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SOPHIE

*PLAYS BY*  
*PHILIP MOELLER*

MADAME SAND

FIVE SOMEWHAT HISTORICAL PLAYS

MOLIÈRE

SOPHIE

# S O P H I E

A C O M E D Y  
BY PHILIP MOELLER

WITH A PROLOGUE FOR THE READER BY  
CARL VAN VECHTEN

*“ . . . la seule courtisane de l'age  
d'or des filles: Sophie Arnould.”  
De Goncourt.*



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To

CARL VAN VECHTEN

*Who first gave me the key to*

*Sophie's dressing room*

*and to*

EMILY STEVENS

*Who was waiting when the*

*knob was turned.*



## A PROLOGUE FOR THE READER

One of the favourite theories of the somewhat overrated George Henry Lewes has it that the applause vouchsafed the actor, the interpreter, is proportionately much greater during his lifetime than that allotted to the creative artist, because the interpreter disappears when he dies and is forgotten, while the great creative artist lives in his work even after death, his fame rolling up with the passing generations. It is no purpose of mine entirely to discredit this theory, but the fact remains that there are actors who have a longer lease on fame than equally worthy creative artists. The irony lies in the axiom that the creative artist who is the most applauded by his contemporaries is usually the soonest to be forgotten by succeeding centuries, while the actor who is the most applauded while he is yet alive is the longest remembered by those who come after. And if you make up a comparative list of players and playwrights of past periods who still haunt the memory and the imagination, I am willing to wager that the list of actors will be the longer one. Nell Gwyn, David Garrick, Mrs. Siddons, Clairon, Peg Woffington, Edwin Booth, Lotta, Salvini, and Rachel have so impressed

themselves on the popular consciousness through their lives and the accounts of them which still exist, that they have taken as definite a place in the minds and hearts of the people as the great characters of fiction, Sancho Panza, Mr. Pickwick, Tartarin, Bazarov, and Daisy Miller. We need have no fear, to introduce a modern note, that the name of Sarah Bernhardt, the French Jewess, who defied the laws of the Théâtre Français, who defied the laws of society to such an extent that on one still-celebrated occasion she permitted her actual lover, Jean Richepin, to enact the rôle of her stage lover in his own piece, *Nana-Sahib*, who defied the laws of Nature, making her audience forget that Marguerite Gautier was seventy-five years old and had but one leg—we need have no fear, I say, that this name is not a thousand times more eternal and amaranthine than that of Victorien Sardou, in whose dramas she won the suffrage of the great public. Her epitaph, indeed, might be that which Voltaire, or another, wrote for Adrienne Lecouvreur:

*“L’opinion étoit si forte  
Qu’elle devoit toujours durer;  
Qu’ après même qu’elle fut morte,  
On refusa de l’enterrer.”*

Not the least of the names that have come down to us from the mauve and pale-green past of the exquisite eighteenth century is that of the extraor-

dinary Sophie Arnould, whose fragrant cognomen might have been perpetuated alone through Gluck's famous remark that without her he never could have presented his *Iphigénie en Aulide* to Paris. But aside from her eminence as the greatest lyric artist of her period, she was very beautiful and very witty, and the details of her life were dramatic and intriguing enough to have furnished material for a score of epic poems and romances. What verses Alexander Pope might have composed in honour of the goings on of Sophie, had Clio permitted him to live a little later! Mademoiselle Arnould was the friend of the great men of her day: Beaumarchais, Marmontel, Duclos, Helvétius, Diderot, even Benjamin Franklin, all came to her salon. Jean Jacques Rousseau visited her at least once, and Voltaire's appearance on her hearthstone assumes, in its historical guise, almost the semblance of a pilgrimage. Her wit won their attention, and her humanity their hearts. Her tongue, when at its best, was capable of producing masterpieces of word humour; her less acceptable sallies were made in the form of paronomasia. These epigrams wormed their way into many eighteenth-century volumes of recollections, memoirs, and letters, and after her death they were collected and issued under the title, *Arnoldiana*. Many of them are still in daily use in France.

The artists of the epoch all desired to reproduce

Sophie's beauty. Greuze's portrait is perhaps the most adorable of the list. This picture also represents Greuze at a better advantage than the more celebrated *Cruche Cassée* in the Louvre. The early engravings of this *Broken Pitcher*, by the way, were dedicated by the painter to Mademoiselle Arnould. Greuze, of course, does not suggest the Iphigénie; it is in La Tour's portrait that we recognize the great tragic actress. There is further a bust by Houdon which, when the revolutionists burst into her house, once served Sophie in good stead. She dubbed the head Marat and saved her own.

Sophie Arnould was born in Paris, February 14, 1740. Her parents appear to have been respectable members of the upper middle class; her mother, indeed, was a frequenter of literary circles and enjoyed the acquaintance of men who inspired her with an ambition to give her daughter a thorough education. So Sophie studied reading and writing, foreign languages, the spinet, and singing. At the age of ten, or thereabouts, her charm, her wit, her beauty, and her talent attracted the attention of the Princess of Modena, who thereafter made herself responsible for the child's education.

It was the custom of the period, more fashionable than pious, for ladies of the great world to seclude themselves in convents during the latter part of Lent. At the beginning of Holy Week, 1757,



the Princess arrived at the Abbey of Panthémont to discover the sisters in a state of consternation. They included in their numbers a nun with an exceptionally beautiful voice who had been counted on to supply the music during the retreat but she had been taken ill. On Wednesday fashionable Paris would come to hear the *Tenebrae* and there was no one to sing it. The Princess offered Sophie as a solution, and the following day when she sang the *Miserere* of Lalande the church was crowded, so quickly had travelled the news of the girl's remarkable singing. The Queen heard of this and sent for Sophie; Madame de Pompadour heard of this and sent for Sophie. The Queen desired Sophie for her private choir, but the King, through the royal mistress, destined her for the Académie Royale de Musique. Now it was common knowledge that those who entered the stage door of the Opera were forced to leave behind an indispensable part of the definition of the word maiden. Sophie's mother, therefore, strove to conceal her daughter in a convent, but, in view of the circumstances, it was impossible to find an abbess willing to brave the anger of royalty and its mistress. Sophie, accordingly, was engaged at the Opera. At first it was intended that she should become a member of the sacred choir connected with that institution, but talent was at a low ebb. Looking for a novelty to stir the pulse of the apathetic public, the directors

injected Sophie into an opera-ballet called *Les Amours des Dieux* on December 15, 1757. The singer made her début at the age of seventeen and was immediately launched on a brilliantly successful career.

In the meantime her father had become an inn-keeper, and a charming Norman painter, hight Dorval, became a paying guest at his house. Dorval's linen was of the finest; his taste in dress exquisite. Indeed he must have been quite as *opéra-comique* as the farmers and shepherdesses of the Trianon. Nevertheless, in spite of the huge baskets of game and fruit which arrived from day to day, the Arnoulds seem to have suspected nothing until the morning dawned when both Sophie and Dorval were missing. A little later Arnould *père* received a letter in which Dorval unmasked and appeared in his true character as Louis Léon Félicité de Brancas, Comte de Lauraguais. He adored Sophie, he asseverated, and when his wife died he would marry her. By way of warning to parents who credit such promises, I might state that the Comtesse de Lauraguais only expired on the guillotine some half century later. The love of the Comte and Sophie continued unabated for a few years; then there came a break. During one of his absences Sophie packed her two sons and all the Comte's presents into a carriage and dispatched them to the Comtesse, who established the duties of

wronged wives for all time by retaining the children and bringing them up with her own and returning the presents. Later Sophie presented the Comte with two more children. In fact periodically they renewed their romance, the one grand passion in both their lives, although both were as inconstant as rabbits and guinea pigs and for every new lover of Sophie's Lauraguais retaliated with a new mistress. But they remained friends until death parted them, a fact to which Sophie's last letter to the Comte bears touching and convincing evidence.

The reader may believe that Mr. Moeller has resorted to burlesque in his quaint picture of Lauraguais but, judging by the facts, I feel, on the contrary, that he has underdrawn rather than overdrawn this strange character of whom Voltaire wrote, "He has all possible talents and all possible eccentricities." He did write plays, mad five-act tragedies, and insane comedies, and it is perfectly true that his pamphlet on inoculation, which at that period was considered as a form of black magic, did cause his detention at Metz. The Comte further dabbled in chemistry and anatomy, endeavoured to bring about reforms in the theatre, and even became a gentleman jockey. He was constantly running into collision with royalty and the courts; he was one of the early aristocratic radicals. He was a delicious whimsical paraphrase of the

eighteenth century encyclopedist and it is to his unfading credit that, in one fantastic flight of his winged imagination and in order to rid Sophie of an attendant bore, he actually brought and substantiated by scientific authority the charge of the new method of assassination with which Sophie in Mr. Moeller's comedy ejects the Ambassador of Austria from her triumphant presence. It is probable that the Comte was the only real love in Sophie's life, although her subsequent turpitudes were many, including relations with the Prince d'Hénin, whom she detested, and Bélanger, the architect, who, with Lauraguais, remained her friend until she died.

Sophie Arnould's voice was not powerful. "Nature," she has written in her *Mémoires*, "had seconded my taste for music with a tolerably agreeable voice, weak but sonorous, though not extremely so. But it was sound and well-balanced, so that with a clear pronunciation and without any defect save a slight lisp, which could hardly be considered a fault, not a word of what I sang was lost, even in the most spacious buildings." It is to be observed that clear enunciation is an inevitable part of the baggage of great dramatic singers. Contemporary critics give her more credit than she gave herself; according to their evidence her voice was sweet in quality, and she possessed the gift of imparting to it colour and expression. The Goncourts have sum-



marized the case: "She brought to harmony, emotion; to the song, compassion; to the play of the voice, sentiment. She charmed the ear and touched the heart. All the domain of the tender drama, all the graces of terror, were hers. She possessed the cry, and the tears, and the sigh, and the caresses of the pathetic. . . . What art, what genius, must there have been to wrest so many harmonies from a contemptible voice, a feeble throat." These words can hardly be misunderstood. Sophie was, indeed, the first, perhaps, of the great dramatic singers, those who not only act with their bodies but with their singing voices. David Garrick pronounced her a greater actress than Clairon. What Mary Garden is to the contemporary lyric stage, Sophie Arnould was to the stage of the late eighteenth century.

Before Gluck came to Paris, French lyric art was fast ebbing out its life. *Pastiches* formed most of the bills, opera-ballets with five acts and five plots, or rearrangements of minor masterworks. Even from these Sophie wrested a tremendous reputation, just as Sarah Bernhardt has defied the world of actresses with the clap-trap of Sardou, and Mary Garden has won recognition as the greatest lyric artist of her day as much as anything through her performance in Massenet's meretricious *Thais*. The titles of the trifles in which Sophie appeared, however, are very pretty and sug-

gest the powder-puffery, the wigs, the flowered gowns, the pregnant artificiality of what must ever remain in the memory as a graceful and gracious period. *Alphée et Aréthuse*, *Pyrrhus et Polixene*, *Dardanus*, *Les Fêtes de Paphos*, *Castor et Pollux*, *Psyché*, *Thetis et Peleus*, *Les Dieux d'Égypte*, *Sylvie*, *Palmire*, *Aline*, *Reine de Golconde*, and *La Terre* were some of the fragrant names. Sophie's repertory included works by Lully, Rameau, Monsigny, and Rousseau, in whose *Devin de Village* she appeared in a boy's part, but of all the operas she sang only the two works of Gluck retain the stage today.

Nature always provides ways and means for those who provide for themselves. Every great reformer in opera has had his corresponding interpreter who has brought about reforms in her own field as sweeping as those introduced by the composer. Debussy had Mary Garden; Wagner, Madame Schroeder-Devrient; Gluck, Sophie Arnould. There is indeed a fascinating similarity to be noted between the personalities and talents of Sophie Arnould and Mary Garden. Like Sophie, Mary is a great actress; she also moulds her voice to suit the new word; she also is a very witty woman. Indeed I can remember story after story about Mary Garden that would be absolutely in character with Sophie Arnould, and if a composer should hit upon the ingenious idea of making a rococo opera of Mr.



Moeller's comedy it seems inevitable that Mary Garden should be chosen to enact the rôle of the heroine.

Mr. Moeller, with complete justification, has distorted some historical facts in his arrangement of his play. Sophie did, in a sense, resort to intrigue to capture the rôle of Iphigénie but not in the manner he suggests. The production of *Iphigénie en Aulide* was, of course, one of the four or five decisive battles in the history of music drama, and Sophie played by no means a small part in its success. Later she appeared as Euridice in Gluck's Parisian arrangement of *Orpheus*. But Rosalie Levasseur "created" *Alceste*.

The causes for Sophie's decline and fall are not difficult to gauge. Her voice, none too good in the beginning, began to fail her, and she could not always depend on it, nor is there reason to believe that on every occasion did she make any effort to please the public before which she was appearing. Then her wickedly witty tongue made her an object of fear, dread, and hate to many of her comrades in the theatre, and her caprices were so flagrant that an opera director of today would probably commit suicide in face of them. For weeks at a time she would refuse to sing at all, thereby seriously embarrassing a management which in any case was embarrassed enough for real talent; even the fact that she was announced to sing did not sanction

any belief that she would. At the last moment she frequently sent word that she was ill; on one occasion she sent no word at all, but came and sat in a box at the front of the house, and when pressed for an explanation declared that she had come to take a lesson from her understudy. In the circumstances one can understand the hisses that greeted her final appearances, inspired partly by a natural feeling of grievance on the side of the public; partly, doubtless, by a management that wished to rid itself permanently of such a menace to order and discipline. And the presence of Marie Antoinette on more than one occasion did not serve to stem the tide of disapproval, for the very simple reason that the cold Queen was as unpopular in Paris as any royalty could be.

Poor Sophie definitely retired from the stage in 1778, when she was but thirty-eight years old, and soon thereafter life for her became a constant struggle. She was granted a pension by the Government but she found it difficult to collect it. When a benefit at the Opera in her behalf was proposed, she refused to consider it when she learned that a condition would be her personal appearance. The Revolution tore away from her what small means she had, and the last few years of her life were as tragic as those of any of the heroines she had represented on the stage. She did not, however, lose her friends, Lauraguais and Bélanger, who re-

mained faithful to the end, although they too had lost the power to assist her in any material manner. Her letters to these men in her last years are very beautiful. Sophie died on October 22, 1802, and where she is buried nobody knows. She was born on Saint Valentine's Day, the first words she sang on the stage were "*Charmant Amour*," and as she was dying the Curé of St. Germain l'Auxerois leaned over her bed to hear her mutter, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much." So the love motif was woven through her life like a theme in a symphony.

Mr. Moeller has chosen in his charming comedy, the most charming and the most brilliant to my way of thinking that has yet issued from his pen, to ignore the tragedy, the heartache, the pain in poor Sophie's history. The hisses of the people, the poverty and squalor of her last years, offer tempting material for another play which he may write later. His fable, in the present instance, is wholly apocryphal, although it is based on history at crucial points. The fact to be emphasized is that he has lighted up the atmosphere and the period, and re-created character. Sophie *lives* in this comedy, lives as she must have lived at the height of her career; she breathes and exists; we understand her and feel with her; we know that the playwright has set her down with an unerring instinct for essentials. Occasionally he has used some of her own epigrams

but he has written plenty of others of his own which seem to be born of the same gay spirit. This, to me, is the ideal form of historical play, yielding to history, but not episodic, standing on its own ground and playing lights on period and character, invaluable to the loving student of the eighteenth century. To those who have hitherto been ignorant of the name of this fascinating woman it will straightway have the effect of sending them scurrying through the records, and they will not be disappointed, but it would be no surprise to me if the adorable Sophie would henceforth be identified in the public mind with the heroine of a comedy which is as good as any in the best traditions of the English stage and which establishes a new standard on the American stage.

CARL VAN VECHTEN.

*September 9, 1919*

*New York*

## THE CHARACTERS ARE:

MARIE GUIMARD, *the dancer, Sophie's neighbour.*

MILLE. ABIGALETTE HEINEL, *the dancer, Sophie's worshipper.*

SOPHIE'S THIRD LACKEY.

SOPHIE'S SECOND LACKEY.

SOPHIE'S FIRST LACKEY.

THE ABBÉ DE VOISENON, *Sophie's confessor.*

SOPHIE.

ROSALIE LEVASSEUR, *Sophie's rival.*

LOUIS LÉON FÉLICITÉ DE BRANCA, COUNT DE LAURAGUAI, *Sophie's "Dorval."*

VIVIENNE, *Sophie's visitor.*

CHRISTOPH WILLIBALD RITTER VON GLUCK, *Sophie's composer.*

MERCY D'ARGENTEAU, *the Austrian Ambassador, Sophie's thorn.*

CAPTAIN ETIENNE MARS, *Sophie's bridegroom.*

THE COUNT DE SAINT-FLORENTIN, *the Chief of Police, Sophie's dread.*

*Sophie's soldiers and the Soldiers who come for Sophie's arrest.*

## THE SCENES ARE:

Act I. *Half-past seven, which leaves Sophie in a quandary.*

Act II. *Half-past nine, which leaves Sophie in danger.*

Act III. *Half-past eleven, which leaves Sophie almost alone.*







ACT I

*Half-past seven, which  
leaves Sophie in a quandary.*



## ACT I

THE SCENE is SOPHIE'S little drawing room adjoining her boudoir in the house of the Austrian Ambassador in Paris. The apartment is the miniature chef d'ouvre of the architect Belanger. He has put all his talent as an artist and all his adoration of SOPHIE into the creation of the room and the result is exquisite. All the delicate finesse of the style of Louis Quinze is in the workmanship. Every detail is controlled on the happy side of grace; the chairs are done in petite pointe, each silently telling its noisy tale of love; the designs of the furniture tapestries as well as the painted panels of the harpsichord are in the most delicately fragrant style of Boucher. On one of the walls is a La Tour pastel of the Comte de Brancas Lauraguais, on another, over the mantelpiece is Greuze's portrait of SOPHIE which today graces the Wallace collection in London. All about the room are those exquisite, varied, tiny, necessities of femininity. On the harpsichord, for instance, is a small vase painted in cupids which, alas, is later to be splintered on the altar of SOPHIE'S temperament. Here and there are little gilded caskets, pillows of the faintest lace; in fact, all the

*adorable little things that SOPHIE loves but which she would not hesitate to throw at your head if the moment so demanded.*

*It is twilight. The room is lit with the glow from the pink shaded candelabra. Surely this is the shrine of a slightly languid but utterly contented nymph. But no, the conclusion is too swift. Look a little closer. Is not that a band of lugubrious mourning about the picture of de Lauraguais? Are not the flowers on the harpsichord of the sombre hues of purple and of a cornflower whose blue is almost black? Yes, tragedy is on tip-toe in SOPHIE'S charming drawing-room and that is why Mlle. HEINEL is weeping as she speaks.*

Mlle. HEINEL

[*To MARIE GUIMARD.*]

That's her coach. Yes—yes— [*they are both at the window*] at last—at last—no, it is passing. [*She is sobbing.*] Sophie! What has become of her?

GUIMARD

Abigalette, you must be calm. It's not ten minutes since she drove away and it takes at least fifteen to reach the palace of the Minister of State.

Mlle. HEINEL

[*With hysterics in the offing.*]

I know, I know, but I've never seen our Sophie

like this. That is what love does to us fragile women. Love, cruel love! It is because my own heart has bled that I bleed for Sophie. Why has God made us women so sensitive? I never hear of an eruption taking place in Naples but I'm all of a tremble here in Paris. Are you never moved, Marie?

GUIMARD

Sometimes when I dance before His Majesty and always when Sophie is kind to Rosalie Levasseur. It is when she smiles at Rosalie that I'm most stirred for then I know that behind the rosy petals of her smile her adorable little tongue is waiting to smite. Soon I think Sophie will give her Austrian Ambassador back to Rosalie.

MILLE. HEINEL

Surely she doesn't keep him chained for love? My coiffeuse says her husband says—and he is a squint-eyed man, Marie, and sees many things when people do not think he's looking—she says, he says that if the hair dye that the Austrian Ambassador uses were brewed into a soup and if the King could manage to have the Queen, Marie Leginska, drink it that that would be a sure way of sending Her Majesty straight to God. No, His Excellency is old enough to be our Sophie's grandpapa. Surely it is not for love she holds him.

GUIMARD

They say not, darling, but then who knows,—we women— [*the sound of a coach rumbling by*] that's she! [*They're again at the window.*] No, the coach has passed. [*She pulls the bell rope.*] Perhaps some word has come, perhaps she has sent a message. Maybe there is something we can do.

[THE THIRD LACKEY *enters.*]

GUIMARD

Is there any sight of Madame's coach?

THE THIRD LACKEY

No, Madame, but my neck is nearly broke leaning out and looking up and down the street.

MLLE. HEINEL

Has no word come? Nothing?

THE THIRD LACKEY

Nothing.

GUIMARD

Are you sure?

MLLE. HEINEL

Hasn't something come? Something with a big seal that you know would be important?

THE THIRD LACKEY

Nothing, Madame, whilst I have been at the door telling people that Madame would see no one. One



young lady has come three times and gone away again.

MLLE. HEINEL

[*Pulling the bell rope.*]

I will ask the lackey that we sent to the garden gate, he must have some news. [*Then again, excitedly.*] Marie, I never was so worried in my life.

GUIMARD

You must be calm, Abigalette.

[*THE SECOND LACKEY enters.*]

GUIMARD

Is there no word from Madame? Has she yet returned?

THE SECOND LACKEY

Not yet, Madame.

MLLE. HEINEL

Has no letter come, something with a big seal? Nothing?

THE SECOND LACKEY

Well, to be precise, Madame, some twenty bills, but Madame Arnould never sees the bills. They are immediately sent to the fourth secretary of His Honour, the Ambassador.

GUIMARD

Where is the other lackey?

## THE SECOND LACKEY

Madame, not five minutes back you sent him up to the roof to look through Madame's telescope to see if she were coming.

MILLE. HEINEL

Yes, send him down.

[*The two LACKEYS with a very formal bow make their exit.*]

MILLE. HEINEL

[*Tearfully.*]

Ah, that adorable telescope. It was through that that he [*she points dramatically to the COUNT's picture*] that he used to read the history of the stars. Marie, I am sure something has gone wrong. Sophie has failed. She will fall into a decline. She will be unable to rehearse tonight. Papa Gluck will be so angry with her that he will rush back to Vienna before the première of his opera tomorrow night; the Dauphiness, Marie Antoinette, will order the Royal Academy of Music closed. We will dance no more this season and my legs were never so much a-tingle and my toes so primed. All—all this because poor Sophie has—

[FIRST LACKEY *enters.*]

MILLE. HEINEL

Have you seen anything of Madame's coach from the roof?

## THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, the telescope was very difficult to manage. When I looked through and thought I was seeing things very far away I was looking, if you please, at two cats engaged, in love or was it altercation?—it is so difficult to tell with canines—on the chimney pots of the house at the corner of the Rue de Roi—ladies, I'm not sure whether it was the Rue de Roi or—

MLLE. HEINEL

Never mind the cats.

GUIMARD

What of Madame's coach?

THE FIRST LACKEY

Of that I saw nothing.

MLLE. HEINEL

Something unforeseen has happened.

THE FIRST LACKEY

Yes, Madame.

MLLE. HEINEL

[*Tremblingly.*]

For God's sake what?

THE FIRST LACKEY

A young lady in a hood has come to the door three times.

## GUIMARD

And?

## THE FIRST LACKEY

She insists on seeing Madame. Perhaps she might explain Madame's absence or what has happened to the Count.

## MLLE. HEINEL

Why didn't you ask her?

## THE FIRST LACKEY

[*With a sly look.*]

Madame, I did, but it is Mme. Arnould that she must see.

## MLLE. HEINEL

You lackeys are all so stupid. Go!

## THE FIRST LACKEY

Yes, Madame.

[*With a very formal bow he makes his exit.*]

## MLLE. HEINEL

Tragedy is brewing! Who is this girl? What has become of Sophie? Where is De Lauraguais? [*Then with superstitious awe.*] Marie, last night my slipper became untied just before my pas de seul. Signor Tortolini was in a dreadful rage. It always means bad luck. Marie, you know I'm very clairvoyant, very, very. [*And then as proof incontrovertible.*] Doctor Mesmer, as soon as he

looked at me, told me that my mother had blue eyes. The world—life—is filled with endless mysteries. I know—how I know I don't know—but some evil has befallen Sophie.

## GUIMARD

Nonsense, Abigalette. While we are waiting shall I show you some new steps?

