

# WHEN BERTHA WAS A PRETTY NAME

## CHARACTERS:

DANIEL CURZON, a moody writer.  
JEAN-MICHEL D'AVIGNON, his French lover.  
JER, Curzon's sleazy ex-lover.  
EUNICE ASHLEY, a publisher out for the bucks.  
MADAME D'AVIGNON (MÈRE ), Jean-Michel's  
arch-conservative mother.  
ALISTAIR, Madame D'avignon's British manservant.  
SUZETTE D'AVIGNON, Jean-Michel's saucy sister.  
JONATHAN KREPE, Suzette's wooden-legged suitor.

SETTING: The handsome drawing room and partial terrace of Chateau D'avignon, Jean-Michel's country estate — drenched in happy Marin, California sunlight. A central all-purpose table, several cushy-comfy sofas, other accoutrements as taste and pocketbook permit.

There are three entrances/exits Up Right, to the front door upstairs bedrooms; Off Right, to the kitchen; Off Left, through the French doors to the partial terrace and garden.

The chateau was built in Edwardian times and possesses the charms of that pre-war period, if we could only see them all rooms numerous and airy, servants, a grass tennis court, even a hammock on the terrace. Every day here seems to be an idyllic summer afternoon.

TIME: Summer. Friday afternoon. Now and Forever.

## ACT I

(Curzon enters the handsome drawing room from Up Right, deeply depressed, his head almost on his chest. He looks around at the beautiful surroundings, shakes his head sadly.)

CURZON (Big sigh.) Oh, god!

(Curzon is an attractive man in his early thirties with an angelic face that belies a bit of the devil in his heart and a wide depressive streak to boot. He has just arrived and wears a pinstripe summer suit and carries a suitcase and an overnight bag.)

(Jean-Michel enters right behind, having closed the door. Jean-Michel is also in his thirties, shorter than Curzon, handsome, Gallic-looking, well-dressed in a sweater and trousers, with a French accent, which he is trying hard to get rid of. He is a manly man and hates people to find him "cute.")

JEAN-  
MICHEL Well, how do you like my chateau?

CURZON (Depressed.) It's all right, I guess. As chateaus go. (Sighs.)

JEAN-MICHEL (Smiling.) Is that the most you can say, Dan? Usually people think it's gorgeous.

CURZON I'm sorry. (Holds his head.) I'm sorry. (Collapsing again, loudly.) Oh, god! God! God! God! God! Oh, *god!*

JEAN-MICHEL Are you in one of your moods?

CURZON I'm trying to fight it.

JEAN-MICHEL Oh, don't fight it. (Sexually excited.) Give in to it. Give in. Give in! No, don't! I must not indulge myself this way.

CURZON I suppose it won't do any good, but how about a Japanese massage?

JEAN-MICHEL Of course, darling. (He massages with two fingers at the edges of Curzon's eyes above the nose.) (Suddenly pulls his hand away.) I can't do this! She might see.

CURZON Who might see?

JEAN-MICHEL (Avoiding the topic.) Nobody. I'm sorry all the servants are on vacation. I've been vacuuming everything myself. (Indicates the vacuum sweeper.) And dinner is in the oven. Something Parisian and mouth-watering. Fries French. Plus a roast pot!

CURZON *Who* might see?

JEAN-MICHEL (Still avoiding the topic.) What is it like inside your head? Oh, if I could only see.

CURZON (Getting up.) You wouldn't want to know, Jean-Michel. *Who* might see?

JEAN-MICHEL She's coming today. And she can't see us touching or anything like that. That will be the end of my money.

CURZON What are you talking about? (Tries to hug Jean-Michel, but is unable to.) Why are you acting so distant?

JEAN-MICHEL I don't know how to tell you.

CURZON So I see.

JEAN-  
MICHEL Sometimes I wonder about us as a couple, Dan. Your moods. My moods about your moods. And are you sure you're over that Jer, that . . . that person?

CURZON Don't change the subject. Jer was a phase I went through, like acne. Now he's a thing of the past — my wicked, wicked past. Who's coming?

JEAN-  
MICHEL I think it hurt you very much to leave him, despite the awful way he treated you.

CURZON I promise you — you'll never hear of Jer again!

JEAN-  
MICHEL Oh, darling! I love you like a ton of bricks, yes? Do you love me like a ton of bricks? One little stolen kiss?

(The kiss sweetly, their lips a-buzz.)

CURZON Oh, yes, Jer! Jer! I mean — (Changing the subject quickly after realizing that he said the wrong name.) We can have breakfast in this room! (Points to jellies and cereal boxes already on the table.) I could even write my books here! (Going to the French doors, pointing across the terrace.) The summer light! The garden! Would that be all right with you — (Careful to get the name right.) *Jean-Michel?* My own Jean-Michel.

JEAN-  
MICHEL Of course. I want you to write a great book.

CURZON I will! The best novel I have ever written! I will conquer this depression! Happiness starts at this very moment. Now tell me who's coming.

JEAN-  
MICHEL My mother is coming for a visit from France.

CURZON But that's grand! I'd love to meet your mother. We can talk about you. How you were as a child, all your little ways and foibles. The way you used to burp and —

JEAN-  
MICHEL (With trepidation.) You don't understand. *Ma Mère* doesn't speak much English, despite her English manservant. She refuses to learn. Just a few fucking words.

CURZON No, Jean-Michel. "Just a few words."

JEAN-  
MICHEL I'm sorry. I should never have learned English from that sailor!

CURZON We all have regrets. Like the time I was in the Caribbean on this yacht and all I could think about was how awful blue was. Blue, blue, everywhere! (Depressed.) Oh, god, it was blue! (Sudden shift.) I'll improvise with your mother. I have a little French.

JEAN-  
MICHEL            There's something I haven't told you. Something serious.

CURZON            Haven't told me?

JEAN-  
MICHEL            *Ma Mère* does not approve.

CURZON            Of what?

JEAN-  
MICHEL            Of anything. She's very French. Especially of my "lifestyle." She does not want me to be gay.

CURZON            It's not for her to choose. Hasn't she learned that?

JEAN-  
MICHEL            She's very, very, very old-fashioned, Dan. My family is one of those who escaped the Revolution. *The* Revolution. My mother's great-great-great grandfather, the Marquis D'avignon, was captured by the vicious Jacobins and scheduled for execution on the guillotine as an aristocrat. They came for him in the little golf cart —

CURZON            Tumbrel?

JEAN-  
MICHEL            *Oui*. Tumbrel. They forced my relative to mount the steps, they placed his neck through the slot, they raised the blade of the guillotine. Up, up, high above his neck. The crowd screaming for his head!

CURZON            Yes? Yes?

JEAN-  
MICHEL            The blade hurtling down. Down, down, down until —

CURZON            (Caught up in the story.) Oh, no!

JEAN-  
MICHEL            (Placing his hand on Curzon's neck.) His neck was so stiff it broke the blade. They tried several times, until finally they had to let him go. (Slowly while massaging.) *Ma Mère* . . . inherited that neck.

CURZON            (Moving away.) What are you trying to tell me?

JEAN-  
MICHEL            She wants me to have a baybee to carry on the family name. You see, my sister, Suzette, is to be married soon, and she will take her husband's name, and she does not care for children. The D'avignon name will die with me.

CURZON            What can we do? How can we persuade your mother?

JEAN-  
MICHEL I'm afraid there's no changing *Ma Mère*. To give you an idea — when I told her I was gay, she had a stroke. She recovered, but she still uses a — a — a —  
(Gestures as though gripping something.)

CURZON A walker?

JEAN-  
MICHEL A walkair. She says she'll have another stroke and die right in front of me unless I marry, and soon.

CURZON And well?

JEAN-  
MICHEL Very well. Oh, I don't feel very well. (Covers his face.)

CURZON (Teasing.) Can't we get married?

JEAN-  
MICHEL She wants a child.

CURZON You could adopt me.

JEAN-  
MICHEL That would not satisfy *Ma Mère*. She's very traditional.

CURZON Is that where you get your conservative streak?

JEAN-  
MICHEL I am not conservative! I merely like things the way they are!

CURZON Oh, I see.

JEAN-  
MICHEL *Ma Mère* is worse. She subsidizes the Pretender to the throne of France. She thinks Joan of Arc was a troublemaker.

CURZON Even though St. Joan helped unify France? Come to think of it, the sainted Joan was probably of the Sapphic disposition. (Imitates her astride a horse.) Men's clothes, short hair. Not married! Why do so many conservative people push getting married as the only alternative when some of their biggest heroes weren't? St. Joan! Jesus Christ himself!

JEAN-  
MICHEL You must never say a word like that to *Ma Mère*! Nevair!

CURZON Listen, Jean-Michel, I'm not going to censor everything I say just to please your mother. Maybe I shouldn't stay here while she's around.

JEAN-  
MICHEL She'll only be here for a few months or so.

- CURZON           A few months!
- JEAN-  
MICHEL           Or until my sister gets married. She and her fiancé are having some trouble. That's made *Ma Mère* even more emphatic about me. It was all set, but now they're not sure. By the way, I've invited them down for the weekend.
- CURZON           You never mentioned your mother. You didn't tell me you had a sister. What else don't I know about you, Jean-Michel?
- JEAN-  
MICHEL           You'll like Suzette. She's even more American than me. Because she went to school here. I don't think *Ma Mère* has ever forgiven us. She's afraid the French influence is dying out in the world. I hope there are no family murders ziz weekend. (Guiltily.) I've invited somebody else down also. Everyone will have to behave if it's not just the family here!
- CURZON           That sounds like something cynical I'd say. Who is this other person?
- JEAN-  
MICHEL           An old friend. She's straight, but she might be interested in publishing some of your work.
- CURZON           Great! Any publisher friend of yours is certainly a friend of mine.
- JEAN-  
MICHEL           She's very temperamental. If you tickle her off, there goes your publishing deal — right up your tubes.
- CURZON           (Correcting the English errors in turn.) Idioms, Jean-Michel. Tick her off, not tickle. Down the tube, not up your tubes. You sure you want me to correct you this way?
- JEAN-  
MICHEL           But of course! I do not want to be one of these cutsey-wutsey Frenchies. People pat me on the head like I'm a baybee! I am not a baybee!
- CURZON           (Patting him on the head.) Jean-Michel, what am I to do with all these people? I was hoping to work on my novel this weekend. (Takes the manuscript out of his overnight bag.) Novels get written by writers sitting and typing, not by weekends in the country with a lot of guests, however charming they may be.
- JEAN-  
MICHEL           You need not worry. None of them are charming. But you need a vacation, after what that scoundrel Jer put through you.
- CURZON           (Correcting.) Put me through.
- JEAN-  
MICHEL           The way he mistreated your telephone!

CURZON Perhaps you're right.

JEAN-  
MICHEL I know it would be better with just the two of us. We could hold hands. We could make love in the larkspur.

