looked about him, then gripped her arm  
earnestly.

Lorraine: Leave him, Eliza! Let Helen look after him  
for a little while. Don't go away so soon.  
Stay here on whatever terms you like to make.  
I shall agree to anything. Will you?

Eliza (helplessly, as if she had no further strength) No.

My answer will always be, no. Always no, no.  
 Even if you cancel his contract I shall go  
 away just the same. I don't know where I shall  
 go, but I shan't stay here.

Lorraine (withdrawing his hand): Forgive me for asking you,  
 then. Say you forgive me.

Eliza (aghast at his expression): Yes, my dear, I ~~say~~ <sup>forgive</sup> you.

~~What a lovely girl!~~

Scene 2: The same, thirty minutes later.

Hellebore tidied the divan cover and patted down the cushions where Charpentier had been lying.

Hellebore: Will you help me unbutton, Françoise?

She followed him behind the screen, where he sat down on a stool, and began unbuttoning the back of his sequin dress.

There was a knock at the door and someone came in. Françoise looked round the screen.

Françoise: Good evening.

Hellebore (turning): Who is it?

Françoise: Mr. Eiselheim.

Hellebore stared at her in astonishment.

Hellebore: Tell him to come through.

He stood up, and Nidok came to the edge of the screen. He wore his overcoat and was carrying a hat and cane.

Nidok: I shall take very little of your time.

Hellebore: Won't you sit down?

Françoise Berger went back to the hearth, where the brothers Duloi-Bordeau were sitting.

Nidok (nervously watching him): No, thank you. I must go immediately.

Hellebore stood awkwardly by his stool with his sequin costume open at the back.

Nidok (in a lower voice): The audience died on me.

Hellebore gasped.

Hellebore: You got the bird?

Nidok: Not exactly. But it amounts to the same thing.

Hellebore: Oh, well, it won't happen tomorrow night.

Nidok: I've come to tell you that I shall be leaving Paris tonight.

Hellebore (with a frown): Why?

Nidok (his eyes on the floor): I feel I'm no longer fit for the stage, Mr. Finstanley. I haven't had a rest for twelve years. I'm beginning to rely on my reputation, and I don't think of new things as I used to. I have lost the power of - (hesitating) - putting things into effect. Just now I asked Lorraine to cancel my contract.

Hellebore (instantly): What did he say?

Nidok: He agreed it was wise.

Hellebore: Don't listen to him, Eiselheim.

Nidok: I shall leave Paris tonight whatever he thinks.

Hellebore (puzzled): But it isn't as if they had really

given you the bird, is it? I can't understand you.

Nidok: These things depend on a man's state of confidence, as you must know, Mr. Finstanley. I have lost faith in myself. That's why they died on me. In the last few months I have been imagining to myself all sorts of enmity where there has been none, - a sure sign of my weakness, a sure sign that I had come to believe in the power of other people over me, and no longer in my own. I saw you on the stage this afternoon with Eliza, and I thought there must be some conspiracy against me between you.

Hellebore: What conspiracy?

Nidok (embarrassed): Eliza has been miserable with us lately, and it seemed to be natural that she should conspire with you against me. One day I shall probably return to the stage, but now I need a long rest, a long period of solitude. (More briskly) I won't deny I hoped it would be you who got the bird tonight. I knew what was going on in Lorraine's mind this morning -

Hellebore: What about?

Nidok: About whether the show ought to be postponed.

Hellebore: Ah, yes.

Nidok: And as a colleague I should have come along and told you. It was a sign of my weakness that I didn't. This morning Lorraine wanted to postpone the show, and I tried to persuade him to let you go on. I did that because I wanted you to prove to everybody that you were finished - I thought you were - and not because I wanted him to give you a fair chance. Can you forgive me that?

Hellebore (mumbling): Of course.

Nidok held out his hand and Hellebore took it.

Nidok: I wanted to part from you on good terms.

Hellebore (uncomfortably): Where will you go now?