*[She has lifted her dainty petticoat and begins twirling about.]*

## MLLE. HEINEL

*[Shocked.]*

What? You would dance in this house of mourning? Don't you see that his portrait is draped in crêpe and that Sophie has all the flowers as near black as she can find them? There are no entirely black flowers. That is because Nature does not wish that beauty should be associated with sadness. Life is so full of unreadable secrets. *[There is a sound of a coach stopping.]* Marie, that's she,—she. *[They are at the window.]* No, that's Rosalie's coach.

## GUIMARD

*[Angrily.]*

Of course, that big crow thinks she smells a corpse. Her footman has brought her card to the door. Surely they will not admit her. *[A pause.]*

No, she is driving off. The servants will allow no one in.

MLLE. HEINEL

What time is it?

GUIMARD

Past the twilight. Sophie will be worn out. How can she sing tonight?

MLLE. HEINEL

How cruel love is. Why did they quarrel? Do you know?

*[She is standing in front of DE LAURAGUAIS' picture gazing up at it as though it were a Crucifixion on an altar.]*

GUIMARD

They do not know themselves. Perhaps she wouldn't have wanted him back at all until she heard he was in prison.

MLLE. HEINEL

*[As though it were an old story.]*

But why there this time?

GUIMARD

Who knows? Perhaps he has insulted the King or been boring the Dauphiness beseeching her to allow him to perform this new disease of inoculation on her dog. Maybe his pet bear has been frightening the Royal Household or perhaps the



Count has stood on his head before the Pope's ambassador. He does as he wishes and there is no place for such people except in jail or bed.

MLLE. HEINEL

[*Sadly, very sadly.*]

Yes, you are right.

GUIMARD

And the wilder he acts the dearer he is to Sophie.

MLLE. HEINEL

[*And the problem is too deep for her.*]

And now she must have him back. Now, when she is installed as mistress to his honour the Viennese Ambassador. I tell you, Marie, that the longer I live the less I know of life. Do you suppose that any of these strange passions ever affect us dancers?

GUIMARD

[*With authority.*]

I think they usually begin after one's seventh lover. You still have time.

[*Footsteps are heard in the hall-way.*]

MLLE. HEINEL

At last it's she.

[*The voice of THE FIRST LACKEY is heard outside announcing the ABBÉ DE VOISENON.*]

## GUIMARD

Sophie insists on having him about. He is the only Abbé who can do justice to her confessions.

[THE ABBÉ enters.]

## THE ABBÉ

[*With urban mansuetude.*]

Ladies, good evening. [*They bow.*] Charming, charming. I hope the angels in the courts of Paradise will be as graceful as you. And where is Sophie?

## GUIMARD

We do not know.

[MLLE. HEINEL is weeping.]

## THE ABBÉ

What is this? Has there been trouble with this pompous German, this Chevalier Gluck, this writer of tunes?

## MLLE. HEINEL

No, your reverence, it is something else.

[*Instinctively the girls turn to look at the portrait of the COUNT.*]

## THE ABBÉ

[*Watching them.*]

Ah! So it is De Lauraguais again.

[*And MLLE. HEINEL deeply sighs.*]

## THE ABBÉ

[*Taking a pinch of snuff.*]

It is always like that with Sophie. For a little while De Lauraguais is in favour,—then pouff! [*And he scatters the dust of the snuff in the air.*] She sends him off for ever, and then some fine morning—and the mornings are fine in Paris—she hears he is for the thousandth time in the Prison of Fort Eveque. He has broken the code of the terrible Saint-Florentin. He has disobeyed the laws of this odious Minister of the Police. He is again in jail. Then Sophie's heart melts and she will die unless she holds her Dorval in her arms again. What is this love, ladies, this fantastic acrobat called love?

## GUIMARD

[*Practically.*]

Well, what?

## MLLE. HEINEL

[*Sighing.*]

What indeed?

## THE ABBÉ

[*And he enjoys the telling.*]

I will tell you, my daughters. Love is self-hood's most subtle disguise. A delicious martyrdom, an ecstatic sacrifice, a lovely mirror in which we see ourselves, pitiful or gay; a great big bother about a

small bright bubble—and then one fine morning—and the mornings are fine in Paris—pouff!—and it is gone. [*And he is again tossing the snuff dust from his finger tips.*] Ladies, I am a bachelor.

MILLE. HEINEL

[*Outraged.*]

Is it thus you speak of the most precious thing in life!

THE ABBÉ

Yes, you are right. The most precious thing in life is love. First the love of God which is eternal hope, then the love of oneself which is our common comfort, then, my children, the love of some one else which is perpetual disillusionment.

GUIMARD

[*Wisely, shaking her head.*]

You have learnt that from listening to too many sad confessions.

THE ABBÉ

I have learnt that because I have peered through the veil of life at truth, or perhaps, my daughters, I should say peeped, because one learns more by peeping than by peering.

MILLE. HEINEL

Father!

## THE ABBÉ

You do not know where Sophie is?

## GUIMARD

She has been spending the day seeking an audience with the Ministers of France.

## THE ABBÉ

Has she so soon tired of the Minister of Austria?

## Mlle. HEINEL

One doesn't tire of what has never begun. To His Excellency, the Minister from Vienna, Sophie is, as all Paris knows except Your Reverence, Mistress in title only.

## THE ABBÉ

[*For the news is news.*]

Indeed?

## GUIMARD

Didn't you know that? With Sophie the relationship is just official, but when Rosalie lived at the Embassy that was an intimacy—how shall I put it? [*and she hesitates*]—an intimacy that wore no slippers.

## THE ABBÉ

And how many weeks has Sophie been gracing the Salon of D'Argenteau?

## GUIMARD

Four, and how triumphantly! Do you know that

it is only because of the strictest orders from His Majesty that the Dauphiness doesn't come to Sophie's suppers after the opera? [*And on she rushes.*] Everybody in the world is mad to come, even the Papal secretaries have used the influence of Rome to obtain a card. Don't you know that a nation that isn't represented at our Sophie's parties is considered second rate in our world, your Reverence?

MLLE. HEINEL

[*For she has been at the receptions.*]

On Thursdays her reception is for Ambassadors. It is then that Sophie sometimes consents to be present, the Ambassadors must take their chances. On Saturdays the attachés are received, but of course Sophie is usually ill on Saturday, and on Tuesdays, when the noble world of Paris treads on each other's names to be admitted, why our dear Sophie is always away in the country. What would you expect, Father, the life of a prima donna is not all song.

GUIMARD

Listen, a coach has stopped. [*She is at the window.*] Is it she? No, look, Abigalette, is not that the livery of the Court?

MLLE. HEINEL

[*At the window.*]

Yes, yes. [*Ah, if it were only at her house that*



*the coach were stopping.*] See, one of the footmen leaves a card for Sophie. All the world is at her feet begging to pay her homage and at this very moment she crucifies her heart for the love of De Lauraguais. Life is so complex. Father, is there no key to the mystery?

## THE ABBÉ

Trust in God, my daughters, which locks the Pandora's box on life and throws the key into the sea of faith.

## GUIMARD

*[Thinking, with her lips.]*

I think you would be better understood in Rome than Paris.

## THE ABBÉ

I had contemplated making myself understood at the Vatican until Sophie sent for me.

## GUIMARD

And now you cannot tear yourself away.

## THE ABBÉ

What would you have, my children, she needs me.

## MLLE. HEINEL

*[SOPHIE's heart is a book to her.]*

Yes, yes.

## THE ABBÉ

And besides I find her house so sympathetic.

[*And then as testimony.*] Do you know, that next to the books in the library of Mme. du Barry and at the Cathedral, that she has the best collection of the Holy Fathers to be found in France?

MLLE. HEINEL

[*Enthusiastically.*]

How dear of Sophie.

THE ABBÉ

Not to the exclusion of all else, Mademoiselle, be reassured. Next to the confessions of St. Augustine is an inscribed copy from Voltaire and between the life of St. Louis and the "Little Flowers" of Saint Francis; bounded in citron levant, if I remember rightly, is last year's number of the *Secret Memoirs of the Police*.

MLLE. HEINEL

How dear of Sophie.

THE ABBÉ

So you see that whilst her piety is catholic her taste is mixed.

MLLE. HEINEL

[*Very deeply.*]

Dear, dear Sophie. I do not see why she should suffer with all those good books in the house.

## THE ABBÉ

Between ourselves, ladies, I think that she enjoys her tears.

Mlle. HEINEL

[*Again outraged.*]

Oh, what a horrid, cynical idea! Poor Sophie, rushing about like mad, her heart torn with desire and you, you in her very house here say that agony is not agony. I don't see how she can have you for a friend—and to confess to you—why look, Marie, his very eyes are made of ice. I'm sure he's as cold as it must be three feet beyond the North Pole. To my mind, the one thing a priest should have is the milk—the pure white milk of human kindness.

SOPHIE

[*From the doorway.*]

Not in too great abundance lest it sour on him.

[*I see her, if for the moment I may intrude, in a turquoise blue, a little dim, low and ruffled, with a tiny beaver hat sporting a tossed pink feather caught with a bow of mauve. A wrap of plum colour has fallen from her shoulders. Greuze, in one of his most delicious and unsentimental moments, has painted her. Look at the picture, it is hanging there over the mantel. There is an air about her of a melancholy that is piquant, a piquancy that is for the moment too sad. It is thus as Greuze*

*has seen her with immortal grace that she in her mortality should grace the doorway.]*

MILLE. HEINEL AND GUIMARD

*[Rushing over to her.]*

Sophie! Sophie!

THE ABBÉ

Good morning, my daughter.

SOPHIE

*[Sinking into a chair.]*

I'm at death's door, but still I remember it is evening.

MILLE. HEINEL

Tell us all—all.

SOPHIE

What is there to tell? Seven times I implored admission to Minister Choiseul. Always some stupidity prevented my admittance. A delegation from the Farmers of Auvergne. Are there any farmers in Auvergne, Father? Though I am dependant I do not like to be inexact about any part of France, perhaps they were from Provence. Then Choiseul was occupied with a tedious interview with the more tedious minister from England. Statesmen take days to leave undecided what a woman could settle in a second. *[And her fingers snap in quick dismissal.]* Then a summons to the King for Choiseul, a conspiracy of stupidities to

keep me waiting. It was all I could do to keep my heart from breaking right there in the Courts of the Hall of Justice but I said to myself: Sophie, you are Sophie, remember you are an artist. It will never do for the supreme prima donna of the Royal Academy of Music to die in the Courts of the Hall of Justice just as anybody might die in the Courts of the Hall of Justice.

MLLE. HEINEL

[*Commiseratingly.*]

Sophie, poor Sophie!

SOPHIE

I drove back here. At first I could not enter. I knew his gentle, accusing eyes would try to smile at me. [*Tearfully she gazes at the portrait of DE LAURAGUAIS.*] Surely, that is the masterpiece of La Tour. Yes, I must try and control myself. All ministers are liars. Your pardon, Father, I mean ministers of State. Why did Choiseul listen to me at all? Last night after my triumph I went down on my knees to him. His eyes were still dim from the divine pathos of my singing. I beseeched him to intercede for my adored one. I implored him to set him free. He promised help tomorrow. This is tomorrow, this is tomorrow, this is tomorrow.

[*And the hope lies buried in a grave of sobs.*]



Mlle. HEINEL

Sophie, dear, for the sake of art control yourself.

SOPHIE

This is the cruel day. Choiseul has forgotten, tonight he leaves for Vienna and at this moment my poor Dorval lies swooning in the Prison of Fort Eveque. It isn't nice in Fort Eveque. I have been there,—a night and a day because I told a lieutenant of the police that his nose was so long that he couldn't see beyond it to his wife's disloyalty. Never be honest in a dishonest world. And now my Dorval is there with only one little window to his cell through which to hear the swallows sing. [*Then to THE ABBÉ.*] Do swallows sing? Ah well, never mind. Poor Dorval, think of it, Father.

THE ABBÉ

[*Quietly.*]

Yes, my child, I am thinking of many things.

SOPHIE

There is no place for genius in the world except in prison or out of France. He has defied the Academy of Medicine. He has sent broadcast the truth of his discovery. He would save suffering humanity by this exquisite new method of his. What is it called? Ah yes, this system of inoculation—it is marvellous.

[*She is weeping.*]



Mlle. HEINEL

[*And she is weeping, too.*]

Yes, miraculous, *very miraculous.*

SOPHIE

[*After all, it must be.*]

I do not understand it but I know it is and for this he is in a dungeon now.

THE ABBÉ

But there are rumours at Court that this time it is for some insult to the King.

SOPHIE

Nonsense, it must have been a misunderstood courtesy. And besides Dorval is a genius. What has courtesy to do with genius?

GUIMARD

Be calm, Sophie, remember you must rehearse tonight.

SOPHIE

Rehearse tonight! That is the life of us artists. We are slaves to beauty, though our hearts are bursting we must sing. How can I ever reach my top notes when I know that my Dorval is in Fort Eveque? And we parted in anger. [*She is in front of his picture now.*] My love, can you ever forgive me that? Can you ever pardon your rash, your wayward Sophie for not knowing that your

whims were but misread blessings? Dorval! Dorval! My adored one! Marie, from where you stand is the bow on the picture straight? Father, quick, that chair.

[*The chair is brought. The ladies assist. THE ABBÉ is holding SOPHIE as she arranges the bow of crêpe.*]

GUIMARD

Be careful, do not fall, remember you rehearse tonight.

SOPHIE

Marie, you're growing thin from worry about my rehearsal. Now that I look down on you I can see nothing but a hairy flag of despair flying at the end of a pole.

THE ABBÉ

Madame, hasten down, the chair is perhaps not very strong.

SOPHIE

Would you deprive me of even these few moments with him? [*Her face is close to the face of the portrait.*] Ah, my adored one, will I ever see you again in this life?

[*The door opens and THE FIRST LACKEY enters.*]

SOPHIE

Well, what is it?

## THE FIRST LACKEY

[*Bowing.*]

Madame, a document has just come from the Minister of State.

SOPHIE

[*From the chair.*]

Dorval is dead, he's dead, I know he's dead! Give me that terrible paper!

[*The document is handed to SOPHIE. The LACKEY makes his exit. With a trembling hand SOPHIE opens the letter.*]

MILLE. HEINEL

[*Aside to GUIMARD.*]

That is the way she's going to look before she sings the first act aria in *Iphigenia* tomorrow night.

THE ABBÉ

My child, come down.

SOPHIE

Leave me to my woe. Leave me alone on the heights with my suffering.

[*She has opened the paper. They are watching her in apprehension. Suddenly with a cry of joy she jumps to the floor.*]

SOPHIE

Choiseul has listened. Dorval is free! He is on his way to me, his Sophie. Listen. [*She*

*reads.*] “Madame, your divine art has moved me. I realize that to make you suffer is an insult to the gods of song. De Lauraguais for the sixth time is free. Urge him to control his whims. Urge him, Madame, to set a curb on yours.”

MLLE. HEINEL

Outrageous! Outrageous!

SOPHIE

[*Continuing.*]

“For need I more than hint, Madame, that neither the Count nor his admirable protectress, Mme. Arnould, are in too high favour with the Count Saint-Florentin, Minister of Police.” [SOPHIE *looks up.*] What a mean little serpent in this otherwise paradisaical document.

GUIMARD

Go on.

SOPHIE

There is nothing else save three quarters of a page of space and then the name Choiseul. [*Then angrily.*] I will save this letter seal and all some day to fling into the face of this Minister. But now, now—Marie, Abigalette, rush into the garden, pluck all the roses you can find. I am done with sadness.

[*She tears down the crêpe from the picture.*

GUIMARD and MLLE. HEINEL *run out.* She

*snatches the lugubrious looking flowers from the harpsichord and flings them through the window.]*

## SOPHIE

Why aren't you dancing, Father? Go down on your knees and dance. Sing a hymn of praise. No, you are right. There is never room in one room for the joy of two people unless they are—ah well, never mind. Be merciful, Father, for tomorrow I shall have an abundance to confess. Dorval, my genius, my adored one.

## THE ABBÉ

Madame, remember you must sing tonight. You will be weary.

## SOPHIE

I am a prima donna. I sing with a bit of my heart and a bit of my mind. The rest of my life I save for my life. And besides, Papa Gluck never stays too late. Why do you suppose I have a temperament? Tonight I will sing divinely because I know that each aria will bring me nearer to the blissful hours that I will spend alone with Dorval. What is more blessed than the love of a man?

## THE ABBÉ

The deeper love for all men. The love that lifts itself to service and sacrifice, the forgetting of oneself.



## SOPHIE

No, no, that is putting wings to facts. Altruism is but egoism gone into society.

## THE ABBÉ

Society, Sophie. You have made a fetish of all this superficial gaiety. The things of this world are but things of the moment.

## SOPHIE

You are right but what is life but a series of moments? Little moments which, if we are wise, we will crown with an ecstasy that seems eternal. You see Sophie can be serious. [*Yes, and she is.*] You do not know how very serious Sophie can be, sad, spiritual, even religious. Do you know that my *début* as a singer was in church? There, as a little girl of six I sang the *Miserere* so sincerely, so divinely,—I was barely six but already I had learnt the agony of life—that for several Sabbaths at least the house of prayer was more popular than the Royal Academy of Music. [*She calls from the window.*] My friends, hasten with the roses lest Dorval come back before the room is gay and before this melancholy prelate convince me [*she has turned to* THE ABBÉ] that life is nothing but a thorny path through a forest of thorns. There, we've been talking about heaven and you haven't had your wine. [*She pulls the bell rope.*]



Father, don't you think we have a little right to a heaven here on earth before we gamble for a gambler's paradise hereafter?

## THE ABBÉ

There is no paradise on earth save a duty that is done.

[*The THIRD LACKEY enters.*]

## SOPHIE

The Abbé's wine in the library. [*The LACKEY exits.*] Duty! What is duty but a holy name that people give to the things they do not want to do? When I sing I do my duty. When I am happy I do my duty for then I am thanking God with happiness,—for the happiness of life. [*And now she is smiling.*] I wonder if you took your cassock off whether you would be so good?

## THE ABBÉ

[*Shocked.*]

My daughter!

## SOPHIE

My Father, is it my fault that you are so literal?

[*The girls return with their arms full of flowers.*]

## SOPHIE

That's it, my darlings. Now the room will look

like a temple of love. Scatter them about as though for a bacchanal.

[*She throws some roses at THE ABBÉ.*]

THE ABBÉ

[*Getting up.*]

I think I will wait in the library.

SOPHIE

No, stay here. You are as safe as a pilgrim before the shrine of Venus provided he is blind and over ninety. [*Then to the girls.*] Put some behind my Dorval's picture, Abigalette. How charming you girls are! I adore having you about!

THE ABBÉ

Then why do they say you hate to have women with you?

SOPHIE

They mean singers, singers, Father. I do not object to these ballet girls. What difference does it make to me that they can twirl their toes higher than I can sing?

MILLE. HEINEL

[*Laughing.*]

Sophie, Sophie!

SOPHIE

[*Gaily.*]

Life is a holiday of love. The first words I

ever sang in my life were "love, charming love." Love, sweet after agony, blessèd after pain. Dorval, Dorval!

[THE FIRST LACKEY *appears in the doorway.*]

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, now that you are at home are you at home?

SOPHIE

Is it he, the Count de Lauraguais? [*Then hopefully.*] Not yet? not yet?

THE FIRST LACKEY

[*With a sly look.*]

The carriage of Mme. Levasseur is at the door.

SOPHIE

[*And her lips knot.*]

So! She knows I have been unhappy and has come to pity me. [*She clenches her tiny pink fist as though for a battle.*] Show her in.

[THE FIRST LACKEY *exits.*]

SOPHIE

Anything to wing the time before he comes. [*Then to Mlle. HEINEL and GUIMARD.*] Do not be offended, dears, you are my friends. I do not have to be nice to you. But to Rosalie, ah, that is different, she hasn't yet forgiven me for taking her

Ambassador. [*The voice of the LACKEY is heard.*]  
Crouch down, my children, for the eternal hills are upon us.

[ROSALIE, *an enormous, blond and dullish woman is announced by the LACKEY.*]

SOPHIE

Rosalie, how sweet of you.

ROSALIE

Sophie, you are in trouble—tongues are wagging. Madame that says this and Madame this says that.

SOPHIE

Rosalie, you haven't listened?

ROSALIE

Why not?

SOPHIE

Why not? Ah yes, you are justified. It is the easiest way for some to learn.

ROSALIE

[*Nodding to the others.*]

So your sweet little friends are here and your good, good Abbé. Good evening, ladies. Father, tongues are wagging. They say that Sophie's little boudoir is more sunny for you than the cloisters of the cathedral. You are deserting your sinners.

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SOPHIE

Rosalie dear, he is sharpening his piety and pity at the very fountain head of sin. Aren't you ashamed to be seen entering my house?

ROSALIE

I have come because I heard you were sad. I wish to help those who are sad.

SOPHIE

Yes, dear, always when the victim is a woman whom you love.

ROSALIE

[*Very seriously.*]

Sophie, I would go to the end of the earth to you if I heard that you were suffering.

SOPHIE

[*Patting her hand, a quaint expression in her eyes.*]

Yes, dear, I know, I know.

ROSALIE

Can I be of help? See, I forget that you are not always nice to me with your tongue. I have a big heart.

SOPHIE

[*So kindly, so sweetly.*]

Of course, dear, look at the size of the rest of you.

ROSALIE

Soon I am to sing for the Dauphiness. I have influence. Do you need some money, say ten thousand francs?

SOPHIE

Darling, you are insulting your memory. Our Ambassador, Mercy d'Argenteau, can be very lively when it comes to tossing francs, and you, dear, never had the reputation of being economical, that is, when it came to some one else's money. Look about you, dearest, does it seem that your Sophie has been hungering for discarded crusts?

ROSALIE

Darling, I have not been lonely.

SOPHIE

How could you be when you take up so much room in the world. They tell me that you have turned ever so intimately to the companionship of music.

ROSALIE

[*Largely.*]

It is all to us singers. It is my life, my soul.

SOPHIE

How does your life look without his wig? You will come with your soul, that is with Papa Gluck, to hear me sing tonight?



ROSALIE

If my Sophie doesn't mind.

SOPHIE

Mind? Put yourself for a moment in my boots. [*Her tiny foot is suddenly stuck out.*] No, I cannot ask you to perform miracles. Why should I mind, my friend? You threw yourself at Papa Gluck before it was decided who should sing Iphigenia. You threw yourself at his head and you landed in his bed, but nevertheless, my friend, it is Sophie Arnould who creates the rôle tomorrow night.

ROSALIE

Sophie, aren't you ashamed to repeat all this gossip in front of these two children?

SOPHIE

These two children are members of the ballet. Besides, what matter, all Paris knows. I'll wager you that the women in the market place sing their babies to sleep to the tune of the ballad of Rosalie. You say you came to do me a service. Now I shall do you one. I shall give you some advice. Nothing is so free to give, or so expensive to take. This is my advice: thin your body and fatten your wit.

ROSALIE

[*Literal to the end.*]

No, no, we singers need deep chests.

[*She points to her own.*]

SOPHIE

[*Disregarding the physical geography.*]

For on the very pinnacle of things, my enormous sister in the art of song, there is very little room to move about in. But do not go too far. Do not waste away to the shadow of a shadow like my poor little Guimard here. That is too much. [*Then to GUIMARD.*] Marie, you are rapidly becoming the skeleton of the Muses. Why the other evening when you were dancing with those two gentlemen of the ballet it looked for all the world like two dogs fighting for a bone. There, what a nice time I'm having and I haven't asked you to sit down. [*And how happy she is.*]

ROSALIE

Then I can be of no help?

SOPHIE

Oh, yes, you can. You can give me the satisfaction of telling you that the agony I was suffering is appeased and whilst it might have been a pleasure to you to have seen your Sophie the most miserable woman in Paris that now you may have the brighter joy of beholding me the happiest lady in France. You see I have really read your kindness. If you came here to pity me I hope your trouble has been

repaid. If you were curious about what was happening to Madame Arnould be assured that Paris need no longer be curious about what is happening to you. If it is not already common gossip, I will tell the tale with a flourish and embellishment which I am sure will rebound most genuinely, Rosalie dear [*and her smile's angelic*], most justly to your credit.

## ROSALIE

Sophie, Sophie, how you misjudge me. Shall we not call quits? As for me I will not speak any more of you and you in your turn must say nothing either good or bad of me.

## SOPHIE

Rosalie, my dear, half of that promise I will keep. [*Then to THE ABBÉ.*] Can you despair of humanity when you see such an exhibition of sisterly love?

## THE ABBÉ

Ladies, ladies, is there no room in your heart for charity?

## SOPHIE

You dear, simple soul you. How could there be when we have each other's reputation to think of?

