

# **THE HERITAGE**

A Play in One Act

by

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Translated from the Russian

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**JACQUES**, a swarthy dark-haired man of short stature, 45

**ELLEN**, a brunette, 21

**SOPHIE**, a blonde, 38

**GENEVIÈVE FRESIER**, an elderly lady, 70–80

**FIRST MALE VOICE**

**SECOND MALE VOICE**

**FEMALE VOICE**

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*1955, south of France, seaside promenade, café. August, evening. Onstage are two small round tables with chairs; behind them is a bar counter. The room is set onstage at an angle to the upstage wall so that, from the auditorium, in perspective, the entrance door with a window (left) and the bar counter (also set at an angle toward centre upstage, parallel to the overall perspective) with a door leading to the kitchen (right) are visible. The back wall of the room (or rather, two walls), draped with a worn, motley carpet, is occupied by shelves of liquor. On the upper left, the edge of the carpet is slightly torn away from the wall and hangs down.*

*On the walls, interspersed with fishing nets, hang pots with plants—there are more of them than bottles on the shelves. Some are in bloom; the plants are scattered throughout the room. Two round tables and four chairs stand centre stage. Near the right edge of the stage by the wall—where the counter ends—there is a floor lamp. The room is dimly lit by three thick candles, burnt down halfway, set in saucers on the bar counter and the tables. Above the entrance door hangs a medium-sized ship's bell, which gives a moderately intense ring when the door is opened and closed.*

*On the counter—right at its centre—on a small nickel-plated tray lies an old, rusty cannonball. To the right of the cannonball, behind the counter, is a door leading to an implied kitchen, an implied storeroom, and an implied toilet. To the left of the counter (which is set onstage at an angle) are the entrance door and a curtained, slightly ajar window from which, from time to time, piercing bird cries carry onto the stage and into the auditorium.*

*Music can be heard from a radio set sitting beneath the shelves behind the bar counter, left. Jacques, in a checked shirt and worn jeans, slowly wipes down the bar counter with a dirty rag. He takes a hefty silver watch on a chain from his trouser pocket, examines it, opens it after a slight pause, checks the time, closes it, and puts it into another pocket.*

**JACQUES**

Well, there you go: ten. Are they turning up or am I supposed to hang around here till midnight? And the corkscrew—yesterday's lot took it, that's Vernier for you. To hell with them.

*He searches for something under the counter. He comes out from behind the bar holding a dented aluminium kettle that looks absurdly large next to everything else. Jacques goes to the windowsill and waters the plants in dark pots lined up along it. He stumbles and spills water on his jeans. He inspects the damage to his clothes.*

**JACQUES**

Shit...

*Shaking the water off his legs and finishing with the plants, Jacques goes back behind the bar. He takes a glass bottle from under the counter and carefully pours water into it from the kettle. When the bottle is about two-thirds full, he puts the kettle back under the counter and sets the bottle on the counter to the right of the iron ball. Having stowed the kettle, Jacques turns to the wall of shelves, takes down a bottle of cognac, has a small sip straight from the neck, and sets the bottle on the counter to the left of the iron ball. A gull cries out. The bell rings, and Ellen comes in. She fidgets with a small handbag in her hands.*

**ELLEN**

Monsieur, are you here? What a loud little bell you have...

**JACQUES**

Come in, come in—don't stand there.

**ELLEN**

So many flowers! And what, no one's here yet? It's awfully dark in here. Good evening, monsieur!

**JACQUES** (cheerfully)

The flowers are all for you! You walked in and it got so bright I don't need any electricity. Better marry me.

**ELLEN** (sitting at the bar to Jacques's left, closer to the door)

What are you saying, monsieur—how could you! They burned your boss in the furnace only today, and you're leading a girl on. Poor Monsieur Dior.

**JACQUES**

As the old devil willed it, that's how they burned him.

**ELLEN**

Why devil, monsieur?! He was the kindest of all the people I knew.

**JACQUES** (smirking)

Jean-Paul—kind?

**ELLEN**

Kind, of course. I can't tell you how sorry I am. He was here only on Monday. The moment I opened the shop, he came in—at the crack of dawn. He walked so quietly, hugging the wall, barely moving. And today all that's left of him is ash—I can't get my head around it, monsieur!

**JACQUES**

Cancer. Couldn't find a vein—jabbed himself all over, the old bastard—then tore it open. And it's all damn shit.

**ELLEN**

What shit, monsieur?

**JACQUES**

Heroin.

**ELLEN**

Heroin!? Just think!

**JACQUES**

Heroin, yes. For the last couple of years he was shooting up. All right. Now we'll be splitting the inheritance.

**ELLEN** (examining one of the pots on the bar counter with a rather odd-looking plant, stroking a leaf)

How unusual. And what is it called, monsieur?

**JACQUES**

No idea. Jean-Paul knew everything, and I only know what to water and when.

**ELLEN**

Very beautiful flowers. What do you think, monsieur—will the others be here soon?

*Jacques feels along the wall by the entrance to the kitchen, clicks a switch. A blurred column of light falls through the window.*

**JACQUES**

Look at that—they fixed it. Actually, they should already be here.

*He clicks the switch; the lamp above the bar counter comes on and the room becomes much brighter. He leans closer to Ellen, smiles.*

**JACQUES**

Let's have a drink.

**ELLEN**

Oh, I don't know... It's hot.

**JACQUES** (blowing out the burning candles on the bar counter)

It's all sirocco. Champagne?

**ELLEN**

What are you saying—champagne on such a sad day? Better pour me some water, if you would be so kind.

**JACQUES** (pours water and hands Ellen a glass)

Better have a bit of cognac with me—calms the nerves perfectly.

**ELLEN**

Well, just a drop.

**JACQUES** (pours cognac)

Jean-Paul's favourite cognac. (He slides the cognac glass along the bar counter.)

**ELLEN**

Really? Thank you, monsieur. (She takes a small sip, grimaces.)

**JACQUES** (pours cognac into his own cognac glass)

Salut, Ellen! (He drinks.)

The bell rings. A gull cries out. Sophie comes in, worn out by a hard day. Sophie is around forty. Her hair is pulled back into a ponytail; there is make-up on her face. A bag hangs from her shoulder.

**SOPHIE**

That's some bell you've hung up! And the dust in here—you can't breathe at all. Hi, Jacques! And you—sorry...

**ELLEN** (smiling)

Ellen. Hello, Sophie.

**SOPHIE**

Ciao. I'm completely worn out. Damn dust.

**JACQUES**

It's all sirocco. Come in, sit down—there. Want cognac? Join us—for the repose of Father's soul.

**SOPHIE** (sitting at the bar to Jacques's right; she takes off her bag and hangs it on the back of a tall barstool)

Why cognac? Better a cold beer. It's hot.

**JACQUES**

No beer.

**SOPHIE**

Ah. Then cognac—let's remember him.

*Jacques pours. Sophie lightly flicks her fingers against the leaves of one of the plants, looks around, notices the ball.*

**SOPHIE**

Look at that—a cannonball here.

*She smirks sadly, runs her hand over the old, rusty iron ball lying on the bar counter to the right.*

**JACQUES**

Right.

**SOPHIE** (putting on a cry)

Poor father.

**ELLEN**

I sympathise with you so much, madam. It's so hard—to lose a father.

**SOPHIE**

As if my father weren't enough, Henri nearly got himself killed this morning too. And what's that you've got there? (She suddenly jabs her finger at Ellen's neck.)

**ELLEN** (casting a sideways glance at her chest)

Me, madam... Monsieur gave it to me a couple of months ago.

**SOPHIE**

A couple of months?

**ELLEN**

Yes, a couple—maybe earlier, I don't remember exactly.

**JACQUES**

What about Henri?

