

THE INTERVENTION

BY

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A TRAGICOMEDY IN ONE ACT

TRANSLATED FROM ORIGINAL FRENCH TEXT INTO ENGLISH VERSION

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THE INTERVENTION

Characters

Edmond Gombert

Marcinelle, his wife

Mademoiselle Eurydice

Baron de Gerpivrac

Giles, a young stable boy/footman (non-speaking part)

An attic bedroom with very poor furnishings. Two work benches side by side, one with a set of bobbins for lace-making, the other with a set of tools for making fans. A few partly-made fans spread out on a white wooden table. Lace, in the process of being made, lying amongst the fans. Two rattan-seated chairs. A wooden chest of drawers. A wall cupboard. A little window. A fireplace without a fire because it is summer. In one corner, a simple white-wooden bed frame with a woven mattress. At the end of the room, a door. To the left, another smaller door. A jug of water on the fireplace.

Scene One

EDMOND GOMBERT Wearing an artisan's smock and a peaked cap on his head

MARCINELLE Wearing a simple cotton dress with a matching short-sleeved cape

EDMOND GOMBERT

For shame! What a jealous woman you are!

MARCINELLE

Shame on you too ! You're the jealous one !

EDMOND GOMBERT

Come on now. Let's have some peace between us. Give me a kiss.

MARCINELLE

No.

EDMOND GOMBERT

So you don't love me?

MARCINELLE

I adore you.

EDMOND GOMBERT

So then ?

MARCINELLE

I hate you.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Why?

MARCINELLE

Because I adore you.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Marcinelle, do you want to kiss me?

MARCINELLE

Where's my work box? I'm late. I must go and deliver my work, the fruits of my labour.

EDMOND GOMBERT

(As she goes to get her box, he gently seizes her arm)

Promise me that you won't cause any more grief?

MARCINELLE

Promise me that you will never ever be stupid again.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Who is more stupid - the jealous man or the jealous woman?

MARCINELLE

It's you, the jealous man.

EDMOND GOMBERT

No, it's you, the jealous woman.

MARCINELLE

I am telling you, it's you who is the stupid one.

EDMOND GOMBERT

The woman who is jealous seems to admit that she is not pretty.

MARCINELLE

And the man who is jealous admits that he is not witty.

EDMOND GOMBERT

All the same, you are pretty, Marcinelle, you are too pretty.

MARCINELLE

And look at you too ! But I don't want to spoil you by telling you what I really think of you. One should never give men advantages because all they do is abuse them. So now then, are you are still feeling jealous?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Yes. And what about you, are you still feeling jealous too?

MARCINELLE

No. But I would be if I were to see you looking at another woman!

EDMOND GOMBERT

Ah, that's it! If we were not poor, we would not be jealous.

MARCINELLE

That's true. I know for certain that I am not bad looking except for my dress which is hideous. When you can see better-dressed women than me, that worries me. I can't afford to buy all the things that are needed to be a real woman- the ribbons, the frills, the flounces, the trimmings, 'seasoning and salad dressing', you could call them! I am not rich enough to be pretty. I have to compete with a broomstick draped in a silk dress. I really dread you seeing all those splendidly dressed women passing by.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Well, and what about you, when I see you watching all those idiots who prance along the boulevard in their patent leather boots. And me, wearing my artisan's smock, do you think that amuses me? But those idiots, nevertheless, do appear handsome.

MARCINELLE

Oh yes! And those other women too, what costumes, what fussy outfits they wear ! How easy it is for them to be beautiful when they are dressed in such fine clothes ! And how easy it is for them to steal their neighbours' husbands and lovers. However, when you consider that they are nothing more than dressmakers' dummies. I, myself, do have a heart.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Oh yes, I am well aware of our disadvantages. Your dandies wear white gloves while my hands are blackened with work. But those fancily dressed fellows are just bone idlers!

MARCINELLE

Do you remember our little girl?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Yes, of course, Marcinelle! – How could I have ever forget her. She is always in my thoughts!

MARCINELLE

When she used to play just there, do you remember her?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Yes, in her little white dress.

MARCINELLE

That I used to wash and lather so carefully with soap.

EDMOND GOMBERT

And the lace that you made for it.

MARCINELLE

She was trying to talk. She used to make us laugh, didn't she? Instead of saying 'bonjour', she used to say 'azure'. Do you remember?

EDMOND GOMBERT

We are certainly poor, but in spite of our poverty, when she wore her white lace dress, she looked like a little queen.

Oh dear! That awful croup!

MARCINELLE

She was only two years old.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Two years. It is strange that the good Lord could not lend us an angel for any longer than that.

MARCINELLE

What a cherub she was ! – You know that cupboard!

(She points to the wall cupboard)

EDMOND GOMBERT

Well ?

MARCINELLE

I keep her little dress in there. Do you want to see it?

EDMOND GOMBERT

No. It would make me cry and I need my eyes for my work. And it's time to get back to our work now.

MARCINELLE

Yes, that's right, I must go into town now to deliver my goods. I will take my work box with

me. Oh! I've just remembered - someone is coming today to collect the Brussels lace shawl that I had to mend. It's finished. It was the ladies' maid who brought it, but she said the lady herself might come to pick it up. Whoever comes, you can hand it over to them. There it is.

(She pulls a big lace shawl out of the chest of drawers and drapes it over the back of a chair. Edmond Gombert sits down at his work bench and goes back to painting part of a fan)

If they ask to pay for it, you can take the money. It took me ten days to do the work, that's ten francs. Anyway, I'm off now so give me a kiss.

(She goes towards him to kiss him. He looks at her)

EDMOND GOMBERT

Where are you going?

MARCINELLE

To deliver my work, I told you, the fruits of my labour.

EDMOND GOMBERT

But where exactly are you going?

MARCINELLE

Rue Duphot. To the big drapery shop on the corner of the boulevard.

EDMOND GOMBERT

So that means you are going to walk along that boulevard again!

MARCINELLE

Which other route do you expect me to take ?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Not that way.

MARCINELLE

To get onto the boulevard, you have to go by that boulevard.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I don't want you to go that way, it's the way to the Champs Elysées and the Porte Maillot.

MARCINELLE

So what ?

EDMOND GOMBERT

The other day I followed you. You watched one of them.

MARCINELLE

One of what?

EDMOND GOMBERT

A 'beau', one of those handsome fellows.

MARCINELLE

A 'beau'?

EDMOND GOMBERT

One of those awful dandies from the Bois de Boulogne. A beanpole of a man with a little monocle in the corner of his eye, a big goofy fellow on horseback with a riding crop who looked very brutish. What a stupid man he is! I feel like giving him a thrashing with that crop of his. But Marcinelle, you stopped to watch him perform like a prancing horse.

MARCINELLE

Perform like a prancing horse? Who? The man?

EDMOND GOMBERT

No, the horse. You stayed there more than five minutes watching in admiration. I saw you.

MARCINELLE

Well, fancy that! A fine thing coming from a man who spends his life eyeing up the women on the first floor balcony opposite.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Here we go again with another quarrel!

MARCINELLE

It's you who started it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

No, it was you.

MARCINELLE

Women should be allowed to have a little of what they fancy. When I think that I have only one hideous straw-stitched hat to wear both winter and summer and you refuse to let me have a poor little bonnet with flowers!

EDMOND GOMBERT

It's not me who refuses to let you have one. It's poverty.

MARCINELLE

It would only cost twelve francs.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I don't even have twelve sous.

MARCINELLE

You're so mean!

EDMOND GOMBERT

And you're a flirt !

MARCINELLE

Well, you're at it again, and starting to call me names now. If you keep this up...