Nidok: Oh, perhaps to Germany, perhaps to Poland. But there is something else I wanted to ask you. Will you give Eliza your help if she needs it?

Hellebore: Where is she now?

Nidok: In my dressing-room. She wants to go with me, but I shan't let her.

Hellebore: Why not?

Nidok: Because I am very deeply attached to her. She must break away from me, otherwise she'll never be a happy young woman. At present I am her excuse for not being happy. I shall remove that excuse.

He held out his hand again.

Nidok: Goodbye to you, then. Forgive me my -  
(with a smile) strangeness.

They shook hands, and Nidok left the room silently. Hellebore went to the edge of the screen and stared after him. He took a white flower from the bank of ~~flowers~~ roses and put it to his nose.

Scene 3: The Casa Celida in the Rue du Bois de Boulogne,  
Two hours later, at about fifteen minutes past midnight.

A log fire burned in Maria Celida's bedroom. Close to it there was a table laid for two, with two bottles, several covered dishes and a lighted candelabra in the middle. On the other side of the room there was a wide four-poster bed enclosed by heavy damask curtains. These curtains hung down from a dome of carved wood fixed to the ceiling. The only light in the room was from the candelabra.

Hellebore sat on one of the chairs by the table, still in his evening clothes, and Maria Celida lay on the bed with the curtain at her side half drawn back. He gazed into the fire, his legs stretched out before him. Maria's long fur wrap lay over the back of one of the chairs.

Maria: I shall never forget those dances you did.

(Opening her eyes and looking across at him) You were quite near our box when you ate the apple, you know.

a/  
Hellebore: I didn't re<sup>a</sup>llise you were there. Otherwise I could have given you a little wink.

He got up and went towards the bed. He sat down at her side, and they kissed.

Maria (drawing him further down) Come closer.

Hellebore: I feel drunk after that champagne, but not like last night.

Maria: Open one of these bottles if you want to.

Hellebore: Later. We've got the night all to ourselves.

Maria: I feel happy.

Hellebore (gazing into her eyes) Shall we go for a walk  
at dawn?

Maria: No, you must sleep.

H. : "At dawn" I love dawn. I remember... He turned his head - Stared

"Down" she asked. Hellebore: I don't feel tired any longer. <sup>down at the carpet, lost,</sup>  
<sup>his mouth open.</sup>

He smiled, and said

She pulled his arms underneath her shoulders, and again  
he kissed her.

Footsteps sounded from above them, and instantly Maria raised herself on her elbows. She listened, staring before her.

Maria:(in a whisper) Who is that?

Hellebore (shaking his head) I don't know.

The footsteps left the room above and came down the stairs at the far end of the corridor leading to the bedroom. They slowly came nearer the bedroom and stopped just outside. There was a light knock on the door, and Maria gripped Hellebore's arm. They waited in silence, and there was another louder knock.

Sangson:(from outside, speaking softly): Maria, did Giordano  
come back with you?

Neither of them moved. Hellebore stared at the fire, bent forward.

Sangson: Maria, is Giordano in the house? Are you there,

Maria?

Maria: (whispering to Hellebore and trying to rise) He needs  
somebody. Call him in. Please call him in.

Hellebore (holding her shoulders down) What can you do for him?

<sup>L</sup>/<sub>X</sub>leave him alone.

Sangson walked away, and after a few moments a door at  
the other end of the corridor closed quietly. <sup>They lay together again</sup>  
<sup>in silence, his hand sunk down on her shoulder</sup>

Hellebore: What did you mean when you said he needed somebody?

Maria: "Oh, I don't know - he needs our help." <sup>he's in pain</sup>

Hellebore: "We must forget about him. <sup>H. answer</sup> "Let him <sup>suffer</sup> if he's got  
to. <sup>let him suffer</sup>"

He went to the door and quietly turned the key in the  
lock, then returned to the bed and sat down at her side. He  
touched her brow, then her hair.

Hellebore: Forget about him, Maria." <sup>he said</sup>

---

suffer/