[*THE FIRST LACKEY enters and speaks low to SOPHIE.*]

SOPHIE

[*Involuntarily.*]

He has come!

ROSALIE

Who?

SOPHIE

[*Quickly on her guard.*]

My larynx, my larynx. The doctor has come to spray my throat. [*She sings a phrase.*] La la—la-la. How can I do justice to Gluck tonight after all this chatter? [*She begins a scale.*] Do-re-me-fa-sol—

MILLE. HEINEL

[*In a rapture.*]

How beautiful.

ROSALIE

She sings that with her head, I can go as high as that with my chest. [*She sings a few notes.*] La-la-la.

[*The two women glare at each other like two unfriendly kittens that are not on singing terms.*]

THE ABBÉ

God's children should love each other.

SOPHIE

Not even God could expect that when they're

singers. Now you must all go, all of you. My larynx, my larynx.

ROSALIE

[*Sounding a note.*]

Let me finish this phrase. You will hear something.

SOPHIE

[*Insinuatingly, militantly.*]

So will you if you do. My physician is waiting. [*Then to THE FIRST LACKEY.*] In a minute. Have him wait. Ladies, if I seem expeditious it is the fault of my larynx.

THE ABBÉ

[*Aside to SOPHIE.*]

That is a queer name for the heart.

SOPHIE

[*Shaking her finger at him and with ever so deep a meaning.*] There are queer names for many things. [*Then to the ladies.*] Good evening, friends, my dear, dear, friends.

Mlle. HEINEL

Sophie, until tonight.

GUIMARD

You must rest before rehearsal.

SOPHIE

Yes, dear. [*Then with purling sweetness, holding out her hand.*] Rosalie—until rehearsal!

ROSALIE

I'm not angry, Sophie. I never mind what you say.

SOPHIE

Don't, dear, the only way to get the better of the truth is not to mind it. [*She bursts into song.*] La-la la la-la-la.

[*Mlle. HEINEL and Guimard kiss SOPHIE. Then ROSALIE and the girls are gone.*]

SOPHIE

[*Excitedly to THE ABBÉ.*]

He has come, De Lauraguais has come.

THE ABBÉ

I knew it was something beside the larynx.

SOPHIE

Why, whatever do you mean?

THE ABBÉ

[*Very, very seriously.*]

With your permission, Madame, I will wait in the library.

SOPHIE

And for goodness' sake don't come in without knocking at the door.



## THE ABBÉ

My daughter.

## SOPHIE

An Abbé need never do that. If he is curious there is always the confessional. But you wicked old man you, I meant do not come in without knocking during the rehearsal. [*She has taken his hand and speaks very genuinely.*] Dear, dear Father, it is such a comfort having you in the house. One never knows when one may need God.

[*THE ABBÉ with his hands behind his back goes into the library and SOPHIE rushes over to the main door centre and flings it open.*]

## SOPHIE

[*In an ecstasy.*]

Dorval! Dorval!

[*And DE LAURAGUAIS enters. He is charming to women but to men he might seem "un-understandable." His whimsies are the women's adoration,—his "differences" the key to their hearts. He is childlike and petulant, passionate and mad, but withal he is so handsome, handsome in that furtive, unconscious way, and as to his esprit, listen for a minute to Voltaire: "He has all possible talents and all possible eccentricities"—and a friend, writing to the sage of Verney describes him as "the*

*most serious fool in the kingdom.” Can you blame SOPHIE for her adoration? Blame, if you will, I cannot.]*

SOPHIE

*[Rushing over to him.]*

Dorval, Dorval!

DE LAURAGUAIS

Darling, do not crush the parrot. *[He takes out a bedraggled bird from under his coat.]* It was all I could do to keep him quiet in the coach. He kept on calling out: “Sophie, dearest Sophie.” He had been listening to me in my cell.

SOPHIE

*[Brushing away the thought.]*

Don't, Dorval, don't, the memory of you in prison is more than I can bear.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Why, I had a rather nice time.

SOPHIE

What?

DE LAURAGUAIS

So many hours for thought. When I wasn't thinking of you, dear, I was busy, part of the time on my new tragedy and the rest in finishing my essay about the wild men of America. I do not know anything at all about these wild men but

where one has no facts to work on there is so much more room for the imagination. [*He looks about him.*] And you, Sophie, you do not seem to have pined away.

SOPHIE

Dorval, dear, you haven't yet kissed your Sophie.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Haven't I, Sophie? Well—well—

[*Her arms are held out to him. He is about to embrace her.*]

SOPHIE

Darling, darling!

[*She is nearer to him.*]

DE LAURAGUAIS

There—I'd almost forgotten Minnette.

SOPHIE

Who is she?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Next to Polly, the wisest of living beings because she is silent. [*He takes from under his coat a tiny marmoset.*] My wife, after a letter of imploration, sent me Minnette to prison from my little menagerie at home. She is a perfect specimen, Sophie, Minnette, not my wife. [*He holds up the tiny monkey.*] Look, her little chest is all marked with sapphire stars. How charming she looks,

though I am afraid I have been sitting on her in the coach.

SOPHIE

Dorval, I haven't had my kiss.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Sophie! [*She comes eagerly towards him. He is about to embrace her, then he stops.*] Let me see, there is something else, isn't there? Have you a Homer in Greek in the house? I need a quotation for my essay.

SOPHIE

[*Petulant now.*]

Dorval, I haven't had my kiss.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Ah well, never mind the Greek. My darling, how I have missed you. Sophie! Sophie!

[*And at last they are in each other's arms.*]

SOPHIE

Have you forgiven me, Dorval?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Have you forgiven me, Sophie?

SOPHIE

Why did we quarrel?

DE LAURAGUAIS

I have forgotten. Let us not try to remember.

---

SOPHIE

Was it because you said there was something I couldn't sing?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Now you are trying to remember so you can feel how sweet it is that you've forgotten.

SOPHIE

My dear, quaint Dorval.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Paris is changed. I have been gone a month.

SOPHIE

[*Sitting down.*]

I have been so lonely.

DE LAURAGUAIS

And is Sophie still queen of the Royal Academy of Music?

SOPHIE

Still, Dorval? I have twenty years ahead of me to decide who is the next divinity.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Looking about.*]

Ah, it is so nice to be home.

SOPHIE

Home?



DE LAURAGUAIS

I didn't like sleeping on the little cot at Fort. Eveque though there was one advantage, Sophie, I did have a fine view of the stars. If I were a god I should hop from star to star just to surprise the planets. On Venus I should only speak the language of Mars and on Jupiter that of the earth. Don't you think your Dorval would cause an awful stir among the planets?

SOPHIE

Look, Minnette is eating the carpet.

DE LAURAGUAIS

The hungry little darling. [*He lifts the monkey up.*] There, I think she'll be much happier on the harpsichord.

SOPHIE

What are you doing? She will scratch the panels. Those lovely landscapes are by Boucher.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Comforting her.*]

It's all right, Sophie, Minnette loves landscapes. She was born in one. By the way, what have you done with the telescope.

SOPHIE

[*Tenderly.*]

I had it brought with me and put on the roof here. For the memory of the dear old times.



## DE LAURAGUAIS

Ah, how good it is to be home. When did you come here, Sophie? I told the driver to go straight to the Rue des Petits Champs and when I got to the old house you were gone. Only an inhospitable sign on the door. But it doesn't matter. I have found you and it is charming here. Where is our bedroom, darling? I think I shall go to bed and sleep for a week. But please wake me at twelve tonight.

## SOPHIE

*[And her voice is warm.]*

At twelve tonight.

## DE LAURAGUAIS

Yes, so I can go up on the roof to the telescope. You know at any moment there may be a new star in the sky. *[His arm is about her.]* It is so sweet to be home.

## SOPHIE

*[A little querulously.]*

Home?

## DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Not understanding her tone.]*

Of course; wherever Sophie is, is home.

## SOPHIE

But—

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Reassuringly.*]

Oh, I shan't mind a bit if you have to be singing your scales as you used to. I'm sorry I ever minded, Sophie, indeed I am. Very often when I lay in my cell in jail I kept saying to myself how much sweeter it was to hear my Sophie singing than the prisoners' sawing wood. And you won't mind, will you, darling, if I go round without anything on?

SOPHIE

What?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Later on you must, too. I have decided to return to the primitive life. I shall put myself in the mood and condition of Adam and then begin reforming the world. And you will help me, Sophie, dear? Everything is to be different, but don't be alarmed; we shall go about it naturally. Kiss me, dear. There are so many ancient customs that can't be improved upon. Wait and see, darling, our home here will be the Mecca of all thinkers of the new school. What's the matter, dear? But don't stop pouting. There now, I shall kiss away all that's bothering you. Sophie!

SOPHIE

[*Not knowing how to begin.*]

Dorval—

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Encouragingly.]*

Darling, I assure you our new mode of life isn't going to interfere at all with your career.

SOPHIE

No?

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[As a final concession.]*

I don't in the least mind your wearing clothes when you go to rehearsal.

SOPHIE

*[Knowing that sooner or later he must be told.]*

Dorval, I have something to tell you.

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Smilingly expectant.]*

Of course you have. No woman ever lived who didn't have something to tell.

SOPHIE

My house is no longer in the Rue des Petites Champs. My home is here.

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[With a denying shake of the head.]*

That is too literal, metaphysically speaking, one's home is the world, one's home is the journey twixt life and death, and the wise are those who

pick the most beautiful flowers of opportunity along the way. Kiss me, dear.

SOPHIE

[*Kissing him.*]

I know all about that.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Of course, my little Sophie does. Is there anything in the world my Sophie doesn't know? And if there *is*, her Dorval knows it. But my Sophie is a prima donna and what does a prima donna know of the realm of the spirit? It will take you a while perhaps to understand our new mode of life.

SOPHIE

[*Hesitatingly.*]

But there are so many things—

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Again profoundly agreeing.*]

Things, things, the ever abiding curse of the material, but as far as I am concerned this house is empty. I won't let anything stand in the way of truth. You are its only reality. Saint Francis knew. He knew that he who has nothing, has all. You are the only nothing that I want, you and silence.

[*He takes her in his arms. There is a long, delicious embrace.*]

---

SOPHIE

[*Timidly.*]

Dorval.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*As he kisses her.*]

Yes, yes, it is sweeter here than in jail.

SOPHIE

Darling.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Now we are alone upon a mountain top.

SOPHIE

I wish we were.

DE LAURAGUAIS

We are. Sing, Sophie, we are so near heaven that I think the angels will bend down to hear and take lessons from your throat. What a sweet, throbbing throat. It's as white as my kitten's and your eyes are like two planets. See, I can look down upon the whole smiling landscape of your face. Sing like a host of nightingales.

SOPHIE

That's very elaborate, Dorval dear, but I must save my voice, for tonight I rehearse.

DE LAURAGUAIS

The divine Arnould to lift her voice in an empty theatre?



SOPHIE

No, dear, I have progressed. The first condition I made to Gluck before I consented to save his opera for him was that we should rehearse where I wished.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Is his music beautiful?

SOPHIE

Yes, but it needs the singing, and what Gluck has left out your Sophie will put in.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Before I left Levasseur was to create Iphigenia.

SOPHIE

*[Looking up at him.]*

And now it is your Sophie.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Yes, I knew you would manage it somehow.

SOPHIE

I have, Dorval.

*[She turns away and tears are beginning on her lashes.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

How sweet of Sophie to feel so sadly about Levasseur.



SOPHIE

I think it has cost me too much.

DE LAURAGUAIS

What, dear?

SOPHIE

It means that you must be careful, Dorval, very careful.

DE LAURAGUAIS

I, Sophie? What have I to do with this? The intrigues of the opera have never touched me. [*And then as a finality for all time.*] When two singers are at the game the only safe place for sensitivity is death or a dungeon. Why should I be careful?

SOPHIE

Dearest, you cannot start your nude Utopia here.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Why not? Is this not virgin soil?

SOPHIE

Yes, dear, so to speak but only so to speak. [*She turns further away.*] Dorval— [*She stops.*]

DE LAURAGUAIS

I hope all this indecision has not got into your art.

SOPHIE

No, in singing my attack is still perfect, though the critics rave.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Come then, darling, what is it?

SOPHIE

*[For she must begin.]*

This is no longer the little house in the Rue des Petites Champs.

DE LAURAGUAIS

No?

SOPHIE

My Dorval will not find it the garden of Eden.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Where you are, dear—

SOPHIE

Yes, adored one, but your Sophie is, so to speak, not alone in Eden.

DE LAURAGUAIS

What?

SOPHIE

*[Ever so reticently now.]*

That—that is, darling,—

DE LAURAGUAIS

You mean the serpent is lurking here?

SOPHIE

I think that's putting it a little too fiercely, Dorval, but this is the home of Mercy d'Argenteau, the Ambassador from Austria.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Suddenly jumping up.*]

And you?

SOPHIE

Oh, sit down, darling. I am the mistress of the ménage.

DE LAURAGUAIS

My God, Sophie, you have not done *that*?

SOPHIE

Dearest, only for my art.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Sophie!

SOPHIE

Or my ambition, call it what you will. I have never lied to you, Dorval; now, then, take my two hands in yours and listen to your Sophie. [*Reluctantly he sits down next to her.*] This Gluck arrives with his opera. The Dauphiness orders its production for the greater glory of Austria. It is the most magnificent part that has ever fallen to the lot of a prima donna. It is the most famous pre-

mière that will ever be sung at the Royal Academy of Music, perhaps anywhere in all the world, Dorval, all the world. Who was there to create such a part but your Sophie? Months ahead Levasseur began her campaign. She played the game, so Paris thought, triumphantly. Two weeks after Gluck arrived he was lord and master of her boring ménage. During all this Paris pitied Sophie—your Sophie, darling—pitied me! But the morning Rosalie awoke to see Gluck's wig hanging on her bedpost, Sophie awoke as mistress of Mercy d'Argenteau, Ambassador from Austria. Rosalie had got her composer but Sophie had got the Court. And she who has got the Court of Austria has got the delicious, wilful Marie Antoinette, and she who has got the delicious, wilful Marie Antoinette has got the power and so because of my unequalled genius, though the part was always rightly mine, by a little swifter shuffling of the aces, Dorval, tomorrow night your adored one creates the rôle of Iphigenia; Paris will go mad with ecstasy, Levasseur will die of rage, and I shall be done for ever with His Honour, the Ambassador from Austria.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Good God, Sophie!

SOPHIE

What is it, darling?

---

DE LAURAGUAIS

I am ever prepared for newness to the mind but when it hits the heart—

SOPHIE

Has my triumph touched your heart? Here, a kiss for that.

*[She bends towards him.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Shrinking back.]*

Sophie, has God gone blind in your heart?

SOPHIE

Whatever do you mean, Dorval?

DE LAURAGUAIS

What do I mean! Do you mean to say that you do not know that even though you are the most generous woman in the world there are certain things which cannot be shared? Have you forgotten that I was the first man you ever loved? That when we eloped together from your parents' house we swore that I should be the only one?

*[And now it is SOPHIE's turn to spring up.]*

SOPHIE

Dorval, can I ever forgive your words?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Sophie, can I ever forgive your disloyalty to me?

There I lay in prison, all the while I kept saying to myself, life is bitter, what is there left for me, what, what? And then my heart would whisper: Sophie's love, Sophie's loyalty, and the parrot would echo: Sophie's loyalty. [*And now his voice is quivering.*] Ah, bitter mockery from that chest of feathers. No, this is too much even for a scientist to bear. Now I see why I cannot start here the beautiful free life that I resolved upon in prison. Now I see why I will not be able to go about returning to Nature with nothing on. I have come back but to go away again. [*He gets up, putting the marmoset back into his pocket.*] Life should have spared me this at least.

SOPHIE

What, darling?

DE LAURAGUAIS

The terrible, unbearable indignity of seeing you belong to another.

[*At this SOPHIE bursts into a long and relieving laugh.*]

SOPHIE

Dorval, the Ambassador is nearly seventy and his left eyebrow is pasted on.

DE LAURAGUAIS

You mean—



## SOPHIE

This, my adored one, is only a relationship of form. I will explain. The exchange on Austrian notes had fallen off. The credit of the Austrian Empire was at stake. Some great play had to be made to recoup its reputation. The moment was auspicious for your Sophie. What could the Ambassador from the nation beyond the Rhine do to win back the loss of its financial prestige? What sudden move to prove that its financial power was still intact? What would be best known in Paris? What helpful news would be boomed through half of Europe? Why this, this, Dorval [*and her voice is vibrant*], that Sophie Arnould, the greatest and most costly prima donna in all the world was mistress of the Embassy to Austria. No nation that was tottering could afford the graceful presence of your Sophie at the Embassy. That's a luxury which might be called extravagant but which Europe knows is worth the price.

## DE LAURAGUAIS

And you, my darling?

## SOPHIE

Marie Leginska is queen of France but Du Barry is recipient of all the Royal intimacies. Your Sophie, Dorval, is the Marie Leginska to the Embassy.

---

DE LAURAGUAIS

Sophie!

SOPHIE

And with great success. The Austrian notes are over par and I myself from investments on the Exchange have put away enough for you to have a beautiful new menagerie for all the beasts that roam the world.

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Joyfully taking the marmoset from his pocket.]*

What do you think of that, Minnette? I will import from Asia, from the most perfumed depths of Cashmere, a tiny mate for you. Polly, my faithful friend [*and out comes the parrot*], didn't I whisper to you through all the hours of the night that Sophie was a genius?

SOPHIE

But everything must be managed nicely, at least whilst His Honour is about. Dorval, your Sophie must retain the form. It wouldn't be proper to have you about the house except at certain times,—certain exquisite, blissful but—prearranged times, particularly, darling, now that you intend going about clad only in your sincerity.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Oh, what a delightful way you have of saying

things. One kiss because you are as wise as Hypatia, two others because you are more beautiful than Cleopatra and three because—

SOPHIE

[*Amid the kisses.*]

I'm Sophie. After tomorrow night all will be as it used to.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Softly.*]

And tonight?

SOPHIE

[*In his arms.*]

It is of tonight that I have been dreaming, of tonight, dearest. After the rehearsal you will climb up by the balcony—that will be so romantic—it will be almost as though we were beginning paradise again.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Sophie! Sophie!

SOPHIE

We have so much to tell each other I think it will take till dawn.

DE LAURAGUAIS

And when will the rehearsal be over?

SOPHIE

Whenever I am ready. All I have to do is to lift

my little finger and Papa Gluck trembles. At midnight, Dorval.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Sophie, it is twenty years till midnight.

SOPHIE

Every minute until then I shall speak your name out loud,—though not too loudly,—like this [*and her hands are clasped in ecstasy while she whispers*] Dorval, Dorval!

DE LAURAGUAIS

Every minute I shall kiss the air like this [*and he catches her in his arms and rains kisses on her lips, saying softly*] Sophie, Sophie!

SOPHIE

Dorval, until midnight.

DE LAURAGUAIS

And then for ever. But on the way I saw the moon over my left shoulder.

SOPHIE

Well, what of it, it was still the moon, wasn't it?

DE LAURAGUAIS

It is an omen. All truth is hid in omens. Once I consulted an astrologer, it was in Baluchistan. He said if one sees the moon on Tuesday over the

left shoulder it means that to attain the heart's desire will take much wit and sudden tact.

SOPHIE

[*Ever so tenderly.*]

Derval, at midnight. Nothing in the world can prevent it, my own lover.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Echoing her tone.*]

Nothing, you are right, nothing.

[*They are in a mad embrace. Suddenly there is a knock at the door.*]

SOPHIE

What's that? I have forbidden the servants even to knock. [*The sound is repeated.*] It's from the library. Why, that's his Reverence. [*She lifts her voice.*] *Come in.*

[*THE ABBÉ enters cautiously with a letter in his hand.*]

SOPHIE

[*Presenting the two gentlemen.*]

Father, let me introduce my first sin to my last confessor.

THE ABBÉ

[*Bowing to DE LAURAGUAIS.*]

Sir. [*Then to SOPHIE*] My daughter, you will forgive me, but one of the lackeys gave me this



letter saying that you had forbidden them even to knock.

SOPHIE

Is it so urgent?

THE ABBÉ

The lackey said that the third secretary of the Ambassador delivered it dispatched to you and that therefore you might care to see it immediately.

SOPHIE

What is it?

*[She is about to take the letter.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

Don't touch it. I have again just seen the moon over my shoulder through the window. Father, you must first bless the letter.

SOPHIE

Don't be silly, Dorval, we are not in Baluchistan. The letter, Your Reverence.

THE ABBÉ

I hope its news is blessed.

SOPHIE.

I will make it so.

*[She takes the letter and sits down to read it. First a smile comes into her face, then a look of intense surprise, then one of raging anger as she springs to her feet.]*



SOPHIE

By all the circles of the hell of Dante, no! no!!

THE ABBÉ

Is the première postponed? Calm yourself.

SOPHIE

[*Storming up and down.*]

This is too much, too much. Dorval, you've looked at the moon to some purpose. Curse the moon, curse your looking and most of all curse this! [*The letter, of course.*]

DE LAURAGUAIS

What is it, dear?

THE ABBÉ

Shall I go?

SOPHIE

Go or stay. What difference does it make? This is a matter past your praying.

[*She has sunk down on the seat of the harpsichord and in a paroxysm of rage begins hitting the keys.*]

THE ABBÉ

You will break the strings. Remember the rehearsal.

SOPHIE

Damnation to the rehearsal. To hell with every-

thing. Your pardon, Father. Never, never, never!

[*She is beating the letter with her clenched fist.*]

DE LAURAGUAIS

Very well, my darling, “never”—but never what?

SOPHIE

This. Listen [*and she reads the letter*], “Honoured and Adored Mademoiselle: You have crowned my house and table with the glory of your presence and the distinguished wit of your mind. Tonight after the rehearsal for the first time I shall avail myself of the privilege of tasting the charming graces of your beauty in a less distant way. Surely to a lady of your swift intelligence I need write no more. With a thousand most profound respects, I sign myself, Your most obedient servant, and may I say, your lover, D’Argenteau.” [*She crushes the letter in her hand.*] The ridiculous old imbecile. The dusty, unbelievable jelly-fish. Father, call down the wrath of heaven on him.

THE ABBÉ

That is a most unusual demand.

SOPHIE

Are you referring to the letter? Of course it is. Outrageous! If he’d only waited until after the

première tomorrow night I would have sent him flying, the old conglomeration of ancient impudence.

DE LAURAGUAIS

And now, now?

SOPHIE

Now what?

DE LAURAGUAIS

What are you going to do?

SOPHIE

How do I know? Father, can you give me no spiritual advice?

THE ABBÉ

The situation, my daughter, I am afraid is not in the catechism.

SOPHIE

Of course, of course, when one needs your help what good are you with all your hymning? Heaven forgive me but I'm all distraught.

THE ABBÉ

My daughter, control yourself.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Yes, for the Lord's sake, Sophie, do,—for without you we will all be lost. [*Dejectedly he sits down.*] And I was to climb up the balcony and it was to be so romantic.

SOPHIE

*[With a sob, half anger, half despair.]*

Don't, don't, you are killing me.

THE ABBÉ

Will you drink a glass of wine?

SOPHIE

Rather a goblet of tears and those my own.  
Dorval! Dorval!

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Not knowing what to do.]*

Sophie, Sophie!

SOPHIE

Oh, don't keep saying Sophie, Sophie, just because I keep saying Dorval, Dorval. Sophie, Sophie! Don't you suppose I know I'm Sophie? Let me think, let me think!

DE LAURAGUAIS

By all means do—do.

*[She is again storming up and down.]*

THE ABBÉ

My daughter, with your permission I will wait in the library.

SOPHIE

That's it, bury yourself in the Fathers of the

Church and leave us living people to our living problems. Would to God you had never come in.

THE ABBÉ

My daughter—

SOPHIE

[*Excitedly.*]

I mean with the letter—oh, I don't know what I mean.

THE ABBÉ

Why don't you pray? Prayer works miracles.

SOPHIE

Pray! Pray that a man that has been showering me with money and whose power I needed, pray that that man should be damned to eternity because he has dared to ask me for the favour of my beauty. Oh, such a thing has never been heard before either in heaven or on earth. And because of that you tell me to pray.

THE ABBÉ

[*Calmly.*]

I must acknowledge, my dear, that the circumstances are slightly peculiar, but nevertheless I shall be waiting in the library if you need me.

[*And with his hands behind his back he most thoughtfully makes his exit.*]

SOPHIE

The sly old libertine.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Looking after THE ABBÉ.*]

What, he?

SOPHIE

No, not he, not he. [*And she has thrown the letter to the floor and is stamping on it. Suddenly her mood changes and she says very tenderly:*] Dorval, my darling, what has become of our midnight?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Love will find a way.