EDMOND GOMBERT,

(getting up from his chair)

Listen, I'm seriously thinking that it's impossible for us to go on living together. We were wrong to get married to each other in the first place. It would have been better if I'd stayed a bachelor boy, and you a spinster girl.

MARCINELLE

Your words are always so hurtful. You can't even say 'single lady'? Ah, these common folk !

EDMOND GOMBERT

Bourgeois people say, 'a single lady'. But me, I say 'a girl'. Me, I'm not from bourgeois society.

MARCINELLE

That's plain to see. I'm telling you that your speech is like that of the common people.

EDMOND GOMBERT

That's because I am one of them. Yes, I am an ordinary man of the people and proud of it. I think like ordinary people and I speak like ordinary people. I have good courageous arms and a good honest heart. So when will I at last be recognised for what I do? I work, I don't slack, but I can't even make ends meet. The other day, I saw a general pass by, festooned with medals and accompanied by an armed guard. Why do they salute and honour him for that? They don't know what they are talking about in the Chamber of Deputies. They never seem to reach any agreements and get things fairly sorted out. I owe two installments of rent. You earn fifteen or twenty centimes a day for your lace-making which ruins your eyes. And I ask three francs for my fans. And then there's unemployment. And we have to provide the basic materials ourselves. And here is my wife, the woman I love, and I'm forced to refuse her a cute little chiffon bonnet.

MARCINELLE

That's because it would make me pretty because there are flowers on it, because you're jealous of other men seeing me.

EDMOND GOMBERT

It's because we're poor. We have only our meagre, cheap furniture ..a dirty pallet, that's all for a bed.. just enough to save us from having to sleep on the floor. Our child died because the doctor arrived too late. They don't seem bothered to rush to help poor people. I just

long for the day when I can become a politician, then things will be different. But in the meantime, I am poor and I see my wife watching the rich people pass by !

MARCINELLE

I'm telling you that it's your fault! The moment a woman in a silk skirt trots along the street wearing a velvet jacket, a frilly layered skirt, a coat made of fine cashmere wool and a feather, you turn around to take a look. And then you quarrel with me about the things that I really need. Proper women all have something nice to wear, but not me. I don't have proper shoes on my feet, just old worn-out bootees that let in water as soon as it starts to rain. Oh! I know you too well. It's simply because hats have flowers on them and they would make me attractive. That's why you refuse to let me have them. You want me to look hideous because it suits you. You have such fixed ideas about things. And you dare to follow me along the street, you have just admitted it! It is really sad to think that you follow a woman along the streets because she might happen to allow horsemen to pass her by on their way to the Bois de Boulogne. And you imagine I might be flattered that these well-dressed people might pay any attention to me, dressed looking like this! Don't you realise how extremely poorly dressed I am? But not to worry, sir, because you're only a common man who allows his wife to go out dressed like a beggar. Just look at my dress. Aren't you ashamed of it?

EDMOND GOMBERT

I know you would like to see me ashamed of your simple cotton dress but as for me, I would like to see you proud of my artisan's smock.

MARCINELLE

Your peasant's smock! If a young flirty woman comes here wearing satin, I wouldn't give you an hour before you become jealous and attracted by the fine attire that such stupid women wear! Listen, I'm leaving now, this will all end up badly.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Jealous, yes. Attracted, no.

MARCINELLE

You heard me, if someone comes for the lace shawl, just hand it over. – Oh! I must eat something before I leave. What's for lunch?

(She opens the food cupboard. A piece of bread can be seen on a board)

That!

EDMOND GOMBERT

Well, it's bread.

(He sits down again and goes back to his work. Marcinelle breaks the bread, bites into half of it and leaves the other half)

MARCINELLE,

(as she is eating)

I will leave you your share of it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Eat it all.

MARCINELLE

No, you really must eat it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I'm not hungry.

MARCINELLE

I'm leaving.

(moving towards him)

Do you want to kiss me?

EDMOND GOMBERT

No.

MARCINELLE

Why not?

EDMOND GOMBERT

I'm not hungry, I tell you.

MARCINELLE

(She takes the box and moves towards the little door)

(aside in the doorway)

We are always quarrelling ! But I do still love him !

(She goes out)

EDMOND GOMBERT,

(alone)

Another quarrel, good God! We don't seem able to sort out our misunderstandings. How will all this end up? Will it mean us finally separating from one other? I wouldn't swear to anything. It no longer seems possible for us to live happily together. Oh dear, if she were to leave me, I wouldn't be able to live without her. My soul would be gone. I would be left with nothing - just left to die. Exactly that, I would be dead.

(He settles down to his work again)

(Woman's voice, ¹singing outside. The voice gets nearer seeming to indicate that the person who is singing is climbing up the staircase)

Beautiful creature, if were we in this high wood
Beautiful creature, were we inside this high wood
We would merrily eat the nuts in it. We would eat them to our hearts' content
²Nique noc nac mucho!

Beautiful creature, you have completely bewitched me - charmed me with your beauty
Beautiful creature, were we inside this oven.....

EDMOND GOMBERT

Who's that coming up the stairs?

(The VOICE, singing the song again)

Beautiful creature, if we were in this oven.....
We would eat the warm little pastries
We would eat them to our hearts' content

Nique noc nac mucho!

Beautiful creature, you have bewitched me, charmed me with your beauty.

EDMOND GOMBERT

A woman from the country?

(There is a little knock at the downstairs door)

Come in !

(The door opens at one end of the room, and Mademoiselle Eurydice appears wearing a dress made of lightly coloured yak wool, with layers of light spring-green taffeta, a very low-cut full length scarf of the same material. Down the front of the dress, green taffeta buttons secured in lace buttonholes. A belt of green plaited ³gros-grain silk ribbon holds a purse made of green ⁴moiré silk decorated with ⁵guipure lace. A cream straw hat decorated with a white feather and a wing of a rare exotic parrot across the top. She holds an enormous bouquet. She pauses in the doorway and looks inside the attic)

¹ Full text of this authentic old popular song from Normandy/Picardy area at end of this translation. There are various other versions

² Noise like a squirrel eating nuts

³ Grosgrain silk or Grogram appeared in literature in 1562, defined as a coarse, loosely woven fabric of silk, silk and mohair, or silk and wool. The adjective gros means thick or coarse, originally from the Old French gros, itself derived from the Latin grossus. See photo

⁴ Moire or moiré silk, has a watery, rippled appearance created by a finishing technique called calendaring which gives it a lustrous finish. See photo

⁵ Guipure lace is a type of bobbin lace. It connects the motifs with bars or plaits rather than net or mesh. See photo

Scene Two

Edmond Gombert Mademoiselle Eurydice

EDMOND GOMBERT

(aside)

A duchess no less.

(He raises his peaked cap)

What kind of lady is this ? She is certainly a beauty. But I don't much like such an excess of beauty – it's like a sharp, sudden light in the night that hurts the eyes by its dazzle. She has arrived at a bad time too, just when I am wallowing in my sad thoughts. She must have come to the wrong door. Whatever could have brought her to my poor hovel?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE,

(entering and looking round)

What a charming little nest! How poor it is! The folk who live here must be happy.

(She stops)

That reminds me of my past. There is an honest smell here. Rattan seated chairs, a whitewood table, a simple white-wood bed. How good the pinewood smells !

EDMOND GOMBERT,

(in a low, sombre voice)

Coffins are made from pinewood.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Curtains made of calico cotton. A pot of flowers on the window sill. You have to take care not to bump your head. A cracked mirror. That's happiness.

(deciding to notice Edmond Gombert)

Good day, sir. Who are you?

EDMOND GOMBERT

I am the person who lives here.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

I can see that. But who are you?

EDMOND GOMBERT

A worker. And who are you, Madame ?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Wouldn't you like to know.