**SOPHIE** (rubbing her temples with her hands)

A car hit him this morning. A fracture of his right leg.

**ELLEN**

My God, how horrible!

*Jacques comes over with the cognac bottle and a cognac glass; he sets the glass on the counter.*

**JACQUES**

How so? Here—drink.

*Jacques pours from the cognac bottle into the glass, hands it to Sophie; he sets the bottle down in front of him on the counter to the right of the cannonball.*

**SOPHIE**

This morning in front of a bus in Avignon some bastard ran him over—didn't even stop.

**ELLEN**

Blessed Virgin Mary!

**JACQUES**

And how is he now?

**SOPHIE**

He's fine now, in hospital—Charlotte is looking after him. Everything hit at once today, somehow.

**JACQUES**

I sympathise. Have a drink—it'll feel easier right away.

**SOPHIE**

Will you pour me some water? Why the hell are there so many flowers here? Are you selling them?

**JACQUES** (laughs)

Who needs them? It's all your father. Here. (He pours a glass of water from the bottle and hands it to Sophie.)

**SOPHIE**

I remember, when I was a child, the whole house was crammed with pots, the floor covered in soil, Mum always sweeping and swearing. He'd bring them, take them away, plant them, replant them.

**JACQUES**

I'm sick of watering: there are too many, and you have to climb up on a stool—otherwise you can't reach. The day before yesterday I fell—nearly snapped my neck.

*The bell strikes; a gull cries out, and Madame Fresier enters the café. Madame Fresier is a solid woman of seventy, heavy-set, in a wide-brimmed white hat and a loose, light linen dress; in her hands she carries a black wooden casket—small, but not a tiny one. A French military cross from the First World War is pinned somewhat crookedly to Madame Fresier's dress, at her ample chest.*

**MADAME FRESIER** (raising her eyes upwards, looking for the source of the sound)

What dust. Hello!

**JACQUES**

It's all sirocco, madam. Good evening, madam. Please, come in.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Thank you.

**SOPHIE**

Good evening, madam.

**ELLEN**

Hello, madam.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Well then, my friends, we must carry out Jean-Paul's last will. Here is the ashes of the deceased, and now, according to the will of the deceased, the ashes of the deceased must be laid to rest in the plants growing in the walls of this establishment. According to the deceased's written will.

**JACQUES**

And in which plants exactly, madam?

**MADAME FRESIER**

The will does not specify particular plants, so I think—in those that are easier to reach, Jacques.

**JACQUES**

That's true, madam. Well then, you start yourself—wherever it will be convenient for you.

**MADAME FRESIER**

All right, Jacques.

**SOPHIE**

Thank you so much for everything you did for Dad. I'm deeply in your debt.

**MADAME FRESIER**

There is nothing to thank me for, Sophie: I am carrying out his will. Can one not carry out the will of the deceased?

*Madame walks up to the counter with dignity and removes her hat, placing it beside the bottle and the rusty iron ball lying at the corner-centre of the counter, on top of a small nickel-plated dish. She sets the casket on the counter, opens it, and looks around.*

**MADAME FRESIER**

I ask everyone to stand.

*Everyone present in the room stands up from their places.*

**MADAME FRESIER** *(looking around)*

Hm... Jacques, is there a spoon?

*After searching under the counter, Jacques finds a fairly large tablespoon and, coming out from behind the counter, hands it to Madame Fresier.*

**JACQUES**

Here you are.

**MADAME FRESIER** *(taking it)*

Thank you.

*Having tipped a spoonful of Jean-Paul Dior's ashes under the ficus standing on the counter, Madame Fresier puts a spoonful into the flowers standing on the counter, then goes to the wall and puts a spoonful of ashes into several pots hanging on the wall. Around the tenth pot, the ashes run out.*

**MADAME FRESIER**

And that's it, dear Jean-Paul. Rest in peace, my friend, and may you be reborn in these beautiful creations of God. I ask everyone to sit.

*Everyone except Madame Fresier sits.*

**JACQUES**

Amen. Please, madam, come in—have a seat. You must be tired today.

**MADAME FRESIER** *(walking, waddling, to the counter; she puts the spoon on the counter)*

You could say that, Jacques. My legs are failing, and my stomach is bad. Age, Jacques. Here's the spoon.

**JACQUES** *(with a loud clatter, throws the spoon somewhere under the counter)*

Sit down, madam.

**MADAME FRESIER** *(glancing sideways at her chest)*

One more moment. All of you see this cross on me. A military cross belonging to your grandfather, Sophie—a hero of the First World War, Jean-Paul Dior—is pinned to me according to the will of your father, Jean-Paul Dior, for the ceremony of laying to rest the ashes of the deceased Jean-Paul Dior in the decorative flowers growing on the walls of this establishment. Gentlemen, I solemnly hand the cross to the daughter of Jean-Paul Dior—that is, to you, Sophie—so that you, in due time, will pass it on to your son Henri, the grandson of the deceased Jean-Paul Dior, according to the will of his grandfather, Jean-Paul Dior. Here is this cross—keep it with honour and dignity.

*With some effort Madame Fresier unfastens the cross from her chest and holds it out to Sophie.*

**SOPHIE** *(taking the cross; she hurriedly puts it into the bag hanging on the back of the chair; she rustles something in it)*

Thank you, I'll pass it on, madam. To my Henri, a cross or a brioche—it's all one to him: he sticks everything into his mouth, and I watch so he doesn't choke to death. Thank you again for everything you did for Dad, madam. *(She raises her cognac glass towards Madame Fresier and takes a sip.)*

**MADAME FRESIER**

It is all the will of the Lord, Sophie. Children like your son are God's most beloved, plain and simple. Put your faith in that.

**SOPHIE**

I do put my faith... Only the Lord, you see, runs His beloved over with cars and breaks their legs.

**MADAME FRESIER**

You might want to watch your tongue, Sophie, or else the boy has hands—and a neck, thank God for that.

**SOPHIE**

That's true, madam.

*The lights go out for two seconds and immediately come back on.*

**JACQUES** *(looking up)*

Damn, acting up again. Well, if anything, there are candles.

*He takes a silver watch on a chain out of his trouser pocket, opens the lid, checks the time, and puts it back.*

**JACQUES**

Let's sit down and remember him properly. We'll drink, and then we'll decide what to do next. Please, madam, come in—have a seat, I'll clear a place in a moment.

**SOPHIE** (*perking up*)

Isn't the watch running slow? It must be no less than two hundred years old. I remember it hanging on a hook in his study.

**JACQUES** (*somewhat irritably*)

What would happen to it, if you don't drop it in water? It's a separate item in the will—Perpinyak read it out today. True, you weren't here yet, so take the paper and read it.

**SOPHIE** (*irritated*)

I explained why I was late for the reading—why are you having a go at me, for God's sake? A will is a will—what, I don't understand?

*Sophie rustles in the bag hanging on the back of the chair, takes out a sheet of paper and puts it down in front of her on the table.*

**JACQUES**

Sorry. It's not an easy day for all of us. Make yourselves comfortable, ladies—let's drink.

*Jacques goes behind the bar, clicks something there; all the lamps in the room come on, and the bistro becomes completely bright. He pushes one table up to the other; sets out the spare chairs, puts a bottle of cognac, a clear bottle of water, and a cognac glass and a tumbler for Madame Fresier on the table. Then Jacques goes to the door, locks it from the inside, turns the sign above the door towards the street so it reads "Ferme", and accordingly the sign faces inward with "Ouvert". He returns behind the bar.*

*A series of bird shrieks comes from the window; everyone onstage turns their attention to it.*

**SOPHIE**

My God, what are they screaming like that for? Is one of them sick, or are they fighting?

**ELLEN**

The birds are crying very anxiously.