CURZON We can still do that. How about now? (He pulls Jean-Michel by the belt toward the French doors.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL Not now. *Ma Mère* is coming.

CURZON Well, tonight then. In bed. Full-bodied man love!

JEAN-  
MICHEL *Ma Mère* might hear us!

CURZON What? Is she going to put her ear to the wall?

JEAN-  
MICHEL I'm sorry, we can't share a bedroom while she's here. You'll have to stay in one of the other rooms upstairs.

CURZON Jean-Michel, I don't believe what I'm hearing. Is this your house or hers?

JEAN-  
MICHEL It's mine, but she pays the mortgage.

CURZON There's a mortgage on the chateau? So we have to abide by her rules? Not very liberated!

JEAN-  
MICHEL *Ma Mère* raised me alone in our castle, practically, with only ten or twelve servants to help her. One time she even changed my diaper.

CURZON Did she give you food to eat?

JEAN-  
MICHEL *Oui*. She used to chew it up for me because she despised processed baby food. She's been more than a mother to me.

CURZON Mothers are expected to feed their children. You don't have to kowtow for the rest of your life because she chewed your food for you!

JEAN-  
MICHEL I'm trying to break away from her. It's not easy. You don't know her. I am not a weak man, but sometimes she makes me stutter when I'm around her.

CURZON Stutter? That's terrible! Well, she can't come. That's all there is to it.

JEAN-

MICHEL She's already on her way.

CURZON I won't have you stuttering around your mother! She can stay in a hotel — or in a tent at the back of the gardens.

(Sound of a car stopping outside.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL I hear a car! It's *Ma-ma-ma-ma Mère!*

CURZON Oh no! Now don't stutter.

JEAN-  
MICHEL B — B — B —

CURZON Get a grip on yourself. Don't stutter!

(They look toward the Up Right entrance nervously. After a moment, Eunice Ashley appears with an overnight bag at the French doors, behind them. She is a tall, fine-boned woman in her forties, enterprising and rather unscrupulous, dressed in white leisure clothes, looking very spiffy. She smokes at the slightest opportunity.)

EUNICE Hello! Anybody home?

(Curzon and Jean-Michel jump.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Seeing her, relieved.) Oh, Eunice, it's only you.

EUNICE (Entering the drawing room through the French doors.) How can I resist a sincere welcome like that!

JEAN-  
MICHEL I didn't mean it that way. You Americans are so ready to take offense!

EUNICE (Gently mocking.) And you Frenchies are so ready to give it, *n'est pas?*

JEAN-  
MICHEL I want you two to meet. Eunice Ashley, the publisher, this is Daniel Curzon, the author.

CURZON (Tongue in cheek.) You can't imagine how pleased I am to meet you.

(They shake hands.)

EUNICE I've actually heard of you. Up and coming, aren't you? Or is it over the hill? One of the other. Jean-Michel tells me you have a new novel almost finished.

CURZON Not quite. Maybe soon. (Holds up the manuscript.)

EUNICE Got a publisher for it?



CURZON            Nothing definite. I'm sort of in-between presses right now.

EUNICE            (To Jean-Michel.) Wasn't that the name of a medieval torture? They put people underneath and squeezed out their guts until they died or something? Yes, pressed to death. (To Curzon.) Very uncomfortable place, in-between presses.

CURZON            Sounds right, from my experience.

EUNICE            (Abruptly.) Complaining?

CURZON            No, no, not me. Never complain.

EUNICE            Good. Don't like whiners. Don't publish whiners. (Puffs on her cigarette.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL            (Under his breath.) Dan, be careful.

EUNICE            (Puffing away.) You wouldn't believe how difficult some of these writers can be. Prima donnas. Supremo egos! You know what this illustrious author of mine said to me the other day? That he wanted to write a tragedy! Now I ask you who's going to buy that?

CURZON            I like tragedies myself. Weighty.

EUNICE            Hell, I like tragedies too. But nobody else does. Now if he could write a modern kind of tragedy, say one with a happy ending, that'd be different. I'm in business, and not for my health. If I was in it for my health, I'd run a health emporium.

CURZON            (Not pleased.) Alfalfa!

EUNICE            What?

CURZON            Nothing.

JEAN-  
MICHEL            Well, since you two are getting along like a ton of bricks, let me leave you for a while. I have some errands to ride. *Ma Mère's* room isn't quite ready yet! It has to be just so. (Exits Up Right.)

CURZON            (Wanting him to stay.) Jean-Michel!

JEAN-  
MICHEL            (Offstage.) *Au revoir!*

                          (Curzon turns back to the temperamental publisher reluctantly.)

CURZON            (Under his breath.) What we have to do to get published!

EUNICE            So tell me about this novel you're writing? Nobody wants novels anymore. Is it filthy?

CURZON (Ironic.) Only moderately.

EUNICE Filth seems to be fashionable right now.

CURZON Always is. (Slyly.) Have you read my work?

EUNICE I hear you're kind of depressing.

CURZON Only bad art depresses.

EUNICE You write bad art? (Starts looking for Madame D'avignon's memoirs.)

CURZON (Laughing a little.) Not to my knowledge. I try to tell it true. Some people call that depressing. The Victorians had to sneak in sex between the ideas. I try to sneak in an idea or two between the sex.

EUNICE (To herself about the memoirs.) Where are they?

CURZON They?

EUNICE (Not answering.) Tell you what — make it untrue and deeply filthy and I may take your book.

CURZON I'll be sure to let you have first refusal.

EUNICE Is it a gay book?

CURZON It concerns human beings who are gay, yes.

EUNICE Can you make one of them not gay — a woman perhaps? Lots of gay writers are very skilled at making the characters into women. Why is that, you suppose?

CURZON I prefer not to disguise my characters.

EUNICE Novels don't sell nearly as well if you've got faggots — excuse me — gays in them. People like to read about themselves. And there are more of us than there are of you! Except in the smaller parts of course. Funny fops and such.

CURZON Right, funny types. We're free to write the world's books, the world's plays, just not put ourselves in them. (Bitterly.) Why is that, you suppose?

EUNICE You one of those agenda guys? I don't publish no agenda.

CURZON (Out of habit.) Any agenda. (For correcting her.) Excuse me. Tell me about yourself, Ms. Ashley. How do you know Jean-Michel?

EUNICE (Still looking for the memoirs, picks up things, puts them down.) My brother was one of his lovers.

CURZON One of . . .? Jean-Michel has had other lovers before me? Are you looking for something in particular?

EUNICE (About the memoirs.) No, no. (About the lovers.) You didn't know about them?

CURZON (Covering up.) Certainly I did.

EUNICE Yeah, you look a lot like my late brother, Simon. Same size. Same kind of nose. You sort of moody?

CURZON Sometimes.

EUNICE Jean-Michel must go for that.

CURZON Really? What became of your brother?

EUNICE Did himself in.

CURZON How awful! What happened?

EUNICE Got moody, I guess. You better watch yourself. Me — I never get moody. I look on the bright side, you know? Even after my divorce, I didn't feel bad for one single moment.

CURZON Good for you, Ms. Ashley.

EUNICE Met Jean-Michel at Simon's wake. There he was lying in that coffin surrounded by larkspur.

CURZON Jean-Michel was?

EUNICE No, Simon. (Re-creating it all with her hands, suddenly looking at Curzon.) I guess Jean-Michel gets the hots for a certain type. Strange taste, don't you think?

CURZON I may have my down days, Ms. Ashley, but I don't believe I look like a corpse. (Moves away.)

EUNICE Have you met his awful mother? Did you hear what she did to my brother, the one right before you?

CURZON Did to him?

EUNICE When she heard that Jean-Michel was going to live with him and possibly even make some kind of financial arrangement on his behalf, she came over here and made a terrible scene. Terrible! I don't know what she said or what she did, but soon after that my brother did himself in.

CURZON (Scared.) No! And yet you're willing to spend a weekend with this obnoxious woman?

EUNICE You have to overlook some things if you want to meet the right sort of people. She's a marquise and she's writing her memoirs, Jean-Michel tells me, and if I could publish those, I'd have a bestseller on at least three or four continents.

CURZON (Disappointed.) So that's the reason you came for the weekend.

EUNICE She's known kings, queens, the *crème de la crème*. Duchesses, for fuck's sake!

CURZON She hasn't arrived yet, so you can stop looking.

EUNICE No? Then I can relax. Boy, could I go for some tennis. You care to play?

CURZON Not just now, thank you.

EUNICE Tennis is the sport of kings. You don't like it?

CURZON Racing.

EUNICE What?

CURZON I believe it's racing that's the sport of kings. Tennis is the sport of — of publishers.

EUNICE Hey, that's almost good!

CURZON I can do better.

EUNICE You write like that? Almost witty and everything? Put some of that, only better, in your novel with the filth and I'll probably take it!

CURZON Ah, how you tempt me.

JEAN-MICHEL (Entering in tennis clothes with a racket.) *Ma Mère's* room is ready at last. (Pronouncing it the French way.) *Tennis* anyone?

EUNICE Just the man I want to see! (Gets her racket from her bag.)

JEAN-MICHEL Do you want to play, Dan?

CURZON You two play. This is the perfect opportunity to work on my book.

EUNICE Come along then, Jean-Michel, I'm going to beat the pants off you. After all, tennis is the sport of publishers!

JEAN-MICHEL No, I shall make you eat my balls. (To Curzon.) Is that good English?

CURZON (After a beat.) It'll serve.

EUNICE No, *I* want to serve!

(Eunice and Jean-Michel go through the French doors to the offstage tennis court.)

(Curzon waves goodbye, looks around with a thankful smile, finds a place on the table for his manuscript, goes back to get his typewriter from his suitcase, puts that on the table, arranges a few more things, and at last sits down, glances through the novel, thinks for a moment, and then begins to type.)

(After a moment or two, Jer appears outside near the French doors, stealthily trespassing on the grounds. Jer is a burly, masculine man in shorts, his chest showing through his shirt, a few years older than Curzon, muscular, not handsome, but sexy in a dangerous way. He is carrying something in a large paper bag.)

(Jer sees Curzon and comes through the French doors.)

JER Pssst!

CURZON (Looking up.) Jer! What are you doing here?

JER I want you to come back to me. Now!

CURZON (Getting up.) Leave at once. We're over and done with!

JER You don't mean that and you know it.

(Jer comes over and kisses Curzon passionately on the neck; they fall to the floor and thrash about.)

CURZON (Disengaging himself, tempted.) Jer, this is madness, you coming here! Jean-Michel outside playing (in the French way.) *tennis*. I mean tennis!

JEAN-MICHEL (Offstage.) Love-Thirty!

CURZON He could come in here at any moment!

JER He's too wrapped up in his game. He doesn't love you. He invites you here and leave you alone within an hour. Is that how I treated you?

CURZON No, you made me miserable!

JER But you felt alive, didn't you? What do you feel with Jean-Michel?