EDMOND GOMBERT

(aside)

How beautiful she is! She enters like a sudden ray of light. She is just too beautiful!
But oh, this high society, how I hate it.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

(humming a tune and making a noise like a squirrel eating nuts)

Nique noc nac mucho !

(to Edmond Gombert)

I have come to collect my lace shawl. Has it been mended?

EDMOND GOMBERT

(muttering to himself)

Ah, it's the person for the shawl.

(aloud)

Here it is, Madame. It is ready.

(aside)

What a strange song she is singing!
But all the same, she is very pretty. This must be my lucky day.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

(aside)

Hey, that boy's not bad. Large hard-working hands, an artisan's cotton smock, but he's handsome just the same. I like him. He makes a nice change from all my little viscounts who are so stupid. In my youth, oh my goodness, I'm already twenty-five....when I was younger, I was a country girl and I enjoyed living on coarse brown country bread.

(aloud, examining the shawl)

This shawl is extremely well repaired. It is so well done. I know all about this kind of work. Madame Gandillot has recently taken up Venetian lace-making again. She makes what is known as the ⁶Anne of Austria's pilgrim collar. It won't sell though, her Anne of Austria collar. Fifteen francs is much too cheap; if it were to cost two hundred francs, it would be all the rage and very sought after indeed. I prefer ⁷Binche lace so much more than ⁸Venetian lace. Talking of which, my dear fellow, I am a charity collector. You see this shawl. It's that

6. a. Anne of Austria's pilgrim collar. see photo.

6. b. A 'col pelerine' was a woman's cape of lace or silk with pointed ends at the centre front, popular in the 19th century. see photo

⁷ Binche is a type of bobbin lace made by braiding and twisting lengths of thread. These are wound on bobbins to manage them. As the work progresses, the weaving is held in place with pins set in a lace pillow. The placement of the pins is usually determined by a pattern or pricking pinned on the pillow. Bobbin lace is also known as pillow lace, because it was worked on a pillow, or bone lace because early bobbins were made of bone or ivory. See photo

⁸ Venetian lace was made in Venice from the middle of the 16th century during the Italian Renaissance. It was immediately appreciated in the rest of Europe. It was made on Morano island. See photo.

and my charity work that have brought me here. I collect for fire victims so I go to attic rooms to ask for money. You might ask where this particular fire took place. I don't know where, but there was a fire. It happened. Will you give me something for my collection? There are women and children on the streets, many poor people. Last year, I collected for a flood. After water, fire. Talking of which, how much do I owe you for the shawl?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Ten francs, Madame.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Here you are.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Keep the money for your poor people on the street.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

(aside)

He is generous. It would be easy for me to fall madly in love with that man.

EDMOND GOMBERT

(aside)

This woman is making me feel uncomfortable. I feel as if I am on the edge of a precipice. It's not for her poor people that I have fallen, it's for her eyes.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

(looking at the fan that Gombert was working on)

Why are you lying?

EDMOND GOMBERT

I, Madame !

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

You told me that you were a worker.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Well I am !

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

It's not true. You are an artist.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Madame?

(aside)

Indeed, I would not normally be inclined to speak to a woman like this.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Your fans are exquisite.

(aside)

Oh! If I could return to such genuine love ! Oh yes, this is like my past life! My bedroom was similar to this. Imagine two young lovers, twittering like love birds. This is the man I need.

(She looks around her and considers the attic room. She notices a book on a shelf)

And I see you read ? (Reading the book title)

Paradise Lost

EDMOND GOMBERT

Yes, ⁹Milton. Do you know this book, Paradise Lost?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

I don't know the book, but I see something here that interests me.

(She looks at the fan he is working on)

This fan is a work of art. It is made from special paper, isn't it?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Chinese vellum skin. I also paint on silk.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Do you paint those pictures, there?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Yes, Madame.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Who is that man there with his fork?

EDMOND GOMBERT

That is ¹⁰Neptune.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

And those little things, there? Are they angels?

⁹ John Milton 1667 Paradise Lost which relates to the way in which Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation and were thrown out of paradise.

¹⁰ In Roman mythology, Neptune, the god of the seas, carries a trident, a fork with three prongs.

EDMOND GOMBERT

They are ¹¹cherubs.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

That's the same thing.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Almost.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Those have wings. They are church angels, it's only at the theatre that they are called cherubs. How much would you sell me this fan for?

EDMOND GOMBERT

To you, I am not selling anything.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE,

(aside)

That's intriguing because I wish that I could give him everything.

EDMOND GOMBERT,

(aside, admiring her)

She's what I call a woman.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

But I want to buy it. Give me a price.

EDMOND GOMBERT

A flower from your bouquet.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

(aside)

He is as galant as a knight. If you were to rub some pomade into his hair and give him a monocle, would there would be any difference between him and any royal prince? The only difference would be that this man is better.

(out loud).

What is your name?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Gombert.

¹¹ Cherubs are love tokens. See photo of fans.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I don't mean your surname. You have a first name. You should only ever tell a woman your first name.

Edmond Gombert

Edmond.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

My name's Eurydice. Edmond, very well, I'm pleased to meet you.

Edmond Gombert

Madame...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I am not 'Madame'.

Edmond Gombert

Mademoiselle...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I am not 'Mademoiselle'.

Edmond Gombert

Well then, what?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Well then, I'm Eurydice. What a thick-skulled stubborn boy you are! My name is Eurydice – I think that's quite clear. Just call me Eurydice.

(noticing the lace bobbins)

What is that set of tools for there?

Edmond Gombert

Those tools there?...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Yes, I want you to tell me what those tools are, there. Just a minute, I must be going crazy! I have just had my shawl mended here. That's a set of lace bobbins, I know that for certain. I really don't know what I'm saying any more. I must be going mad. This set of bobbins seems to be alive and watching us closely.

Edmond Gombert,

(aside)

I can't let this go on any longer. Just to see this woman gives me pleasure. So much

pleasure. She's like one of those terrible flowers whose perfume can kill.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE,

(aside)

I am jealous of this set of bobbins. It is like another woman.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Madame...

MADemoiselle EURYDICE,

(staring at the set of bobbins)

It is like a well-loved woman.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Madame...

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Full of virtue.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Mademoiselle....

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Oh, I am jealous of her.

(Out loud)

I told you to call me ¹²Eurydice. Edmond, do you want my bouquet?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Your bouquet!

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

I'm giving it to you. Take it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Oh! I will treasure it all my life!

(He presses it to his heart and puts it in the jug of water)

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

How funny he is! He puts it in the water. This man's quite naïve !
(She laughs)

¹² In ancient mythology, Eurydice is the young girl who the poet Orpheus is in love with. Her name is used here in a meaningful context.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Have I done something stupid?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

No. You are nice.

(She gives him a tap on the cheek)

EDMOND GOMBERT,

(aside)

The fact is that if I was foolish enough to fall in love with that woman, this love within me would be like this bouquet in this jug. She must take me for a fool. So I must try to prove to her that, as a Parisian artisan, I can speak the same French language as she can. By Jove, that's a fact because I once spoke at a meeting at the ¹³Charonne Street political club.

(aloud, stuttering badly)

I...You see, madam...the first time there was noise in the street...no, it's not what I want to say ..there,..there are some things. However it would not be for me who.. you understand, mademoiselle..

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

You are a good boy.

EDMOND GOMBERT

(listening at the little door through which Marcinelle left)

Oh! My God, I hear someone climbing the stairs. It must be my wife. I must escape from her.

(aside)

Now I'm starting to be afraid of my wife.

(aloud to Eurydice)

It's my wife. She's returning home. She's a bit jealous. If she finds me with you, she will start up an argument. I shall leave for a little while. I will return. If she is surprised to see you here, tell her that you found the key in the door and that you came in, just say whatever you want - that you came for the shawl.