**JACQUES**

As soon as someone opens the upstairs window, or there's some other noise—they start right up. Their nest is probably somewhere around here... I'm used to it, and the customers find it amusing.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Well, everyone needs a corner of their own... So what if they're birds? We are all God's creatures.

**JACQUES**

That's right, that's right. Will you drink, madam? This is Jean-Paul's favourite cognac, madam. Or perhaps something else? I won't pour wine—the last corkscrew was stolen yesterday.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Stolen? A corkscrew? What the hell does anyone need it for?

**JACQUES**

Vernier's fishermen were celebrating their foreman yesterday—I gave them the corkscrew. Then they started beating each other's faces—couldn't share a girl. And the girl's nothing to write home about: tall, skinny, sort of greenish, a tooth sticking out in front, and she jabbars louder than the gulls—without wine you can't look at her or listen to her. They did have enough wine, though. They got blind drunk, the bastards. I threw them out, and now there's no corkscrew.

**MADAME FRESIER**

I'll give you a new one tomorrow.

**JACQUES** (*laughs*)

You are very kind, madam. So shall I pour you some?

**MADAME FRESIER**

Pour water—it's hot. And I'll drink cognac with pleasure, even though I shouldn't. My stomach, Jacques, has gone quite bad. Old age, Jacques.

*Jacques pours water and sets the tumbler on the table.*

**JACQUES**

What old age, madam? You're good for anything! And we'll set that stomach right now.

*Jacques pours cognac into the cognac glass and sets it beside the tumbler of water.*

*A gull cries out.*

**MADAME FRESIER** (*going to the pushed-together tables; she smooths her skirt, sits down, takes the tumbler of water and sips*)

Listen to you, Jacques—"good for anything"... Old age is old age. You know, when I remember the poor old neighbour, my tears start boiling. I used to go to him to cook and wash. And how we talked! You could talk about anything with him; he could listen like no one else. All because he was a good man, a warm-hearted man, a real man. So let us drink to the eternal rest of his soul. May your memory be bright, Jean-Paul.

*Madame Fresier stands again, raises her cognac glass, and sips from it. After Madame Fresier, Ellen and Sophie stand with their glasses from behind the bar, raise them, and sip from them. Jacques, standing behind the bar, does the same.*

**JACQUES**

Ladies, let's go to the tables; it'll be more comfortable there.

*The ladies take their places at the joined tables: Ellen sits on the left, closer to the entrance door; then Jacques, exactly between the two tables, facing the auditorium; then Sophie; and on the right, not far from the floor lamp, Madame Fresier. Everyone except Madame Fresier is turned to face the auditorium; she sits in half-profile.*

**SOPHIE**

There are no words for how grateful I am to you for Father, madam! Only it seems you blame me that he was alone. But you know we had a falling-out with him back in '44. Daddy said then: go away from here and never come back. I did come to make peace, to show him his grandson—but he wouldn't even let us over the threshold. I remember Father shouting on the stairs, Henri whimpering beside me, and I stood there turned to stone—can't move, can't say a word. So we went back to Avignon. *(crying)* And you try travelling with someone like that. He's like a plant—he hears nothing, doesn't speak, and doesn't understand. They barely agreed to take him into hospital today. Thank Charlotte—she agreed to look after him. *(crying)*

**MADAME FRESIER**

What can you do, Sophie. I heard your quarrel then: in the stairwell Jean-Paul was shouting something, but I didn't quite catch it. Jean-Paul loved you; he often remembered you.

**SOPHIE**

Loved me... To hell with it, let's have another drink.

**JACQUES**

That's right. *(pouring cognac into Sophie's glass)*

*Jacques stands, goes to the floor lamp and switches it on. The room becomes a little brighter still.*

*Suddenly, from behind the door, the sound of a car pulling up is heard, a sharp screech of brakes; the car door slams; a crash is heard—the sound of the palm pot by the café entrance toppling; the locked front door jerks, then there is a knock on it; at once a gull cries out, and a drunken, cheerful male voice is heard.*

**MALE VOICE**

Zahir, open up! Your palm pot's fallen over.

**JACQUES** *(goes to the slightly open window and starts talking into it)*

Where'd you crawl out from? Well, aren't you a beauty. Bought yourself a little horse?

**MALE VOICE**

Plenty of little horses around. Facel Vega it's called. *(hiccup)* Now tell me—why would I buy it? I'm at sea all the time. Borrowed it off the captain for the evening. But the captain's at sea all the time too... What does he need it for? Yeah... It's all complicated...

**JACQUES** *(cheerfully)*

Tell me—why'd you get behind the wheel like that? You'll kill yourself, or you'll kill someone. You're smashed.

**MALE VOICE**

What's it to you, anyway? I'm... I'm better drunk than sober. Knocked it over myself—I'll pick it up myself. *(hiccup)* Listen, I've come straight off the ship to you, didn't even stop at home, and you won't let me in. Let me in, Zahir! *(drums his fist on the door)*

**JACQUES**

Quiet, stop yelling. Why so early? We were expecting your tub the day after tomorrow.

**MALE VOICE**

They loaded us two days early—so we came two days early. Tub, if you please... The fruit carrier “Liège”! Tub, he calls it... So what—won’t you let me in till the day after tomorrow, Zahir?  
*(hiccups)*

**JACQUES** *(leans out of the window; in a lowered voice)*

I’ve got ladies in here, actually.

**MALE VOICE**

I want ladies too! Open up, Zahir!

**JACQUES**

Quiet! We’ve had trouble: Jean-Paul slit his veins—today they burned him at the crematorium.

**MALE VOICE**

Nice news you’ve got, Zahir.

**JACQUES**

That’s how it is. The old man left the café to the four of us—so we’re sitting here now, figuring out what to do next.

**MALE VOICE**

You know... What if I buy you out? I’m sick of bobbing about at sea, I want land under my feet. I’ve got money. *(hiccups)* You’ll sell to your brother, Zahir?

**JACQUES**

Come by tomorrow. Not now—we’ve got to decide. Go on, go on, we’ll see each other tomorrow. And stop knocking over pots.

**MALE VOICE**

All right, I’m off. Catch a gift from home.

*An enormous orange flies in through the window. Jacques catches it and laughs. Then there’s the crash of another pot falling over, and drunken swearing.*

**MALE VOICE**

I didn’t break anything. That’s it, I’m gone.

*A car door slams; the engine starts; the car squeals off.*

*Jacques goes behind the bar, takes a plate and a knife, and comes back to the joined tables.*

**JACQUES**

Fruit carrier “Liège”, ha-ha. My brother—he sails as the cook on the “Liège”.

*He smirks, returns to the joined tables, cuts the orange crosswise into four even wedges right on the plate, and lays them out on it.*

Help yourselves, ladies.

**ELLEN**

Sea cook, monsieur?

**JACQUES**

A sea cook, yes.

**ELLEN**

And you have two names, monsieur?

**JACQUES**

Two names, yes. Father’s French, mother’s Arab—so they gave my brother and me two names straight away. We’re from Algeria, from Oran. We’re twins—only he’s got one eye missing, and I’ve got both. *(He winks at the girl and laughs.)*

**ELLEN**

Forgive my curiosity.

**JACQUES**

What are you talking about, Ellen.

**SOPHIE** *(angrily)*

How can that brother of yours barely stay on his feet and still drive? It’s someone just like him who crippled my Henri yesterday.

**JACQUES**

Yeah. That was wrong of him.