CURZON I don't know yet. My feelings are . . .

JER See! With me you knew where you stood. I was a sadist emotionally. You were a masochist. I came staggering home and sleazed up your life with drunken and drugged-out three-ways, and I never said I loved you, true?

CURZON All too true.

JER Yet I never said I didn't love you!

JEAN-

MICHEL (Offstage.) Love-Forty!

JER Is that what you want — Love-Forty? (Shuts the French doors part way.) Polite little tennis games on your little private court, lemonade and hammocks, tame little love-making every month or so.

CURZON Jean-Michel isn't tame, and you know it.

JER But it's not really hot, the way it is with me, is it? My hands all over you, my big piece down your —

CURZON Oh, stop, stop! Someone will hear you. We're expecting Jean-Michel's mother and sister at any time now.

JER Are you afraid of them? With me there's no need to be. If you were at my place, we could be wallowing on the floor right this minute, with all my dogs around us! A drunken trick could be vomiting in our bed.

CURZON I'm tempted, I admit. But it cannot be.

JER But why not?

CURZON I don't know how to put this, Jer. I love you, but I don't like you.

JER I can live with that.

CURZON You promise me the dogs and wallowing and all that, but how do I know as soon as you have me back, you won't treat me badly all over again?

JER You don't know. (With a cruel smile.) That's the beauty of our relationship.

CURZON I'm not going to give up this new life for the old one. There's security here, and Jean-Michel cares for me. I'm going to have to say no to you, Jer, for the first time in my life.

JER Do you want me to make a scene?

(Takes large garden shears out of the paper bag as though a weapon.)

CURZON Not that!

JER Yes, this. I'll cut your telephone wires again! (Starts snipping wires.) And as soon as you have them repaired, I'll snip them again, and I'll keep on snipping until you come back to me!

CURZON Stop that! Stop it! (Grabs Jer's hands.) What is this thing you have for telephone wires?

JER You'll come back then?

CURZON I can't.

JER            You won't.

CURZON        All right then, I won't!

JER            The dogs miss you. They whimper all the time because you're not there. How can you do that to them?

CURZON        Do they really whimper?

JER            I may have to put them in the pound if they don't stop. And you know what happens to them in the pound? Gas. Gas in their little lungs, choking them, choking them as they try to bark out your name. Daniel! If they're lucky. (Thick with sadness.) Millie, maybe Mattie, or maybe Lew, or all three could be sold for . . . experiments. Electrodes implanted in their brains, making their little paws twitch. (Shakes all over.) Or simulated car accidents! With Millie driving. Look out! Look out! . . . SMASH! (All but weeping.) Bye-bye, little Millie, Mattie, and Lew . . . Is that what you want, Dan?

CURZON        (Almost weeping too.) No!

JER            Then come back to me.

CURZON        You're making all this up. The dogs are fine.

JER            Okay, then how about this? I didn't tell you before, but my sister's husband is the owner of a major publishing house. I'll get him to publish your books, for the rest of your life.

CURZON        He won't publish me just because you ask.

JER            I have something on him.

CURZON        But I want people to publish me because they admire my work!

JER            Come on, this is the real world. You can't have everything, Dan. What do you say? (Rubbing his bare chest as a further inducement.)

CURZON        I find your offer offensive, insulting, degrading to my art and to me! How could you think I'd be tempted for even a moment? . . . How big an advance do you think he'd give?

JER            Plenty.

CURZON        Oh, this is disreputable. . . . Hardback?

JER            Any back you want — hard, soft. *My* back. Motion picture rights.

CURZON        Motion picture rights?

JER            Just say yes, and it's all yours.

CURZON You devil! You'd tell me anything to get your way.

JER What's it to be, Dan? I can't wait all day. (His hand inside his shorts provocatively.) Decide now. Decide!

(A tennis ball bounces onstage through the French doors. Jean-Michel soon follows.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL Oh, I almost broke a window.

CURZON (Guiltily.) Jean-Michel!

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Seeing Jer.) What are *you* doing here?

CURZON He was just leaving. He came by to give me something.

JEAN-  
MICHEL What? A venereal disease?

CURZON Something I left behind at his house.

JEAN-  
MICHEL And what was that?

CURZON (Thinking quickly.) My shears! (Grabs the shears.) I'm very sentimental about these. (Holds them closely.) My Aunt Jane left me these after she committed suicide with them.

JEAN-  
MICHEL I see. What a pity Jer can't stay longer, but I'm sure he has much to do. Visits to health clinics and so on.

JER Curzon lied. I didn't bring his shears.

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Looking at Curzon.) He didn't?

JER In fact Curzon still loves me, not you. And he's leaving you!

CURZON It's not true!

JEAN-  
MICHEL What is going on here? Leave my chateau!

EUNICE (Entering.) What's taking so long? Can't you find the ball?

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Picking it up and shaking it.) Yes, I have the ball!

JER (Taunting.) And it's in your court, Jean-Michel!



EUNICE (To Jer.) Who are you?

JER The villain in the piece, or so they think.

JEAN-  
MICHEL Are you going to leave or am I having to throw you up!

(Alistair, a stately English manservant in a uniform, an unsmiling man in his forties, enters through the Up Right offstage doorway, carrying the first of several trunks.)

ALISTAIR (Announcing.) The Marquise D'avignon and her party!

JEAN-  
MICHEL Oh no, *Ma Mère!*

(Offstage, like some threatening metallic creature, his mother's walker advances on the others, closer and closer. Screech, bang. Screech, bang!)

CURZON Interdigitate, Jean-Michel. (Takes his hand.) Interdigitate!

JEAN-  
MICHEL But *Ma Mère! Ma Mère!* (A nervous wreck.)

CURZON We must be brave.

(Jean-Michel reluctantly lets Curzon hold his hand, nervously. Alistair brings in a second trunk.)

(Finally Madame D'avignon appears with her walker, which is draped in black crepe. She doesn't look like an invalid. More like a female pope. She is an imperious woman in her fifties, wearing old-fashioned somber garments, something Edwardian. She stops, glares at the two men holding hands. The others are struck speechless by her presence.)

MÈRE (Threateningly.) Jean-Michel, *Qui, qui, qui* is ziz man? (Waves at Curzon.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL Ah . . . (Opens his mouth but nothing comes out.)

CURZON (Removing his hand from Curzon's.) I can explain everything, Madame!

MÈRE *Explen?* (Advancing on him in the walker. Screech, bang. Screech, bang!) No touch! No touch hands! I cut! I cut! Alistair, where is my *guillotine!*

CURZON /  
JEAN-  
MICHEL (Turn toward each other, both stuttering.) G-G-G-G-G-G-G — (Curzon's head is mush, his tongue blubber; he stutters so hard it's as though she has her hands around his throat.)

*Blackout*

## ACT II

## SCENE ONE

(The same. A few moments later.)

MÈRE (Indignantly.) Jean-Michel, who is ziz idiot?

JEAN-MICHEL He's just a little upset, *maman*. (Trying to play host.) Does everyone know everyone? Eunice Ashley, this is my mother.

EUNICE Please to meet you, Madame. (She tries to shake hands.) I'm very anxious to read your memoirs.

MÈRE (Indifferently.) *Oui*.

JEAN-MICHEL Daniel Curzon, my mother.

CURZON How-how-how-how-how-how-how do you do-do-do? (To regain his composure he tries to kiss her hand, but she pulls it away as if his lips have pustules on them.)

MÈRE (With a look of disgust to her son.) Bahh!

JEAN-MICHEL This is Alistair, my mother's manservant. Well, I guess that's everybody.

(Alistair bows stiffly; the others acknowledge him only slightly.)

JER (Thrusting himself forward.) Aren't you going to introduce me?

JEAN-MICHEL (In a whisper.) As a matter of fact, no. Get out!

MÈRE (Not missing a thing.) *Quesque c'est?*

JER I'm Jer. I'm not without some importance. I am a non-denominational minister, unfortunately now defrocked. This man and I were lovers before your son stole him away from me, violating the Seventh Commandment, I believe. Or is it the Sixth?

MÈRE Lovairs? *Vous?* Him?

CURZON Formerly. Only formerly! Now your son and I are lovers.

MÈRE (Making a terrible face.) Blahh! (Then spitting.) Blahh! No lovairs! *Non! Non! Non!*

JEAN-MICHEL *Maman!*

JER Dan, is this the Old World you want to live in? Come away with me. I may not be perfect, but you won't have to put up with this crap.

JEAN-MICHEL My mother is just a bit *fatigué* from her long voyage. I bet she would like to lie down. (to *Mère*.) *Couchez, maman?* Upstairs? *Maman?*

MÈRE *Non!*

JER Well, Dan, what's it to be?

CURZON I gave you my answer, Jer.

JER I don't believe you.

JEAN-MICHEL (Embarrassed, in a whisper to Jer.) Not *now*, please!

JER What better time?

JEAN-MICHEL Please don't bring out your dirty laundry when *Ma Mère* is here!

JER *Ma Mère* has never seen dirty laundry? She might not know it then when it hits her in the face.

JEAN-MICHEL I ask you as a gentleman!

JER No one ever said I was a gentleman.

JEAN-MICHEL Then as *I* am a gentleman!

CURZON Gentlemen, please!

JER Dan?

CURZON (To Jer.) I'm not speaking to you anymore!

JER Oh, yes you will. You want my body!

JEAN-MICHEL It's so hot in here! Alistair, could you get us some iced tea? You know the kitchen, don't you? (Frantic.) Iced tea! Iced tea!

ALISTAIR Yes, sir.

SUZETTE (Entering through the French doors, in a cheeky voice.) Hold on there. I'll have some iced tea too! My sinuses are killing me! (She is almost having an attack. Suzette is a fair-haired, pretty, thoroughly Americanized young woman in her

twenties, dressed in a frilly, feminine frock with lots of jingly bracelets, altogether rather saucy, despite her sinus trouble.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Suzette!

SUZETTE       Jean-Michel!

(Sister and brother hug warmly.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL        It's so good to see you!

SUZETTE       You too! Your garden is wonderful this year, but there is so much pollen!

JEAN-  
MICHEL        I'm sorry. When I knew you were coming, I vacuumed the flowers.

SUZETTE       Oh, you're so thoughtful! Maybe the tea will help. (She suddenly has an attack of sinus trouble and screams and holds her sinuses. After a moment she recovers and says sweetly.) That's better. Don't mind me. My sinuses.

JEAN-  
MICHEL        *Maman* is here. (Points her out.)

SUZETTE       Is she? Well, I'm not speaking to her!

(Suzette and *Mère* look at each other, then turn away.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Oh, no! The last I heard you were.

SUZETTE       When I'm good and ready, I'll marry. And if I'm never ready, then good!

JEAN-  
MICHEL        By the way, where is Jonathan?

SUZETTE       Oh, trailing behind, I suppose. With our luggage. He would insist on carrying it all himself from the station.