(He goes out through the door at the end of the room)

EURYDICE, (alone)

His wife. That word from his mouth displeases me. He didn't say 'my spouse'. She is his mistress. For shame! It's one mistress after another. That's strange because just the other

¹³ This street was mentioned in Hugo's Complete Works. Volume 3. Barricades were once set up here.

day, when I was at the National Theatre watching a tragedy, I heard a verse that seems to have been meant for me. ¹⁴'I am heading for a downfall'.

(Day-dreaming)

Perhaps I should 'rise to a life that has value and honesty'.

(The little door opens. Marcinelle enters)

¹⁴ Allusion to a verse of the tragedy *Cinna* by Corneille 'Et monte sur le faite, il aspire à descendre'. The character, Auguste (like Eurydice) having reached the greatest height of success and glory, feels the need of a more simple, humble life. But rather than stoop to this, he wants, like Eurydice to be raised up, and access a life which, in fact, has great value.

Scene Three

MADemoiselle EURYDICE MARCINELLE

(Marcinelle enters without seeing Mademoiselle Eurydice. She places her work box on the table and notices the bouquet. She runs towards it.)

MARCINELLE

(aside, talking to herself)

A bouquet! What's that bouquet doing here?

(She picks it up, throws it on the floor, kicks it, then takes the broom and sweeps the bouquet to the end of the room)

That's the limit ! It's obvious that he's buying bouquets for the women on the balcony opposite. But what with? He doesn't have any money to give to me. Oh! It's high time I got my own back on him!

(aside, seeing Mademoiselle Eurydice)

Who is this 'madam'? What is she doing there?

(aloud)

What are you doing here, Mademoiselle?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Excuse me, Madame, I am here to collect my shawl. I have just arrived.

MARCINELLE

Oh! the shawl. Here it is. That will be ten francs. Was there no-one here when you arrived? Did you not find anyone in?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

I found the key in the door so I entered. I have just come in.

MARCINELLE,

(aside)

Gone out. Where's he gone? And the bouquet! That would explain it. He must have kept it here to give to a rich woman. I now know how I can catch them out. So be it! It's him who will get the blame this time.

(looking carefully at Mademoiselle Eurydice who, by her face, seems absorbed in examining the repaired shawl)

Now, here's a finely dressed lady. That's what I call 'well-dressed'. This is the only way, of course, that a woman can make herself pretty! And how pretty she is !

(aloud)

Are you satisfied with the repair, Madame?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(aside)

How beautiful she is in her simple cotton dress.

(aloud)

I was admiring it. You have done a marvellous job.

(She stares at Marcinelle)

I have just realised, it's you!

Marcinelle

Madame

MADemoiselle Eurydice

You are Marcinelle!

Marcinelle

Yes, I'm Marcinelle.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Marcinelle Barvin.

Marcinelle

Do you know me?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

From the Hupriaux district, near Valenciennes.

Marcinelle

That's where I come from.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Well, I'll be!

Marcinelle

I don't understand...

MADemoiselle Eurydice,

(looking at her straight in both eyes)

Big Jeanne!

Marcinelle

Madame...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I am Big Jeanne. Don't you recognise me as Big Jeanne? I am from the Hupriaux.

Marcinelle

Madame...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

What! You don't recognise me? I'm Big Jeanne who used to go barefoot when it was raining, carrying my clogs to save them from wearing out!

Marcinelle

It's not possible. It can't really be you, can it ?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

It's me.

Marcinelle

You !

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Me.

Marcinelle

I beg your pardon, Madame, but you have spoken to me like someone who used to know me.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

So speak to me like a friend then! Just because I appear to be wealthy, you treat me with contempt. I pretend to be happy. That's it, you don't recognise your friends when they are happy. If I had wanted to, I could have repaired that lace myself. All of it, just as well as you. I'll have you know that I am a lace-maker too. You just put a pattern behind a set of bobbin needles; you only use four bobbins at the same time; if you take eight of them, you work them two by two, that makes four doubles; you take the bobbins from the pile on the right, you take them to the middle, you throw them to the left, you twist them, and you continue until you get to the last two, sticking a pin in at each point. Certain techniques for mesh-work, other methods for braid. As for the ¹⁵Malines lace, when you are over seven years of age, you are too old because your fingers are too big. It could take fifteen months, even twenty months to make a piece of lace! You are given a pound of thread and you have to produce the same weight in lace. When you consider that thread can cost a hundred to eight hundred francs! I also used to do ¹⁶Alençon lace; for that you needed a pick and a piling hook. And then there was patterning, cushioning, buckle fastenings, gauze strips, padding, facing, assembling it all, measuring it and fixing it. Do you remember our priest? How ridiculous he was! We used to listen to him coughing during mass and he used to say: 'I would have done better to stay in bed and take care of my asthma.' He was a very

¹⁵ Malines lace comes from Belgium -see photo

¹⁶ Alençon lace is a French needle lace sometimes called the "Queen of lace." Lace making began in Alençon during the 16th century and the local industry was rapidly expanded during the reign of Louis XIV by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who established a Royal Workshop there to produce lace in the Venetian style in 1665. Alençon emerged as a unique style around 1675.

friendly fellow. Did he ever give you a tap under the chin? There were other techniques too, using spindles, and the aprons we used to make with small loops of twisted lace thread. Do you remember how we lace-makers used to work according to the manufacturers' tastes in fashion? How amusing the village fête was! Do you remember the quarrels we used to have during the Corpus Christi processions when the Hupriaux folk met up with the Quiévrain folk on the Paris road, and the two processions used to bang into each other with their flags and banners?

MARCINELLE

It's true, it really is you, Big Jeanne!

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

So you agree with me now! That's good. Oh, just as if it was by my dear father and mother, I am recognised at last! I'm starting to feel welcome.

MARCINELLE

So how did you come to be here in Paris?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

It is quite simple. I came here to earn fifty thousand francs a year.

MARCINELLE

Big Jeanne! You are dressed like the Duchess of Berry. Well this is a ¹⁷turn-around ! Whatever has happened to you to bring all this about?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Nothing. I just earn fifty thousand francs a year.

MARCINELLE

Doing what?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Singing.

MARCINELLE

Singing what?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Songs.

MARCINELLE

What kind of songs?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

¹⁷Catastrophe can mean 'turn around' or development. In classical tragedy, the last development of the intrigue leads to the dénouement.

Our songs.

MARCINELLE

Get away with you, I can't believe that!

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

And by dancing.

MARCINELLE

Dancing what ?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Dances.

MARCINELLE

What kind of dances?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Our dances.

MARCINELLE

Oh, you are just saying that to make me laugh.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

That's very true, it's certainly not to try to make you cry.

MARCINELLE

Our country peasant ¹⁸dances! Our country peasant songs!

MADemoiselle EURYDICE, (singing)

Beautiful creature, if only we were in your pond
Beautiful creature, if only we were in your pond
we would put in some little ducks to swim
some little ducks to swim. We would put them there
To our hearts' content

Nique, noc, nac muche! !

Beautiful creature, charmed, bewitched with your beauty.

(She dances a minuet, then repeats it)

Beautiful creature, if only we were in your garden
Beautiful creature, if only we were in your garden
We would sing there in the evening and in the morning.

¹⁸ Popular dances of the time were the bourrée, the jig and Tyrolean dances

We would sing there to our hearts' content

Nique, noc, nac muche!

Beautiful creature, charmed, bewitched with your beauty.

(She finishes dancing a minuet)

Well, what I have just shown you is worth a hundred and fifty francs. In a year, that would mean fifty thousand francs.

MARCINELLE

Fifty thousand francs!