**SOPHIE**

Yeah, of course it was wrong. And just now I remembered Father from when I was little, before the war. Mother was still alive then, so we went on a picnic as a whole family, to Luberon. Lassalle, Father’s supplier, invited us to his farm, the whole family. I remember everything around was violet—lavender in bloom as far as the eye could see. Mother is unpacking the basket of food, and this pendant *(points to Ellen’s neck)* on her neck is swinging like a pendulum—right-left, right-left. Father and Lassalle are by the river with fishing rods, I’m on a swing, flying towards the sun. The swing, you know, is fixed to a thick bough of a plane tree and it flies almost around the whole tree. The wind whistles in my ears, below me a purple field, and then the swing snaps.

**ELLEN** *(covering her mouth with her hand)*

Oh!

**SOPHIE** *(takes an orange slice)*

Back then I broke both arms, both legs, and my right collarbone. And I remember this: just now I was flying towards the sun, and now the violet earth is rushing at me. After that—nothing but solid pain, and I also remember how he drove me to the hospital in a Citroën—at the wheel, crying, and all the time saying: “My beloved girl, my good little daughter, just don’t die, just don’t die!” And I’m lying on the back seat, my head in Mother’s lap, and through the pain one thought keeps spinning in my head: “Why does it stink of shit so much here?”

*She tries to drink cognac from the glass, but it’s already empty. Sobbing, she eats the orange.*

**ELLEN**

So many troubles have fallen to your lot.

**SOPHIE**

Yeah.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Listen, how did it happen that Henri got hit by a car?

**SOPHIE**

I had to get to the bank before the bus, so I took Henri with me—you can’t leave him at home alone for long. So I went to the bank, madam, and I sat him by the fountain on the square with the pigeons—he talks to them—muttering something to them in his own way. I stepped away for ten minutes, maybe fifteen, and he must have got up from the bench. Then some guy in a car. Anyway, the bastard hit him with the car and drove off, didn’t even stop, damn him to hell. My Henri went flying into the fountain, and not just into the water—first he hit the edge. I ran out of the bank at the noise, I look, and people are shouting around the fountain. I came up—my God—my boy is lying by the fountain, his leg all bloody and twisted somehow, awkwardly. I thought: that’s it, I’ve got no son anymore. I don’t know how my heart didn’t burst right there. Then I look—he’s stirring. It’s a good thing people managed to pull him out of the fountain in time, or he’d have drowned. Then they barely managed to get him into hospital. I asked Charlotte to keep an eye on him—they didn’t even want to admit someone in his state on his own.

**ELLEN** *(nervously twists the pendant)*

I feel so sorry for both of you...

**MADAME FRESIER** *(shaking her head in dismay)*

And what did the doctor say?

**SOPHIE**

Henri, madam, is going to lie there for no less than a month, maybe the full two. So I need to get back sooner—to let Charlotte go.

**MADAME FRESIER**

With Henri, I’m sure it’ll work out—I know the Avignon hospital well, the doctors there are not the worst. How is Charlotte doing, by the way? Still the same—hm—sociable?

**SOPHIE** (*sobbing*)

Charlotte, madam, has been married for a year now—to a teacher from the parish school. They go to Mass, they're expecting a little one. She'll be giving birth very soon. So we work together, madam, at the hairdressing salon.

**MADAME FRESIER** (*thoughtfully takes an orange wedge, biting into it with the peel. Chewing, she talks and wipes the juice dripping from her lips with the back of her hand*)

To Mass, you say? Well, well. (*sighs, shakes her head*) And the Lord does send them... You too lay there broken for almost a whole year then. And then your mother right after."

**SOPHIE**

More than a year, madam. A year and four months in bed. I don't remember Mother's face anymore.

**ELLEN**

And what about your mother? Oh, sorry!

**SOPHIE**

It's nothing. In '35 she died, exactly two years after that swing incident. Top me up?

**JACQUES**

Of course. It must be hard, remembering all this.

**SOPHIE**

Not anymore. Mother died in the mountains—slipped off the path into a gorge, and they never found her. It happened at Sainte-Victoire: she and her friends went to the cross, to ask for a little child for one stenographer. My mother worked at the municipality. It was a sunny day then, not a cloud in the sky. And then, for no reason at all, a strong wind rose, a whole storm, and she fell into the abyss. They never found the body.

**ELLEN** (*sympathetically*)

It's true—you've had it in full.

**SOPHIE** (*peering at Ellen's neck*)

You've had it, but not in full. Tell me—how did this pendant come to you?

**ELLEN**

Amber?

**SOPHIE**

Amber, amber. Father had nothing to do with it at all—this is an inheritance on Mother's side. How did he take it and give it to you? It's my mother's grandmother's little trinket—look, there's even a fly in it. Must've earned it, have you? (*she smirks maliciously*)

**ELLEN** (*lowering her eyes, quietly but firmly*)

Why are you like this, Sophie? I put it on in memory of Jean-Paul's kindness—how could I have known it was from your mother? And am I to blame that, out of kindness, he gave it to me as a keepsake? He said: "Here, take it—you'll remember me sometimes." And he himself put it on my neck with trembling hands. Monsieur could barely walk already back then.

**SOPHIE** (*sarcastically*)

Well, if he put it on himself—then all right. Girls were always hovering around him—he was always bringing them home, and always different ones. That's how we lived, more or less, until the end of the war, until I moved out from him to Avignon. All right then, Father—rest in peace.

**JACQUES** (*reproachfully*)

It's unseemly to speak like that about your father on the day of the funeral.

**ELLEN** (*quietly*)

You ought to be ashamed, Sophie, for saying things like that. There was nothing between us, and there couldn't have been. He was four times my age. How can you even...

**SOPHIE** (*irritated*)

Why's everyone jumping on me? I'm just speaking my mind. Jacques, watch your tongue. Fancy words—"unseemly." What are you, moonlighting as a curé on Sundays?

**MADAME FRESIER** (*raising her hands in a conciliatory gesture*)

Now, now...

*Madame Fresier's line is cut off by an insistent knock at the door. A seagull cries; female and male laughter is heard. A husky, low, raucous female voice speaks.*

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

Jacques, come on, open up already, we're freezing, Jacques! Jaa-aques!

*Ellen startles and exchanges a look with Sophie.*

**JACQUES**

Bloody hell—what is it today. Sorry—I'll be right back.

*He hurriedly gets up from the table and goes to the window.*

How did you manage to freeze, Lucy, in the month of August?

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

Without you, even August is cold.

**JACQUES** (*laughs*)

Back to that again. How did the song go?

**WOMAN'S VOICE** (*laughs*)

I can't do it badly.

**JACQUES**

That's true. Hi, Marcel.

**MAN'S VOICE**

Salut! Like we agreed—we came! Listen, she'd barely stepped off the stage and right away: when are we going to Jacques's? "I love him to death," she says—"I can't help it."

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

What are you talking about, Marso? Open up already, Jacques! Let us in, quick—I'm dying for a drink! Come on!

*Madame Fresier shakes her head reproachfully. A seagull cries.*

**JACQUES** *(into the window)*

Listen to me. Jean-Paul's dead—today they burned him. It's the wake now: his daughter came, and the neighbour. So—let's do it another time.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

Burned?

**JACQUES**

He slit his wrists—the neighbour found him in the bath. And he left a letter saying he wanted the furnace.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

Holy Virgin Mary! Wasn't it just the other day he was pawing at me, the old dog? Oh, Jean-Paul... May the Lord rest your sinful soul.

*Sophie smirks into her fist.*

**MAN'S VOICE**

All right, shut it. Let's go—see? Now's not the time. We're off, Jacques. Our condolences.

*A seagull cries.*

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

Of course, Marso. Jacques, accept our sincere condolences. Oh, poor Jean-Paul... Well, you know where to find us.

**JACQUES** *(calling after them)*

Yeah, I know. Like I wouldn't.

**ELLEN**

Are those your friends, monsieur? They must be upset.