JEAN-  
MICHEL        How's his leg?

SUZETTE       Like his personality. Still wooden.

(She snickers guiltily, then tries to cover it up as Jonathan enters, carrying their luggage. He is a nice-looking, if severe, man about thirty, always in a suit and tie, pompous, arrogant and homophobic, with a wooden leg that gives him a noticeable limp.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Jonathan! How good to see you.

JONATHAN (Putting the luggage down.) Hello there!

JEAN-  
MICHEL Everyone, this is Jonathan. Jonathan Krepe. (Pronounced “creep”.)

JONATHAN That’s Krepe with a K. I never can get over your French doors, Jean-Michel. You’re French and you’ve got French doors! What’ll you think of next!

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Grinning to cover the lack of wit and introducing the others.) Jonathan, some friends of mine. (All nod.) And of course you know *maman* from her last trip.

JONATHAN *Maman!* (He limps over to her effusively.)

MÈRE Jonathan!

(They exchange cheek kisses.)

JONATHAN (To Suzette.) Your mother looks remarkable! (To *Mère*.) *Si jolie!*

MÈRE Demurring.) Ohho!

JONATHAN It’s true. *Oo, la, la* knows no years! You look younger every time I see you!

(*Mère* demurs again, is almost girlish at his compliments.)

ALISTAIR I’ll get the iced tea, sir. For the entire party?

EUNICE I’ll have some.

JONATHAN Indeed!

JER I’ll have some too!

ALISTAIR I’ll bring enough for all. (Exits.)

MÈRE Putting Jonathan and Suzette’s hands together, or trying to.) *Si belle!* A coupell!

SUZETTE (Pulling away.) Oh, *maman!*

MÈRE Suzette!

SUZETTE *Non!*

MÈRE Suzette!

SUZETTE *Non!*

MÈRE Suzette!

SUZETTE *Non!*

MÈRE            Suzette!

SUZETTE        *Non!*

CURZON        (Having recovered, taking Jean-Michel's hand.) We're a couple too. See? Interdigitated?

MÈRE            (Gives a horrified scream as if she's seen a reptile.) Eeek!

JEAN-  
MICHEL        (Afraid of being seen, disengages his hand quickly.)

CURZON        (To Jean-Michel.) You aren't a coward, are you?

MÈRE            (Feeling her head.) *Ma tête! Apoplexie! Ma tête!*

JEAN-  
MICHEL        *Maman*, are you all right? (Goes to her.)

(*Mère* droops. Jean-Michel, Jonathan, and Eunice assist her.)

JER             (To Curzon.) Great family, don't you think?

CURZON        I'm not talking to you!

JONATHAN     (to Jean-Michel.) You could at least have the decency not to kill your own mother by carrying on in front of her with a man! Interdigitated indeed!

CURZON        Carrying on?

JEAN-  
MICHEL        I'm sorry, *maman*.

JONATHAN     I think she'll be all right. No thanks to you. (Loans Madame his handkerchief, fusses over her.) Suzette?

SUZETTE        Yes?

JONATHAN     Come here, please.

SUZETTE        (Weary of her mother's innumerable illnesses, but trying to hide it a bit.) What is it, Jonathan? (About her sinuses.) I'm draining.

JONATHAN     I know what will make your mother feel better. Something wholesome! (He seizes Suzette's hand and holds it up in triumph.) *Maman*, ladies and gentlemen, (They all look at him.) I have the honor of announcing my engagement to Miss Suzette D'avignon. Soon to be Mrs. Jonathan Krepe.

SUZETTE        (She bursts into tears.) Suzette Krepe!

JONATHAN     Darling, what's wrong?

SUZETTE Nothing. Everything. Krepe Suzette, that's me! (Cries harder.) And you don't even see! I'm not talking to you anymore! I don't want to marry you, Jonathan!

JONATHAN But what have I done?

(Suzette runs off, weeping.)

MÈRE Suzette! Suzette!

JEAN-  
MICHEL Suzette! Come back!

CURZON The course of true love never did run smooth, interdigitated or not.

JONATHAN (To Curzon.) It was you who upset my pet, Suzette!

CURZON Upset your pet Suzette?

JONATHAN Jean-Michel, how can you have these sort of people in your home?

CURZON It's his home. Let him decide. And it's *these sorts* of people, for god's sake!

JEAN-  
MICHEL Dan, keep out of this, please.

CURZON Keep out of it? This man is a bigot.

JEAN-  
MICHEL It'll be all right.

CURZON No, it won't if we give in. I can't even hold your hand in your own house? Like it's a crime or something. (Tries to grab his hand but Jean-Michel won't let him.)

MÈRE Oh! (Starts to faint again, her walker rattling.) *Oh!*

JONATHAN Cease this! You're killing *maman!*

JEAN-  
MICHEL Dan, please! Not now!

CURZON If not now, when? Are we always going to be afraid to touch every time some relative comes to visit us? Is this our future together?

JEAN-  
MICHEL Do you want my mother to disinherit me?

CURZON Now we're getting to the real sordidness. You want me to compromise my integrity merely so you can inherit a fortune?

JONATHAN Integrity? Hah!

CURZON (To Jonathan.) Will you shut up, please.

JEAN-MICHEL (To Curzon.) Will you shut up, please.

CURZON No, I won't!

JEAN-MICHEL Then I'm not talking to you!

CURZON Good! I'm going to my room!

JER I'll come with you, Curzon.

CURZON You're not welcome in my room, Jer.

JER I'm not leaving this house without you. At least let's have sex.

MÈRE (Overhearing, shrieks.)

JEAN-MICHEL Jer, leave my house.

JER You come too, Jean-Michel. I love three-ways.

MÈRE (Overhearing, with an even louder shriek.)

JEAN-MICHEL It's all right, *maman*. You misunderstood. Misunderstood!

JONATHAN I'm going to find my fiancée! I'll have my tea later. (Exits through the French doors.)

CURZON I'm going to my room — alone! (Exits Up Right.) I'll have my tea later!

EUNICE Does this mean our damn tennis game is off? I was winning!

JEAN-MICHEL Eunice! Come, *maman*. You rest here. (Arranges her comfortably on a sofa.) Are you all right now?

MÈRE (In a tiny voice.) *Oui*.

JEAN-MICHEL I have just a few things to clear up with Curzon. (To Eunice.) Will you look after my mother?

EUNICE Certainly.

JEAN-MICHEL I won't be long.



MÈRE Jean-Michel! Jean-Michel! (Holds out her hands to him imploringly.)

JEAN-MICHEL Yes, *maman*?

MÈRE (Laying it on thick.) I love you! Do not deesapont me. Love you! My baybee! (She smacks him good.)

JEAN-MICHEL (Falling back.) *Oui, maman.* (Exits after Curzon.)

(Eunice looks at *Mère*, who stares back.)

EUNICE Afraid I don't speak that French. (Beat as he looks at her walker.) I don't suppose you'd like to play tennis? (Waves the racquet.)

MÈRE (Snorts.)

EUNICE About your memoirs. Have you got a publisher yet?

MÈRE (Rudely opens a book and starts to read.)

(Enter Alistair, the manservant, with a tray of iced tea glasses.)

ALISTAIR Iced tea is serv — (He sees that most have left. (To Eunice.) Iced tea, Ms. Ashley?

EUNICE Haven't had a chance to build up much of a thirst yet. (to *Mère*.) Now about your memoirs. (as if she's deaf) *Memoir-ay-vous!* If I could just —

MÈRE *Non! Non!*

EUNICE I'm sure I could make you an offer —

MÈRE *Non! Non!* Tradesmen!

ALISTAIR I believe Madame is not interested in selling her memoirs. They are for the consumption of the few.

EUNICE Well, I'll try later, when she's in a better frame of mind.

ALISTAIR Do not count on that, ms.

EUNICE I'm going to bat a few balls by myself — hard! Leave the tea. I'll drink it later. (Exits through French doors.)

ALISTAIR Your room is prepared, Madame. I checked. Tea? (Offers her the tray.) It's very good.

MÈRE (Getting up from the sofa.) *Non!* (Storming out of the room quickly in her walker.) *Non! Non! Non! Imbeciles! Imbeciles!*

ALISTAIR Well, for later then.

(Alistair looks around at the empty room, then at the glasses on the tray. Still dignified, he carefully begins to spit into each one of the iced tea glasses.)

*Slow Fade*

SCENE TWO

(The same. A few minutes later. Alistair is gone; the trunks are gone. The spit-contaminated iced drinks are on the table.)

(Enter Suzette from the garden, pursued by Jonathan.)

JONATHAN But why won't you marry me?

SUZETTE I don't know, Jonathan. I don't know!

JONATHAN It's because I'm lame, isn't it? That's it. (Pats leg.)

SUZETTE Actually your artificial leg is the one thing about you I'm absolutely fond of. You must show it to me sometime.

JONATHAN (Shocked at her lack of decorum.) What kind of cad do you take me for?

SUZETTE What kind are you? Mayn't I tap it? I've never even touched it and we're supposed to marry?

JONATHAN A man never shows his leg to his woman until she's his wife.

(Suzette reaches out to touch the leg just as Curzon enters for his novel, unseen by the other two. He starts to leave, but stops when he overhears what he takes to be rather ribald talk.)

JONATHAN (Pulling away.) I'm not sure I should let you touch it, Suzette.

(Curzon is startled by what he thinks he hears.)

SUZETTE I just want to know how hard it is.

(Curzon reacts throughout, not knowing whether to go or to stay.)

JONATHAN It's not all that hard.

SUZETTE Good, I wouldn't want it to be. (Curzon reacts.) Does it ever hurt?

JONATHAN Only sometimes, when I remove it.

(Big reaction from Curzon.)

SUZETTE Oh, you poor thing. You know what a sucker I am for dumb animals and people like you. The first time I saw you, hobbling toward me at that anti-vivisectionist meeting, I —

JONATHAN Your heart went out to me, I know. Even though I was there by mistake, thinking it was a pro-vivisectionist meeting. Suzette, please don't take your love away now that we're this close.

SUZETTE We're so different, Jonathan, you and I.

JONATHAN What if I let you feel it? Would that make you happy, darling?

(Curzon reacts, is tempted to peek.)

SUZETTE Oh, could I, Jonathan?

JONATHAN Just be careful. It hurts just now. (He demarcates a narrow area on his leg.) Touch it here.

SUZETTE (She reaches out to touch it.) *Here?*

JONATHAN Not there! Here.

CURZON (Interrupting.) Excuse me. I thought the room was empty.

SUZETTE Oh, Curzon, it's you! (Moves away, spilling Jonathan's leg.)

JONATHAN What do you want?

CURZON I was going to work on my novel.

JONATHAN Can't you see we're engaged?

CURZON There are other rooms in the house where you can —

JONATHAN Engaged in every sense of the word! We're making important plans for our marriage. So would you mind leaving us alone? That's a good chap.