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Yes, per year. I sing and dance at the Orpheus theatre. They call me Eurydice. I am very popular with fashionable society. I perform my bourrées, my minuets and my folk dances. I teach fashionable ladies how to do my beautiful movements. I give tap lessons to those who like the German style of dancing and I teach hip-swinging motions to those who like the Spanish style of dancing. Hip-swinging is fun but the heel-clicking steps are not so jolly. You know what I mean, those Tyrolean heel dances, la-la- la- hoo ! Slapping your thighs is not for everyone.

MARCINELLE,

(looking out of the window)

Were you brought here by that coach and horses out there?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Yes.

MARCINELLE

You have a nice carriage.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

It's not mine; but would you like it?

MARCINELLE

You are so funny! I don't understand.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

It is a horse-drawn carriage on eight springs. It belongs to the little baron sitting inside. It was he who brought me, you can see him at the front reading the race notices while he waits for me, he's the grandson of a general killed at the battle of ¹⁹Wagram. I have my own eight spring carriage even more splendid than his. So I'm asking you, would you like this carriage here?

¹⁹ Battle of Wagram 1809. French v. Austrians.

MARCINELLE

I don't understand.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

To start off with, you can make use of that carriage there. Would you like it?

MARCINELLE

I think you must be playing a little game of charades with me. What do you mean? Are you asking me if I want this carriage? ..

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Yes, why not? Wait a minute..

(She leans out of the window)

Psst ! Baron, Come up here.

(to Marcinelle)

He's a very well-to-do man. He's the grandson of a general who killed....., what's he up to?

MARCINELLE

Fifty thousand francs.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

You will earn that whenever you want.

MARCINELLE

And how would I do that?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

With my repertoire. You know it by heart. You haven't forgotten our songs, have you? You haven't forgotten our dances?

MARCINELLE

Those we used to do in the village?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Of course. You can dance those.

MARCINELLE,

(staring at the little wall cupboard containing the dress she made for her deceased child)

I don't dance any more.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Sing the songs, then.

MARCINELLE

I don't sing anymore.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Well, just do me the pleasure of putting on this shawl for a while so I might see how it looks.

(She removes Marcinelle's peasant jacket to reveal her bare neck and shoulders. She then throws the shawl over Marcinelle's shoulders. It is very full and completely covers her dress)

Do you know that really looks good on you. Lace shawls really suit you?

(Marcinelle admires herself in the mirror)

That is a just a cheap frippery of a thing. It would only cost twelve hundred francs.

(aside)

She is really very beautiful. She's a woman who certainly doesn't need of a corset from Mister ²⁰Worth

(pointing to the mirror)

Do you normally look at yourself in that?

MARCINELLE

You don't expect me to have a tall dressing mirror, like a ²¹psyché mirror, do you?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Why not? I have one of them. But do you remember the old days when we used to admire our reflections in the spring water?

(Baron de Gerpivrac enters wearing a high collar, a monocle, long bushy sideburns, a hat trimmed with green voile and carrying a fashionable walking stick, made in Great Britain)²²

²⁰ Charles Worth was a famous English couturier based in Paris.

²¹ A psyché mirror also called a cheval dressing glass, a tall dressing mirror, suspended between two pillars, usually joined by horizontal bars immediately above and below the mirror and resting on two pairs of long feet. The cheval glass was first made toward the end of the 18th century. The glass could be tilted at any angle by means of the swivel screws supporting it, and its height could be adjusted by means of lead counterweights and a horse, or pulley, from which the name was taken. Rich women possessed these mirrors.

²² The French aristocracy favoured English fashion items, as the words of the Baron show later in the play. He would be wearing a type of cravate which attaches behind the neck with a buckle. He would have a thick beard worn on each side of the face, from ear to chin.

Scene Four

MADemoiselle Eurydice, Marcinelle, Baron de Gerpivrac

(Baron de Gerpivrac, attended by a young footman is waiting outside on the landing and is visible through the half-open door)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC, (entering still wearing his hat on his head)

I am about to announce to you, having given it much thought, the names of all the current jockeys.

(He takes a notebook out of his pocket and reads):

Pratt, Watkins, the two Grimshaws, Salter, Goater, Jordan, Walter (not to be confused with Salter), Daley, Covey and Cannon. Well, I am sure that Salter belongs to Lord Hastings, and Cannon belongs to the Duke of Beaufort. It's Salter who rides Primate and Cannon who rides Ceylon. I favour Primate for his hocks and for his hindquarters, but he has eye-teeth that do not inspire much confidence in his character. My dear, do you use ²³almond cream? I only have confidence in almond cream. The skin is very delicate. ²⁴Benzoin oil is a good for perfuming a bath; the soap made of lettuce juice is sufficient for the hands, ²⁵Althea extract is suitable for the nails, but for the face you need almond cream. It is far better than all your ²⁶cold creams. You cannot do better than mix it with a little warm water and you have a white cream which is pleasant to the eye and to the nose. But do you understand the importance and fame of the ²⁷Chantilly racecourse? If not, you are missing everything. That poor Piccadilly was bandaged up at the starting gate and came in lame. When I think that Charlie Pratt, the great jockey of the century, on Exhibition, did not win the Ponds prize, I do have to question the existence of God!

(noticing Marcinelle)

Ah! What a beautiful shawl !

(he looks her up and down with his monocle, undressing her with his eyes)

Pretty girl!

MARCINELLE,

(aside)

He calls me a 'girl' too.

(Baron de Gerpivrac greets Marcinelle, then replaces his hat and keeps it on)

²³ Amandine is a beauty cream made of almonds, benjoide water and Althea.

²⁴ Benzoin oil is probably what Hugo means when he says 'benjoide'. Benzoin is extracted from resin of the Styrax Benzoin tree and belongs to the Stryracaceae family. It is also known as gum benzoin, luban jawi (meaning frankincense of Java), Benjamin or Styrax benzoin.

²⁵ Althea, a plant of the Eurasian genus *Althaea* (family Malvaceae), comprising herbaceous perennial plants which include the marsh mallow and the hollyhock, *Alcea rosea*, or "shrub althea" is a widely cultivated hibiscus syriacus.

²⁶ Cold creams are beauty creams. This shows the Baron is conversant with cosmetics.

²⁷ The first race card at Chantilly was held on May 15, 1834 and its existing grandstand was built in 1879 by the famed architect Honoré Daumet, who also did the renovations to the nearby Château de Chantilly. The racecourse was constructed abutting the existing Great Stables. built in 1719 by estate owner, Louis Henri, Duc de Bourbon, Prince of Condé. Designed by the architect Jean Aubert, the mammoth 186 mètre long stable considered the most beautiful in the world.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Madam, that I might have the honour of presenting you with my humble greetings.

MARCINELLE,

(aside)

Not before time. At last, he is showing some respect and restoring my feelings towards him a little .

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Baron, you should have waited for me to introduce you...

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

... that I might have had.... ; I did it using the imperfect subjunctive. But after that, I cannot keep it up.

(to Marcinelle)

Beautiful lady, shawls are no longer fashionable; wearing them is just the same as wearing a pilgrim's cloak.

(To Eurydice)

Yes, I might have had to wait to be presented if we had been at Chantilly, at the Marche, at the Cross of Berry, on the race-course, or on the grass, or as they say ²⁸'turf' in England, you know. But not here. Oh no, there is something lacking here. I have just seen the Duke Achille pass by, that little fellow, you know, with the fashionable umbrella called a ²⁹paragon-fox. But nevertheless, there is a lack of taste. Eurydice, I don't like your hat too much either; when you walk, it does something strange to your hair. You should wear a sailor hat with the ribbon the same colour as the dress. And then your scarf does not do much for me either. The nineteenth century scarf must hang down to a very wide point in the style of a cape. In front, it should cross over the chest and shoulders like braces do.