**JACQUES**

That's right—friends, Ellen. Musicians from the "Odéon". Lucy sings, Marcel's on the accordion. They dropped in for a drink—we'd been meaning to sit down together for ages, and I'd completely forgotten. And they're without Claude—he plays double bass for them.

**ELLEN**

A double bass—is that like a big violin, monsieur?

**JACQUES**

Yes, Ellen—a violin that big, exactly. Probably sitting somewhere drinking too. They've had it rough lately: a guitarist came with them to play—Kenny from Brooklyn, a huge Black guy. And a couple of months ago, after a concert, he took a bullet in the forehead. Killed stone dead. They all got caught up in a mess—the whole quartet—right after the show. Down nearby on the seafront the Corsicans were settling scores, started blazing away at each other, and the lads were walking past—so Kenny got lucky.

**SOPHIE**

So much for Kenny's tour.

*Ellen stares, covering her mouth with a fist.*

**ELLEN**

But how...

**MADAME FRESIER**

Those bloody Italians have no fear at all around here. Pour me another little drop, Jacques.

**JACQUES**

Of course, madam.

**MADAME FRESIER**

And I'd been bringing Jean-Paul his supper on Thursday. I cooked lamb ragout—thinking, let him have something hot for dinner. I'm walking, Jacques, going up to his floor. I look—and his door is open. I knocked, and nobody answers; that's when I sensed something was wrong. Well, I went in. I look—on the table in the sitting room a lamp is on, and under it a sheet of paper. I put the saucepan on the table, I take the note, unfold it, read it, and it says: "Sorry, I killed myself. The body is in the bath. Call the gendarmes." Signed "Jean-Paul Dior," and next to it the will is lying there in an envelope.

*Ellen covers her mouth with her hand.*

**ELLEN**

How horrible... And how did you bear it, madam?

**MADAME FRESIER**

Me, Ellen—I worked at Central Hospital for over forty years as a surgical nurse, so I've seen such things there that the dead stopped frightening me long ago. Well, so—I went to look at him. I go in, and there he is lying in the bath in full dress: in a suit, in a white shirt with a tie, in boots and a beret. His left arm is hanging down to the floor. And on the floor, in the puddle where the blood ran from his hand, there's an open razor lying there. The water in the bath is brown, and Jean-Paul is dead under the water—only his eyes are open, like two saucers. Around him lit candles are burning—ten of them, no less. All of them already guttered.

**JACQUES** (*shaking his head*)

And why did he light the candles, then? Though in the dark, I suppose it's awkward to slit your veins.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Well, so—I called the gendarmes, spoke with them, and went back home.

**SOPHIE**

Poor Father... (*shakes her head, looks down at the table*)

**ELLEN**

I would've fainted for sure. The eyes open—what a nightmare! Monsieur Jean's eyes were so, so kind—blue, like the sky. When he'd come into the shop, he'd squint slyly, give my cheek a gentle little pat with his hand, and say: "What's new with you, daughter? I bet the boys can't leave you alone? The usual for me." Monsieur Jean-Paul has been very kind to me lately. (*wipes her eyes with her hand*) Last month I started making his deliveries myself—he asked me to. "You're a young girl," he says, "your legs are strong, and it's hard for me to walk now." And I'd pop in to bring him the paper—it really wasn't hard for me.

**SOPHIE**

You went to his home? Well, that explains everything. Monsieur Dior wasn't so lonely after all, was he? Look at those legs—and the rest is in perfect order too.

*Ellen hides her face in her hands, shakes her head, and sobs.*

**JACQUES**

Sophie, what the hell are you talking about again?

**MADAME FRESIER**

Shame on you, Sophie! Big deal—he asked her to bring the newspapers.

**ELLEN**

I'm a decent girl. Why are you doing this to me, Sophie? (*cries*)

**JACQUES**

Sophie, you're acting like Lord knows what.

**MADAME FRESIER** (*sternly*)

Look at her—she's still just a girl. Apologise to her.

**SOPHIE** (*with a heavy sigh*)

Sorry, Ellen. My nerves are completely shot, I suppose. You can see what's going on with me today. Father burned in the furnace, my son got hit by a car—everything in one day.

**ELLEN** (*sniffling*)

It's all right—I understand what today is like for you.

*Jacques gets up from the table and goes to the bar. He trips over something on the floor, falls forward onto the counter with his hands, knocks the cannonball, and it, together with the dish, crashes to the floor with a bang.*

*A seagull cries.*

**JACQUES**

Shit.

*Jacques picks up the cannonball, puts it back on the dish it had been lying on, and sets the empty bottle he picked up on the counter next to the cannonball and the box that held the ashes.*

**ELLEN** (*concerned*)

Did you hurt yourself, monsieur?

**JACQUES** (standing at the counter, rubbing his right hand with his left)

Just a bit.

**ELLEN**

What was that that fell?

**JACQUES**

That was the cannonball. Sophie—tell her what kind of cannonball it is. You know better.

**SOPHIE**

From a Russian cannon.

**ELLEN** (*stunned*)

What cannon?

**SOPHIE**

That cannonball tore my great-grandfather's head off—back in Bonaparte's day. In 1812 my great-grandfather served as adjutant to Marshal Ney—it was in Russia, near Smolensk. And my great-grandfather's pal hauled the cannonball back to France as a keepsake for my great-grandmother—what a fine fellow. From a present like that she gave birth two months early. All my childhood I had to listen to this bullshit, all my childhood.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Why do you speak with such contempt about a family relic? You should be proud of such a history in your family, and yet you... Not every family has such glorious forebears, not every family.

**SOPHIE**

Those who don't are the lucky ones.

**JACQUES**

You could have shown some respect, at least, on your father's funeral day. Ah, you...

**SOPHIE** (*explodes*)

And what is it to you? What did I even say? Why should I feel guilty? Pour me another one, and it's time we got down to business. It's late already.

**JACQUES**

All right—business, then business. Want another one—then let's start business by paying for the cognac together.

**SOPHIE**

Ah... All right, then. How much should I give you?

**ELLEN**

I've got absolutely nothing on me. Maybe I can settle up later? And I shouldn't have been drinking—I'm really dizzy.

**SOPHIE**

Don't drink, don't drink. And don't eat. Go home and lie down... Just don't sleep too long, or you'll oversleep and be late for the shop.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Stop it, Sophie!

**JACQUES**

Don't worry, Ellen—we'll settle up. The bottle's ten thousand francs, so it comes to two thousand five hundred each. And I'll go to the kitchen, rustle up something to eat.

**SOPHIE**

That's some cognac you've got.

**JACQUES**

It's not just cognac—it's Jean-Paul's favourite cognac. That's why I opened it. Camus Grand Marque.

**MADAME FRESIER**

A day like this—cognac like this. Here—take it, Jacques, I'll pay for everything. Take it, take it—I want to treat you.

*Madame Fresier takes a ten-thousand-franc note from the reticule lying in front of her on the table. Having taken the money out, Madame Fresier holds it out to Jacques. Jacques comes to the tables, takes the note, and slips it into his breast pocket. The light flickers and goes out for two seconds, then comes back on.*

**JACQUES**

Thank you, madam. Flickering again. All right—if it comes to it, we'll stick in some candles.

*Jacques goes to the kitchen; after a while, the clatter of dishes and the hiss of frying pans can be heard from there.*

*Three ladies remain on stage.*

**SOPHIE**

*Where are you from, Ellen?*

**ELLEN**

There's the Monastery of the Archangel Gabriel not far from Apt—I lived there my whole life, up to eighteen. I don't know my parents: Sister Agnes only said the Germans killed them both when I was two, and the nuns passed me off as a farmer's orphan—they raised me. And I myself wanted to take the veil after school, but Sister Agnes talked me out of it: "You won't make a bride of God," she said—"there's too much life in you." So right after school I came here, and I've lived here almost two years now—I wanted to find out about relatives—my parents were from here. Well, I found out: nobody's left here, and it's not known if anyone's alive, or where. I rent a room nearby.