SOPHIE

[*Fairly shrieking at him.*]

“Love will find a way.” Oh, spare me that, not that. Not love, but Sophie. I haven’t been yearning for you for weeks and weeks to give you up now when you’ve just come back.

DE LAURAGUAIS

But you can be ill tonight.

SOPHIE

Ill? Tonight I must rehearse. Gluck will never open tomorrow if we do not rehearse tonight. So much satisfaction I cannot give to Rosalie. And as for D’Argenteau, if I were to swear I were at



death's door, that infamous old reprobate would be waiting on the other side, till either I was well or had in earnest died.

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[As though indeed it were hopeless.]*

Well, and what will you do?

SOPHIE

Something, something. I am Sophie Arnould. If only by some means we could be rid of this Ambassador until tomorrow. *[She stops in front of the harpsichord.]* If only there were a way.

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Coming towards her.]*

Darling, have you forgotten me?

SOPHIE

No, darling, do I act as if I had?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Sophie, you have not counted on me. Am I for nothing the best swordsman in France? Have I for nothing studied every herb which has the slightest pretension of being called a poison? Do I not know the secret botany of Persia? Is it to be wasted in the time of direst need that I can shoot a gold ring hung from a pigeon's neck, said pigeon being at the time of shooting in full flight? Sophie, have you forgotten me?

SOPHIE

No, there must be no killing. I do not see the use of a lover who is hanging from a gibbet. I am a realist. Wait, wait, I will find a way. [*She stops deep in thought.*] There must be some way, Dorval dear. [*And now she is over next to him and they are again in each other's arms.*] If all goes well at midnight, Dorval,—midnight.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Sophie!

SOPHIE

We shall see what the wit of France can do against this Austrian. [*She glances up, a look of mighty cogitation in her eyes. Then suddenly*] Yes, that would do if somehow I could manage it.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Magnificently.*]

If all else fail, my darling, I will sacrifice my life to save your innocence!

SOPHIE

Dorval dear, you are very brave and very ingenious, but even you cannot save what doesn't exist.

[*And as they kiss again the curtain falls.*]

ACT II

*Half-past nine, which  
leaves Sophie in danger.*



## ACT II

DE LAURAGUAIS *is discovered at a table near the harpsichord, assiduously writing with a big quill.* THE ABBÉ *with a sort of curious admiration stands watching him.* *On the table, beside the sheets of DE LAURAGUAIS' manuscript, is a flask of wine and several glasses.*

### THE ABBÉ

Monsieur, I admire your separation, to be able thus to write when the air seems tinged with torment for you and Madame Sophie.

### DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Looking up.*]

Sophie is at the helm. The higher the sea the more expert will be her steering. She is an adorable captain.

### THE ABBÉ

At what are you at work?

### DE LAURAGUAIS

On my new tragedy. The great Voltaire is waiting at Verney to hear it. Are you fond of tragedy? Will you hear a scene? It is in seven acts and its theme is the conquest of the spirit over the flesh. That is why I call it a tragedy.

## THE ABBÉ

So?

## DE LAURAGUAIS

Man's greatest desire is to be his deepest undoing. The theme's a deep one but I think my genius, if I let it go unbridled, can encompass it.

## THE ABBÉ

Do you find it difficult to write great plays?

## DE LAURAGUAIS

Not at all. All I do is write many very complicated scenes which no one can understand and I am immediately hailed as a genius. Playwriting I take as a pastime. My profounder thoughts are for something else.

## THE ABBÉ

[*Glancing towards SOPHIE's boudoir.*]

My son, I understand.

## DE LAURAGUAIS

[*But you see THE ABBÉ doesn't.*]

Yes, for my History of Arithmetic. That will be something that will startle the world. It will earn for me an invitation into the Academy of the Immortals but I shall spurn it. Honours are not for the honourable. Who are these immortals? [*He goes on scratching away.*] In a hundred



years they will be entombed in the cenotaph of the world's forgetfulness.

## THE ABBÉ

Sic transit—

## DE LAURAGUAIS

Are you interested in the more abstract problems of arithmetic?

## THE ABBÉ

I would have to be if I were to number the number of souls to be saved.

## DE LAURAGUAIS

Have you ever asked yourself why there should be only three dimensions? Have you ever considered why two and two should make four and not something else?

*[From SOPHIE's boudoir comes a beautiful voice in a shower of scales.]*

## DE LAURAGUAIS

That is Sophie oiling up for Papa Gluck.

*[And now a cadence sung in purest legato style sustained in pianissimo.]*

## DE LAURAGUAIS

Listen, all of hope, all of despair crowded into a perfect phrase.

## THE ABBÉ

You're something of a musical critic, too?

## DE LAURAGUAIS

I am everything that time will let me be.

*[Two or three notes soaring and then the voice is still.]*

## DE LAURAGUAIS

Now she is still and the silence seems like silver, like the silence in a meadow when a rabbit suddenly sticks up its ridiculously long ears. Have you had much to do with rabbits? If we knew all about rabbits we would know all about everything that ever was. Abstractions are the only realities.

*[Now a series of leaps and trills from the boudoir.]*

## DE LAURAGUAIS

Listen, she is trilling like a lark whose tiny bosom is too small for so great a passion. *[He calls in to her.]* Darling, do you mind not singing quite so loud? I am just in the midst of a splendid scene in Act Six. How extraordinary my Sophie is. She can face a climax with a song on her lips. *[More scales and trills.]* Would you mind closing the door?

*[THE ABBÉ is about to.]*

## SOPHIE'S VOICE

What are you doing, Dorval?

---

DE LAURAGUAIS

Dimming your voice, darling.

SOPHIE

What?

DE LAURAGUAIS

It's so beautiful that in another moment your rapt confessor here will believe that he is in heaven and will have to kill himself to prove it.

[THE ABBÉ *has closed the door.* DE LAURAGUAIS *finishes scrawling his page and is pleased with what he has written to the verge of tears.*]

THE ABBÉ

It's going well, isn't it?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Magnificently. Listen!

[*He stands up and is about to read.*]

THE ABBÉ

[*Starting for the library, a thin little smile about his lips.*]

I will leave you to your genius. I think that perhaps my soul is too simple for all this glory.

DE LAURAGUAIS

As you will. But don't go on my account. You don't disturb me in the least. I'm bubbling over with inspiration. [*He again sits down to his*

*tragedy.*] Nothing can disturb me now. Nothing.

*[But at this moment the door of SOPHIE'S boudoir is opened and she stands on the threshold, radiantly gowned, her hair done in a fantastic coiffure, "à la Iphigenie," a crescent of diamonds ablaze above a cloud of chiffon, cerulean blue.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Glancing up from the splendid scene in Act Six.]*

Admirable, my darling, admirable, but why all the astronomy?

SOPHIE

I shall start a new fashion for Papa Gluck. Iphigenia is the virgin priestess of Diana. The moon, the chaste white moon is her symbol. Lest you have any doubts this is the moon. *[And she points to the crescent in her hair.]* For the next few months every lady in Paris will wear her hair like this. There are already pastries à la Sophie and sachets à la Sophie and babies named for Sophie. Why should there not be a headdress à la Sophie? I am a prima donna; when I am not in people's ears it is well that I should be in their heads. *[Then to THE ABBÉ.]* Have you had your supper, Father?

## THE ABBÉ

Delicious chicken stuffed with truffles, soufflé, almond cake and iced wine.

## SOPHIE

Listen, Dorval, how he smacks his lips, and these remote Fathers of the Church are supposed to be removed from all earthly joys. Piety has its nice rewards. It makes it so easy to sin without sinning.

## THE ABBÉ

Madame, I shall be waiting in the library if you need me.

## SOPHIE

*[And right is hers.]*

Who knows, I may. I always have my coach at the door, my blankets perfumed and a priest in the library. Life is so complicated.

*[And thoughtfully, his hands folded behind his back, he walks into the library.]*

## SOPHIE

Dorval, dear, for the first time in her life I think your Sophie is a little nervous.

## DE LAURAGUAIS

What is it, dear?

## SOPHIE

As a child of five I sang before the Queen with no more tremor than you might feel milking a

cow in Brittany—of course I take it for granted that you know how to milk cows—but tonight, dear, events come crowding. You, Dorval dear, and Papa Gluck and then a way, a sure, quick, sudden way to be rid of this Ambassador.

DE LAURAGUAIS

And what will my sly little Sophie do?

SOPHIE

Something, dear. The instant you entered the house I knew that life which is sweet as a duet can never be sung as a trio. Dorval darling, D'Argenteau must go.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Tell him, dear.

SOPHIE

Tell him! Hasn't that horrid old man found a sufficient reason for staying?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Hasn't my little lark a little influence?

SOPHIE

Of what use is all that now?

DE LAURAGUAIS

If my songstress could reach the King, His Majesty will understand. None better than His Maj-



esty. Tell him we haven't even said good morning in a month.

SOPHIE

Du Barry doesn't love me. I cannot reach the King.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Well, then, there's Minister Choiseul.

SOPHIE

*[Despondently.]*

And he has left this evening for Vienna.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Ah, that's too bad! A word from him, a little letter, his word is law. The jails are filled with people whom Choiseul doesn't love.

SOPHIE

Darling, it was Choiseul sent you back to me. Here's the dear letter that told me you were coming. *[She takes the letter from the table.]* Dorval! Dorval!

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Again at his tragedy.]*

Darling, are there many rhymes for pageantry?

*[But SOPHIE doesn't know or at least she doesn't answer as she stands there deep in thought.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

How beautiful my Sophie is.

[*And he is up and has taken her in his arms.*]

SOPHIE

Dorval, if it could be managed somehow.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Yes, dear?

SOPHIE

But what are we going to do?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Anything you say, dear, but you mustn't interrupt me again. A beautiful speech has just come to me. [*And now he is back at the table writing.*] And my Sophie ought to know that often murder is simpler than a beautiful speech.

SOPHIE

Murder, my gentle Dorval? [*Her eyes are crinkled in consideration.*] Ah, there's a thought on which to hang a deed.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Oblivious.*]

This line should have a noble ending. [*And he writes it, pleased.*]

SOPHIE

*[To herself.]*

If there were only a way.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Quiet, dear, quiet, quiet!

SOPHIE

There must be. *[Dejectedly her head drops and she is looking at CHOISEUL'S letter which is hanging from her hand.]* There must be. *[Then suddenly the idea comes to her.]* Why not? There's half a page of space. Why not? *[A second more and she has folded over the edge of CHOISEUL'S letter and has torn off the lines that he has written.]* If needs be, *this*, beside the soldiers. Why not, why not?

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Finishing the speech he's writing.]*

I've got it, dear!

SOPHIE

*[And now she is seated at the table opposite to him.]*

And so have I.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Listen! *[He reads from his manuscript.]* "The purple blare of pageantry." What do you think of it?

SOPHIE

I don't think of it, darling. Go on with your tragedy. I'm beginning a pretty drama of my own.

*[And for a little while there is quiet whilst they both sit writing.]*

SOPHIE

*[With a flourish as she finishes.]*

I think by now the water will be hot enough to boil this ancient goose from Vienna.

*[And she has folded the letter and has stuck it in her bodice.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Still in flowing inspiration scribbling on.]*

Beautiful! Exquisite! This evening, dear, the muse is fluid. Beautiful! Beautiful!

SOPHIE

*[Lovingly bending over him.]*

Have you no pity for that poor quill making it say all those pompous things?

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Finishing the sentence he is writing and sprinkling some sand on the manuscript.]*

And what is it my Sophie intends to do this evening?

## SOPHIE

All that is needed, Dorval, when his Excellency arrives. [*Then in anger.*] Oh, I can see him now, strutting in at the very moment when Rosalie will be enjoying the happiness of hearing me sing a beautiful B Flat—my B Flats are famous, Dorval. [*Suddenly she bursts into song.*] La-la-la la la la. Thank God, thank God, I still have it here. [*She is pointing to her throat.*] Ah, what an artist I am to retain my voice when at this very moment I know what is going on in the mind of that unblushing octogenarian of an Ambassador. First I must be rid of Gluck and his attendant angel, Rosalie. But that will be simple, Dorval, as simple as plucking marigolds in May. Do marigolds grow in May? Ah well, no matter, and then for my Ambassador.

## DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Still writing away.*]

Sophie, if he insists.

## SOPHIE

Heaven, Dorval, will not desert a prima donna who has had the forethought to have a few gendarmes, if necessary, waiting in the house, and if needs be a little letter. [*And her hand is on her bosom.*]

## DE LAURAGUAIS

But has my Sophie forgotten that if she goes too

far there is always the Count de Saint-Florentin and his dull, dark dungeons to make my Sophie behave?

SOPHIE

*[Her voice the harbinger of a rage about to be born.]*

Saint-Florentin! Dorval, if it weren't for him all Paris would be Sophie's *[And then her voice is like a flute heard at the far end of a lane.]* But Sophie and her sisters, the angels, will find a way.

*[THE FIRST LACKEY enters.]*

SOPHIE

What is it?

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, there is a lady at the door who begs to see you.

SOPHIE

There always is.

THE FIRST LACKEY

She is in need.

SOPHIE

Give her fifty francs. If she is no longer handsome give her sixty. Where there is less beauty there is sure to be more need.



## THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, she beseeches a moment's speech with you.

SOPHIE

Tell her I rehearse tonight and can see no one.

## THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, your pardon, but it is the fourth time today that she has come whilst you—

[*He hesitates.*]

SOPHIE

Oh, go on; don't you suppose I know that you know all that is happening in this house? I understand servants. My papa didn't keep an inn for nothing.

## THE FIRST LACKEY

[*And in his eyes is the suggestion of a twinkle.*]

No, Madame, I don't suppose he did with wine fifty francs a keg.

SOPHIE

You were saying?

## THE FIRST LACKEY

That the lady has called four times today whilst you were riding back and forth to the Minister of State enquiring whether or no Monsieur the Count de Brancas Lauraguais would be set free so that

you and he—if all goes well—would have the charming pleasure of each other's society at midnight.

SOPHIE

Bravo! You are so frank that now I know you are not a spy of the Minister of Police.

THE FIRST LACKEY

That would be so simple, Madame, and not nearly so enjoyable as serving you. Madame, we who serve in this world must also have our little pleasures. We can choose the employer who amuses us the most. And your house, Madame, is, I assure you, the most delightful one in Paris.

SOPHIE

Indeed?

THE FIRST LACKEY

Ah, yes, indeed, Madame. Whilst the lackeys elsewhere have to wait several months to find out what is happening by reading the *Secret Memoirs of the Police*, I am proud to say that with you, my lady, it is much more diverting to get all the news first hand.

SOPHIE

[*To DE LAURAGUAIS still busy on Act Six.*]

Dorval dear, that is how I retain my servants. I make life so piquant for them.

## THE FIRST LACKEY

Ah, Madame, if you only knew. [*Perhaps he is laughing deep down his throat.*] How could I desert the services of a lady who said what you said to the Police Inspector when he questioned you the night after that very gay little supper party in the Rue des Petits Champs? It was Tuesday in a February, if I remember rightly.

SOPHIE

And what did I say?

## THE FIRST LACKEY

The talk had been very intimate about His Sovereign Majesty, the King. Your pardon, Madame, if I drink a glass of wine to the King.

[*He pours out a glass from the flask at the table at which DE LAURAGUAIS is writing.*]

SOPHIE

[*As the LACKEY drinks.*]

Well, what did I say?

## THE FIRST LACKEY

[*Putting down the glass and barely able to conceal his mirthful admiration.*]

Madame, when he came to question you as to what had been said you said you did not remember.

SOPHIE

Of course, why not?

## THE FIRST LACKEY

And when he said that a woman like you should remember, you replied;—Madame, you will permit me [*and he giggles behind his hand*] you replied: “That before a man like *him* you were not a woman like *you*.” Whilst I can expect something as droll as that any day, Madame, I have no intention of living and listening in the house of any one except the divine Sophie Arnould.

SOPHIE

Thanks.

THE FIRST LACKEY

May I show the lady in?

SOPHIE

Any other time, but tonight—tonight—

THE FIRST LACKEY

As you command me, Madame, but there is a look in her face as sad and as tragically beautiful as your own, Madame. That is, in your best moments at the opera.

SOPHIE

You have heard me at the opera?

THE FIRST LACKEY

Indeed yes, Madame. You see, in my spare moments I write the musical critiques for the *First*

*Lackey's Gazette*. They have a first hand intimate tone but, of course, you do not read the *Lackey's Gazette*. I'm sorry you will not admit the lady.

## SOPHIE

It is some silly child who wishes me to scrawl my name on the panels of her fan, or to stand god-mother to her unborn illegitimacy. They are always coming to me for help and for advice. If it were not tonight I would aid her, I would help all my suffering sisters, but tonight I rehearse and besides—

## THE FIRST LACKEY

[*Smoothly.*]

I shouldn't be worried if I were you, Madame. I think you will carry off with success whatever it is you are planning to do this evening to get rid of your honourable protector, the Ambassador from Austria. Now as to this young lady on your doorstep—

## SOPHIE

Go. I have heard enough of this lady on my doorstep.

## THE FIRST LACKEY

Again your pardon, Madame, but unless I am very much mistaken the lady is an aristocrat.

SOPHIE

[*A little more interested.*]

Indeed?

THE FIRST LACKEY

Yes, my lady, each time she came back I left word that she was to come back again because I thought that you would care to speak to her.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Writing away.*]

But, Sophie, if you see all the people that stand on your doorstep—

THE FIRST LACKEY

[*Very significantly.*]

Madame, I should see *her* if I were you.

SOPHIE

[*Reading his tone.*]

She is a woman. We women, the weak of the world, should stand together.

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, I assure you, the young lady's emotion is very genuine. I am a judge of acting. I have studied the art of Madame Arnould. Unless I am greatly mistaken the matter with the lady is something of the heart.

[*He is looking curiously at SOPHIE.*]



SOPHIE

[*Quickly.*]

Show her in. Show her in.

[*And THE FIRST LACKEY makes his exit.*]

SOPHIE

Something of the heart?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Of course, when a woman is in trouble it is always trouble with the heart.

SOPHIE

[*Perhaps a little bit sentimentally.*]

Love wounds us and if we are not wounded we die because we're not.

DE LAURAGUAIS

And has my Sophie ever thought that the passion of love is as strong in a widow as in a young girl in whose trembling bosom the flame of love has been for the first time lighted?

SOPHIE

That is so.

DE LAURAGUAIS

But the widow hasn't the same excuse as the young girl, which is curiosity.

SOPHIE

No, Dorval, but habit, confirmed habit. Go,

she is coming. Wait in the library with the Abbé. Woman to woman is fairer with no man about.

[DE LAURAGUAIS *exits* and SOPHIE *goes over to the mantelshelf and looks at the clock.*]

SOPHIE

Ten minutes before Papa Gluck arrives. [*She sings a passage.*] Tra la la la la la. Still there! still there!

[THE FIRST LACKEY *stands in the door.*]

THE FIRST LACKEY

[*Bowing.*]

Madame.

[*A young girl enters. Over her dress she wears a long cloak with a hood that all but hides her face.*]

SOPHIE

Madame, you wish to speak to me?

[*The girl inclines her head.* SOPHIE *motions to the LACKEY and he exits.*]

VIVIENNE

Madame, I am Vivienne de— [*Suddenly she stops. She advances a step nearer to SOPHIE.*]

Madame Arnould, I have come to you—

[*Her voice falters.*]

SOPHIE

Yes, Madame, sit down, sit down.

VIVIENNE

If you can spare me some few moments from your crowded life?

SOPHIE

You are right, my child. Never was my life more crowded than this evening.

[VIVIENNE *instinctively turns toward the door, a sob checking her voice.*]

SOPHIE

[*Tenderly, to stop her.*]

What is it, Madame?

[*Suddenly the girl rushes over and throws herself at SOPHIE'S feet.*]

VIVIENNE

Madame, you will pardon my rash impetuosity?

SOPHIE

My child, my child. [*And she lifts the girl's hood, starting back in amazement but controlling her surprise.*] How pale you are, how very pale!

VIVIENNE

Madame Arnould, I have come to you because you know the human heart.

SOPHIE

And your mother, child?

VIVIENNE

My mother, she is dead.

SOPHIE

[*Quietly.*]

So!

VIVIENNE

Madame, you will know, you will understand. To my father, Madame, your name stands for all that—that—is evil.

SOPHIE

[*Her lips tightening a little.*]

Indeed, my child?

VIVIENNE

But, Madame, you will tell me what to do. My father does not understand. To you life is no snare of blind prejudices. You will know, you will understand. To you life is no bitter tradition to be followed but a gorgeous, free pattern to be made. Madame, you will help me. I have come to you because of all women in Paris you know the human heart.

SOPHIE

If I do it is because I have listened to life and not to lies. You are not the first girl, my child, who has come to Sophie Arnould. There, there.

[VIVIENNE *is weeping now, her head is in SOPHIE'S lap. SOPHIE is stroking her hair.*]

VIVIENNE

You will tell me what to do? You will understand my suffering. I am on my knees to you as though to the Madonna.

SOPHIE

The Madonna? Do not let your imagination run away with you.

VIVIENNE

I am on my knees begging, beseeching you for your advice. Madame—

SOPHIE

[*Quietly taking her hand.*]

So, it is something of the heart.

VIVIENNE

Madame, madame—

SOPHIE

We women! What are we but big children, amused with toys, lulled to sleep with flatteries and seduced with promises. I know, my child, you've given everything, your life, your love to some one who has cast it off as nothing.

VIVIENNE

[*Hysterically.*]

Would to God I had.

SOPHIE

*[And she is more surprised than she knows.]*

What?

VIVIENNE

Would to God I had!

SOPHIE

It is a gift, Madame, that deserves the giving and the taking.

VIVIENNE

*[Sobbing.]*

I will tell you all, all.

SOPHIE

*[Expectantly.]*

All?

*[She bends forward, looking into the girl's eyes and instinctively again VIVIENNE turns away. There is a pause.]*

SOPHIE

All or nothing, Madame, as you will.

VIVIENNE

What am I to do? What? I am so terribly in love that—

SOPHIE

When are we women not?



VIVIENNE

And now he is going away for ever.

SOPHIE

I do not understand. I thought love to most men was like an enigma. When the puzzle is solved then the interest ceases.

VIVIENNE

We love as none have ever loved before.

SOPHIE

Yes, it is thus each time and each time it is true.

VIVIENNE

But my father, Madame.

*[Suddenly the light dawns on something not quite so near to SOPHIE's knowledge, for she, even as a young girl, had taken her own destiny into her hands and eloped with DE LAURAGUAIS.]*

SOPHIE

Your father? Then this is a tragedy of a father and not a step too far.

*[She is again peering into the girl's face.]*

VIVIENNE

*[In terror.]*

Madame, you know who my father is?

SOPHIE

*[Avoiding the intenseness of her gaze.]*

A gentleman, I am sure, Madame, for you are his daughter.

VIVIENNE

He has forbidden it, Madame. Never will a penniless soldier, even though he is a captain, be his son-in-law. Today he has driven Etienne from the house. Madame, I am distraught, distraught.

SOPHIE

Well, there's tomorrow.

VIVIENNE

[*Bitterly.*]

Tomorrow.

SOPHIE

Tomorrow. The cure or grave of all things.

VIVIENNE

[*Tearfully.*]

That is not all.

SOPHIE

Madame, you must be calm. I must know. How else can I help you?

VIVIENNE

[*Attempting to control herself.*]

I will tell you everything.

SOPHIE

Yes?

VIVIENNE

My father has acted swiftly.

SOPHIE

And you?

VIVIENNE

I am at my wits' end. My heart is flooded with agony. Etienne is my soul, my life.

SOPHIE

[*Again gently stroking her hair.*]

Madame, Madame.

VIVIENNE

Life without him is death, death.

SOPHIE

I know.

VIVIENNE

That is why I have come to *you* for help.

SOPHIE

[*And her lip is maybe curled a little.*]

To the first lady in France that a father would have chosen as a confidante.

VIVIENNE

Madame, do not jest with me.

---

SOPHIE

I am not jesting, but why, why, I wonder, has the web of life weaving so far apart spun you and me together?

VIVIENNE

My father has used his power. He is a friend, Madame [*and her voice comes slowly now*] of Choiseul.

SOPHIE

Choiseul?

[*Half consciously her hand again covers the letter in her bosom. There is a pause. She is waiting for VIVIENNE to go on.*]

VIVIENNE

[*After a moment.*]

Through the power of the Minister of State, Etienne's Regiment has been transferred. As I speak, Madame, they are about to leave for Le Havre and then,—then America. He will never come back, Madame, there are rumours of war in America.