MARCINELLE,

(aside)

He is charming. They are right when they say that white hands look handsome on a man..

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Or you could wear a Swedish cape. You might tell me that it is more for winter than for summer, but I would reply that..

(he whispers in her ear)

the ³⁰Empress herself has brought the Swedish cape into fashion.

²⁸ Uses English term for racecourse. English racecourses are fashionable and England has a reputation for elegance.

²⁹ Paragon Fox. In the text there is a spelling mistake 'paragon' instead of paragon. This may have been a typo or perhaps Victor Hugo thought this was the actual word. Samuel Fox founded Fox Umbrella Frames Ltd in 1842 Sheffield, UK. He was the inventor of the U-shape ribs of an umbrella called "Paragon".

³⁰ If the Empress wears it, it is considered the highest fashion statement of all.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Gerpivrac, you are wrong about the shawl. A shawl made of ³¹Brussels lace is always in fashion. But you know baron, I am collecting for fire victims, unfortunate people, orphans..., widows ...

Baron de Gerpivrac

Et cetera. There you are, five francs.

MADemoiselle Eurydice,

(aside)

The poor artisan worker has given me twice as much as that.

Baron de Gerpivrac

I have seen some very luxurious silk scarves this season. There is the Pongée scarf. My dear, I must say, at the Chantilly races, there are only three prizes that are up for grabs, the Lawn, the Courtesy and the Morlaye. I was just thinking that they have abandoned their flat race for colts and fillies. I must add that all the handicap races are arranged a bit at random. They allowed the first comers to run. One isn't born a horseman, you know. It is easier to be born a prince than a jockey. A true jockey is a masterpiece. It is not a case of improvisation or experimentation. It is knowledge that is required. Drinking is a science, smoking is a talent, running is something in your destiny. I would prefer intelligence to be cultivated. The day when I knew how to tell the difference between wines from Savoy flavoured with raspberry, Moselle wines tasting of violets and the wines from Mount Limart with the taste of nougat, I felt like a man. I recommend to you the silk factories of ³²Pongée. Do you, yourself, know what is the best and most superior? It is a cashmere dressing gown with Pekin bands bordered with golden ribbon, with iris blue taffeta linings and then you have the horseman's cloak with straight panels down each side. And there's something else that you need to know, you must only buy your scarves at the ³³Indian Market.

Marcinelle,

(aside)

At least this one doesn't talk politics.

MADemoiselle Eurydice,

(aside)

He's brainless. His head is hollow. He's such a fake! He just wants to make a good impression. These people pretend to be fashionable and we somehow fall for it! Our success depends on them. We have to please them. What pathetic women we are pretending to be joyful and forever forced to smile !

³¹ Brussels lace is a type of pillow lace that originated in and around Brussels. The term "Brussels lace" has been broadly used for any lace from Brussels; however, the term strictly interpreted refers to bobbin lace, in which the pattern is made first, then the ground, or réseau, added, also using bobbin lace. Brussels lace is not to be confused with Brussels point, which is a type of needle lace, though is sometimes also called "Brussels lace".

³² Pongée is still woven in silk by many mills across China, especially along the banks of the Yangtze at mills in Sichuan, Anhui, Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. Generally it varies in weight from 36 to about 50gm/sq m. In lighter variants, it is called Paj. It is used as a blouse weight or lining silk.

³³ 'Malle des Indes' is a fictitious name which evokes a shop specializing in the sale of imported silk from India or China.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

A bit of gossip for you, Eurydice. You know, that fat Papal banker, the Marquis Guzzi, he is getting married. He is marrying a girl from a well-titled family, Mademoiselle Humieres-Laurangais. She's sixteen years old, pretty and with not a sous to her name. He is worth twenty million.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

He is marrying that pretty flower of a girl, and him, that Guzzi, that ugly monster!

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Why not? Monsters cannot remain single. In ³⁴Theramène's speech, there are phrases that seem to indicate that the monster is married.

(noticing the bouquet on the floor)

Oh, so I see that's what you do with my bouquet!

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

It's only fallen on the floor.

MARCINELLE,

(aside)

Well, well, well, it's his bouquet. It's his bouquet to her. What secret significance could there be in this? What if I were to take on her baron? It would kill two birds with one stone. It would rebound from my unfaithful husband onto that cheating woman. Just considering that husband of mine, if there are men who have mistresses, then there have to be women who have lovers.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Fallen, yes. Just as you please, Eurydice. Speaking of this fall, I managed to get off with it lightly the other day. We went to the place of some Russian prince, – you know, one of those Koffs, this year's new Russian prince, the fashion for Russian princes changes every year, - we had a friendly little derby race in the park that he rents by the month. I rode my mare called 'Four Horseshoes in the Air'. This name almost brought me down. I got away with it though, jumping the two fences, one five foot high, another seven foot, then the ditch and the Irish Bank which was twelve feet in height, my dear.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Oh ! twelve foot!

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

You women don't understand all that. It is ³⁵high.....(pronounce in a posh way- 'hoi')

³⁴ Theramène is one of the characters in Phedre, a Racine tragedy. The monster is a sailor being sent by Neptune. He has horns on his brow like cuckolded husbands.

³⁵ For the sake of the humour, pronounce *'hoi''. The hoi polloi is a way of referring to common people, and it is an elitist term usually used by people who consider themselves to be above the masses. Snobs rarely like the hoi polloi — that is, the masses, a.k.a. "the great unwashed." The term comes from the Greek for 'the many'. It would provide satirical humour similar to original intention.

See footnote 35 below.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

³⁶Polloi

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

You are a tease, Eurydice, You seem to be making fun of me. But I know why. Here, take your twenty louis!

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

What twenty louis?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Didn't you ask me for twenty louis only the other day?

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

I don't know.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Neither do I. Here's the money all the same.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

I must say your gold has a good smell about it.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

My gold spends the night in Eau de Cologne.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

I'll take the twenty louis for my fire victims.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Oh no! I protest, no, I can't have that !

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

Why not ?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

It would be a good deed.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

Well?

³⁶ or replace Garonne with 'Tide', 'Tea', 'Society', 'Parish' or even 'Capelles' to raise a laugh for a Guernsey audience..

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

I don't do good deeds. Good deeds prevent one from winning the game. It's a well-known fact.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Are you afraid of doing something good? Where is the harm in doing a good deed ?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

It's unlucky, that's what it is. It brings bad luck thirty-fold and forty-fold. If it were not so, I would do good deeds, I am not a bad man.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

But you gave me five francs just now.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Because I was tired of carrying about a hundred sous coin. Giving a hundred sous coin is not benevolent, it is simply like taking a bit of grubbiness out of ones pocket.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

So be it.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Every age has its different ways of doing things. Our way is not to do charitable deeds. There were times in the past for sentimentality. Now we are more serious. We want to know the outcome of everything. Gothic ideas are old Ideas. I am not forced to take pity on lost children like saintly ³⁷Vincent de Paul or make sentimental gestures to all and sundry like my great grandmother used to do with her hair adorned with irises and wearing a fashionable ³⁸Colinette hat. Perhaps we are no better than her generation but we are different. We have our own ways of going about things. Listen, if you were to give me some thick white ³⁹extremadura cotton material, thread count of four and five, and some red cotton, I could crochet you a bib. But I do have my superstitions, you know.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Let us say no more about it: I will write it on my list: ten francs from an artisan, five francs from a baron.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

So you know how to read, Eurydice?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Why shouldn't I ? Haven't you just said you have the skills to make a crocheted bib?