**SOPHIE**

And how did you meet Father?

**MADAME FRESIER**

She works in our building.

**ELLEN**

On the ground floor. Monsieur used to come in every day for his newspaper—that's how we met. Lately I was going up to him myself. He was very kind to me.

**SOPHIE** *(winks)*

And you're an accommodating girl. Come on—admit it. There was something, yeah? Don't be offended—who else could it have been with. We're among ourselves now, and there's no point being offended by the truth.

**ELLEN** *(hides her face in her hands)*

Why are you doing this to me?! How can you bring yourself to say such things!

**MADAME FRESIER** *(furiously)*

Stop behaving like the lowest bitch: if anyone should be opening their mouth, it's certainly not you. You're his daughter, of course, but after what went on between you two, it's strange he mentioned you in the will at all.

**SOPHIE**

Go teach someone else how to live, madam. I already apologised once—how many more times do I have to apologise? What right do you have to judge our relationship—and in front of strangers, too? And you yourself, I see, didn't turn your nose up at the inheritance. What do you need an inheritance for in your old age, madam? You're alone—no children, no grandchildren, no husband—so what do you need an inheritance for? You could have refused it in favour of the hospital.

**MADAME FRESIER** (*gets up, outraged*)

How dare you say that to me, Sophie? I'll tell you about the hospital. I've been alone since nineteen sixteen, when my Gérard came back from Verdun without arms and without legs. I remember—I came to his ward, and in the bed there's a stump all wrapped in bandages, only the head sticking out, groaning softly. I married him then, in the hospital chapel, while he was still alive, and I took a job as a surgical nurse so I could care for him. My Gérard lived a week, and I stayed on as a surgical nurse—first junior, then senior. So I've been a widow, Sophie, since nineteen sixteen, and I haven't looked at a single man since. Well, I did look, of course—God forgive me. And do you know that your father only lived this past year thanks to me? Who gave him his shots? I did. I did—Geneviève Fresier. Who fed him and washed his clothes? Me. I fed him, I washed his clothes. Not you—me. Who did he entrust with laying his ashes to rest? He entrusted me. You couldn't even be bothered to show up at the cremation, and you turned up at Maître Perpinyak's for the reading of the will after he'd finished reading it out. So you'd better keep quiet about who deserves what. A dead man's will is sacred, and if he left a quarter to each—then each will get a quarter. And stop picking on the girl. I remember what you and Charlotte were up to here back then—your son is paying for what you did back then, along with you. To say such things to me! Just think of it!

**SOPHIE** (*cries*)

Why are you doing this to me... Do you think I was late to the cremation on purpose? Who has Henri wronged? Isn't it enough what happened to him—now he has to take the blame too...

**ELLEN** (*cries*)

Forgive me, Sophie! I don't know what I've done wrong, but please forgive me. Not once did I sleep with your father, not for a single second. You know, if you want, I'll sign my quarter over to you—I'm fine being a shopgirl. (*fiddles with the pendant*)

**SOPHIE** (*cries*)

Forgive me, Ellen. To hell with the pendant. A will is a will. Forgive me, girl—you're not guilty of anything.

**MADAME FRESIER**

That's enough. Wipe your tears, and there must be no more conflicts between us. The law is the law—it's written in black and white in the will: a quarter for each, so what are we making scenes for? It needs to be settled peacefully. Let's respect the will of the deceased—otherwise, why did he set it down in the will?

*Sophie and Ellen take out handkerchiefs and, blowing their noses loudly, begin wiping from their faces the traces of the tears they have shed.*

*From the door leading to the kitchen, Jacques appears. He is wearing a dirty white cook's coat; on his head is a cook's hat of the same colour. A dirty white checked towel is slung over his shoulder. In his right hand Jacques holds a smoking, sizzling black frying pan; in his left—another smoking, sizzling black frying pan. The ladies fall silent. Jacques comes up to the tables and sets the food he has brought down on the table. He takes off the coat and the hat and tosses them onto the bar counter together with the towel.*

*Hearing Sophie's and Ellen's snuffles and nose-blowing, Jacques peers intently into their faces.*

**JACQUES**

Were you crying? There's no point. We won't get Jean-Paul back. Let's eat instead.

*Jacques goes back to the kitchen; there is some clattering, and he returns at once carrying a tray with a bowl of salad, cutlery, plates, a half-metre-long baguette, and three lemons cut in half. He sets the cutlery in front of the women, goes behind the bar, and pulls out a second bottle of cognac from underneath it.*

*The women look over the food with interest.*

**MADAME FRESIER**

Supper—that's welcome. How appetising it smells here! Sardines? Look at that—golden.

*Jacques puts the bottle of cognac on the table, pulls out the cork with his hand and pours into the glasses, then breaks the baguette into four pieces with his hands.*

**JACQUES**

That's right—sardines, madam. Here—an omelette and potato salad, madam. Fried the sardines yesterday, but they're even better than fresh ones.

**SOPHIE** *(squints)*

Why are they so small?

**JACQUES** *(irritated)*

Small? What do you mean, small? All sardines are small. Don't like the size—don't eat sardines. Go somewhere and eat whales—they're all big.

**SOPHIE**

My God, why are you all so touchy? I swear I won't say another word.

*Sophie starts helping herself: omelette, sardines, then salad. She takes a piece of baguette, squeezes half a lemon into her plate, and begins eating with appetite.*

**ELLEN**

Could I have some salad?

**JACQUES** *(smiles)*

Anything your soul desires, Ellen.

*Jacques goes to the window crowded with little black pots and begins tearing off bunches of greens growing in them. He returns to the tables and lays the greens down next to the baguette.*

**JACQUES**

Here—let me put some on.

**ELLEN**

Just a little.

*Jacques serves salad onto Ellen's plate, then starts tending to Madame Fresier—putting a bit of this and a bit of that onto her plate. The ladies thank him.*

**SOPHIE** *(serving herself)*

*I'll serve myself. I promised I'd keep quiet... I'm keeping quiet.*

**JACQUES**

Oh no—tell me how the food is. Fancy that—“the sardines are small.”

**SOPHIE** *(eating)*

Mmm. Tasty. Really tasty.

**JACQUES**

Well—enjoy, then. Right—let's drink to Jean-Paul, and then it's time for business. It's very late already, and we've got to get up tomorrow.

*Jacques raises his glass; the women do too; they clink and drink.*

**ELLEN**

So you, monsieur, run everything here yourself? You cook and you serve?

**JACQUES**

Jean-Paul used to stand at the bar sometimes, but in the last year—how could he? He only dropped in now and then—you know that yourselves. So yes—me.

**ELLEN**

You must work a lot, monsieur.

**JACQUES**

Sometimes I'm here for days on end, depends on business. There's a bed in the storeroom. I'm sick of it, Ellen.

**MADAME FRESIER** *(chewing)*

A place like this needs attention—of course. How else?

**SOPHIE** *(chewing)*

And is there much bookkeeping here, Jacques?

**JACQUES** *(chewing)*

What bookkeeping, to hell with it. Bought—sold. All right—let's eat, and then we'll talk.

*A short food pause follows: Jacques gets on with the fish, the omelette, and the salad; the ladies join him, and for a while—about twenty seconds—all those on stage eat in silence. After eating for a little, Jacques draws back from his plate, sets his cutlery down on the table, takes the bottle of cognac, stands up, and pours cognac into the glasses.*

**JACQUES** *(pouring into the glasses)*

Right. We need to come to an agreement.

**MADAME FRESIER**

So, as you know, Jean-Paul left to the four of us present here his apartment with an attic, this café, and the contents of his bank account in the amount of fifteen million three hundred thousand francs—an equal one-quarter share of the entire estate for each of us. So, what thoughts does anyone have about this? What do you think, Jacques?