CURZON Checking the working parts, were you?

JONATHAN Sorry if normal love-making annoys you.

CURZON It doesn't annoy me at all, but you seem to think you own the sunlight and nobody else should have any.

JONATHAN What you don't seem to understand is that this is about a marriage, a sacrament, not a — how shall I put it? — a thing between you and whoever or whatever.

CURZON I couldn't hold hands with Jean-Michel in this house, and yet you two are carrying on like mosquitoes in heat.

- JONATHAN That's how the world replenishes itself!
- CURZON Just what the world needs! More mosquitoes! (Swats at a passing mosquito.)
- SUZETTE Now don't argue. I didn't come down this weekend for that. Everybody here is either arguing or else not talking at all.
- JONATHAN See, now you've upset Suzette!
- CURZON Upset — please, let's not go through *that* again. Forget Suzette! (Groans at the word play.)
- SUZETTE I beg your pardon!
- CURZON I didn't mean that. I guess I'm upset, Suzette. (Groans over the words.) I need a drink. (Curzon sees the iced tea glasses on the tray and grabs one.) This ought to hit the spot! (Picks up a glass, not knowing of course what Alistair did to it.)
- SUZETTE I'll have some of that too. (Picks up a glass.)
- JONATHAN Oh, I might as well. (Picks up a glass.)
- CURZON Truce? (Offers a toast.)
- SUZETTE Truce. Come on, Jonathan.
- JONATHAN I'm not sure we should have come here this weekend. After we're married, we'll have to be much more selective about whom with we associate.
- CURZON (Smiling over the grammar, toasting.) To "about whom with!"
- JONATHAN Well, for now. (Offers his glass to Curzon and Suzette.)
- (They lift their glasses to their mouths.)
- CURZON (Suddenly just before he drinks.) Oh, the ice is melted. I like mine with lots of ice.
- SUZETTE I'll wait until I get some ice myself.
- JONATHAN True men drink it any way they find it. (Takes a big swallow of the spit-tainted tea.) Ah, best tea I've ever had! (Smacks his lips.)
- CURZON Ah, true men clean up their plates!
- JONATHAN No, gay men clean up our plates!
- CURZON True, true men do dirty up the world.
- JONATHAN Gay men dirty up their buttoles. (To Suzette.) Sorry, darling. Man talk.

SUZETTE I'm modern.

CURZON Gay men give more to the goddamn world than they ever get back!

JONATHAN True men create the world.

CURZON Then de-create it with wars.

JONATHAN (Mockingly, hugging his ears.) "Oh, it's a war, it's a war! Help me, help me!"  
Guess who?

CURZON You are a pig penis!

JONATHAN Faggot!

CURZON It's Mr. Faggot to you!

JONATHAN (To Suzette.) We'll have to ask Alistair how he made this. Drink up, dear.

SUZETTE (Waves no.)

JONATHAN What a couple of sissies. (Takes another big sip, savors it.) It's got a certain *je ne sais quoi!*

SUZETTE I think I'll ring for Alistair. (She looks around, can't find the bell.) Where's that little silver bell Jean-Michel has? (She searches a little more, then jiggles her bracelets hard instead.)

JONATHAN I wonder how your mother is. Do you think she's resting? Shall we look in on her? She's the only thing about this whole weekend that any decent person would find enjoyable.

SUZETTE (Seeing his interest in her mother.) What an odd thing to say, Jonathan. *Maman* will look out for *maman*. You can count on that. (Jiggles her bracelets again.)

ALISTAIR (Entering from kitchen.) You rang, miss?

SUZETTE Alistair, could you make us some fresh tea?

ALISTAIR (With no expression.) Something wrong with it, miss?

SUZETTE No, we just want oodles of ice.

JONATHAN Get Alistair's recipe, Suzette. I want you to make it just this way after we're married. It tastes like . . . (Trying to figure it out.) Like . . .

SUZETTE I'm not going to cook.

JONATHAN That's not cooking!

SUZETTE With my marriage, I come into my money, and money means I don't drudge.

- JONATHAN Well, I'll ask then. Al, tell me — man to man — how you made this first-rate tea. (Takes another sip.) It's some rare spice, isn't it? That's what you've put in it! I've found him out, Suzette!
- ALISTAIR I'm afraid it's an old family secret, sir.
- JONATHAN You can tell me.
- ALISTAIR That would betray a trust, sir.
- JONATHAN Oh, what a lot of — On the other hand, it goes to show that there are still some servants who will go out of their way to protect the families that employ them. You don't find that nearly enough these days.
- ALISTAIR Thank you, sir. Anything else, miss?
- SUZETTE Maybe some cakes or scones or something gnoshy. I know — little crackers.
- CURZON I believe Jean-Michel is planning a dinner party later. With a roasted pot!
- SUZETTE But I want something now! Crackers, I must have crackers!
- ALISTAIR I'll see what I can find, miss.
- JONATHAN And something to drink. Be sure to make it as good as that last batch.
- ALISTAIR I'll pay particular attention to your glass, sir. (Coughs slightly, bows and exits to kitchen.)
- JONATHAN I wonder if Alistair would come to work for us after we're married. I think I could find a place for him on one of my estates.
- SUZETTE He's devoted to mother. He'd never leave her.
- JONATHAN Your mother could come and live with us.
- SUZETTE Over my dead body and your dead leg.
- JONATHAN I don't think you're fair to your mother, Suzette. To say nothing of my leg.
- SUZETTE (Meditatively.) You don't know Bertha as well as I do.
- JONATHAN She seems to have all the right values. And so dynamic.
- SUZETTE *Maman* used to be quite sweet, but something has happened to her. She can't stop interfering in her children's lives.
- JONATHAN Mothers should interfere in their children's lives. I would certainly expect you to interfere in our children's lives on a daily basis.
- SUZETTE Do you want children, Jonathan?

JONATHAN Naturally. Don't you?

SUZETTE I'm afraid I'll become like my mother. That shouldn't happen to anybody.

JONATHAN Our children will be perfect — my brains and your beauty.

SUZETTE What if they get your leg and my sinuses?

JONATHAN My wooden leg isn't hereditary.

SUZETTE It's not?

JONATHAN I told you I lost it playing golf at the club.

SUZETTE I thought you told me you lost it in a motor accident.

JONATHAN I told you no such thing. I was moving in for a birdie when I stepped in a gopher hole, twisted my ankle, and there were complications. But I don't of course wish to talk about those.

SUZETTE Good. I don't wish to either.

JONATHAN (Incensed.) Well, we could talk about some of them! My complications are not like most people's.

CURZON I think I'll take my novel and work on it up in my room. (Picks up the manuscript.) Pardon me.

SUZETTE Goodbye, Curzon. My brother tells me he's very fond of you.

CURZON I'm very fond of him.

SUZETTE It's a pity you're not talking.

CURZON Yes, it is.

JONATHAN Suzette, we were discussing more significant matters, namely, our forthcoming wedding. Is it too much to ask that you concentrate on me for half a moment?

SUZETTE Jonathan, don't be a boor!

JONATHAN I see no point in encouraging the fall of the Roman Empire or the behavior that went with it.

CURZON Your knowledge of history is spotty, like those glasses. Try classical Greece and the behavior that went with it!

JONATHAN I suppose the next thing you'll say is they had sodomites in classical Greece! (Laughs.)

CURZON No, that's what Jean-Michel and I use in our love-making — classical grease.

SUZETTE You'd better come away, Jonathan.

JONATHAN Yes, Suzette, let's go onto the terrace. I don't care to hear any more smut.

SUZETTE But let's not talk about marriage or children or any of that. I won't be a party to Nature's plot against women!

(Alistair enters with a tray of crackers in a dish.)

ALISTAIR Your snack, miss?

SUZETTE Oh, I don't want it now after all. But thank you for fixing it, Alistair.

ALISTAIR Very good, miss. Mr. Krepe, more tea?

JONATHAN Me neither. Later! Yes, later. (Waves it away.)

ALISTAIR Very good, sir.

SUZETTE Don't talk, Jonathan. Let's just go out into the garden and try to breathe!

(Takes a deep breath. Jonathan takes a deep breath. Suzette and Jonathan exit, with her teaching him breathing.)

ALISTAIR (Offering snacks.) Mr. Curzon?

CURZON I'm too angry to snack! (Slams his manuscript down on the table.)

ALISTAIR Very good, sir.

(Curzon exits. Alistair looks at the snacks, snaps a bite off angrily, then exits to the kitchen with subdued annoyance.)

(Curzon re-enters to get his forgotten manuscript, then starts to leave. Jean-Michel enters with a whisk broom and dustpan; he hesitates.)

CURZON Are we talking to each other?

JEAN-MICHEL Yes, we've got to talk.

CURZON I'm ready.

JEAN-MICHEL Is that scum ex-lovair of yours gone?

CURZON So far as I know.

JEAN-MICHEL You're not arboring him somewhere?



CURZON           Jealousy does not become you, Jean-Michel.

JEAN-  
MICHEL            I don't think you really love me.

CURZON            But I do! I didn't ask Jer to come after me.

JEAN-  
MICHEL            If I could only be sure.

CURZON            What can I do to prove it to you? I didn't leave with him, did I?

JEAN-  
MICHEL            You were tempted, I'm sure of that! (Starts to clean up non-existent dirt out of nervousness.) I need to clean something!

CURZON            Jean-Michel, I thought we were to have an honest relationship. Do you want me to deny my feelings? I had those feelings, but they're fading. Fading.

JEAN-  
MICHEL            Jer is so dirty! And I am so clean! Did you kiss him?

CURZON            No . . . He kissed me.

JEAN-  
MICHEL            Ugh! Let me clean your lips! (Tries to use the whisk broom on Curzon's face.)

CURZON            Wait! Wait! I know, darling. Jer doesn't make any sense. But love is a strange monster. I'm trying. I am trying to get used to this new clean and wholesome life with you. I never want to go back to my old sordid ways. You've got to help me be pure.

JEAN-  
MICHEL            It's so difficult, so difficult. I want to suck him up in my vacuum!

CURZON            I didn't want to bring them up, but you have some questionable things in your past as well, I gather.

JEAN-  
MICHEL            Things?

CURZON            Well, since you asked. Your string of lovers who all look like me. How do you think that makes me feel?

JEAN-  
MICHEL            What are you talking about?

CURZON            How can I feel that you love me personally? I'm just stamped out of some mold in your subconscious.

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Confessing.) I can't help it. Depressives make me drool. I have tried to fight it. And I swear I have nevair, nevair tried to make you unhappy for my own selfish reasons!

CURZON I'm sure you haven't. . . . *Have* you, Jean-Michel?

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Confessing.) Well, maybe a few times.

CURZON (Prodding.) A few times?

JEAN-  
MICHEL Well, maybe a leedle more than zat.

CURZON Jean-Michel, I don't think you're normal.

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Resigned.) *Oui*.