³⁷ French catholic priest renowned for his charity notably to orphans

³⁸ Colinette hat -see photo

³⁹ Cotton material made of thread from Extremadura, a region of Spain, sold in different thicknesses e.g. 1 very thin, 2 thin, 3 medium, 4 thick, 5 thicker.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

My dear, our ancestors, the colonels of a hundred years ago, did raised-satin stitching.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

But it was through their marching that they won the battle of ⁴⁰Fontenoy.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC,

(aside)

I have had enough of Eurydice. She knows too much. She is beginning to have a lively mind. She's boring. At heart she is a revolutionary, that girl. She speaks as if she were a ⁴¹demagogue. Oh! if I were the government, I would suppress the freedom of the press ! This Eurydice, here, is against us!

(aside, looking at Marcinelle)

There's a completely fresh, new woman. What if I were to leave the old one here. This little one would suit me well.

(moving towards Marcinelle)

This shawl has a fault.

MARCINELLE

What kind of fault?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

It hides your shoulders.....

MARCINELLE

(She blushes)

Monsieur!

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

The most beautiful ones in the world.

(drawing up her shawl)

Monsieur !

(As she draws up the shawl, the hem of her dress is revealed)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC,

(aside)

⁴⁰ Battle 1745 French v. English.

⁴¹ A revolutionary in 19th century. Head of a popular faction, which supports the interests of the people.

A simple cotton dress! Under a shawl worth fifty pounds sterling, a skirt worth six pence ! She's a working woman. She's unworldly, her life is simple, she is so naïve. I think I am falling in love with her. It was Eurydice making her try on the shawl that caused me to fall for her.

(whilst looking at himself in the mirror)

In a love relationship, the woman must be beautiful and the man must have a good mind. So we could be a good couple. However, that doesn't mean to say that I, myself, am not good-looking.

(Aloud)

Eurydice, you who are interested in politics, what's the latest news? Do we have peace? Are we at war?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

The Lyon exchange has been in a state of flux; trading has gone down to six hundred and seventy five; the property market is holding its own at eleven thirty-five. They say the ⁴²English Stock Exchange is in melt-down.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC,

(to Marcinelle)

If you were to put your foot for me into a fine little Russian leather riding boot wearing a white silk stocking. If you were to have a skirt of Hindu crêpe in a shade of pearl, with blue Geneva taffeta pockets, and a French soldier-suit made of white goat's wool. If you were to wear a taffeta waistcoat, and a Havana leather belt covered in matt silver, you would be a jewel, people would marvel at you.

MARCINELLE,

(aside)

I am feeling dizzy. How well these people speak in that world of theirs! I don't understand the meaning of the words, but I seem to be hearing music.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE,

(in a low voice to Marcinelle)

You know. The eight spring carriage is yours.

MARCINELLE,

(in a low voice)

What do you mean?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

(in a low voice)

⁴² Eurydice gives the stock exchange news. It is the start of a financial crisis.

Don't worry yourself. The baron is trying to seduce you. Throw him off.

MARCINELLE

This man.....

MADemoiselle EURYDICE,

(in a low voice)

Well! He is my baron! That is to say that I belong to his baronial title more than to him. You might ask what he is a baron of and the reply would be ⁴³'Baron of Mademoiselle Eurydice'. Do you want that? Would you like to take that on? If you want it, I am giving it to you.

(aside)

I wouldn't mind changing places with her. I don't mind her man's artisan's smock either.

MARCINELLE,

(aside)

Oh dear! Bad thoughts are passing through my mind.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

At ⁴⁴Baden Baden, there is an alms box for the poor outside the entrance to the spa ⁴⁵gardens and casino. They gamble millions of francs and do you know what they find in the box for the poor at the end of the season, in the generosity box? Seven francs fifty. Oh, the gamblers know their business, you know. They don't go to play roulette to win the Montoya prize. Eurydice, if you go to Baden Baden, you must wear a ⁴⁶Hust cap.

MARCINELLE,

(aside)

I am afraid. I want to. It is a terrible thing when you feel your conscience slipping away.

(She falls into a deep daydream)

MADemoiselle EURYDICE,

(in a low voice to Marcinelle)

He has fallen madly in love with you. I know it.

(aside)

If she leaves her station in life, I'll take it. I have a foolish yearning to live an attic room life. Where I am at the moment, the air is becoming more and more unbreathable. She is living a real life. Oh, I am envious of her round bonnet, her Indian cotton dress, her fingers pricked

⁴³ Property of a baron to which a title is attached

⁴⁴ Bade is old name for Baden Baden, a German town with a famous Kursaal.

⁴⁵ Kursaal, or pleasure garden and casino much frequented by the rich.

⁴⁶ *Hust cap or does Hugo mean a *Hunt riding hat/cap?

by the needle, her daily work, her innocent forehead, her poverty. 'Oh! true love, to love, to be loved, to be free, without a penny....how perfect!' To be faithful to one's artisan man. To be faithful again would mean to become virtuous again.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

What are you thinking about then, Eurydice?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

About you.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC,

(aside)

Poor Eurydice! She is lost without me, but I am becoming tired of her. It's a shame for her!

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Hey, on that point. I was forgetting my rehearsal at midday! I think I've almost missed my rehearsal. What time is it? Baron, have you got your racing watch?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

My watch made of ⁴⁷wood? Oh yes, only those will do. Thirty five minutes past eleven.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Let's hurry then and be on our way. I could be asked to pay a fine. Take me there, baron.

MARCINELLE,

(removing the shawl and giving it to him)

What about your shawl?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Quite right.

(calling)

Giles !

(The footman is still on the landing. She half-opens the door and throws him the shawl)

Take that and put it in the carriage.

(The footman takes away the shawl)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC,

(to Marcinelle whose shoulders are now bare)

⁴⁷ Wooden watches were high fashion statements.

Oh, stay the woman you are. Never become an angel. What a shame it would be if you had wings! One would no longer see those shoulders.

MARCINELLE, (aside)

Oh God! It's true. Where's my jacket?

(She hastily puts her little jacket back on again)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Just like a cloud that covers the perpetual star.

MADemoiselle EURYDICE,

(to Marcinelle)

What are you afraid of? Have you have never been to the ball?

(aside)

What a inspirational ⁴⁸muse!

(aloud to Baron of Gerpivrac)

You are a poet, baron.

(aside)

It would be better not to have anything to do with such a fool as this man who lives only for the moment and offers nothing but empty promises.

(aloud)

Good bye, Marcinelle.

MARCINELLE

Are you leaving ?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

Yes, and I'm galloping off again in a rush.

MARCINELLE

My husband is going to return. Do you not want to wait for my husband ?

MADemoiselle EURYDICE

You're a married woman!

MARCINELLE

You know very well I am, since you have given your bouquet to my husband.

⁴⁸ Woman whose beauty inspires an artist/poet.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

How stupid you are to be married! Can it be true that you are a legally married woman !
That does not make any difference to others though....

Monsieur Baron de Gerpivrac, say good-bye to Madame, and come and join me. I will run
ahead. I cannot miss my stage entrance. Time to say farewell.

(She goes out)

(Marcinelle and Baron de Gerpivrac remain alone)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC,

(to Marcinelle)

Let this not be farewell. I will return.

MARCINELLE

Monsieur...

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

You are adorable. I adore you. I have two hundred thousand francs of private income to my
name. I will return.

MARCINELLE

Monsieur...

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

If you allow me to return, soon I will pass by this way again in the street below, leave your
window open and that will be a sign that you are saying 'yes' to me.

(He goes out leaving the door at the end of the room half-open revealing the landing and
the stairs. A moment after he has left, Edmond Gombert appears leaning over the banisters
before entering and seeming to watch the staircase)

MARCINELLE,

(alone)

He told me to leave the window open. I am trembling. I have not done anything wrong yet
except think. Thinking is dreadful. If my window is left open, that will mean 'yes'. I see a
luxurious life leading me on and jealousy behind pushing me forward. I feel myself being
pulled as if by a mighty hand. My poor Edmond! But I do still love him. It is really him that I
love. Oh, who will come to my aid?