**JACQUES**

I'll sell my share. My brother's ready to buy the café right now—you heard him yourselves. He may be drunk, but he meant it. And we'll sell the apartment too.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Hm. I see. I see, Jacques. What do you think, Sophie?

**SOPHIE**

Why not keep the café? It brings in money, doesn't it? I could run it.

**JACQUES**

I just said: I need my share in cash. What's so hard to understand?

**SOPHIE**

But it's Father's memory—how can you sell Father's memory?

*Jacques, looking down at the table, shakes his head, takes his glass and downs it in one swallow.*

**JACQUES**

Don't want to sell Father's memory? You can spin that "Father's memory" bullshit to your kid—or to whoever else you like. I know perfectly well what it's worth. Want Father's memory—take the cannonball.

**SOPHIE**

Stick your cannonball up your arse.

**JACQUES** (*half-rises*)

What did you say?

**MADAME FRESIER** (*raises her hands in a calming gesture*)

Why do we need scandals? Let's decide calmly. In the end, you can settle everything in court—so why the scandals? Ellen, what do you think?

**ELLEN**

Madam, I agree to anything! Whatever you decide—that's how it'll be. I'll accept it all.

**SOPHIE** (*venomous*)

Of course you agree—you've just been handed a fortune for nothing.

*Ellen hides her face in her hands, shaking her head.*

**JACQUES**

You're a real bitch.

**SOPHIE**

Go to hell.

**MADAME FRESIER** (*slams her palm on the table*)

All right—stop it and listen to me now. I have an acquaintance from the days I worked at the Central Hospital. A friend of mine runs a big sewing-and-laundry shop; that laundry does the Central Hospital’s washing, ironing, and mending. Bed linen, gowns, and all the other hospital rags—she washes them, repairs them, irons them. Madeline has no fewer than twenty people working under her: it’s a big laundry, good income. The owner’s decided, at her age, to step back from the business and she’s looking for a buyer—wants to sell it into good hands. So I’m thinking: would the three of you like to buy into that business together, in shares? Very, very reliable—tested, profitable—and on top of that a worthy cause. If we sell everything and add what’s on the account, there’ll be enough money—and some left over. Ellen, what do you think?

**ELLEN**

I told you—I agree to anything, madam. Whatever you decide, that’s what I’ll do.

**MADAME FRESIER**

And what do you think, Jacques?

**JACQUES**

Madam, you didn’t hear me either, it seems. I said: I need money, and I don’t need any business—no “worthy” one, no “reliable” one. Give me my share in cash, and do whatever you want with yours.

**MADAME FRESIER**

I see, Jacques. Sophie—what do you say?

**SOPHIE** (*thoughtful*)

I don’t even know, madam. On the one hand, a laundry is, of course, not really what I’d want to do—I’d rather do this here. Rags and all that... On the other hand, if you say it’s profitable and reliable, why not think about it? Father would probably have been glad.

**JACQUES** (*darkly*)

There she goes again—Father. Leave him alone.

**MADAME FRESIER**

We can pay your part out to you in cash, Jacques—and we’ll part ways peacefully, then.

**JACQUES**

Now that’s a different conversation, madam. Give me my money and you can start a laundry, or a crematorium, or even a brothel. (*nods at Sophie*)

**SOPHIE** (*stands up at the table*)

You goat... And what about you—did you take it up the arse? I remember Father perfectly: he fucked anything that moved and he didn’t turn his nose up at men either—I caught him once with the milkman right there in the kitchen. Ugh, the thought... He did, he did—otherwise how the hell would you have ended up here at all?

**JACQUES** (*stands up at the table*)

What the fuck are you babbling, you bitch? Where the hell were you crawling around for ten years, you cheap whore? I work here day and night, and that's what you're spewing at me? Making me out to be some kind of pervert in front of all the heirs? Me with Jean-Paul? You filthy Nazi occupation slut, how did your tongue even turn in your mouth, you bitch! You think I don't know why Jean-Paul threw you out? When you were nineteen you were rubbing up against some Nazi all over the corners here—think I didn't know? And your underdeveloped little scrap was fathered by that same Nazi. Jean-Paul told me everything back then. Wanted yourself some German love. Your father nearly killed himself from shame back then. What a love story, nothing to say. Whore. Prostitute. You fucking Nazi occupation slut.

*He spits on the floor.*

*Sophie springs up from the table, tosses her half-smoked cigarette into the frying pan of sardines; a chair goes over. With unexpected force, Sophie swings and punches Jacques in the nose. Jacques clutches his face; his nasal cartilage is broken, blood pours thickly through his fingers. Sophie, stunned by the consequences of her impulsive act, freezes, a hand clamped over her mouth.*

**ELLEN** (*whispering*)

You broke his nose...

**MADAME FRESIER**

Sophie, what the hell—have you gone rabid? He's bleeding like mad! Jacques! Let me look! My God, Jacques!

*Jacques stands for a moment with bloody hands pressed to his face, then slowly lowers them, looks at them, then grabs one of the tables and hurls it aside. The frying pan with fish, the frying pan with omelette, the bowl of salad, and all the dishes on it fly off. The half-empty bottle of CAMUS la Grand Marque on the neighbouring table stays where it is, turned so the label is clearly visible to the audience.*

*The women scatter in different directions: Ellen shrieks and jumps back; Madame Fresier goes down with her chair, but is on her feet at once. With nothing now between him and Sophie, Jacques lunges at her in silence, grabs her throat with both hands and starts choking her.*

*Sophie wheezes and tries to fight back, but to no avail. After about ten seconds of choking, Madame Fresier finally reacts.*

**MADAME FRESIER**

My God, he'll kill her! Jacques, you'll choke her! Somebody help!

*Jacques keeps crushing Sophie's throat; she stops resisting altogether—when suddenly Ellen bolts to the bar, where a clear one-litre bottle without labels stands. She grabs it by the neck, runs clumsily up behind Jacques, and swings—smashing the bottle into his temple.*

*Jacques releases Sophie's throat at once, slowly turns, looks at Ellen in silence for a moment—and then collapses heavily to the floor. A black trickle runs from his temple.*

*Freed, Sophie drops to her knees and coughs violently, both hands clamped to her throat.*

*Ellen takes a step back; the bottle slips from her fingers and falls. Ellen is completely at a loss. A pause onstage: everyone freezes, motionless.*

**ELLEN** *(in a whisper, fist over her mouth)*

Holy Virgin Mary... What is this...

*A seagull cries.*

**MADAME FRESIER** *(cautiously approaching the body)*

Well, damn... Oh... You really got him...

*Madame Fresier slowly straightens, goes to Jacques' motionless body on the floor, and carefully checks his pulse at the jugular vein.*

**MADAME FRESIER**

He's not breathing. No—he's not breathing. Is Sophie alive?

*Madame Fresier goes to Sophie; Sophie is convulsively coughing and spitting.*

**SOPHIE** *(hoarse)*

Alive, madam. I think.

*She gets to her feet, holding her throat. She sees Jacques lying there, comes closer, sees his head in a black puddle, braces herself on the bar and bends over behind it—vomiting.*

*Madame Fresier searches for water, finds a tap behind the bar, fills a glass, and brings it to Sophie.*

**MADAME FRESIER**

Drink.