CURZON And what am I supposed to think will happen to us when all your previous lovers have bitten the dust?

JEAN-  
MICHEL It will be different for us. It will! I can't go through that again. Do you want to hear about my lovairs?

CURZON No.

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Disappointed.) No? Really? You are zee thirteenth.

CURZON We've both got to change. Or we're doomed in love.

JEAN-  
MICHEL You're so wiseass, *cherie*.

CURZON *Wise*. If only wisdom were enough.

JEAN-  
MICHEL What more does it take? (They look longingly at each other.) You forgive me for not telling you about my other lovairs?

CURZON Do you forgive me for Jer?

JEAN-  
MICHEL As long as he doesn't come back. Ever!

CURZON He won't. Not if I have anything to do with it.

JEAN-

MICHEL I think we're working out our problems, Dan. It gives me such hope.

CURZON We mustn't be overly optimistic. Love usually fails.

JEAN-MICHEL Oh, I *like* zat in you, zat sour, brooding quality. (Sucks air between his teeth out of desire.) Kiss me!

CURZON (Not kissing him.) Besides our pasts, there's still that other problem.(Points upstairs.)

JEAN-MICHEL *Ma Mère?*

CURZON Your *Mère*.

JEAN-MICHEL I can't change her. She has sat in her ways. She may leave me alone as long as we don't flaunt it.

CURZON Flaunt it? All we want is what others have. Jean-Michel, we can't keep on hiding our affection. I think it's time you confronted your mother.

JEAN-MICHEL I couldn't!

CURZON You have to!

JEAN-MICHEL She'll make me stutter.

CURZON Then I'll meet with her! I'll convince her of our love. And I won't stutter this time!

JEAN-MICHEL Yes, yes, do you think you could?

CURZON I will. I must.

JEAN-MICHEL She could cut me off without a *sou*.

CURZON It's not just the money, which could allow us to live in comfort for the rest of our lives. It's also the principle. Our love deserves equality.

JEAN-MICHEL *Liberté, égalité, fraternité!* (Bursts out with a bit of "*Le Marseillais*.") Oh, *oui*, let's storm the Bastille of prejudice!

CURZON You'll go with me then to your mother?

JEAN-  
MICHEL        No, you go. (Grins sheepishly.)

CURZON        Jean-Michel!

JEAN-  
MICHEL        I'll arrange it with *Ma Mère*. Just the two of you. Do zis one thing for me!

CURZON        Will I have the strength?

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Dan, we can't let her win again!

CURZON        Very well then. Bring on your mother!

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Where do you want to meet her?

CURZON        Here! Now! (Points to floor.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Wait here. Stay strong! (He exits Up Right.)

CURZON        What have I gotten myself into? (He hums a bit of "*Le Marseillais*" for courage.)

*Lights Fade*

SCENE THREE

(Sound of Madame's walker advancing toward Curzon, but he stands his ground. She appears, imposing as ever.)

CURZON        Come in, Madame. I'm sure Jean-Michel told you I have something important to discuss with you. I realize your English is limited, but I'll do my best to clarify everything. May I help you sit down? (Pulls out a chair.)

MÈRE        (Refusing it.) *Non!*

(She makes her way in her walker to the table and sits. Curzon starts to sit too but is too nervous and keeps getting up.)

CURZON        (Trying to convince himself.) Communication is a great thing. (Very French accent.) *Communication*. It leads to the resolution of petty differences and to international understanding!

MÈRE        *Quoi?*

CURZON        Well, let's proceed anyway. There's the little matter of your son and me.

MÈRE        Son?

- CURZON        That's right. Your son and I . . .
- MÈRE            (Very loudly.) Blahh! Blahh! Blahh! . . . Blahh!
- CURZON        But there's another way of putting it. Really.
- MÈRE            *Blahhhhhhhhh!* (Makes vomiting sounds, shakes her head, bangs her walker.)  
Puke!!
- CURZON        I see your point of view, but look at it this way. Jean-Michel and I care for each other. At least we're working on it. I believe we can overcome the obstacles in our path and learn to deepen our feelings for one another —
- MÈRE            (Holding her head.) Feelings! Hurt feelings!
- CURZON        I'm sorry, I don't mean to hurt your feelings. But you hurt mine too, you must understand.
- MÈRE            My feelings! *My feelings!* (Points into her mouth, expresses pain.)
- CURZON        Oh, your *fillings* hurt!
- MÈRE            *Oui*, feelings.
- CURZON        Do you want to see a dentist?
- MÈRE            Dentist! *Bah!* (Puffs out air.)
- CURZON        You'd rather suffer. I see. What can I do for you?
- MÈRE            (Seizing the opening.) Go! Go! (Points.) Leave my son! *Forevair!*
- (Jean-Michel appears at the French doors, eavesdropping, keeping out of his mother's line of vision.)
- CURZON        I will stay, stay!
- (Curzon catches sight of Jean-Michel, who gives him a furtive wave by way of support.)
- JEAN-  
MICHEL        (In a whisper.) Way to go, Dan!
- CURZON        It's time you faced some facts, Mrs. D'avignon. May I call you *Ma Mère*?
- MÈRE            *Nevair!*
- CURZON        Madame, it's time you got over your old-fashioned ways of thinking. It's time you gave your son his own head.
- MÈRE            I geeve my son *head*?

(Jean-Michel waves at Curzon, to stop him from teaching his mother the wrong English.)

- JEAN-MICHEL      Dan, what are you saying!
- CURZON          No, you don't have to give your son head. *Tête*. (Points to his head.) *Tête*.
- MÈRE            I geeve *you* head?
- CURZON          (Looking back at Jean-Michel.) Let's try that another way. (He spots a vitamin bottle among the breakfast items on the table.)
- CURZON          You see, what Jean-Michel and I feel for each other is — you understand "healthy?" Like vitamins. (Shows her the bottle.)
- MÈRE            *Quoi?*
- CURZON          Minimum daily requirement! All natural.
- MÈRE            (Holding up a box of granola bars.) Emulsifiers!
- CURZON          (Reading vitamins hurriedly.) Keep out of reach of children. Ah, no — (Grabbing a box of cereal.) Niacin! Calcium! Riboflavin! People have to eat. Your son and I have to eat too.
- MÈRE            You eat my son?
- JEAN-MICHEL    (Holds his ears, getting more upset.) *Dan!*
- CURZON          I don't seem to be getting through.
- MÈRE            You eat my son?! (She rises and tries to hit him with her walker.)
- CURZON          Mrs. D'avignon! Please! (Looks to Jean-Michel, who isn't helping.) Mrs. D'avignon! (Tries to avoid the walker.)
- MÈRE            (Furiously.) Cannibal! Cannibal! Cannibal!
- CURZON          Madame!

(Jean-Michel is forced out of hiding.)

- JEAN-MICHEL    *Maman!*
- MÈRE            *Cannibal! Cannibal!*

(Enter Suzette and Jonathan.)

- SUZETTE        What's wrong, *maman*?

JONATHAN What is this man doing to you? Shall I beat him within an inch of his life?

(Enter Eunice from the offstage tennis court.)

EUNICE Is everybody all right?

CURZON Oh, my God, we're worse off than before I talked to her!

(Enter Alistair with a tray of crackers in a silver dish.)

ALISTAIR Would you like your snacks now?

(*Mere* is very upset and tries to exit Up Right but almost falls down, more seriously than the last time. Suzette, Jean-Michel, and Jonathan rush to her aid, with much worrying and fussing.)

MÈRE *Apoplexie! Apoplexie!* (She feels her head, then thrusts both arms skyward, and falls.)

(They carry her off wailing.)

JONATHAN (Before he leaves, to Curzon.) You swine, you've given their mother a stroke.  
(Exits.)

ALISTAIR (To Curzon.) Is there anything I can do, sir?

CURZON Apparently there's nothing anyone can do! . . . Only I'm not giving up! I'll never give up! (Disturbed, as he exits through the French doors.) I'll eat those goddamn crackers later!

ALISTAIR Very good, sir.

(Alistair looks after the departed Curzon, then after the departed others, looks at the tray of neglected crackers he has brought. With dignity, he unbuttons two or three buttons of his uniform and begins placing the crackers in his armpits, holding them there gently until they are "done," careful not to break them, alternating armpits and crackers in a ballet of revenge as the Lights Fade.)

*INTERMISSION*

## ACT III

## SCENE ONE

(The next morning. Saturday. Madame sniffs one of the crackers Alistair earlier baked under his armpits, as she sits on a sofa writing her memoirs with a large quill and an inkpot. She seems to be enjoying herself, laughs over a judicious phrase as she writes.)

MÈRE (Sniffing the delightful aroma of the crackers.) *C'est bon!*

(Jean-Michel enters from Up Right Entrance in his night clothes, looking tired.)

JEAN-MICHEL Are you feeling better this morning, *maman*?

MÈRE *Oui.*

JEAN-MICHEL Those snacks seem to have revived you, almost like smelling salts.

MÈRE (She takes a bite of the cracker.) *C'est exquis!*

JEAN-MICHEL I'll have to get some more of them for you. You're working on your memoirs, I see. I may go back to bed myself. Will you be all right?

MÈRE *Oui.*

JEAN-MICHEL English, *maman*, English while in America.

MÈRE *Phhhhh!*

JEAN-MICHEL I'm so glad you're better.

MÈRE (For pity.) Only a leetle bettair.

(He nods sadly and exits. After a moment, as Madame continues writing, Jer appears at the French doors, more fully dressed now.)

JER (Whispering.) Madame, may I speak with you?

(Alistair enters, causing Jer to hid behind a sofa. Alistair passes the crackers, counting to see if any have been eaten. Sees Madam eating one, smiles. Exits.)

JER (Looking to be sure the others are not around.) Maybe we can make a deal that's beneficial to both of us? You get your son. I get my lover. But with your English and my French —



- MÈRE (In perfect English.) I know all about my son.
- JER You speak English!
- MÈRE I can speak seventeen languages when it suits me.
- JER I know of certain incriminating facts about Curzon's past that might be of interest to you. The sooner you get him away from Jean-Michel the better for Jean-Michel's health, shall we say? I know this sordidness to be a fact. Because I was the inspiration of it.
- MÈRE I don't think my son will leave Curzon just because of his past. He thinks he's in love, the fool!
- JER Curzon's not even his real name, did you know that?
- MÈRE What is his name?
- JER Brown. Dan Brown.
- MÈRE You mean he comes from peasant stock?
- JER Low Irish types.
- MÈRE (Jumping up, throwing down her crackers.) I knew he wasn't of our class! He's trying to worm his way up in my world. What can we do to stop him!
- JER If we could arrange it so that Curzon's novel is published by a good press it would make him so happy and contented he would become a turn-off for Jean-Michel. They'd break up in no time. I told Curzon I knew somebody who would publish him, but that's a lie. Do you know of anybody?
- MÈRE That Eunice Ashley wants my memoirs. Perhaps if I give her those and told her she has to take Curzon's novel as well..
- JER Curzon has to think Ashley truly wants his novel or he won't bite.
- MÈRE I have a perfect plan. . . . Is this Curzon any good? I don't read books by living authors.
- JER Some people think he's very good. I haven't read him either.
- MÈRE Hmmm. And why are you doing this? Do not tell me stupid, sentimental reasons — that you love this Curzon!
- JER Because nobody leaves me and gets away with it! As soon as I get him back, I'll dump him.
- MÈRE Excellent! I like a man to be vindictive. It seems more manly.
- JER It seems we have something in common after all.