(Edmond Gombert enters)

Scene Five

Marcinelle Edmond Gombert

EDMOND GOMBERT

What's that idler doing strolling about down there?

MARCINELLE

Ah! It's you! So we have bouquets, do we? We seem to have bouquets in here.

EDMOND GOMBERT

What was that fellow doing leaving here, that rascal of a chap?

MARCINELLE,

(pointing to the bouquet under the broom in the corner of the fireplace)

That's what I do with your bouquets. Just you watch and see where I'm putting them, your bouquets of flowers.

EDMOND GOMBERT

That rascal must be a marquis. I demand to know if that ⁴⁹popinjay came out of your bedroom?

MARCINELLE

Yes. He's the lover of your mistress.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Of my mistress?

MARCINELLE

Of Big Jeanne!

EDMOND GOMBERT

Big Jeanne!

MARCINELLE

Of Mademoiselle Eurydice !

EDMOND GOMBERT

Eurydice?

MARCINELLE

⁴⁹ Muscadin is a nickname given in Directory 1794-1799 to young royalists preoccupied with their elegance. It's equivalent 'Popinjay' in English is a vain or conceited person, especially one who dresses or behaves extravagantly.

Of the singer, of the peasant woman with the airs and graces, of the chubby-cheeked, conceited creature with the bouquet !

EDMOND GOMBERT

Just tell me what that rascal was doing here !

MARCINELLE

But, watch me, I've got a broom.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I want to know....

MARCINELLE

I am sweeping my bedroom. Too bad for things that are there and ought not to be there.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I know that fellow was in there with you. You are going to have to explain this to me...

MARCINELLE

I returned home with my work box, having delivered the work I had spent many nights labouring on, not expecting to find anything like this on my return. I was simply returning from my delivery errand, so go and forget your foolish thoughts and suspicions! Having loved you and given you the best days of my youth, I can't see any point now in having kept all those hopes in my heart, only to end up finding bouquets in my house carefully arranged in water?

(Muttering) Oh my God, he looks as if he's going to faint, so I must take care...

A bouquet from a whore. And me, an honest woman, and yes, I am an honest woman.

(She goes to the window and closes it)

....and I asked very little of you, simply to be poor, to eat nothing but dry bread, to go round bare-footed, just so that you, my man, can play around and leer at all the women who pass by, a man who doesn't even know how to resist a bouquet of flowers from the clutches of a hussy. When I came in, I said: 'there is something that smells bad in here'. So what can it be then that has such a bad smell?

(pointing to the bouquet)

It was this item bought from the flower stall. No need to explain. A woman comes here for the lace shawl accompanied by the man who keeps her. She invites him up. Tell me if that has got anything at all to do with me? That 'madam' of yours seems to be madly in love with her own man.

EDMOND GOMBERT

⁵⁰Benjamin Constant was right to say to the Bourbons: 'It will end up badly'. Oh! The rich can't leave us poor folk in peace. Are we, by chance, still living in feudal times obeying the

⁵⁰ Benjamin Constant 1767-1830, writer and republican politician.

⁵¹rights of the seigneur? That little fellow is one of those seigneurs. Oh beware, you haughty fellows, if you come to our homes, we'll erect the barricades! The revolution will be terrible. I know all about those bloody ⁵²September days. Believe whatever you like, madam, it doesn't matter to me. It's not me who is responsible for other people's bouquets. There is a woman with a bouquet, there is a jug of water. Can I prevent the jug of water from being there? Don't forget, you ladies with your beautiful skirts, your feathers, your velvets, your jewels and your chiffons, such fine clothes do not have long-lasting effects on us men; we know just what they cost us, and that if it is not us who give them, it's us who pay for them. It is just the same when we men have bouts of drunkenness, the hang-overs don't last long either. What could be more important to me than the beautiful but poor woman who possesses virtues of honesty and courage. We are just two people sharing adversity, who wear poor clothes and have fingers hardened by manual work and eyes red with close work! So then, because you are angry, madam, I must be a good little boy and hold my tongue and allow myself to look ridiculous by telling you the story of a bouquet of flowers. Where's the bouquet? Oh no, leave me in peace. Let's leave one another.

MARCINELLE

Yes, let's separate. You said it before I did, but I was thinking about it before you were.

EDMOND GOMBERT

So that means we shouldn't sleep here together tonight.

MARCINELLE

Let's divide up all that we have. We'll each keep what belongs to us.

EDMOND GOMBERT

You stay here. I will leave.

MARCINELLE

You mean straight away.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Straight away.

MARCINELLE

And let that be final. Let it be for good.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Separation for ever. Are you listening?

MARCINELLE

I hope so.

EDMOND GOMBERT

⁵¹ The feudal system would be accorded to men giving them the right to have sexual relations with the women of their vassals.

⁵² During the early French revolutionary wars against Prussia, there were massacres of political prisoners on the 2–5 September 1792.

Then, let's divide up our belongings.

MARCINELLE

My belongings aren't heavy, and dividing up our things won't take long.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Each takes their half. Keep what's yours, I'll take what's mine. The removal man is just there around the corner and can strap things onto his cart. He will carry away all I am taking.

MARCINELLE

Agreed.

EDMOND GOMBERT

And don't imagine that I will return. In just half an hour, it will all be over.

MARCINELLE

In ten minutes.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Five, if it's possible. Quick.

MARCINELLE

Let's divide everything.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Let's divide everything up between us.

MARCINELLE,

(starting to divide up the furniture)

Two chairs. One with the badly worn seat.

EDMOND GOMBERT

That's mine.

(He takes the chair with the badly worn rattan seat.)

MARCINELLE

(emptying pottery / china from the sideboard)

Three plates for you. Three for me.

(He puts the plates on the worn rattan seat of the chair. She puts hers in the fireplace. Each put their share on their side)

MARCINELLE

Your fork, your knife.

(She gives them back to him)

Here are mine. There's only one glass.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Keep it.

MARCINELLE

There's only one table and only one mirror.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I'll take the table. You take the mirror.

(He puts the table next to the chair. She unhooks the mirror from the wall and puts it against the fireplace. Marcinelle opens the chest and empties out the drawers. She makes up two parcels)

MARCINELLE

This parcel contains your clothes. Take it.

EDMOND GOMBERT,

(showing her the other parcel)

Is this yours?

MARCINELLE

Yes.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Fine.

MARCINELLE

Here are your tools.

(He piles up the tools near the chair.)

Here are my bobbins.

(She places her bobbins near her parcel of clothes)

(Marcinelle opens the cupboard and pulls out a little white dress with lace sleeves.)

MARCINELLE

For me.

EDMOND GOMBERT

No! for me.

(He seizes one of the sleeves of the dress. She holds onto the other)

MARCINELLE

Don't pull. You're going to tear it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I am taking it.

MARCINELLE

I am keeping it.

EDMOND GOMBERT,

(letting go of the dress)

Alright then, yes. Keep it. You will be alone when I leave. It will make you think of me.

MARCINELLE

No then. You take it. Take it away. I give it to you. It will prevent you from forgetting me.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Go on, keep it.

MARCINELLE

I say to you, take it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

There is a way that you could keep it and that I could have it.

MARCINELLE

And what's that?

EDMOND GOMBERT

If we stayed together, if we don't separate from one other. Let's not leave each other for ever, Marcinelle!

MARCINELLE

Edmond !

EDMOND GOMBERT

We love each other ! Do you really want us to stay together ?

MARCINELLE

You can see that our little one clearly wants us to.

(They fall into each other's arms, the little dress held tightly between their chests.)

End