SOPHIE

Are there? Like Marie Antoinette I think that the operas of Gluck are of more importance than

the trifling troubles of these barbarians. America, America. I seem to have heard the name. Is it not the abode of wild men with huge feathers and tiny tomahawks? But your soldier, my child?

## VIVIENNE

*[Her voice like an aeolian harp aswing in the wind.]*

He will never come back. Never! *[Then with tragic emotion.]* If I'd only given myself to him, there at least would have been the memory of that before I die. Would to God I had, would to God I had!

## SOPHIE

Ah, my child, how brave these words are, this giving and this dying. How many girls are there like you whose life has suddenly become a dream of wild romance in a safe little world of satin, how many are there, as exquisite as you, who can give themselves to a man except in marriage and still hold him and his love and his respect? No, do not shriek out,—do not say what's in your heart that love is all that matters—sometimes, yes. Some day when you are older you will know that I am right.

## VIVIENNE

Oh, would that I were dead!

SOPHIE

Yes, yes, but one must be alive to wish it. Do not turn away.

VIVIENNE

Madame!

SOPHIE

My child, how many women are there, do you think, of all who have died for love? Your sort, my child, and mine, how many are there who, if they could have spoken, after the filthy river had flowed into their mouths would have said that the deed was worth the doing. No! Fate means it another way for you. You must marry Etienne.

VIVIENNE

*[Desperately.]*

Marry Etienne! How? How?

SOPHIE

I see it clearly written in your eyes. Your frailty will be your strength. You will be safer in the fortress that the world calls marriage. As for us others, well, my dear, if a woman would fly into the face of the world she must have either a terrible bravery or a more terrible contempt. There, there! I'm wasting all this breath and in a few moments I'm to sing for Gluck. You must marry Etienne.

VIVIENNE

*[Tragically.]*

Madame, as you speak his regiment is leaving



Paris. If he deserts his regiment it is death. If he goes I know he never will return.

SOPHIE

You are right. He never will return.

VIVIENNE

Don't say that. Don't say that.

SOPHIE

He will never return because he will not go.

VIVIENNE

What, Madame?

SOPHIE

I said he will not go.

VIVIENNE

Who will prevent him?

SOPHIE

[*Calmly.*]

I.

VIVIENNE

How? How?

SOPHIE

Give me a moment to think it over. It will take swift action and some little tact.

VIVIENNE

[*At a loss.*]

Madame, is this an affair of tact?

SOPHIE

Of course, all things are. Tact is to know how, when. [*She has got up.*] This is not so simple, but I am Sophie.

[*And now she is pacing up and down thinking of a way.*]

VIVIENNE

[*Following her, her arms outstretched.*]  
Hasten, Madame, hasten.

SOPHIE

My dear, I advise you not to make love to Etienne as quickly as you follow me about. Ardour is all in the nuance.

VIVIENNE

Madame, you are making sport of me. When I leave your house tonight it will be to die.

SOPHIE

Then I do not think you will leave my house tonight until— Ah, if at this moment I only had the royal seal of France.

VIVIENNE

Hurry! Hurry!

SOPHIE

But failing that I still have my imagination.

VIVIENNE

Madame, at this moment Etienne's regiment is leaving Paris.

*[She is sobbing violently.]*

SOPHIE

Don't, I beg of you. Your sobbing drowns my thoughts. How shall we do it? How? *[She is at the table at which DE LAURAGUAIS has been writing his tragedy.]* Ah, if I only had his quaint imagination. *[She has taken up DORVAL's quill and is pressing it to her lips.]* Dorval! Dorval!

VIVIENNE

What, Madame?

SOPHIE

Nothing, I am thinking. *[And she is, her shoulder on the table, her tiny thumb pressed against her teeth.]* Shall it be the Queen?

VIVIENNE

Her Majesty!

SOPHIE

No, no one has ever heard of the Queen in Paris. *[More cogitation.]* Du Barry? No, with that cherub's smile of hers she'd use the trick against me.

VIVIENNE

Hasten! Hasten!

SOPHIE

My dear, Rome wasn't built in a day though burnt in an hour. Who's left at Court whose name would matter? Why not the Dauphiness? Yes, she's my friend. Yes, Marie Antoinette will do.

VIVIENNE

Madame, you do not know my father. It is too late, to appeal to the Court.

SOPHIE

Don't be ridiculous. We will not appeal to the Court. The Court will appeal to us.

VIVIENNE

Madame, I do not understand.

SOPHIE

Of course you don't. Now I will tell you more that you do not understand. The Dauphiness desires the presence of this lad in Paris.

VIVIENNE

[*Aghast.*]

Madame!

SOPHIE

[*Smiling.*]

How swift you are, but wrong. *I* say she wishes it. She has used me to obtain her will. Such a letter a Princess dare not write herself. Yes, that will do. Marie Antoinette, Sophie Arnould—that

will do, that will do. [*Then as the quill rushes on.*] Where is your soldier now?

VIVIENNE

At his Barracks—Rue Sainte Margarete.

SOPHIE

Rue Sainte Margarete. Some thirty words, much dark intention, two mighty names and the deed is done. Listen! [*and she reads what she has written.*] “Sir Honoured Major Colonel of the Seventh Cadets, Rue Sainte Margarete. As you are a soldier and a gentleman this shall be secret until the end of time. At the urgent wish of no less a one than Her Serene Highness, Marie Antoinette, I address you. For reasons of State and of most vital moment to the heart and realms of Austria and France, dispatch at once Captain Etienne”—[*then speaking*] why look, I’ve forgotten his name. What is it?

VIVIENNE

Etienne!

SOPHIE

Of course Etienne. But what, what?

VIVIENNE

Etienne Mars.

SOPHIE

Etienne Mars! Splendid! Thank God the name’s a short one. See, I can just crowd it in.

Etienne Mars. Was ever a gallant soldier more gallantly named? [*Then again reading.*] “Of most vital moment to the heart of France, despatch at once to the Austrian Embassy, Captain Etienne Mars. Some day my arms may be about your neck in gratitude.” [*She looks up.*] That alone would be sufficient. [*Then back to the letter.*] “Yours in the guarding of a mighty name, Sophie Arnould.” [*And in her eyes already sits the victory.*] Sophie Arnould, Marie Antoinette, not even Saint Anthony could resist two such lovely names. [*She is up from the table.*] Now you must do as I bid you.

VIVIENNE

Whatever you wish, Madame. Whatever you say.

SOPHIE

Good! Sit down. You, too, must write a letter.  
[*And VIVIENNE sits waiting whilst SOPHIE stands in thought.*]

SOPHIE

How shall we word your farewell to your father?

VIVIENNE

Farewell?

SOPHIE

Of course, my dear, the matter's tragic.



VIVIENNE

Madame, you will save Etienne?

SOPHIE

Yes, yes. Here take this quill. [*She lifts the one that DE LAURAGUAIS has been using.*] It is used to tragedy.

[*VIVIENNE sits waiting as SOPHIE stands in thought.*]

SOPHIE

How shall we word the letter to your father? Let me see, let me see. [*A moment more of thought and she begins dictating.*] Father, I am dead. [*Then suddenly.*] No, that's too swift and too much speed will ruin the effect. No, that will never do, but on the other hand we cannot take too long. The blow must be a sudden one. [*Then with the inspiration of a new idea.*] Perhaps it would sound more moving in verse. I wonder.

VIVIENNE

Etienne! Etienne!

SOPHIE

My child, you must control yourself. [*A pause.*] Yes—now write as I dictate. Honoured Father: The cup of life has been too bitter for my quaffing. [*And now she is smiling, as softly she says to herself*] Dorval could do no better.

VIVIENNE

What, Madame?

SOPHIE

[*Swiftly.*]

No, that's not in the letter. What have you written?

VIVIENNE

[*Reading.*]

Honoured Father: The cup of life [*her sobs get the better of her and she cannot go on*] Madame—  
Madame.

SOPHIE

[*After a moment watching her.*]

My child, let some of the tears fall on the letter. There's nothing more real than reality.

VIVIENNE

[*Again controlling herself, takes up the quill.*]

Yes, yes.

SOPHIE

I know it isn't easy, dear. It never is easy to say farewell except, they say, to a husband. Ah yes, where were we? [*She looks over VIVIENNE'S shoulder, reading.*] The cup of life has been too bitter for my quaffing.

VIVIENNE

Madame, I— My hand is trembling.

SOPHIE

Of course, it should, it should. Now finish with [*She again dictates.*] When you read these lines your daughter— [*She stops.*] You are perhaps an only child?

VIVIENNE

[*Through her tears.*]

Yes.

SOPHIE

Good! That makes it irresistible. How far have you written?

VIVIENNE

[*Reading.*]

When you read these lines your—

SOPHIE

[*Again dictating.*]

Your Vivienne, your— [*Her voice deeply stressing the words.*] Your Vivienne, your only— underline only—child, will be floating dead in the Seine. There, I think that ought to do.

VIVIENNE

[*Springing up in terror.*]

Madame, madame, dead in the Seine.

SOPHIE

[*Quietly.*]

A moment ago you would have killed yourself

for love. Be calm. It is ever so much more comfortable being dead in a letter than in the river. Yes, that will do. In an hour you will be floating in the Seine.

VIVIENNE

[*She has heard of such ends to love.*]

The Seine!

SOPHIE

Yes, would you prefer the Jordan or the Styx. That would take longer and be more difficult to manage but still I'm Sophie.

VIVIENNE

[*For things are moving vertiginously.*]

Madame, it is all so swift.

SOPHIE

So is a century in the race with time. In an hour you will be floating in the Seine and half an hour after that you will be married to Etienne.

VIVIENNE

Married?

SOPHIE

Yes, here, my child. The priest is already in the library. Here, in the house of Sophie Arnould, here in this holy shrine of pale innocence and bright love. [*And now she is thinking over exactly how she'll manage it as she looks at the letter she has written.*] Dorval—yes—my coach—yes

—yes. My dear, it oughtn't take more than an hour before Etienne's here. What's he like? Wouldn't it be too shocking if after all I didn't like him?

[*She rushes over and pulls the bell-rope.*]

VIVIENNE

Like him! Madame, he is the hero of my dreams.

SOPHIE

You should be a novelist. You have such a new, fresh way of saying things. [*And now she is bending over VIVIENNE.*] And is your letter finished? Good! Good! [*Then she dips her finger into one of the flower vases and sprinkles the drops of water on the sheet.*] More tears, more tears. Man's heart is but a ship afloat on woman's tears. [*VIVIENNE looks up.*] No, dear, don't put that into the letter, though I think it might do very nicely in Dorval's tragedy.

[*THE SECOND LACKEY enters.*]

SOPHIE

See that this lady is kept alone and undisturbed in the little blue room beyond my boudoir until I let you know.

[*She again pulls the bell-rope. Then to VIVIENNE.*]

SOPHIE

You have supped?



VIVIENNE

Madame, I—

SOPHIE

Nonsense. [*Then to THE SECOND LACKEY.*]  
See that supper is served to this young lady.

[*THE LACKEY is preceding VIVIENNE to the exit on the left.*]

VIVIENNE

Madame, can I ever—

SOPHIE

Tut! Tut! Go eat your supper, dear, and drink some wine. Remember you must be brave. In an hour you're going to your own wedding. These marriages, these marriages, if I ever have a daughter I shall be the only woman at her wedding who won't be married. [*VIVIENNE is about to speak.*] There, dear, later you can thank me.

VIVIENNE

[*Standing in the exit left.*]

Madame!

[*She turns to go, but SOPHIE stops her with a sly little smile in her eyes.*]

SOPHIE

But, my child [*and her voice is as though her ear were to a keyhole*], my child, this letter to your father, to whom shall we send it and just where?



## VIVIENNE

Madame, I am so happy that I quite forgot.

*[She rushes back to the table and with DORVAL'S quill addresses the letter. SOPHIE stands watching her. In a moment the address is written and she hands the document to SOPHIE.]*

## SOPHIE

You have forgotten the sand but no matter.

*[She stands waving the letter in her hand.]*  
Madame— *[She points to the door left.]* Wait  
in the little blue room beyond my boudoir.

*[And the instant VIVIENNE has made her exit SOPHIE glances at the address, a look of fun, or is it triumph in her face.]*

## SOPHIE

I thought so from the beginning. I have seen  
her at the King's Levée.

*[She turns to see THE FIRST LACKEY standing in the room.]*

## SOPHIE

I suppose you were listening to everything.

## THE FIRST LACKEY

*[Very respectfully.]*

Certainly, Madame.

SOPHIE

*[Barely able to suppress her laughter.]*

Well?

THE FIRST LACKEY

I think, Madame, that this is apt to be the most diverting of all your little comedies. Oh, what a privilege to live in Madame's house.

SOPHIE

Have the gendarmes come?

THE FIRST LACKEY

They are waiting below in the pantry.

SOPHIE

See that each has a bottle of wine.

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, I have seen to that already.

SOPHIE

And in a little while have them shown into the library. One never knows.

THE FIRST LACKEY

Ah, how true. One never knows.

SOPHIE

*[Nervously singing a few notes.]*

La-la. *[She puts her fingers to her throat.]*  
My voice! God be praised it's still there.

*[Then she rushes over to the door of the library.]*

SOPHIE

*[Calling.]*

Dorval! Dorval!

THE FIRST LACKEY

*[One of his eyebrows a bit asquint.]*

Madame, the Count is reading his tragedy to the Abbé.

SOPHIE

*[Nevertheless obdurate.]*

Dorval, Dorval!

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Entering, his manuscript in hand.]*

Has Gluck come?

SOPHIE

Not yet.

DE LAURAGUAIS

The Abbé thinks very well of my fifth act.

SOPHIE

You mean his eyes are still open?

DE LAURAGUAIS

What, dear?

SOPHIE

We must act swiftly.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Misunderstanding her.*]

Not with my play. It calls for majesty.

SOPHIE

Not with your masterpiece, my Dorval, but with facts. Here, take this letter and my coach. [*She hands him the letter supposed to have been written for MARIE ANTOINETTE and then, fairly pushing him towards the door.*] You must ride post haste to Rue Sainte Margarete.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Looking at his manuscript.*]

But what of my tragedy?

SOPHIE

Later, the rest of your life for tragedy, my poet. Now we have a comedy to play. Here, take this letter, it's from the Court.

DE LAURAGUAIS

What?

SOPHIE

A matter of grave moment, Dorval, to—to—ah well, no matter. Kill my horses if you must but in half an hour reach the Barracks Rue Sainte Margarete and if you value Sophie's love do not come back alone.

---

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Sadly, looking at his manuscript.*]

But it was just at this moment that my two lovers meet alone in the garden.

SOPHIE

Well, let them make all the love they want to in my coach. Fly, fly! There's to be a marriage and you'll bring back the bridegroom.

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Mystified.*]

Yes, dear, but I assure you I had more rest in prison than since I've been back here with you. Only home half an hour and you already bundling me off in your coach to bring back a bridegroom. I'm a man of thought, Sophie. I'm patient, very patient, but remember it was the last straw that broke the camel's back.

SOPHIE

Why, I don't think my Dorval has the faintest resemblance to a camel, though I know you love them.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Just the same, dear, remember that last straw.

SOPHIE

I do and perhaps the very straw that broke the camel's back may have been the one that showed

the way the wind was blowing. Before evening, I shouldn't be surprised, if there would be a little tempest here. Do not begrudge your Sophie her bit of straw. Go, go, for our sake, Dorval, for your Sophie's sake.

## DE LAURAGUAIS

I'll go. [*He glances at the letter.*] Rue Sainte Margarete. But you women have so little forethought. How will I ever be able to think of lovely lines for my tragedy rumbling along in your coach? But for your sake, Sophie dear. Rue Sainte Margarete.

[*And he exits.*]

## THE FIRST LACKEY

[*Very pleasantly, looking after him.*]

Madame, I share with you your adoration of the quaint eccentricities of the Count de Lauraguais. He is a credit to his King and France. You will permit me to drink to the King?

[*And he does so.*]

## SOPHIE

[*Singing a few notes.*]

Tra-la-la-la. Still there, still there.

[*THE SECOND LACKEY enters.*]

## THE SECOND LACKEY

Madame, Mlle. Guimard has arrived for the rehearsal.



SOPHIE

Have her wait. I am not yet ready. I will ring.

[THE SECOND LACKEY goes out.]

SOPHIE

[To THE FIRST LACKEY.]

I have here a letter to be delivered, of the very greatest importance.

[She hands him VIVIENNE'S letter. He reads the address and looks up, surprised.]

SOPHIE

You quite understand?

THE FIRST LACKEY

[With a knowing eye.]

I do.

SOPHIE

Very well, see that it is delivered, but not before the hour is up.

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame is looking a bit ahead? Ah, what a privilege to live in your house, Madame, but if Madame will permit me I should suggest at least an hour and a half before this letter is delivered. It will take the Count at least half an hour to reach the barracks with the cobble-stones of Paris in the dreadful state they are.

SOPHIE

Yes, you are right.

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame has something up her sleeve? When the ice is thin Madame thinks it just as well to have many little rafts about.

SOPHIE

The simile's a little mixed, but somewhere in the nest the truth lies hidden. Now show the soldiers into the library. You understand your orders?

THE FIRST LACKEY

Perfectly, Madame.

*[And with a deep bow he goes out.]*

SOPHIE

*[Singing a few notes.]*

La-la. Still there, still there.

*[She goes over to the door and calls in to*  
THE ABBÉ.]

SOPHIE

Monseigneur, Monseigneur!

THE ABBÉ

*[Entering.]*

Monseigneur? Madame, if I stay long enough in your house I may be Pope.

SOPHIE

Who knows? Why not? I am Sophie Arnould, but at least you will stay long enough to indulge in one of the holy sacraments. You will perform a marriage.

THE ABBÉ

*[In amazement.]*

A marriage?

SOPHIE

Yes, at midnight. A marriage. The most unimaginative thing that has ever happened in Sophie's house, but circumstances alter faiths.

*[THE THIRD LACKEY enters.]*

THE THIRD LACKEY

Madame, the Chevalier Gluck and Mme. Levasseur have arrived for the rehearsal.

SOPHIE

I am not ready yet. I will ring.

*[THE LACKEY exits.]*

SOPHIE

*[Again singing a phrase.]*

Am I in voice?

THE ABBÉ

Divine. But do you know that several gendarmes have just come into the library?

SOPHIE

Yes. Have I ever sung better?

THE ABBÉ

It is the voice of the angels.

SOPHIE

Were you surprised to see the soldiers?

THE ABBÉ

[*His hands lifted.*]

Madame, in your house I am prepared to see the devil himself come down the chimney.

SOPHIE

In case he does I have you here as host, your Reverence. Tell the gendarmes to be nice and quiet during the singing. [*And then, and indeed she wants to know.*] They are good, strong fellows?

THE ABBÉ

They are, my child.

[*And he exits into the library.*]

SOPHIE

[*Giving the bell-rope a violent pull.*]

Now I am ready for the devil, for the Austrian Ambassador and the celestial strains of Gluck.

[*She arranges the head-dress in her hair. She goes over to the harpsichord and is lean-*

*ing against it in languid beauty when GLUCK, ROSALIE LEVASSEUR and GUIMARD enter.]*

SOPHIE

*[Bowing.]*

Chevalier, ladies, welcome.

*[They all bow.]*

GLUCK

*[An irritable genius and a pompous gentleman as he leans over to kiss her hand.]*

Madame, I hope your voice is not as veiled as your hair. What is that, may I ask?

*[And he points to the crescent.]*

SOPHIE

The head-dress of Diana.

GLUCK

And what have head-dresses to do with Gluck?

SOPHIE

Why, I don't know how they affect you. I'll ask Rosalie.

ROSALIE

Sophie, Sophie.

*[She attempts to hide her embarrassment behind a laugh.]*

SOPHIE

Maestro, the moon is the symbol of Diana. Is not your heroine a priestess of Diana?

GLUCK

Madame, do you think the simple grandeur of my music calls for all this costuming?

SOPHIE

Perhaps not. When genius demands it I can move the moon.

GLUCK

You French have a way of saying nothing as though it were something.

SOPHIE

Do, all of you sit down whilst I arrange the planets.

*[She takes the veils and the moon from her hair.]*

ROSALIE

My Sophie is in a playful mood tonight.

SOPHIE

Why not? My voice was never better. *[Then to GUIMARD.]* Marie, where's Abigalette?

GUIMARD

Signor Tortolini has called her for rehearsal.

*[GLUCK has taken his seat at the harpsichord and begins turning over the sheets of the score of Iphigenia in Aulis.]*



---

SOPHIE

[*To* GUIMARD.]

Then my poor little friend will not hear me sing tonight?

ROSALIE

But tomorrow evening, dear.

SOPHIE

No, Rosalie. When *Sophie* sings there is no one allowed standing in the wings.

GLUCK

Madame, I am ready.

SOPHIE

[*Still to* ROSALIE.]

Neither the King nor the ladies of the ballet.

GLUCK

Madame, if you think that Gluck has come here to talk about the ladies of the ballet you are very mistaken. But I understand you Parisiennes. What is an opera to you but a period in which you are bored to death until the dancers appear? Should not music be something more divine than an excuse for fifty ballerinas standing on their toes and grinning?

SOPHIE

What would you have them do, Maestro, when they are so unhappy?

GLUCK

I have not come here from Vienna to be told why the ballet is unhappy.

SOPHIE

You know, Maestro, it is because they must dance and cannot sing your lovely melodies.

GLUCK

So, so, you French have a mixed up way of saying things, but sometimes you are right. [*He plays a few chords on the harpsichord.*] And your voice, Madame?

SOPHIE

Waiting to do justice to your art.

GLUCK

My art, my sacred art. What does Paris know of my art? I bring you my genius, my beautiful legato melodies, my music which is divinely sad, my pathos which is divinely musical, my phrases which do not fill the air with meaningless nothingness, but—

SOPHIE

[*Clearing her throat.*]

Ahem, ahem.

GLUCK

[*Continuing.*]

My music, which is not the reason for a prima

donna's pricking the heights of heaven with florid trivialities but which in its nobility shall tell of the soul and its passions and its pains. Madame, what does Paris know of this? Nothing! But after tomorrow evening Paris will know what beauty is. The flood gates will be let loose. On my *Iphigenia* will be founded a new school of opera, an opera [*and now he speaks the tremendous climax*] an opera which some day, perhaps, will need no ballet.

ROSALIE

[*Starting up in wonder.*]

What, no ballet?

GLUCK

Yes, Madame, sit down, no ballet. Tomorrow night I will begin the future. Tomorrow night Paris will hear the grandeur that is Gluck.

SOPHIE

Why, you're not doing yourself justice.

[*He again sounds a few chords.*]

SOPHIE

I am ready. Where shall we begin. [*She leans over his shoulder.*] Here. [*She reads the words from the score.*] "The vows with which these people honour me."

[*GLUCK starts playing the accompaniment to the melody, but suddenly he stops.*]

GLUCK

What's this? Your instrument is a tone off pitch. You have studied this aria in C. Well, we shall sing it in D. I will transpose. Gluck must not be off pitch though everything else in Paris is. Are you ready, Madame? It is very warm, you will excuse me. I may take off my coat?

[*He gets up.*]

ROSALIE

[*Rushing forward.*]

Give it to me, Maestro.

SOPHIE

[*Aside to ROSALIE.*]

Why don't you take off his shoes for him?

GLUCK

My shoes? Afterwards perhaps, Madame, but as yet I am not so warm.

[*He sits down again at the instrument and strikes a chord.*]

SOPHIE

[*With a majestic bow.*]

Behold the virginal priestess of Diana.

ROSALIE

Ah, what an actress our Sophie is! But I too have had my triumphs. The other evening in

Rousseau's opera when I sang the part of the lad Colin, half of the audience thought I was a boy.

SOPHIE

[*Oh, so cooingly.*]

And the other half knew you weren't, dear.

ROSALIE

What?

SOPHIE

[*To GLUCK.*]

I am waiting, Maestro.

GLUCK

Silenzio! Madame,—I will play the opening phrase. Now, Madame.

[*He plays the first few measures of the aria. SOPHIE with parted lips is about to sing when at this moment there is a knock at the door.*]

SOPHIE

[*Involuntarily.*]

Not yet! Not yet!

GLUCK

What is it?

SOPHIE

[*Her voice is a little unsteady.*]

Perhaps His Excellency.

*[The knock is repeated. It is from the door of the library.]*

SOPHIE

I thought it was too soon for him. It is His Reverence. Come in.

*[THE ABBÉ enters.]*

GLUCK

Madame, are we to rehearse or are you giving a reception?