MÈRE           How do you say in English — strange — ?

JER             That's us, strange bedfellows. (Kisses her hand.)

MÈRE           (Putting her memoirs into a folder on the table.) By the way, do you have any suggestions for my daughter?

JER             Like what?

MÈRE           How to get her to marry Jonathan Krepe.

JER             Really? He seems so narrow.

MÈRE           Precisely. A sterling young man. Actually he's too good for Suzette.

JER             Will they be happy together?

MÈRE           I was married to my husband for over thirty years, and we were never happy for one minute. But we stayed together. That's what morality means!

JER             Where is your husband now?

MÈRE           Dead.

JER             I'm sorry.

MÈRE           I'm not. He was a dreadful man.

JER             Perhaps the worst is over for you.

MÈRE           I'm still in mourning. (Acknowledges the black crepe on her walker.)

JER             Why don't you quit?

MÈRE           I must honor my husband's memory.

JER             When it's love, the least you can do is make somebody suffer, even if it's yourself.

MÈRE           Ah, a young man after my own heart!

JER             I like you too.

MÈRE           Can you help me with my plan?

JER             Won't Curzon and Jean-Michel object if —

MÈRE           What if you wore a disguise?

JER             A disguise?

MÈRE            Come to my room. I still have some of my late husband's clothing in one of my trunks.

JER             I can't wait!

(Madame starts to get up.)

JER             Do you need help?

MÈRE            Not nearly as much as they think! (She shakes the walker. She and Jer hurry Up Right, sharing a conspiratorial chuckle together.)

(Enter Alistair from kitchen.)

ALISTAIR        Madame, do you want — ? Madame? (Sees that she is gone, starts to exit, then decides to clean up after her writing. As he straightens up, he sneaks a peek at her memoirs. Big yawn.)

(Enter Suzette from upstairs, Up Right Entrance, in a robe.)

SUZETTE        Good morning, Alistair.

ALISTAIR        (Closing the memoirs in a hurry.) Good morning, miss.

SUZETTE        Is mother all right?

ALISTAIR        I believe so, miss.

SUZETTE        (Showing some romantic interest.) How long have you been with her now, Alistair?

ALISTAIR        Four years, give or take a few months.

SUZETTE        I don't know how you tolerate it. (Touching her nose.) My sinuses are much improved today.

ALISTAIR        I read Marcus Aurelius.

SUZETTE        He's one of those philosophers, isn't he? I'm sorry I haven't gotten to know you better, Alistair. (More romantically interested in him.) But I am glad you've helped *maman* so much.

ALISTAIR        Thank you, miss.

SUZETTE        (Very close to him.) By the way, do you share mother's bed?

ALISTAIR        *Miss Suzette!* (Almost drops the inkpot he's moving, moves away.)

SUZETTE        Don't be silly. Servants have sex lives, don't they? Or so I've heard.

ALISTAIR        Not with their employers.

SUZETTE Well, I can't help thinking *maman* would be less disagreeable if she was getting some — attention. Have you read her memoirs?

ALISTAIR No, miss.

SUZETTE I can't imagine they're very interesting. What has she ever done? Besides, she goes out of her way to avoid scandals of any sort.

ALISTAIR It's not for me to comment, miss. (Tidies up some more.)

SUZETTE (Moving in on him, blocking his path.) Don't you ever get tired of serving and fetching? I'd go mad.

ALISTAIR One adjusts, miss. My parents were well-off, but they met with economic misfortune when I was in my youth. I have therefore spent most of my life working in the homes of the wealthy and the titled.

SUZETTE Such a sad, sad story, Alistair. I'll get *maman* to give you a raise at once. (Touches him.)

ALISTAIR Best not to disturb Madame after her ordeal of yesterday.

SUZETTE (Sexily.) So thoughtful, Alistair.

ALISTAIR Will that be all, miss? Are you hungry? There's Mr. D'avignon's pot roast.

SUZETTE (Blocking his exit.) Afterwhilies, perhaps. What do you think of Jonathan, my fiancé? He's into bonds or something these days. He's a perfect stick, don't you think?

ALISTAIR I don't have opinions about my betters, miss.

SUZETTE Oh *foo*, I bet you have opinions about every single one of us, you sly thing you!

ALISTAIR Will that be all, miss?

SUZETTE (Moving aside, watching him leave.) God, how I envy the lower classes. What mysterious lives they lead.

(Alistair exits to kitchen.)

(Suzette goes to the French doors leading to the garden, takes a cautious breath.)

SUZETTE Oh, I do hope the god-awful pollen isn't coming back! The whole world wants to put pollen in me! (Exits to garden. Sighing.) Oh, dare I sniff a rose?

(Enter Curzon from Up Right entrance with suitcase, to gather his things garden shears, manuscript, etc. Packs everything.)

(Enter Jean-Michel, now dressed for the day.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL           Are you leaving?

CURZON           I think it best, under the circumstances.

JEAN-  
MICHEL           Where will you go?

CURZON           I don't know yet.

JEAN-  
MICHEL           Back to Jer?

CURZON           (Trying to cram his manuscript into his overnight bag, but unsuccessfully.) That doesn't deserve an answer.

JEAN-  
MICHEL           I knocked on your door last night.

CURZON           You did?

JEAN-  
MICHEL           You didn't answer.

CURZON           I must have been sleeping.

JEAN-  
MICHEL           Did you really sleep after all that business with *Ma Mère*?

CURZON           Not a wink.

JEAN-  
MICHEL           (Intrigued.) Then you chose not to answer my knock. Were you brooding?

CURZON           Yes.

JEAN-  
MICHEL           Were you depressed?

CURZON           Very.

JEAN-  
MICHEL           (Erotically stimulated.) *Oh, Dan!* I should have been there!

CURZON           I didn't want to see anyone.

JEAN-  
MICHEL           Did you have a headache?

CURZON           Pounding.

JEAN-  
MICHEL (More excited.) Why didn't you let me be with you!

CURZON What could you have done? (Starts to leave.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Sexually aroused.) Was it a deep, black, miserable depression? The kind where life seems like a big pit full of green slime?

CURZON Worse.

JEAN-  
MICHEL (More aroused.) How *bad* was it?

CURZON It was as if God appeared to me in a vision and told me the meaning of life. And you know what that was?

JEAN-  
MICHEL What?

CURZON Life is a series of low points punctuated by disappointments, capped off with physical decrepitude and illness, followed by death and total obscurity.

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Thrilled.) I can't stand it when you talk like this! But don't stop!

CURZON How many people get what they want out of life? Does anybody? Name one person who's gotten what he or she really wants!

JEAN-  
MICHEL Don't leave! Oh, Dan! Don't leave!

(Jean-Michel tries to take off Curzon's clothes. Curzon resists.)

CURZON No, Jean-Michel! We can't!

JEAN-  
MICHEL Why not? I love you!

CURZON That's just your male sex drive talking.

JEAN-  
MICHEL No, it's true. (Grabs at Curzon's clothing, rubs his hands all over his body.) I love you so much!

CURZON "I love you" is merely what men say when they're about to come.

JEAN-  
MICHEL Oh, *more*! More! I beg you!

CURZON It's best that I leave. When I feel suicidal, that's when you feel most excited. We're not compatible.

JEAN-  
MICHEL        No, we're perfect for each other! I'll tell my mother to leave. I can't live without you.

CURZON        Oh, you say that now. But as soon as I cheer up a little bit, you'll forget all about your promise. And I can't live on this level of depression much longer. I can't think. I can't function. I can't write. And I live to write.

(Enter Eunice Ashley from upstairs carrying her overnight bag.)

EUNICE        Good morning, you two lovebirds.

(Curzon and Jean-Michel separate.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Good morning, Eunice.

CURZON        Good morning.

EUNICE        (To Curzon.) How's that filthy novel coming along? Can I read it yet?

CURZON        It's in pretty rough shape at the moment. I spent half of last night putting the filth in and the other half taking it out.

EUNICE        Well, whenever it's ready, show it to me.

CURZON        Ms. Ashley, I guess I didn't make myself clear. I don't want to write filth!

EUNICE        Well, pardon me, Mr. High and Mighty! There are plenty who will. (Pats her bag.) Well, I've got to be getting back to the city.

JEAN-  
MICHEL        So soon? You just got here.

EUNICE        I know, but I have some business to attend to.

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Can't you do it over the phone?

EUNICE        I tried earlier, but the line seems to be dead.

CURZON        In all the excitement I forgot to mention that Jer cut the wire.

JEAN-  
MICHEL        What a horrible man! That Jer is ruining my life!

CURZON        (To Eunice.) Did you drive, Eunice? Perhaps I could go back to the city with you, if that's all right.

EUNICE        You're not staying either?

CURZON (Looking at Jean-Michel, wanting to stay.) No.

EUNICE It's all right with me. Thank you for asking me down, Jean-Michel. Tell your mother I'd still love to read her memoirs, if she's ever in the mood. But I won't hold my breath.

JEAN-MICHEL I'll tell her. Thank you for coming. (To Curzon, aching.) Are you really leaving?

CURZON I think we need some time apart.

JEAN-MICHEL (Wanting him to stay, but proud.) I will not beg. You know your heart.

CURZON I'll call you, Jean-Michel.

JEAN-MICHEL You can't. The phone is dead.

CURZON It seems Jer has come between us after all.

EUNICE (At the door.) Ready, Curzon? I'm in a hurry!

CURZON I'm ready. (Near the exit.) Goodbye, Jean-Michel.

JEAN-MICHEL Goodbye, Dan.

(They look at each other but won't say more.)

CURZON Jean-Michel?

JEAN-MICHEL Yes?

CURZON Remember your idioms.

JEAN-MICHEL (Nods.)

(Eunice and Curzon exit.)

(Jean-Michel places his forehead in his cupped hands, grieving.)

(Enter Suzette from garden carrying a sprig of lily of the valley and a rose.)

SUZETTE What's wrong?

JEAN-MICHEL Curzon is gone.



SUZETTE      Why?

JEAN-  
MICHEL      Never mind.

SUZETTE      (Goes to him.) Can I help?

JEAN-  
MICHEL      (Not wanting to be touched.) No, no one can.

(Suzette hugs Jean-Michel anyway.)