*Madame Fresier holds the glass out to Sophie, who is on her knees. Sophie takes it and drinks in small sips. Then Sophie rises from her knees, swaying, sits at the bar, leans onto it, drops her head into her hands, and begins to sob hysterically.*

*Ellen, in shock, stands by the bar with her hand over her mouth, staring without blinking at Jacques' dead body.*

*Madame Fresier sits at one of the tables that's still standing and, also with her hand over her mouth, shakes her head.*

**ELLEN**

Holy Virgin Mary... We should probably call the gendarmes... Am I going to prison now? Or to the guillotine? I don't want to die.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Easy. Easy. We're alone, the door's locked, there's no one. Ellen, stop sobbing—go shut the window. Check the door and turn the lights out before someone comes in off the street. Ye-e-es. You really clobbered him.

*Ellen, sobbing, goes to the window, shuts the ajar frame, and lowers the blinds; the seagull outside reacts at once.*

**ELLEN**

Where's the switch?

**MADAME FRESIER**

Behind the counter by the kitchen entrance—he switched it on there. Just light the candles first.

*Sophie, swaying, gets up from the counter, swaying, goes behind it, takes a box of matches from the counter, lights, one by one, the three candles standing in saucers, then goes to the wall, feels around with her hands, finds the switches and flicks them several times in a row. First, the light coming into the room through the window goes out; then the lamps inside the room go out. The room is lit by the dim light of the three candles standing in saucers on the counter.*

**SOPHIE**

God... what's going to happen to us now... *(rubs her neck and forehead, returns to the counter and sits at it)*

**MADAME FRESIER**

We need to get rid of him somewhere. Right. The pier is close—there are boats there. We can take the body there. But what do we wrap him in?

**SOPHIE**

Madam, what are we going to wrap him in here? Let's just throw him in as he is.

**MADAME FRESIER**

And if someone sees?

**ELLEN**

Maybe in the carpet?

**MADAME FRESIER**

What carpet now?

**ELLEN** *(points to the wall behind the counter)*

There—the carpet. See? The edge is torn off.

**MADAME FRESIER** (*comes up to the counter*)

Look at that—it really is a carpet. Right: bottles onto the counter, shelves down.

*Sophie and Ellen go behind the counter and start taking the bottles off the wall, moving them onto the counter. When they are done, they take down the shelves and put them somewhere under the counter.*

**MADAME FRESIER**

Bring the carpet here.

*The women take hold of the carpet from both sides and yank it toward themselves, tearing it off the wall. It comes off and partly falls onto the counter, knocking over the bottles piled on it. A cloud of dust rises—the carpet hasn't been cleaned since it's been hanging there. The women leave the carpet on the counter, walk around it and, taking it from the other side, spread it out on the floor beside Jacques's corpse. Another cloud of dust rises.*

**ELLEN**

A-a-CHOO! God... how am I supposed to live with this now! A-a-CHOO! (*smooths out the right side of the carpet*)

**SOPHIE** (*briskly, smoothing out the left side of the carpet*)

You saved my life—so you're a righteous woman now. A-a-CHOO! What did they even teach you in your monastery... A-a-CHOO.

**ELLEN** (*crosses herself*)

Most Holy Virgin Mary...

**MADAME FRESIER** (*directing them with a glass in her hand, sitting at a small table*)

Ellen, take his legs. Sophie, take his arms. Onto the carpet.

*Sophie and Ellen, obediently grunting, grab the corpse and, turning their faces away from it, nevertheless manage to drag it over and heave it onto the edge of the carpet.*

**ELLEN** (*sobbing*)

He was cheerful... kind.

*They begin rolling the corpse into the carpet.*

**SOPHIE** (*viciously*)

He nearly left my boy an orphan, the bastard—good riddance. Hold on—let me take what I'm owed.

*Sophie shoves her hand into the corpse's left trouser pocket, then, not finding what she wants, into the right one, and pulls out a silver watch on a chain. Nervously she tries to unhook the chain from the trousers and in the end simply rips it off together with a piece of fabric.*

**SOPHIE**

What are you staring at? What—throw them into the sea along with this bastard? You get the pendant—I get the watch. Damn it... *(wipes her blood-smearred hands on the corpse's shirt)* Now—hold the legs tighter. Wait, don't wrap yet—I'll be right back.

*Sophie goes to the counter, takes the cannonball, puts it into the cook's hat lying on the counter nearby, and stuffs it into the bundle at the legs.*

Here's your memory of Dad, you Algerian scum.

*The women slowly wrap the corpse in the carpet, wearily roll their shoulders, rub their hands, and look at what they've ended up with.*

**ELLEN**

I'm covered in it. *(looks at her hands)*

**MADAME FRESIER**

Then go wash up.

*Ellen goes behind the counter and comes straight back, shaking her wet hands. Madame Fresier squeezes through after her.*

**SOPHIE**

They'll notice he's missing, madam. Did the notary know about the meeting?

**MADAME FRESIER** *(thoughtfully)*

We agreed on it in front of him. And those two who stopped by. And the brother. Hm. Hm...

**SOPHIE**

What do we do?

**ELLEN**

Maybe I should still go to the gendarmerie and confess everything?

**SOPHIE**

What are you talking about, dear?

**MADAME FRESIER**

No one is going anywhere. We'll do it like this: Sophie spends the night at home and goes to Avignon. You, Ellen—slip into the shop quiet as a mouse and just work, quietly. And tomorrow morning I'll come here and find the blood. We'll have to report it to the gendarmerie, of course. I'll tell them we stayed for a while and then went our separate ways—and as I was leaving last, some Italians came to Jacques, shouting loudly. If they come to you, you'll say the same: we talked, didn't agree, and decided to meet again in a week. And then, who knows—three or four months from now we'll come back to the will. And think about the laundry.

**SOPHIE**

You picked a fine time for your laundry... The Algerian was right: sell everything and split it. And like hell I'm spending the night in the place where Dad was sloshing around in his own blood. I'll stay the night at the "Europe."

**MADAME FRESIER** (*dryly*)

As you like.

**ELLEN** (*in a trembling voice*)

How am I supposed to work after what I did, madam? I won't be able to live peacefully anymore.

**MADAME FRESIER**

You will—like a good girl. Either you smile in the shop, or you rot in prison, if they don't send you to the guillotine. Do you understand what I'm saying?

**ELLEN**

I understand, madame—how could I not. I'll pray.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Excellent idea.

**SOPHIE** (*impatiently*)

Come on, hurry up—I can't stand looking at him anymore.

**MADAME FRESIER** (*calmly*)

Easy. Easy. Carry him. Only—Ellen, go out first and check if there's anyone out there.

*Ellen opens the door; a gull cries out; the bell rings. Ellen goes outside and, after about five seconds, comes back in.*

*The bell rings; a gull cries out.*

**ELLEN**

Looks like no one, madam.

**MADAME FRESIER**

Drag him to the boats on the pier—and down he goes.

*Madame Fresier opens the front door.*

*The bell rings; a gull cries out.*

*Sophie and Ellen take the carpet bundle from both sides and, with visible effort, grunting, haul the body out through the door.*

*The door closes; the bell rings; a gull cries out. A clear, loud splash is heard.*

*Madame Fresier puts on her hat, overturns the one table still standing, knocks the bottles on the counter down onto the floor, and knocks several flower pots off the walls onto the floor.*

*Then Madame Fresier takes Sophie's woven bag hanging on the back of a chair; knocks the chairs over onto the floor, and goes to the door. Suddenly she peers closely at the floor in front of the door, bends down with a grunt, and picks up Ellen's amber pendant that has fallen from her neck. She goes to the candles on the counter, examines the pendant in the candlelight, then slips it into her pocket.*

**MADAME FRESIER** (*shakes her head*)

We need to decide something.

*Madame Fresier goes to the counter, blows out two candles, takes the one remaining burning candle together with its saucer in her hand and, lighting her way to the door, slowly goes out. At the threshold she blows out the last candle and drops the saucer with it onto the floor. Going out, she closes the door behind her.*

*The bell rings; a gull cries out; darkness.*

**THE END**

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