THE ABBÉ

With your permission, Maestro?

GLUCK

Yes, with my permission.

THE ABBÉ

It is impossible to obtain tickets for the première tomorrow evening, Maestro.

GLUCK

It has been impossible to obtain tickets for four weeks back.

THE ABBÉ

Therefore, Maestro, I should be deeply grateful if you would grant me the privilege this evening of hearing Madame Arnould sing.

GLUCK

Of hearing Madame Arnould sing. On all sides



I hear nothing but Madame Arnould, Madame Arnould. Is it no privilege, I ask you, to also hear the music which is Gluck's? What is the divinest singing when there is nothing to sing? Padre, my opera is not like your Te Deums, where the less heard the holier it sounds. What is a voice even so divine—sometimes—as Madame Arnould's without sentiments to give it wings? Bah! Madame, is there some one else who will come in to interrupt us? It is very warm, you will permit me to take off my vest? [*He attempts to.*] What, what, this *verdammte* buckle is too tight.

SOPHIE

Rosalie, dear, the buckle is too tight. Come, dear, practice makes perfect. Come, come.

ROSALIE

I will help you, Maestro.

THE ABBÉ

[*Quickly aside to SOPHIE as ROSALIE is busy with GLUCK.*]

Madame, the gendarmes beseech you to allow them to come in and hear you sing.

SOPHIE

The darlings, leave the door a little open. I adore soldiers.

[*By now the vest is off and GLUCK is back at the harpsichord.*]

---

GLUCK

Now, Madame, we will begin. You will follow me.

SOPHIE

What? [*Then petulantly.*] I will do no such thing. You will follow me.

GLUCK

[*Getting up in anger.*]

What is that?

SOPHIE

Maestro, it is too late to begin discussing that. I told you at the first rehearsal and last night at the last that if I consented to create your Iphigenia for you that the interpretation must be left to me. If I am to interpret it I must be followed. You are right, Maestro, a great singer is nothing without something great to sing, but it is also true that the divinest music is still diviner when divinely sung.

GLUCK

Madame, you will excuse me. It is very warm. [*He takes off his wig.*] See [*pointing to the score*], I have marked each phrase, each swell, each pianissimo; what more is there needed, Madame?

SOPHIE

The moment's inspiration and my art.

GLUCK

[*Mopping his brow.*]

But it is thus that Iphigenia is to be sung and only thus.

SOPHIE

[*Tenderly, patting him on the cheek.*]

Papa Gluck may have created his Iphigenia, but unless I know my mamma,—and I think I do,—he did not create his Sophie.

GLUCK

[*In a rage.*]

Madame, I have heard enough.

SOPHIE

[*With the gentlest of composure.*]

Now I see why you are the greatest composer that ever lived.

GLUCK

[*Slightly mollified in spite of his heat.*]

What is that?

SOPHIE

You have so much temper to turn into beauty.

ROSALIE

Why, what a charming idea.

SOPHIE

Remember it, dear. Often a memory serves the place of wit. [*Then to GLUCK.*] Come, Maestro.

[*Her arm is about him as she leads him back to the harpsichord.*] Don't worry, Maestro, we will never be more than a measure apart. Your Sophie is so ingenious.

GLUCK

[*Glaring at her.*]

Madame, Madame Levasseur has also studied the rôle of Iphigenia. Perhaps there still is time.

ROSALIE

[*Eagerly.*]

Yes, yes.

SOPHIE

But there isn't, Rosalie. The première will be tomorrow night and Sophie will sing. There, there, genius is so sensitive, there. [*She is patting GLUCK'S very bald head.*] Maestro, your head is as smooth as your recitative. [*She has forced him to sit down.*] Now your Sophie will sing as sweetly as a seraphim who has not yet learnt the ennui of paradise.

[*And she is waiting next to the harpsichord with a celestial light in her eyes.*]

GLUCK

[*Again sounding the opening phrase.*]

For the last time, *silenzio*. Madame is ready, yes?

[*They are all leaning forward listening.*]

GLUCK *plays a few measures, when suddenly the door bursts open and Mlle. HEINEL, in her ballet costume and all aflutter like an aspen in a morning wind, comes rushing in.*]

Mlle. HEINEL

*[Breathlessly.]*

Darling, I couldn't live and not hear you sing tonight. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to come. At the last moment the rehearsal was called. I went to it but I promised Signor Tortolini if he would let me off for just half an hour that I would give him something very, very unique.

SOPHIE

I hope so, dear. I hope so.

Mlle. HEINEL

Then I'm not too late. Oh, I'm so excited. I drove through Paris as though that terrible man Attila were at my heels.

ROSALIE

*[Curiously leaning forward.]*

Attila, and who is he?

SOPHIE

The only man in Paris you do not know.

Mlle. HEINEL

*[Embracing SOPHIE.]*

Darling, I'm so glad I'm in time. *[Then lightly*

over SOPHIE's shoulder to GLUCK.] Good evening, Maestro.

GLUCK

[*His irritation at the sizzling point.*]

Madame Arnould, I came here this evening to rehearse and not to waste half an hour whilst my chaste Iphigenia embraces a *verrückte ballerina*.

ROSALIE

You are right, Chevalier, this is too much.

SOPHIE

[*Pulling the bell-rope.*]

Can I help it if Paris is so eager to hear me sing, but that is an emotion, Rosalie, which you cannot understand. [*Then to GLUCK.*] Now, Maestro, you mustn't interrupt me again.

[THE SECOND LACKEY enters.]

SOPHIE

[*To THE LACKEY.*]

See that no one is admitted except His Excellency. [THE LACKEY exits. SOPHIE has gone over to THE ABBÉ and her voice is despondent.] His Excellency.

THE ABBÉ

[*Low, to SOPHIE.*]

Perhaps there is no cause for alarm. Matters of State may have detained him.



SOPHIE

*[Hopelessly, though hoping.]*

Perhaps, perhaps.

GLUCK

What is this, Madame? Am I to be kept waiting whilst you indulge in your confessions?

SOPHIE

*[Like a good child enjoying the nice newness of a naughty moment.]*

No, Chevalier, you would have to wait for seven lives whilst I absolve the sins of one.

*[She begins to laugh.]*

GLUCK

*[Flinging the score on to the floor.]*

We will not sing tonight!

SOPHIE

*[Putting the book back on the rack.]*

My composer, it was you who insisted on rehearsing and not me. If you do not wish to, well—

GLUCK

*[Again mopping his brow and sitting down distracted.]*

I have suffered the patience of a Spartan.

SOPHIE

*[With a smile.]*

To create the tragedy of Troy, and now your Grecian is waiting. The triumvirate's complete.

GLUCK

*[His fingers on the keys as in the painting of Duplessis.]*

Tomorrow for the first time Paris shall hear my music. For the first time France will know the difference between real inspiration and these ridiculous rules of counter-point. What do I know of rules but to break them? Am I not Gluck?

SOPHIE

*[Banishing all doubt.]*

I think you are, Maestro.

GLUCK

So, let us have no more chatter. Let us have music,—music which tells and teaches all though it speak no word nor sentence. Let us have music, the divine music of Gluck which is not written for the ear but for the heart. Madame is ready?

*[He again plays the first nine measures of the aria in Act I, then he lifts his hand and is about to begin again. SOPHIE has taken a deep breath. The silence hangs upon the beauty about to be born, but alas, at this second a sound of voices is heard in the hall and the next moment His Excellency, the Austrian Ambassador, is shown in by two of the Lackeys. D'ARGENTEAU is a typical diplomat of the old school whose breath of life—that is,*

*all that is left to him—lingers along in puffs of stiff formality. Everybody on the stage with deep ceremony bows very low to him and GLUCK has risen and is standing at the harpsichord.]*

SOPHIE

*[Behind her hand to ROSALIE.]*

Don't bow so low. You may never be able to get up.

D'ARGENTEAU

*[With great dignity, acknowledging the salutations.]*

Ladies, Christophe, Abbé de Voisenon. The rehearsal has already begun?

SOPHIE

*[Smiling at GLUCK.]*

Yes, several times, but we can begin again.

D'ARGENTEAU

Good! Then I am still in time. It is an honour, Chevalier, this happy conclusion and this glorious combination. *[He begins coughing faintly.]* Arnould and Gluck. Gluck and Arnould. Two perfect halves of a still more perfect whole. An alliance of loyalty and art. France and Austria. Austria and France. Two complements completing beauty. Composer and singer. Creator and musician. Austria and France.

SOPHIE

[*Echoing his tone.*]

Composer and creator, singer and musician, Austria and France. I hope your Excellency doesn't get dizzy from this perfect balancing.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame is in a playful mood tonight.

SOPHIE

Never more so, Your Excellency.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Bending over to kiss her hand.*]

I suppose as usual tonight your voice is the rival of the nightingale's?

SOPHIE

I do not yet know, both I and the nightingale find it very difficult to sing with some one holding our hand.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*With a wheezy little laugh.*]

Good, good, I am a diplomat. A hint is sufficient.

[*He again kisses her hand.*]

SOPHIE

That is the second time you have kissed my fingers.

D'ARGENTEAU

It is charming to repeat what is charming.

SOPHIE

But I assure you it is quite unusual twice in the same evening.

D'ARGENTEAU

*[Insinuatingly.]*

Madame has perhaps not received my letter?

SOPHIE

*[A little startled.]*

Yes.

D'ARGENTEAU

These then are tiny hints and signs. *[He is oggling her slyly.]* Signals and suggestions. I hope it is all as clear and delightful to Madame as it is to me?

*[He bows.]*

SOPHIE

Quite.

*[She bows in return.]*

GLUCK

Begging your Excellency's pardon, but whilst you and Madame are so busy bowing to each other my music is freezing to death on the harpsichord.

D'ARGENTEAU

*[With another brave little giggle.]*

Excellent. Excellent. Let me no longer detain Iphigenia from her devotions. Madame, do

you know that the Dauphin and Dauphiness and all the Court will be present at the première tomorrow night?

SOPHIE

[*Carelessly.*]

Of course, why not?

ROSALIE

[*And it's her moment.*]

All, your Excellency? But they say that the King—

D'ARGENTEAU

Ah yes, you are right. His Majesty and Madame Du Barry who has a composer of her own and not an Austrian, begging your pardon, Christophe—Madame Du Barry and His Majesty will absent themselves.

SOPHIE

Seeking felicity the while. Dear Du Barry, how fond she is of Shakespeare. So, they refuse to come tomorrow night? [*And for a moment her voice is angry, then with purling sweetness.*] Ah well, what matter? We will content ourselves with the presence of the proper heirs to the throne rather than with that of one, whose heirs if she ever have any will be improper.

ROSALIE

[*Aghast.*]

For God's sake, Sophie, what are you saying?



Do you dare speak that way of His Majesty and—  
[*She looks about her, afraid to go on.*]

SOPHIE

[*Lightly.*]

Darling, the carroty Du Barry knows that Sophie doesn't love her.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, softly, softly. Amongst friends this sort of chatter may be pleasant but amongst courtiers, well—

SOPHIE

I know that the ears of Saint-Florentin are always listening, but this evening, Excellency, we are friends—only friends.

[*And behind the general appellation is the particular message directed at him.*]

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Looking at her through his monocle.*]

Only friends?

[*Then very formally he again attempts to kiss her hand, but she avoids the compliment and goes over to the harpsichord.*]

GLUCK

Well, Madame, for the tenth time, are you ready?

SOPHIE

[*Putting her little handkerchief on the harpsichord beside her.*]

Why, Maestro, I've been waiting for you.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Taking a chair nearer to SOPHIE.*]

With your permission, Chevalier, from here I can hear and see the better.

[*He leans over and takes SOPHIE'S little handkerchief. She is watching him.*]

GLUCK

Prompto! Silenzio! Piano! Piano!

[*SOPHIE stands waiting. GLUCK plays a few bars and whilst he does so D'ARGENTEAU with a ridiculous look at SOPHIE is pressing her handkerchief to his lips with elaborate eloquence.*]

GLUCK

[*Very low, all the while playing the music.*]

Piano,—now,—now.

SOPHIE

[*With a sudden little scream.*]

I cannot sing!

GLUCK

What?

SOPHIE

[*With an hysterical little cough.*]

My handkerchief, my handkerchief!

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Handing it to her with a bow.*]

Madame, you are distressed?

SOPHIE

Yes, Your Excellency. [*She is tearing the handkerchief to bits.*] It is my temperament, my temperament. [*More little screams.*] Oh, oh, oh!

[*GUIMARD and Mlle. HEINEL rush over to her.*]

GUIMARD

What is it, Sophie?

Mlle. HEINEL

Darling, darling!

SOPHIE

[*The back of her hand to her brow.*]

I am a little nervous, that is all. [*Then to D'ARGENTEAU.*] Your presence, Excellency.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, I am moved that my presence moves you.

SOPHIE

It does, it does. Begin again, Maestro. [*And*

*now both hands are tremblingly lifted to her face.]*  
I am afraid that I am a little tired.

GLUCK

*[Sternly.]*

I *know* that I am, Madame.

ROSALIE

Let her rest a moment, Chevalier. We women are so fragile.

SOPHIE

That's it, fragile. *[Then each time, weaker.]*  
Fragile, fragile. *[She attempts to sing a few notes.]* La, la, la. *[Then with horror.]* My voice, my voice. Maestro, if you tire me tonight perhaps I will not be able to sing tomorrow.

ROSALIE

*[Almost gaily.]*

What?

SOPHIE

*[Weakly.]*

Only perhaps. Only *perhaps*.

MILLE. HEINEL

*[Commiseratingly.]*

Sophie, darling.

SOPHIE

*[With tears on the edge of her lashes.]*

What will become of my beautiful legato style?

Oh, how ruthless art is. We work and work and now, now I must rest, I must sleep, Your Excellency, twelve hours, thirteen hours, fifteen hours.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, if it is as bad as that I am sure the Chevalier—

GLUCK

[*Stepping forward.*]

Excellency.

SOPHIE

[*Weakly.*]

No, I will sing, but if I do, tomorrow your opera will not sound like *Iphigenia in Aulis* but *Iphigenia in hell*.

MLLE. HEINEL

Sophie, Sophie!

SOPHIE

I will martyrize my soul. [*Then wearily.*]  
Begin, begin.

MLLE. HEINEL

If she sings now she may burst a vessel in her throat.

ROSALIE

Yes.

SOPHIE

[*With a look at ROSALIE of the most abject tragedy, her finger on her throat.*]

Something is straining here.

MILLE. HEINEL

Quick, a doctor. Open the window.

GUIMARD

A glass of brandy.

D'ARGENTEAU

*[With deep commiseration.]*

Madame, I am sure the Chevalier will understand. Ladies, I know you will appreciate that under the circumstances it might be better if Madame and I were left alone.

SOPHIE

*[As though being dragged to an altar.]*

Alone? Oh, oh.

D'ARGENTEAU

*[To the others.]*

Your presence, the excitement, the strain of the première tomorrow, of course, all this—if Madame and I were left alone.

SOPHIE

*[She is weeping now.]*

Some one, all of you leave me alone. My nerves are like so many little knives turned in against me.

GLUCK

Madame, you will be better tomorrow?



SOPHIE

Yes, better tomorrow.

MLLE. HEINEL

Poor, suffering genius.

SOPHIE

*[She has now sunk into her chair and is leaning back, her hand upon her bosom.]*

Oh, oh!

*[ROSALIE rushes forward with an irresistible burst of affection.]*

ROSALIE

If my Sophie is so ill her Rosalie will stay all night with her.

SOPHIE

*[With a sudden involuntary cry of clarity.]*

No, no, not the *three* of you.

GUIMARD

What?

MLLE. HEINEL

My darling, your mind is wandering.

SOPHIE

Yes, wandering.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, you will pardon me a moment. Do not worry, I will come back.

SOPHIE

[*As though she were in a half remembered swoon.*]

Yes, yes.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Aside to GLUCK.*]

Chevalier, I am so deeply moved that this should happen in my house, but women—one never knows. I have never seen Madame like this before.

GLUCK

Excellency, I understand. [*Taking up his wig and his vest and his coat.*] But do you think she will be able to sing tomorrow?

ROSALIE

[*Hopefully.*]

This is perhaps an attack of that new disease of inoculation that the Count de Lauraguais has imported from England and for which he was sent to prison.

SOPHIE

[*Vaguely.*]

Prison, inoculation, De Lauraguais?—

GLUCK

[*Deeply concerned now.*]

But if she cannot sing tomorrow.

ROSALIE

[*Oh, so anxiously.*]

Yes—yes—

SOPHIE

[*Faintly.*]

I will sing tomorrow. I will sing.

[ROSALIE, THE ABBÉ, GLUCK and D'ARGENTEAU are now crowding solicitously about her.]

GUIMARD

Look, she is paler.

MLLE. HEINEL

[*Sobbing.*]

How brave, how magnificent our Sophie is.

SOPHIE

[*Sobbing.*]

Oh, oh.

GLUCK

In the morning I will send a messenger.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Very formally to GLUCK.*]

Chevalier, I will see you to your coach. [*Then to SOPHIE with pleasant reassurance.*] Madame, I will be back, do not disturb yourself. I will be back.

GLUCK

[*Deeply solicitous, to SOPHIE.*]

Madame, I hope you will rest well tonight.

SOPHIE

[*And now the sound is more of an echo than a voice.*]

Rest well tonight?

GLUCK

[*At the door.*]

Madame Levasseur.

ROSALIE

[*Low to THE ABBÉ. Hardly able to conceal her delight.*]

She is indeed very weak. I will come back later to see what I can do for her.

GLUCK

[*At the door to ROSALIE.*]

Madame, I am waiting.

ROSALIE

[*Aside, with a reassuring nod to THE ABBÉ.*]

It will be all right. [*Then whispering to him.*]  
I'll surely come back.

[*And she makes her exit with MLLÉS. HEINEL and GUIMARD.*]

GLUCK

[*Very low at the door to D'ARGENTEAU.*]

But, Your Excellency, if she cannot sing.

SOPHIE

[*Faintly, as though from behind the throne of God.*]

I will sing. I will sing tomorrow. I will sing.

[*She is now lying back weakly and as GLUCK and D'ARGENTEAU make their exit THE ABBÉ, coming forward, bends over her.*]

THE ABBÉ

[*His hands clasped sympathetically in front of him.*]

Are you stronger, my child?

SOPHIE

[*Weakly.*]

Have they all gone?

THE ABBÉ

Yes.

SOPHIE

[*With a little more strength.*]

Close the door.

[*THE ABBÉ does so, SOPHIE watching him.*]

THE ABBÉ

[*Coming back, with deep concern.*]

My daughter, do you often get these seizures?

SOPHIE

*[Suddenly sitting up in radiant health.]*

Of course, Your Reverence, whenever necessary.

THE ABBÉ

What?

SOPHIE

Quick, go into the library. See that my gendarmes are given all the wine they want to drink. I wish them mellow when it comes to deeds and justice.

THE ABBÉ

*[At the door of the library, quietly shaking his head.]*

And who was it called woman the weaker vessel?

SOPHIE

Eve in celebration of the fall of man.

*[THE ABBÉ, his hands behind his back, goes into the library and SOPHIE is lying there spent and weary when D'ARGENTEAU enters.]*

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, you are more composed?

SOPHIE

Thanks, Your Excellency.

D'ARGENTEAU

Your indisposition moves me.



SOPHIE

It is passing. I am better.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Elaborately.*]

Yes, the roses have come back to your cheeks, the dawn of health again spreads its glow across the white temples of your brow.

SOPHIE

For heaven's sake don't be so poetic. I'm still very weak.

[*He sits down near her. She moves to the far end of the couch.*]

D'ARGENTEAU

Chevalier Gluck seemed very disturbed that you could not rehearse.

SOPHIE

He might have been more so if I had. I do not think I am in the mood for singing. I am still very tired, not to say weak.

D'ARGENTEAU

A glass of wine?

[*SOPHIE makes a gesture of refusal.*]

D'ARGENTEAU

Just a sip?

SOPHIE

No.

D'ARGENTEAU

As you will.

[*There is an embarrassed pause. SOPHIE sits watching him.*]

SOPHIE

[*Weakly singing a phrase.*]

La, la. Yes, God be praised, it's coming back.  
Slowly but surely.

[*D'ARGENTEAU looks at her, coughs a little and turns away.*]

SOPHIE

Of what are you thinking?

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame—

SOPHIE

I know.

[*He starts.*]

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame.

[*There is a pause.*]

SOPHIE

Well?

D'ARGENTEAU

What did you think I was thinking of?

SOPHIE

Perhaps of the Japanese conception of Nirvana. Why not, why not, I ask you.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Moving his chair a little nearer.*]

Madame.

[*He stops.*]

SOPHIE

Don't say anything to startle me. You see what I've just come out of. [*Her breath is coming very quickly.*] My heart! I am not yet what you would call thoroughly controlled.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Taking a book from the table.*]

Madame, shall I read you a few pages from *Rousseau's Confession*?

SOPHIE

I do not like confessions. They are never true. I shall never write my own.

D'ARGENTEAU

No, Madame?

SOPHIE

Confessions are apt to be either self-pity or self-praise. Both are prejudices. I think I will go to bed.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Embarrassment overcoming his formality.*]

Madame, I—

SOPHIE

What's the matter?

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, is going to bed?

SOPHIE

Of course. Why not? People have been going to bed since the beginning of time. Even Mother Eve went to bed though I suppose she didn't have to go any place since she was alone in the world.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, perhaps you are right—but—

SOPHIE

Your Excellency has something on his mind? Matters of state beyond a woman's comprehension? [*She sings a phrase.*] Yes, it is coming back. Good, good.

D'ARGENTEAU

Your voice was never more beautiful.

SOPHIE

I hope you're a judge. I think it is a little ragged. What I need is rest, plenty of rest. So once again, I bid Your Excellency good-night.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Getting up.*]

Madame—

SOPHIE

[*With a sweet little smile.*]

Yes, Your Excellency?

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, will you favour me by sitting down?

SOPHIE

[*Sitting.*]

Why not?

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Delicately clearing his throat.*]

Madame, you received my letter?

SOPHIE

Yes.

D'ARGENTEAU

Well?

[*SOPHIE gets up, goes to the harpsichord and takes up the score of Iphigenia.*]

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Watching her.*]

Well, Madame?

SOPHIE

Yes.

---

D'ARGENTEAU

Sophie.

[*He gets up as quickly as he can and rushes towards her.*]

SOPHIE

[*Pointing to the score.*]

Yes, here is something that I hadn't seen before.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*A little nearer.*]

Sophie.

SOPHIE

[*Pointing to the music.*]

Here without preparation Gluck has modulated into the minor.

D'ARGENTEAU

Yes, Madame, but—

SOPHIE

And here the accompaniment takes up the melody.

D'ARGENTEAU

Sophie, love always plays the accompaniment to life. [*Very gallantly he takes her hand.*]

Sophie.

SOPHIE

[*Very gently drawing it away.*]

Your Excellency, which do you prefer, harmony or counterpoint?



---

D'ARGENTEAU

These are mysteries which do not concern a statesman.

SOPHIE

Why not? Can there not be the melody of justice and the harmony of states?

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame's wit is not too quick tonight. If you think that my letter suggested that I desired you to give me music lessons you are greatly mistaken.

*[He again attempts to take her hand.]*

SOPHIE

*[Drawing hers away.]*

It is never too late to begin. Listen, this is a major chord. *[She strikes one.]* Isn't that simple, noble and direct?

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, your chord is more direct than you.

SOPHIE

Why, whatever do you mean?

D'ARGENTEAU

Every time I speak of the letter that I sent you you speak of something else. Madame, I am a diplomat.

SOPHIE

Always, Your Excellency?

D'ARGENTEAU

The evening is getting late and whilst my mind eagerly drinks in your learned discourse on the musical arts may I delicately suggest to you that my heart—my heart is trembling on the verge of other matters. You did receive my letter?

SOPHIE

Yes.

D'ARGENTEAU

And?

SOPHIE

[*Reticently, bashfully,—poor SOPHIE.*]

Sir, I am a woman. Will you not allow me a few days to weigh the intention of your words?

D'ARGENTEAU

With all my heart, Madame.

SOPHIE

[*Glancing toward the library with a deep sigh of relief.*]

Then they and this [*her hand is lifted*] will not be needed.

D'ARGENTEAU

They, Madame? This, Madame?

SOPHIE

My mind still wanders. [*She gets up from the harpsichord.*] Excellency, I again bid you good-night.

D'ARGENTEAU

A moment, Madame.

SOPHIE

Ah, but I am weary. We can discuss your gallant offer, shall we say, next week?

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, it is beyond my power to wait until next week.

SOPHIE

Sir!

D'ARGENTEAU

*[With an elaborate bow.]*

It must be this evening.

SOPHIE

This evening?

D'ARGENTEAU

Yes, I have had orders from Vienna.

SOPHIE

And what have orders from Vienna to do with me?

D'ARGENTEAU

You have become an affair of State.

SOPHIE

What?

D'ARGENTEAU

You will understand it better when I explain to you that my Empress—God spare her long to us—

SOPHIE

[*Interrupting him.*]

Never mind, long or short what difference does it make?

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Very formally continuing.*]

That her Imperial Highness, Marie Therèse, has a sense of rectitude unparalleled in the history of the world.

SOPHIE

In the name of the Fiend, why are you going so far afield?

D'ARGENTEAU

In order to bring the truth to cover. Detailed news has reached her Imperial Highness as to the exact nature of our relationship. Today I have received orders from Her Serene Highness that without further delay, and in order that Her Serene Highness' sense of truth and rectitude be satisfied, that our relationship, Madame,—yours and mine—shall no longer seem one thing and be another, but—

SOPHIE

Well?

D'ARGENTEAU

That it shall immediately become such as every honest and self-respecting Parisienne will accept and understand.

---

SOPHIE

Good God!

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, need I reiterate that the credit as well as the honour of my Empress and my Nation are at stake?

SOPHIE

What of my honour, mine? Mine?

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, your reputation, I assure you, can be nothing but advanced by the consummation. I suppose I need say no more?

SOPHIE

No, you need say no more, but do you suppose that Sophie Arnould will suffer this indignity?

D'ARGENTEAU

Indignity? May I suggest to you, Madame, that Sophie Arnould has already suffered the indignity of accepting some eight hundred thousand francs?

SOPHIE

A mere pittance for the invaluable prestige of my name. If at first you had even hinted to me the possibility of this basely immoral conclusion, I should have flung your disgusting proposal and your revolting money in your face.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, I am a loyal servant and need I reassure you that you are not in the least distasteful to me?

SOPHIE

*[And her tone would freeze the heat of Hell.]*

Indeed?

D'ARGENTEAU

These orders are from the throne.

SOPHIE

From the throne? What of it? Am I not sovereign of the lyric stage? What do I care for the orders of your horrid old Empress of Austria?

D'ARGENTEAU

*[With fragrant sarcasm.]*

Then I am to presume that your assuming the position of Mistress in my house was purely a disinterested act?

SOPHIE

*[With illuminating truth.]*

Not at all, Your Excellency, can't you see further than your quickly failing eyesight lets you? I came to live here at the Embassy because the glamour of my name and presence was the one way to stay the tottering credit of your discredited accounts.



D'ARGENTEAU

And in return?

SOPHIE

In return, Your Excellency, I was assured the rôle of Iphigenia in the divine opera of Maestro Gluck. Tomorrow night I sing the rôle, the kronen is itself again and we are—so to phrase it,—quits.

D' ARGENTEAU

And the Empress?

SOPHIE

*[She is becoming superb.]*

The devil damn the Empress. Tell this to your righteous, your very righteous Empress. *[And then with sublime heroics.]* Tell her that Sophie Arnould is mistress in name only.

D'ARGENTEAU

Then you refuse?

SOPHIE

Yes, I refuse.

D'ARGENTEAU

*[Sinisterly.]*

I do not think that Saint-Florentin will be pleased to hear the story.

SOPHIE

No, nor Paris either. Does Your Excellency imagine that I intend to tell it?

D'ARGENTEAU

Then, Madame, there is but one way.

[*He steps towards her.*]

SOPHIE

Yes, and that is a way you haven't thought of.

D'ARGENTEAU

What?

[*He comes still nearer.*]

SOPHIE

Don't come near me. I have suffered the danger of your presence far too long already.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, I—

SOPHIE

Out of a sense of pity I have spared you as long as this. But this last approach is too much. It tears the bandage from my eyes. It shows me in a blinding flash the awful menace that you are.

D'ARGENTEAU

Is this a scene from the opera?

SOPHIE

No, it is a chapter of the truth. [*And then shrinking back from him.*] Do you know yourself?

---

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Misreading her.*]

For seven generations I can trace my noble blood.

SOPHIE

Make it seventy, what difference does it make? Don't you know that the best family-trees bear the most questionable fruit? You should give yourself up before it is too late. You should walk from this house now, this very evening, and go of your own volition straight to prison.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, have you gone mad?

SOPHIE

No, this is the sanest moment of my life. Now I see that you and all the others like you are a terrible, an unbelievable danger to society.

D'ARGENTEAU

What?

SOPHIE

You are an assassin!

D'ARGENTEAU

An assassin?

SOPHIE

Yes, a murderer. Don't you understand me? An assassin. One who kills.

D'ARGENTEAU

In the name of God, Madame, of what do you accuse me?

SOPHIE

Of attempting my life.

D'ARGENTEAU

Your life!

SOPHIE

Yes, mine,—mine!

D'ARGENTEAU

Have I held a pistol to your brow? Have I poured poison in your wine?

SOPHIE

Bah, those ancient methods are too simple and too easily traced. You have chosen a more cunning way to kill. By schemings more sinister and subtle you and the cruel others like you have played your murderous game. By devious and deadly ways you have killed, killed, killed! [*And now she is mistress of the theme and in full flood of conviction.*] But today your day is over and from now *your* perfidious name shall ring through time as the first of the devils who paid the price for his crime. You are my assassin! Inch by inch, day by day you have been killing me. You and the others like you, here in France, everywhere, even in the remotest interiors of the

dim antipodes, you are slaying people right and left; men, women, children, beasts, all the world over, are dying every day from the hidden practices of such as you. The dead are silent and you, the murderers, still keep the secret. But now I, Sophie Arnould, the latest and most famous victim, I, Sophie, will shout the hideous truth to all the world before it is too late. You are my assassin! You are boring me to death.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, this is fantastic outrage.

SOPHIE

Is it thus you would defend yourself? No, alas, it is the truth. Every day some poor innocent is bored to death. The greatest doctors in France will testify that such deaths are happening every day though the poor wretches think it's been the plague. It's time that mankind knew the truth, terrible and blasting though it is. Do you think that I, Sophie Arnould, will be the last unknown sacrifice? Hereafter mankind will bless me for the fact. I tell you, you are boring me to death. If you stay here until tomorrow you will have my corpse, my beautiful corpse, on your hands.

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Very ironic now.*]

Perhaps, Madame, but nevertheless, I think that I shall stay.

---

SOPHIE

You will stay?

D'ARGENTEAU

Yes, Madame, for your eloquence has made you more beautiful than ever.

*[He steps closer to her.]*

SOPHIE

*[Shrinking from him.]*

You will stay?

D'ARGENTEAU

Yes, for who will force me to go?

SOPHIE

If not your conscience, then my friends.

*[And she rushes over to the door of the library.]*

My friends, my true, my loyal friends, come in.

D'ARGENTEAU

What's this? Madame, what are you doing? Remember who I am and where you are.

SOPHIE

Too late, Sir, I have not forgotten either.

D'ARGENTEAU

Beware, I am Mercy D'Argenteau.



SOPHIE

And I, I am Sophie. My friends, come in, come in!

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, you will regret this, if you go too far.

SOPHIE

One cannot go too far to save one's life.

D'ARGENTEAU

We shall see.

SOPHIE

Yes, we shall see. My friends, come in! Come in!

*[And the gendarmes with the bottles in their hands and most of the contents in their stomachs crowd in, followed by THE ABBÉ.]*

SOPHIE

*[Magnificently, pointing to D'ARGENTEAU.]*

Soldiers of France, I command you to arrest that man!

D'ARGENTEAU

*[His rage mounting.]*

Madame, I have had enough of this opera bouffe.

SOPHIE

It's just the beginning, Your Excellency. The curtain has just gone up.

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, you are indeed mad. This has gone too far.

SOPHIE

It goes still further. [*Then with a thrilling gesture, for after all she is the greatest actress in France.*] I have borne with that man for days, for weeks. Tomorrow it will be too late. There stands my murderer, my assassin.

[*The soldiers spring forward.*]

D'ARGENTEAU

[*Warding off the gendarmes.*]

In the name of the realm of Austria I command you to stop!

SOPHIE

This for Austria! [*And with a snap of her fingers she wipes the realm of the Hapsburgs from the earth.*] There stands my murderer, seize him!

D'ARGENTEAU

Stop!

SOPHIE

My murderer, my assassin, seize him, seize him!

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame, *you* or France if needs be will answer for this outrage.

SOPHIE

Arrest that man!

D'ARGENTEAU

[*To the soldiers.*]

I warn you, you will sweat in the galleys for this.

SOPHIE

Take him away, take him away!

[*He is almost surrounded by the soldiers now. He attempts to draw his sword, but one of the gendarmes rivets his arms behind him.*]

D'ARGENTEAU

It will cost you your lives, if you touch me without a warrant. Madame, command them to release me.

SOPHIE

[*And sarcasm stalks triumphant in her voice.*]

Release you! Choiseul has spoken. The law's the law. You are doomed!

D'ARGENTEAU

Choiseul! What's that? Bid these brutes unhand me.

SOPHIE

What! You call "brutal" the chivalrous protecting strength of France?

D'ARGENTEAU

Bid them unhand me. There is no warrant for my arrest,

SOPHIE

Justice needs no warrant!

D'ARGENTEAU

*[For by this last thread he hangs to save his dignity.]*

The warrant, the warrant! On your life dare touch me without a warrant!

SOPHIE

*[For she is ready as you may have guessed.]*

Here is the warrant then! *[And from her bosom she tears the letter from which hangs the ribbon and the seal of France.]* Listen, my men. *[And she reads.]* "The testimony of Madame and her learned physician has been heard by me. Hereby I do command the arrest of Mercy D'Argenteau as a danger to the State of France. Signed by me this day, Choiseul." *[And now she looks up for the men are ready.]* And here's the seal. You know the seal. *[As indeed they do.]* Now do your duty, drag that murderer from my house.

D'ARGENTEAU

*[Hoarse with anger.]*

Your house!

SOPHIE

Well, your house then, what difference does it make in whose house you commit the murder?

*[The soldiers have surrounded him.]*

D'ARGENTEAU

*[Shrieking now for in his rage all traces of formality have deserted him.]*

The Minister of Police, the Count de Saint-Florentin will hear of this perfidious conspiracy and base assault upon my person.

SOPHIE

Take him away! Take him away!

D'ARGENTEAU

Madame wished to spend the night alone.

SOPHIE

*[And her tone tells many things.]*

Alone?

D'ARGENTEAU

She will, she will, alone in a cell at Fort Eveque. The Majesty of Austria has been laid upon. Wars have been started for less than this.

SOPHIE

*[Topping his tone.]*

Take him away. Go! Go! You have seen the warrant.

*[The soldiers are dragging him out.]*

D'ARGENTEAU

Yes, I shall go if needs be to the King.

*[And struggling vainly with the tipsy soldiers he is hustled from the room.]*

## THE ABBÉ

[*In the deepest consternation.*]

Madame, this offence is indeed a grave one. That document was forged.

## SOPHIE

Forged? Not exactly—but part written and by me.

## THE ABBÉ

Madame, I fear that you have gone too far.

## SOPHIE

[*Quietly.*]

Whatever do you mean?

## THE ABBÉ

He will be avenged, Madame. What if Saint-Florentin should come himself tonight with a real letter of arrest?

## SOPHIE

[*With a grave little nod of her head.*]

You dear, worrisome, old Reverence, you, why I'm expecting him.

[*And she stands smiling querulously and sweetly at THE ABBÉ as the curtain falls.*]



ACT III

*Half-past eleven, which  
leaves Sophie almost alone.*



### ACT III

*Behold poor SOPHIE in a terrible state of agitation whilst the FIRST LACKEY with most deferential respect, as befits a lackey, is attempting to console her.*

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, I assure you everything will be all right.

SOPHIE

But where, where is he?

THE FIRST LACKEY

The Count has perhaps not yet reached the Barracks.

SOPHIE

What? Haven't you in the same time been to Fort Eveque and back? Something has gone wrong.

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, I assure you.

SOPHIE

And besides, I told you to drive slowly.

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, I rode.

SOPHIE

[*She is pacing up and down.*]

What difference? What difference?

THE FIRST LACKEY

With me there was but one horse and begging your pardon, Madame, with two horses twice as much may happen as with one. Besides, Madame, I did not have a tragedy on my mind.

SOPHIE

What?

THE FIRST LACKEY

Well, you see, Madame, the Count may have at any moment stopped the coach because its motion interfered with his line of thought. That's the chief reason, Madame, that I did not take up literature as my profession. I could never be sure, Madame, when the necessities of life would interfere with the inspirations or vice versa. Now with the Count—

SOPHIE

[*Darkly.*]

He may be dead. Who knows?

THE FIRST LACKEY

I don't think so, Madame.

SOPHIE

Has he come back to me for but one fleeting moment, and is he now to leave me for ever? [*She is*

*over at the picture.*] Dorval! Dorval! What in the name of God can be keeping him?

THE FIRST LACKEY

Some fancy.

SOPHIE

Dorval!

THE FIRST LACKEY

You will permit me to share your admiration for the Count? He must be the most delightful of companions.

SOPHIE

*[Tearfully. She is back at the little table.]*

It was here he sat writing his tragedy.

THE FIRST LACKEY

In spite of that, Madame, the most delightful of companions.

SOPHIE

Perhaps he has stayed at the Barracks. Maybe he has enlisted and is now on his way to all the picturesque dangers of America. He hasn't seen me for several weeks, but still his moods, his sudden caprices—

THE FIRST LACKEY

Ah, Madame, they are so delicious. Imagine the delightful society of a companion whose next act is always a mystery. Now I can imagine the Count about to kiss Madame's fingers and—

---

SOPHIE

Don't! What were you saying? [*She is at the window now.*] I have not been listening.

THE FIRST LACKEY

That's what Madame thinks, but the truth is that Madame *has* been listening, listening to my harmless babble and at the same time straining her ear to hear the rumble of the Count's coach on the cobbles, listening to the young lady who every now and then begins to weep in the little blue room beyond the boudoir, hearkening to the fears in her heart and at the same time to the Abbé turning the leaves of his book in the library.

SOPHIE

Dorval! Dorval!

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, I have observed that heaven always protects the fantastic and the unsober.

SOPHIE

Of course, as a reward for their trying to be something different to what a stupid fate would have them be, and in the meantime, what has become of him? I think you had better ride to the Barracks in the Rue Sainte Margarete.

THE FIRST LACKEY

If Madame so wishes it, but I have no doubt that



the Count has already left the Barracks. Something may have detained him.

SOPHIE

What? What?

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, so many things may have detained the Count. He may have stopped to write a sonnet about the palace gardens in the starlight, or perhaps he may have seen an enemy and insisted on finishing a duel for which he will again be sent to Fort Eveque.

SOPHIE

Is that how you would console me?

THE FIRST LACKEY

With a man of the Count's oddities I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't get back before morning or again if—Madame, that is a coach, it is stopping at the door.

SOPHIE

At last, at last! Never again will I let him out of my sight. One never knows what he'll do and where he'll do it. Without warning he might sail right off to Bohemia. Dorval! Dorval! Yes, that's his step on the stairs. [*Then to THE LACKEY.*] Quick, go in to the library. Refill the Abbé's lamp. Tell him if he is reading the Bible to turn to Voltaire. I want him to keep awake.

[*And THE FIRST LACKEY, bowing, exits.*]

SOPHIE

[*At the door, her arms wide open, ready to greet an eternity in breeches.*]

Dorval darling, Dorval!

[*But it is ROSALIE.*]

SOPHIE

[*Starting back.*]

A thousand devils, you!!!!

ROSALIE

What, my dear Sophie, you are still a little hysterical?

SOPHIE

What have you come back for?

ROSALIE

[*From the bottom of her great, great heart.*]

Can you ask? My Sophie is ill. My Sophie should not be left alone.

SOPHIE

Your Sophie's better.

ROSALIE

[*Shaking her head.*]

Oh, no, you're not. You're still pale. Abigaille says she never saw any one as pale as you were.

SOPHIE

What do *I* care what she says?

ROSALIE

Rosalie does. She says you were as pale as a lone lily in the middle of a lake. What the middle of the lake has to do with it I don't know.

SOPHIE

[*Her tiny toes tapping the floor.*]

Nor I. I'm better, I tell you.

ROSALIE

[*Determinedly.*]

I do not think so, dear. You are very ill. Half of Paris will be at the curtains of your bed to-morrow.

SOPHIE

Wondering who is on the other side. I am better I tell you. Now you must drive home. Your Sophie is herself again.

ROSALIE

You talk like all invalids. They always think they're better, when they are far from well. [*She lets down a lock of her hair.*]

SOPHIE

Take it off, dear, take it off. But why are you doing that?

ROSALIE

In a moment I shall put on my little cap. I am going to stay all night.

SOPHIE

*[And her smile is not what even a careless optimist could call happy.]*

Are you, dear?

ROSALIE

Oh, I don't mind. Sophie, these attacks do not agree with you. You look twenty years older.

SOPHIE

I may look it, but you always were.

ROSALIE

You look wretched, wretched.

*[SOPHIE goes over to the mirror and begins dabbing her cheeks with rouge.]*

SOPHIE

There, that will bring the roses back. Every now and then nature needs a helping hand. Does that look better, dear?

ROSALIE

What difference does it make when you're going straight to bed?

SOPHIE

*[Coming over to her.]*

This. I will tell you something in confidence. I imagine all the male angels are watching me when I sleep.

ROSALIE

I told the Maestro I would sit up all night and nurse you.

SOPHIE

[*And now her tone is threatening.*]

The Maestro will be lonely.

ROSALIE

And your voice, dear?

SOPHIE

So it's that, is it? You think it's gone, do you? Well, listen. [*And she magnificently throws off a bravura passage which might crown the art of any soprano.*] What do you think of that, eh? Rosalie, you could sell what's left of your soul to the devil and never, my enormous step-sister of Euterpe, would you be able to sing like that.

ROSALIE

No? But there are some others who understand my voice.

SOPHIE

None better than I. You have the most beautiful asthma in all of Europe.

ROSALIE

Maestro Gluck is very worried about you.

SOPHIE

Go home and console him then. Sing him to sleep if your talk is not sufficient.

ROSALIE

*[Passively sitting down.]*

How nervous Sophie seems.

SOPHIE

*[With determination.]*

I am. I am.

*[She is about to pull the bell-rope.]*

ROSALIE

The longer I stay the more I realize you shouldn't be left alone.

SOPHIE

No?

*[And her fingers are twitching.]*

ROSALIE

Not even your three lackeys could persuade me to go. You are very, *very* ill.

SOPHIE

Oh, why did I get rid of all those soldiers?

ROSALIE

Soldiers?

SOPHIE

*[Pointing to the library.]*

Yes, in there.

ROSALIE

Where?



SOPHIE

They were strong. Two might have been enough for you.

ROSALIE

What are you saying? Darling, aren't you worried about yourself?

SOPHIE

In Paris, these days, it seems necessary to have the house full of soldiers if one wants to spend the night alone.

ROSALIE

You must go in and lie down. You have fever. Your words mean nothing.

SOPHIE

Oh, yes, they do, yes, they do. Now you must go, Rosalie.

ROSALIE

[*Shaking her head.*]

Oh no, no.

SOPHIE

Oh, yes, yes. [*She has taken the vase from the harpsichord.*] I've never cared much for this. [*She points to the design.*] The cupids are overdressed. I shouldn't mind if it were broken. [*She is weighing it threateningly in her hand.*] Darling, I wish to be alone, and quickly, quickly.

ROSALIE

Doctor Mesmer is back in Paris. You are very excited. I'll send my coach for him.

SOPHIE

I don't want Doctor Mesmer.

ROSALIE

Do you know what you are saying?

SOPHIE

I want no doctors. They are never sincere unless they carry a gun.

ROSALIE

But Doctor Mesmer. He will bleed you or look into your eyes and presto! [*She makes a gesture dismissing all earthly ills.*]

SOPHIE

I don't want your Mesmer. I sent him my dog who was ill. Two days after he sent my Lulu back to me quite cured. The next day my Lulu died. But thanks to your Doctor Mesmer she died in perfect health. You can spare yourself the trouble.

ROSALIE

You are no longer in a condition to judge for yourself. Before you were white and now you are red.

SOPHIE

Yes, and in a minute something is going to be

blue if you don't go. [*She is again suspiciously handling the vase.*] I said I never cared for this bit of Sevres.

ROSALIE

[*A little frightened now.*]

What do you mean?

SOPHIE

What do you think I mean. [*The sound of a coach.*] Isn't that a coach? [*And now she is almost adrift on her anger.*] Get out, get out.

ROSALIE

But—

SOPHIE

[*The floodgates are open.*]

You came here hoping I was dead or dumb, didn't you? Well, go back and tell your Maestro that I am strong again and, damn you, take this with you for a souvenir!!!

[*And with a shriek of rage she flings the vase at ROSALIE'S head. It misses her, hits the panel of the wall, and falls splintered to the floor.*]

SOPHIE

There, I'm a woman after all.

[*The noise has brought THE ABBÉ rushing into the room.*]

## THE ABBÉ

[*Alarmed.*]

What is it, my daughter?

## SOPHIE

[*Calmly, almost sweetly, for the moment's tempest is partly spent.*]

At pitching I was always poor, but when it comes to pitch—ah, that's a different matter. Shall I sing for you?

## ROSALIE

[*Edging towards the door.*]

Sophie,—

## SOPHIE

I might still throw the mirror or one of the smaller chairs, but I'm feeling better.

## ROSALIE

[*Gingerly approaching THE ABBÉ.*]

Father, you and I had better put the poor trembling thing to bed.

## SOPHIE

Look out. [*Now she is growling like an angry puppy.*] Oh, don't you come near me.

## ROSALIE

[*To THE ABBÉ.*]

You go first. I don't think she's fond of me.

SOPHIE

[*With a sudden cry, for an idea has come to her.*]

Tell her, Your Reverence, what terrific danger she runs in staying here.

THE ABBÉ

[*At a loss.*]

My child—

SOPHIE

Then I must divulge the horror of it.

ROSALIE

What is it—look—she is about to swoon.

SOPHIE

Don't come near me. Don't come near me on peril of your life.

ROSALIE

This is more than I expected.

SOPHIE

Do you know what a leper is?

[*ROSALIE emits a sudden shriek.*]

SOPHIE

Do you know the terrible danger of coming near a leper?

ROSALIE

Good God! Where is Doctor Mesmer?

SOPHIE

Well, I am not a leper.

THE ABBÉ

My child, my child!

[*He is alarmed, for SOPHIE seems possessed.*]

SOPHIE

But something more deadly, more terrible and more new. [*Then with a voice appallingly sepulchral in tone.*] Rosalie, you are in danger here. [*ROSALIE shrinks further back.*] Now you shall hear the torturous truth. Tomorrow you may be dead.

ROSALIE

My God!

SOPHIE

Keep away, keep away!

ROSALIE

[*Literal though lashed to the mast.*]

I'm not coming nearer.

SOPHIE

I've got that terrible new English disease.

ROSALIE

Oh!



## SOPHIE

You see before you the first victim of that awful ailment called inoculation. Go, for your own sake, go.

## ROSALIE

*[Trembling for all her size.]*

Thank God, Doctor Mesmer is still in Paris.

*[She is about to rush from the room. A sound of a coach stopping.]*

## SOPHIE

At last it's he. Go! Go!

*[DE LAURAGUAIS' voice is heard in the hall.]*

## SOPHIE

*[Shrieking.]*

Go!

*[ROSALIE is about to leave by the centre door.]*

## SOPHIE

*[Pointing to the library.]*

That way. Do not come near me. That way, through the library. Bathe swiftly in sulphur water and you may live to tell the tale.

*[And ROSALIE precipitately rushes off through the library while DE LAURAGUAIS enters at the main door centre.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

[*Smiling querulously.*]

Is this some quiet moment in the opera?

SOPHIE

The rehearsal is over.

DE LAURAGUAIS

And?

SOPHIE

I've just sent Rosalie flying. She swore she'd spend the night with me.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Indeed?

THE ABBÉ

And this inoculation?

SOPHIE

The first thought that came into my head. I had to get rid of her somehow.

THE ABBÉ

[*His hand lifted as though to call down the forgiveness of God.*]

And what sort of a night do you think that poor lady will spend?

SOPHIE

Your Reverence, how should I know? [*Then to DE LAURAGUAIS.*] And where have you been? What have you been doing?

DE LAURAGUAIS

Waking a Corporal, who woke a Sergeant, who woke a Lieutenant, who spoke to a Captain.

SOPHIE

And?

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[With enthusiasm.]*

Sophie, you've never in your life seen anything as beautiful as the shadows that the moon casts in the Barracks yard.

SOPHIE

Shadows?

*[But she of all should know what shadows are to him.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

Yes. I asked the Captain's permission to make a little sketch by lamplight before I told him what I came for.

SOPHIE

You did, darling?

*[And even though she's angry she cannot suppress her smile.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

It took me half an hour and then I tore it up, though Da Vinci might have been proud of it.

SOPHIE

And in the meantime your Sophie has been pac-

ing the floor in agony thinking that something had happened.

DE LAURAGUAIS

It has.

SOPHIE

[*Starting up.*]

He has come?

THE ABBÉ

[*Reading SOPHIE's face.*]

Madame, control yourself.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Why, just what you expected.

SOPHIE

Who?

DE LAURAGUAIS

The groom.

SOPHIE

[*With a terrific gasp of relief.*]

Of course, I'd forgotten the groom.

DE LAURAGUAIS

He's waiting now. [*He goes over to the main door.*] Captain, won't you come in?

[*And ETIENNE MARS, a handsome and rather shy young soldier, enters and stands waiting, his cap in his hand.*]

SOPHIE

A moment before you say a word. Let me have a look at you. Yes, at a first glance I can say I like you, but then, Your Reverence, I like all soldiers. A uniform has a most direct, not to say, unmentionable effect on me. Soldiers, murderers, priests and poets are my pets. [*Then to ETIENNE.*] Good evening, my lad, good evening.

ETIENNE

[*Bowing his best, though a little clumsily.*]  
Madame.

SOPHIE

No, I don't think you can ever qualify for His Majesty's ballet.

ETIENNE

Madame, I—

SOPHIE

But, of course, you don't know why you're here, do you? [*She points to DE LAURAGUAIS.*] Didn't Monsieur tell you?

DE LAURAGUAIS

How could I, Sophie, when I didn't know?

ETIENNE

Madame, I do not understand what this is all about. In a hurry I am rushed from the Barracks on some important orders from the Court. In the coach I try to think, to wonder what is happen-

ing. I question this gentleman here, but he looks at me very mysteriously and whenever we pass a street lamp, he insists on stopping the coach and reading me long speeches from a manuscript, speeches, which as far as I could understand them had nothing to do with me or the life of a soldier.

SOPHIE

How wicked of you, Dorval. [*Then to the boy.*]  
You are Etienne Mars?

ETIENNE

At your service, Madame.

SOPHIE

You are a soldier and unhappy.

ETIENNE

Madame?

SOPHIE

You do not stand as though you took pride in your uniform.

ETIENNE

[*Angrily.*]

It is this uniform which has given them the power to [*he stops, why should he go on before these strangers*] the power to—

SOPHIE

To send you to America, when you leave your life in France.



ETIENNE

[*Flushing.*]

Madame, I would give my life for France.

SOPHIE

Of course, but your heart, my lad, your heart?

ETIENNE

Madame,—

[*But he is silent.*]

SOPHIE

[*Smiling.*]

Your heart?

ETIENNE

I—I—

[*She is looking at him. He looks straight back at her, but is still silent.*]

SOPHIE

[*Stepping nearer to him, her hand kindly laid upon his shoulder.*]

Of course, my lad, I understand. It were less brave to speak. I knew that I would like you, but there is still a test. We must study your control when under fire.

ETIENNE

[*Straightening up.*]

My record at the School of Arms, Madame,—

## SOPHIE

The School of Arms, la, la, sham battles and targets of straw. Now you must stand a genuine attack, my brave young soldier. [*Then suddenly.*] Attention.

[*And ETIENNE, a bit mystified, is standing as though on parade, as SOPHIE flings open the door that leads to her boudoir.*]

## SOPHIE

[*Her voice lifted.*]

Will you please come in? [*Then to ETIENNE.*] Watch out, my lad, the enemy is charging.

[*And VIVIENNE stands on the threshold. There is a gasp of astonishment from ETIENNE but he doesn't relax his military attitude until the next second with a cry of delight the girl is in his arms.*]

## VIVIENNE

Etienne! Etienne!—

[*And THE ABBÉ and SOPHIE and DE LAURAGUAIS stand watching them. A pause.*]

## DE LAURAGUAIS

[*After a moment.*]

Yes, yes, this is all very charming, but if something doesn't happen soon they may stand that way in that picturesque embrace for ever.

SOPHIE

They seem to like each other, don't they? But something is going to happen, for now they'll be married. [*Then to THE ABBÉ.*] That's what I kept you here for.

THE ABBÉ

But her father?

SOPHIE

Nonsense, isn't marriage better than death?

DE LAURAGUAIS

That's a question that's open to discussion.

SOPHIE

We shall be witnesses. Well, Your Reverence, begin, begin.

[*ETIENNE and VIVIENNE face about and on either side of them stand SOPHIE and DE LAURAGUAIS.*]

THE ABBÉ

[*His hand lifted.*]

My children—

[*The loud rumbling of a coach on the cobbles, which suddenly comes to a stop at the door. SOPHIE looks up.*]

THE ABBÉ

My children.

SOPHIE

You said that before.

THE ABBÉ

[*Reverently.*]

This is a moment—

[*And indeed it is. For THE FIRST LACKEY stands in the doorway and the way he looks at SOPHIE is something that she understands.*]

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame, a word with you.

SOPHIE

[*Her voice a little unsteady.*]

Well, what is it?

[*And very respectfully he is over next to her and is whispering something to her behind his hand.*]

SOPHIE

Good God! But they have come too quickly.

THE FIRST LACKEY

Madame will ring when she is ready to be arrested?

SOPHIE

Yes. [*Then she is over to the others.*] Quick, in there. Finish the wedding in there. [*She points to the library.*] Make haste, make haste! Weddings are always twice too long. Cut short

the blessings and with all expedition do the deed. Do not linger at the kissing. There'll be time for that, though the time's not now. Bless you, my children. Go! Go! [*Then suddenly.*] And take this for your gift. [*From the harpsichord she takes the diamond crescent and gives it to VIVIANNE.*] It is the symbol of the chaste Diana. Wear it tonight and tomorrow have the setting changed. Quick, quick. [*And they exit and she turns to THE FIRST LACKEY.*] Now then, show them in.

## THE FIRST LACKEY

[*And even his composure is not quite poised at perfection.*]

Them, Madame? It is Saint-Florentin himself.

## SOPHIE

[*As a finality.*]

I am Sophie Arnould herself. Let him come in.

[*And THE LACKEY exits and SOPHIE is weakly lying on the couch when the terrible SAINT-FLORENTIN, Chief of Police and martinet of morals, stands in the doorway, and behind him are crowding several lieutenants of the police.*]

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*Sternly.*]

Madame!

SOPHIE

[*Quietly.*]

Sir?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame, need I explain the meaning of my visit at this hour of the night?

SOPHIE

Am I to interpret it as a compliment?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Any interpretation that suits you, Madame, so that we arrive swiftly at the facts.

SOPHIE

Ah, that allows me many ways out.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

It is useless, Madame, all the exits to your house and garden are guarded.

SOPHIE

I would expect you to be literal. Your profession makes you so. I wasn't thinking of a way out of my house. I have no intention of leaving.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

No, Madame?

SOPHIE

[*Echoing, like a dove.*]

No,



SAINT-FLORENTIN

Indeed?

*[He signals to two of his lieutenants, who step further into the room.]*

SOPHIE

I wasn't thinking of a way out, but of another way out—of a way to convince you that whatever you have come for is a mistake. Won't you sit down?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

I have come to arrest you. There is no need of sitting.

SOPHIE

I don't see why you shouldn't. There is no reason why the most disagreeable things in life shouldn't be done charmingly.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame, if you have any intention of formulating a code of manners, I can assure you a lengthy, quiet time in which to elaborate your theories.

SOPHIE

Which means?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

That within the hour you will enjoy the silence of Fort Evêque.

SOPHIE

[*Pleasantly.*]

Fort Evêque.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

I make myself clear, Madame?

SOPHIE

[*Getting up.*]

Quite.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Are you ready?

SOPHIE

Well, not on the second.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

And what have you to say?

SOPHIE

[*Glancing towards the library.*]

That I am sure your duty would come first with you in the face of all personal feeling whatsoever.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

My duty to my King and to my office first. After that, Madame, what touches me is my own.

[*And his voice is a little unsteady.*]

SOPHIE

Ah, if there were only something that could soften your heart, I would plead to you by that for mercy.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame, in your case there is nothing.

SOPHIE

No?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

You have heard me.

SOPHIE

*[A step nearer to him.]*

And won't you listen to me?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

*[Drawing back.]*

You will be heard before the bar at Fort Evêque.

SOPHIE

*[Sitting down.]*

With what am I charged?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

With base disloyalty to our Sovereign, Louis,  
King of France.

*[He stands erect and he and the soldiers  
salute the name of the King.]*

SOPHIE

*[Imitating them.]*

How perfectly the cue is taken. It's a pity we  
can't do things as patly as that at the opera. *[She  
sings a few notes.]* La, la, la. In spite of every-  
thing still there.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame, I have heard enough.

SOPHIE

That isn't very complimentary. Now as to the charge?

*[From a signal from SAINT-FLORENTIN the lieutenants step forward.]*

SOPHIE

Wait!

*[Her voice is lifted with her hand.]*

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame!

SOPHIE

I have the right to demand in what way I have insulted the King.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

No explanation,—

SOPHIE

*[Taking advantage of the words.]*

No, you are right. *[And now a little more in the tone of injured heroism.]* I, disloyal to the King, I, who have been his servant since my childhood, I, who was stolen from my mother's arms to serve with my beauty and my art the pleasure of my Sovereign. Paris shall judge whether I have

served and sung to no avail. How have I failed or lacked in loyalty?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

You have shown his Majesty disloyalty by an outrage committed on the person of a guest to the throne of France. He has been criminally maltreated on a warrant which was forged. Are we coming nearer to the facts?

SOPHIE

*[Her eyelids quivering a little.]*

Yes, as you tell the tale.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

The deduction, Madame, follows. After the truth the punishment.

SOPHIE

*[She has again got up.]*

Of course, when has truth been born save of sorrow? But you will, you must hear me.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

I told you that at the prison you would be heard.

SOPHIE

What's ever heard in prison but injustice and the clank of keys? The prospect's not inviting. No. *[Then with determination.]* No, I will not go.

[*And she sits down again comfortably arranging the pillows behind her head.*]

SAINT-FLORENTIN

I advise you. It will be less pleasant if you force me to use force.

SOPHIE

You are right. It will be. [*And her little fists are pounding one of the pillows.*] See how I can use my fists. And my teeth, my nice white teeth [*and she is smiling at him*] they are as strong as they are pretty. And my nails are ready, and if needs be, sir, my toes—though I am no dancer, sir, my toes.

[*A little foot it threateningly pointed at him.*]

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Five soldiers guard the door there [*he points to the main door, centre*], and five below surround your garden.

SOPHIE

Ten to one. You compliment my sex, but from the beginning we have been the stronger.

[*And a far away smile begins in her eyes as she half glances towards the library.*]

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame, are you proud of the means that women such as you have used to gain their power?



SOPHIE

Judged from a woman's standpoint, yes. But I was not thinking of myself, but of my mother.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*His lips tightening, perhaps in a sneer.*]

Your mother, Madame? If you think thus to move my heart.

SOPHIE

[*With a gay little laugh.*]

I was not thinking of my mother, but of the mother of us all. One memorable day in Eden was not woman's weakness stronger than the strength of man? But then perhaps you do not care for apples.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

You quote the scriptures. Has your life profited by them?

SOPHIE

Not before perhaps, but now if you will let me I'll play the repentant Magdalen. If I am guilty there was a reason.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*Warding off the threatening emotions.*]

At the proper time you will be heard.

SOPHIE

[*And the centre of the stage is hers.*]

No, now, now!

SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*Firmly.*]

Madame.

SOPHIE

[*Her eyes flashing.*]

Did this octogenarian of an ourangutan tell you why I ordered him to leave my house? [*And then, with outraged modesty.*] Did that vile old man hint to you the orders of his viler empress?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

No reasons were sufficient for this outrage.

SOPHIE

[*Tearfully.*]

Ah, there speaks the callous heart of man.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

A criminal assault was made at your command. Do you deny it?

SOPHIE

No, I glory in it and I will not go to Fort Evêque.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Only for tonight, Madame. Tomorrow you will be sent to Metz.

SOPHIE

[*For now she is really frightened.*]

Metz! No! For tomorrow I am to sing for Paris and for Gluck.

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

If you have cause, Madame, address your appeal from prison to the King. My duty and my word are law.

## SOPHIE

Duty! Law! Do you think I'll spend the night in jail because of those two ridiculous old prejudices?

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

Not only tonight, Madame, but time is passing, it is useless.

## SOPHIE

No, not yet. You will at least permit me to change my gown. I will put on something lighter since Metz is in the south.

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

You will wear the usual garb of the prison.

## SOPHIE

Why, that wouldn't become me at all. I must change. You can't imagine how adorable I look in my dress of cream and garnet.

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame, it makes no difference to me how you look.

## SOPHIE

*[With the most bewitching of glances.]*

Oh, it will when you see me. I will fetch the

gown. [*She starts towards one of the doors. The soldiers interpose.*] Oh, very well, I'll wear something else if you insist. I have a salmon crêpe all worked in emerald parrots. That ought to be very gay in jail. It will be nice for the other prisoners.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*His eyebrows meet in anger.*]

I've heard enough of this.

SOPHIE

And one thing more. I must take along my little bonnet edged with cherries.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*Terribly.*]

Madame, come.

SOPHIE

[*Pathetically.*]

If I must go to prison let me go looking my best. Let it seem as though I liked it.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

You will go now and as you are.

[*He makes a sign to the soldiers.*]

SOPHIE

For the love of God, a moment.

[*She backs against the door of the library and is attempting to hear what is going on inside.*]

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame.

*[The soldiers again step forward.]*

## SOPHIE

Dorval would come in if it's over. Have you any idea how long it takes to get married? I've never been, you know.

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

What, Madame?

## SOPHIE

Nothing. My mind wanders.

*[She is back in the centre of the room.  
The soldiers have taken her by the arms.]*

## SOPHIE

Just a moment, half a moment, a tenth of a moment! Let go of me, you horrid men! The littlest part of a moment!

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

*[To the Soldiers.]*

You know your orders?

*[One of the soldiers takes a pair of wrist irons from his pockets.]*

## SOPHIE

Oh, those terrible things. Never, never!

*[She breaks from the soldiers and throws herself at the feet of SAINT-FLORENTIN.]*

SAINT-FLORENTIN

*[Very sternly.]*

Madame, these melodramatic gestures are in vain.

SOPHIE

Perhaps they are, but I can't help it. You see, I'm a prima donna.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

*[Fiercely.]*

Get up.

SOPHIE

*[Clinging to his knees.]*

Sir, by my honour as a woman—

SAINT-FLORENTIN

*[Struggling from her.]*

Your honour as a woman!

SOPHIE

Well, if that doesn't mean anything to you, then by my fame as a singer. I swear I will not attempt to escape.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Get up. This will avail you nothing.

SOPHIE

Not me, perhaps, not me, but have you any idea how long it takes to get married?



SAINT-FLORENTIN

*[His anger mounting.]*

What has marriage to do with this?

SOPHIE

Who knows? Grant me this moment even though it avail me nothing. *[She still has hold of him.]* I won't let go until you do.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

*[To his lieutenants.]*

Wait at the door.

*[The soldiers exit.]*

SOPHIE

Thanks. Thanks.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

I will give you till the hand of your clock has passed the minute.

SOPHIE

It's a pretty clock, isn't it?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

*[Fiercely.]*

I said a minute.

SOPHIE

*[Watching him very closely now.]*

Sir, if you had a daughter—

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*And his hand goes to his heart as though suddenly wounded.*]

Madame—

## SOPHIE

But I see you haven't. But if you *had* a daughter and she were beseeching you as I am, would you not listen? Have you no pity for a woman's suffering even though you cannot understand it? I am a woman, a poor weak woman. Do not take me to Fort Evêque tonight. Just imagine what effect it will have on my voice.

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

This is not the first time you have laughed at justice and flaunted your wild caprices in the face of the authorities and the police.

## SOPHIE

If you had a daughter would you have expected her to have listened to the insults of this diplomat?

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

Do you think your career is not known to us?

## SOPHIE

If my days have not been wisely lived it is because I have loved too much. [*Her voice afloat on tears.*] My head has always been too weak, my heart too strong.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

The minute's over.

SOPHIE

Ah, you are cruel, but if you had a daughter?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*With quiet dignity.*]

Madame, I had a daughter and it is women such as you and the libertine looseness of the life you symbolize that has driven my daughter to her death.

[*And from the library THE ABBÉ'S voice can be heard in a loud Amen, his sermon has been a long one.*]

SOPHIE

Her death?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Paris has fallen on evil times. An unbridled thirst for liberty has poisoned the minds of the people and the hearts of our children. There are already heard murmurs against the divine right of kings and the sacred authority of parents.

SOPHIE

Sir?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

The word of a father is no longer heard. The will of a father is but a gibe for laughter, and why, why?

SOPHIE

[*Leaning forward, for she has got him where she wants him.*]

Why?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Because women such as you are the adored idols of the moment. Your licentiousness is deemed a virtue and your vile freedom is hailed as the pattern of all law.

SOPHIE

Is there no time for repentance?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

But your reign is over. You, and the others like you. I swear on this, Madame, on this [*and he takes from his bosom the letter from VIVIENNE, wet with the tears from the flower vase*], on this last letter from my child.

SOPHIE

Your only child?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

On this, Madame, I swear that I will make of you, of you, Sophie Arnould, so terrible and infamous an example that hereafter the malodorous history of your name and the unbridled looseness of your life shall no longer seem a shining virtue and example to the innocence and youth of France.

SOPHIE

You ought to sing. You can say so much in a single breath.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*Towering over her.*]

Your name and deeds shall be set down in dishonour, and be assured, Madame, that we shall give you all the time you need behind the prison walls of Metz to think of this repentance at which you scoff.

SOPHIE

[*Her analysis of him complete.*]

You're *grim*, that's what you are, *grim*.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

I am Saint-Florentin and I have spoken.

SOPHIE

Nothing can move your heart?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Nothing.

SOPHIE

[*A step nearer to the door of the library.*]

What a lecture he's giving them. But by now it surely must be over.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*But his lecture is not the one she means.*]

It is, Madame, you have heard. Are you ready?

SOPHIE

One second now.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

[*About to open the centre door.*]

You will go without force or must they drag you out?

SOPHIE

No, that has been done here once before this evening.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame.

[*And with a commanding gesture he points towards the door.*]

SOPHIE

And I cannot take my bonnet with the cherries?  
[*She begins to seem to sob.*]

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Your tears are wasted.

SOPHIE

[*With a last melodramatic plea for mercy.*]

And is there no chance of my escape? I am a woman. Think of your dead daughter. Is there no chance?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

As much chance, Madame, as though at this mo-



ment I might see my dead child enter through that door.

SOPHIE

[*Pointing to the door of the library.*]

No, you mean that one. Oh, I don't know what I'm saying. I'm distraught. Pity me, pity me. Your dead daughter—enter through that door—and if she did?

SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame, I will profit by the irony you teach me. If she did, then and then only you would be free.

SOPHIE

[*The fox is in the trap.*]

It is an age of miracles. [*And she actually stands there winking at him.*] You granted me a minute which was mostly taken up with your horrid lecture. Now, I shall take one more second and that will be mine.

[*And she rushes over to the door of the library and in a voice of triumph shouts.*]

SOPHIE

If it's over, my blessings, my children, and now, come in, come in! [*Then as VIVIENNE and ETIENNE stand in the doorway.*] There, you terrible man you, I give you back your daughter and because I know your word is law I am free.

SAINT-FLORENTIN

What's this?

## SOPHIE

Oh, don't say you're dreaming. You're not. [*And vindictively she gives him a terrific pinch.*] There, that's the usual test. Your daughter came to me, she would either marry Etienne or die. You're cruel. I know you are, but not so cruel as to wish your child, your only child rather dead than married.

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

Vivienne! Vivienne!

## VIVIENNE

[*Her voice trembling.*]

Father!

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

Vivienne, what does this mean?

## SOPHIE

It means that if you had been in a more pleasant mood and shown better manners that I might have invited you to the ceremony. But it's too late now and the only way you can make amends is by being nice to them. Look at them. Is there anything sweeter or sillier than a bride and groom?

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

Madame, you mean?

## VIVIENNE

Father, this is my husband.

## SAINT-FLORENTIN

[Turning to SOPHIE.]

Madame, you, you—

## SOPHIE

Of course, if you want to, you can send us all to Metz. But what good would that do? And besides, what a place to spend a honeymoon.

## VIVIENNE

[Tremblingly, tearfully, coming close to him.]

Father,—father, you will forgive me?

[He attempts to turn from her, but it is in vain and the next second she is in his arms.]

## VIVIENNE

[Through her sobs.]

You will forgive me?

## SOPHIE

Of course, he will. How else can the comedy end? No man is as hard as he thinks, and as for us women,— [The clock on the mantelshelf begins sounding the hour.] Listen, my little clock is striking twelve, it is midnight, midnight. Tomorrow, sir, I sing and, so with your permission, I—I—well, I will go to bed. You will let me kiss the groom? [And she does so.] Take care of your husband, my child. Husbands need it. How shy he is, but I like him for it. You've brought

your father a splendid son-in-law. [*Then to SAINT-FLORENTIN.*] And perhaps, after all, sir, you will acknowledge I am something of a judge of men. And now good-night—good-night.

SAINTE-FLORENTIN

Madame, this time you have outmatched me, but next time—

SOPHIE

Well, next time I will still be Sophie.  
[*And they are gone.*]

SOPHIE

At last midnight, midnight. [*She goes over to the door of the library. She calls.*] Dorval, Dorval.

[*There is a moment's pause and DE LAURAGUAIS enters, his manuscript in his hand.*]

SOPHIE

It is midnight, Dorval.

DE LAURAGUAIS

And Act Six is still unfinished.

SOPHIE

We are alone.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Not quite, the Abbé is in the library.

SOPHIE

*[Calling to His Reverence.]*

Come in.

THE ABBÉ

*[Entering.]*

Is there something else, my daughter?

SOPHIE

Yes, you must bless our midnight.

THE ABBÉ

*[A quiet, tolerant smile on his lips, for what would you have him do when SOPHIE bids it?]*

My daughter!

*[His hands are lifted for the blessing.]*

SOPHIE

And now go home yourself and dream of paradise.

THE ABBÉ

*[Helpless, for in the end life survives all codes.]*

My children.

*[And THE ABBÉ very thoughtfully, with his hands behind his back, exits by the main door, centre.]*

SOPHIE

*[Her voice soft and low.]*

It is midnight, Dorval.

DE LAURAGUAIS

Ah, what a day I've had.

SOPHIE

But now it is over.

*[She is closer to him.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

Yes, all things lead to all ends. Have you ever thought of that, Sophie? Today gives birth to tomorrow. What *has* been is the key to all that *is*. There shall be a chapter on that thought in my new book of philosophy.

SOPHIE

*[Very tenderly, very lovingly, shaking her head.]*

Dorval! Dorval!

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Very seriously.]*

Have you ever thought of that, Sophie?

SOPHIE

Of what, darling?

DE LAURAGUAIS

How all things lead to all ends? Have you ever realized that a wind blowing a leaf away in Eden may be the very reason that you and I are standing here.



SOPHIE

*[And her tone tells all.]*

Very likely, dear. Very likely. *[Her hand is on his arm.]* Dorval!

DE LAURAGUAIS

What is it, dear?

SOPHIE

What?

*[And her voice smiles.]*

DE LAURAGUAIS

Such a day, such a day. I'm very tired.

SOPHIE

Very, dear?

*[And somehow one of her exquisite shoulders has slipped from her gown and the pink glow from the candelabras play about her neck and DORVAL is not unmoved by the effect.]*

SOPHIE

*[Smiling up at him.]*

Very tired, dear?

DE LAURAGUAIS

*[Kissing her shoulder.]*

Well, perhaps not so tired after all.

*[And they embrace and the next second they are gone into the boudoir. There is a pause and then, THE FIRST LACKEY, being the*

*most excellent of servants, comes in to wind the clock. He is engaged in this quotidian favour to time when a sound arrests him. He glances for a moment in the direction of the boudoir and then with an expression in his eyes which tells of many things, many important things since the beginning of time, he quietly, one by one, blows out the candles and as the curtain falls is gone.*













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