SUZETTE      My poor big brother! You have such trouble with your love life, don't you?  
(Holds the rose to his nose.) Smell this; it'll do you good.

JEAN-  
MICHEL      (Sniffing, faking enthusiasm.) *Oui*.

SUZETTE      Mine isn't going exactly where I want it to either. (She lets him keep the rose but keeps the lily for herself.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL      No?

SUZETTE      (Drawing the lily along one cheek.) Jonathan and I had sex last night for the first time. Did you hear us?

JEAN-  
MICHEL      No.

SUZETTE      I don't know why not. He dropped his prosthesis on the floor in the middle of it all.

JEAN-  
MICHEL      Dropped it?

SUZETTE      I asked him if he'd mind taking it off. Rather more fun, if you know what I mean.

JEAN-  
MICHEL      *Oui*.

SUZETTE      And there it was in the bed with us, like a third party. I confess I found it invigorating. Then Jonathan got moving about — you know the way men do —

JEAN-  
MICHEL      *Oui*.

SUZETTE      — and pretty soon he knocked it out with his good leg. (Sniffs her lily.) My sinuses are not bad today. Oh, how I love my lily!

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Trying not to laugh.) That's terrible! Did he break it?

SUZETTE (Also trying not to laugh.) Chipped it a little bit. He was so embarrassed!

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Biting his lip.) We shouldn't laugh.

SUZETTE (Biting her lily.) I suppose not.

(They burst out in uncontrollable laughter, like hyenas on fermented berries, then force themselves to stop, then break out again.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL We're awful!

SUZETTE Oh, I'm tired of all this sweet-sweet business about Jonathan's leg. He isn't a nice person just because it's wooden, you know! And last night, I learned something about me and Jonathan's leg once and for all. How shall I put this? . . . It just didn't fit! Oh, Jean-Michel, Jean-Michel, what is to become of us? Why don't we run away and forget everything and everybody — Curzon, Jonathan, our mother! We could live together somewhere — as brother and sister!

JEAN-  
MICHEL Yes! Far away from here, where we won't have to worry about love for the rest of our lives! I could take photos instead!

SUZETTE I could do charity work with beri-beri victims! Let's pack! (They start to leave.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Pulling her back.) What about our mother?

SUZETTE Alistair will look after her. (They start to leave.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Pulling her back.) What about money?

SUZETTE Don't be so practical. Fortune favors the — the? Who does it favor?

JEAN-  
MICHEL But what about your fiancé?

SUZETTE He'll be heartbroken, I suppose. Fortune favors the fickle, isn't that it?

JEAN-  
MICHEL I've never done something so irresponsible before.

SUZETTE There's a time to be responsible and a time not to be. (Flings her lily into the air.) I throw my lily to the fates!

JEAN-  
MICHEL (After a hesitation, he flings his rose and lets it drop where it will.) And I,  
this rose!

JEAN-  
MICHEL /  
SUZETTE (Pointing at the flowers on the floor.) It's an omen!

SUZETTE How soon can you be ready?

JEAN-  
MICHEL Five minutes.

(They start to exit. Enter Jonathan, blocking them.)

JONATHAN Well, what have we here? Going someplace?

JEAN-  
MICHEL/  
SUZETTE Ah, ah . . .

JONATHAN Cat got your tongues? I didn't hear what I thought I heard, I'm sure. I can't  
imagine that you would run away after last night.

SUZETTE Run away?

JONATHAN Not after I shared my . . . *all* with you.

SUZETTE Well . . .

JONATHAN Was I inadequate in some way? Did I disappoint you? I tried my best. I don't  
know what more I can give if my best isn't good enough.

SUZETTE (Succumbing to the guilt-tripping.) Jonathan, it's not because of last night.

JONATHAN Then you'll stay? You do love me as much as I love you after all?

SUZETTE Ah — (Suzette doesn't know what to say, looks at Jean-Michel for help.)

(Enter Curzon from garden.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL Dan! Is that really you?

CURZON Eunice's car won't start. She's working on it. Is it all right if I wait here until it's  
fixed? I'd help her, but as you know I'm not mechanical.

JEAN-  
MICHEL (Wanting him to stay but hiding it.) Oh, of course. Rest your ass somewhere. Is  
that correct English?

CURZON I wouldn't know. If you don't mind, I'll stand. (He pretends to be nonchalant.)

(There's a very awkward moment for all four.)

JONATHAN (Trying to break the ice.) Did I ever tell you about the time I attended a stag dinner for T.S. Eliot?

(They give him an odd stare.)

(Enter Madame with Jer disguised: a drawn-on mustache, a beret, old-fashioned French clothes; he also is using a walker he has borrowed from her. Sometimes they screech and bang as one; at other times they make individual noises.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL *Maman?*

MÈRE Ziz is Monsieur Bolognese, my publisher.

JER (With a Southern accent.) Hi ye all! Nice to make your timely acquaintance.

JEAN-  
MICHEL He reminds me of papa somehow.

MÈRE (Prompting Jer.) Monsieur Bolognese is from Italy, is he not?

JER Southern Italy. (Now with Italian accent.) Nice-a to make-a your acquaintance.

EUNICE (Entering.) The damn car's fixed, Curzon, no thanks to you.

MÈRE Monsieur Bolognese came by to discuss —

JER Madame's memoirs-a. I'm a big-a publisher.

EUNICE Publisher?

JER Anybody else-a here got a book?

CURZON (Tired of hawking his wares.) No. All out of books!

JER No-a book? I'm-a thought somebody had a book!

EUNICE Book?

CURZON It's not finished, and probably never will be.

JER I'm-a like to talk to you about-a you book.

EUNICE Now just a minute. I have first dibs on Mr. Curzon's book. We have a verbal agreement.

JER Not-a so! I'm-a hear is a great-a book. I want! I'm a publish all over the world.

CURZON (Suspicious.) I don't understand.

EUNICE I understand! This man's trying to outbid me. Jean-Michel you didn't tell me we were going to have an auction on Curzon's novel.

JEAN-MICHEL I don't know anything about this.

JER I'm-a hear of Mr. Curzon's work everywhere! Everywhere!

CURZON You do?

EUNICE The least I'm owed, it seems to me, is the chance to make a bid. How much are you offering?

JER It's a private-a bid.

EUNICE Let me make one too. I'll do it right now. Where's a piece of paper? Here's one. (Finds a blank sheet.) What ballpark are we talking about?

JER Ballpark-a?

MÈRE *Beaucoup!*

CURZON *Beaucoup ballpark?* I'm not sure about any of this.

JEAN-MICHEL Maybe you should take ziz offer, Dan.

CURZON Don't you want to read my novel first?

JER I'm-a read all your books! I'm-a take-a this one on faith!

JONATHAN I'm sure if Madame approves then there's nothing to worry about.

EUNICE (Handing Curzon the slip of paper.) Here's my bid!

CURZON (Opening it, amazed.) Really? I accept!

JER Hey! Just a minute now! What-a about me and my publishing company?

EUNICE You heard him. He's accepted my bid.

JER (To Curzon.) Is this-a true?

CURZON (Picking up the accent in his excitement.) This is-a more money than — (Recovering, dropping the accent.) — than I've ever seen in my life!

JER (Gesturing at Eunice.) Okay then, she can have-a you book! I'm-a withdraw!

CURZON (To Eunice.) But I can't promise filth! Only art!

EUNICE (In a hurry.) Jesus, whatever, whatever!

CURZON It's a deal then!

EUNICE (Triumphantly.) Aha!

(Curzon and Eunice shake hands.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL Dan, I'm so happy for you!

CURZON Jean-Michel, with this much money, we wouldn't have to depend on anybody else. (Looks at Madame.) If we were still together, that is.

JEAN-  
MICHEL If we were.

CURZON If.

JER (Surprised.) You-a two are breaking up?

JEAN-  
MICHEL We were, just before you and *Ma Mère* came in. . . . But, Dan, are we?

CURZON *Ne vair!*

(Curzon and Jean-Michel smile and move closer to each other, grinning in a lovey-dovey way.)

MÈRE (Furiously, under her breath to Jer.) You said they would break up!

JER (Under his breath.) Not-a now, Madame. Not-a now!

CURZON Mrs. D'avignon, you've been a godsend. You've brought your son and me back together.

JEAN-  
MICHEL *Oui, maman.* Thank you.

MÈRE (Temporarily nonplussed, under her breath.) *Merde.*

EUNICE Now if I could just have Madame's memoirs, my day would be complete!

MÈRE *Non, non, non, non!* And *non!*

EUNICE Can't I at least read them? They must be sensational.

MÈRE (Insulted.) Hardly!

EUNICE Really?

JEAN-  
MICHEL        *Maman* takes pride in the discretion of her memoirs.

MÈRE        (To Jer angrily.) Come, Monsieur Bolognese, we have plans to take care of!

(She beckons hard. In their walkers they clank away. Both make sharp turns at the Up Right exit.)

EUNICE        I can't believe her memoirs are that tame. I'm going to ask Alistair if he's read them. (Exits to kitchen.)

CURZON        Jean-Michel, everything has changed so fast my head is spinning. I have never been so happy in all my days! Life is wonderful! Life is positively miraculous! (Spreads his arms wide, twirls around giddily.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Dan? Dan, is that you? I hardly recognize you. You're so — so . . . happy?  
I don't think I can look at this!

(Jean-Michel turns away from Curzon with a face of disgust that does not portend well for their love as the *Lights Fade*.)

## ACT IV

(The same. Sunday morning. Jonathan is snoring over Madame D'avignon's memoirs. She enters quietly and sneakily in her walker.)

- MÈRE (Pouncing.) I see you are reading my memoirs!
- JONATHAN (Waking up, startled.) Madame, I didn't mean to pry.
- MÈRE What do you think of them?
- JONATHAN They are . . . ah . . .
- MÈRE I hope they are not too exciting.
- JONATHAN They are not.
- MÈRE Dullness is undervalued nowadays.
- JONATHAN I had no idea you have lived so little.
- MÈRE I'll forgive you for snooping, for now. I need your help. You'll give it, of course.
- JONATHAN Your English! It's so much improved.
- MÈRE When in Rome, act like the Americans. Do you want Suzette or not?
- JONATHAN How can you ask? Of course I want her.
- MÈRE Well, you're going to lose her unless you act now. Just as I'm going to lose my son unless I act.
- JONATHAN What do you mean?
- MÈRE Curzon's been happy for almost twenty-four hours. And Jean-Michel still hasn't kicked him out.
- JONATHAN Disgusting! What dastardly deed do you want from me?
- MÈRE Make Curzon even happier!
- JONATHAN Happier?
- MÈRE Tell him you like fags, ask for his autograph, anything! But make him grin from here to there!
- JONATHAN Whatever for?
- MÈRE My son is strange. Depression "stimulates" him.
- JONATHAN Ah, I'm beginning to see . . . (Nods.)



MÈRE Exactly.

JONATHAN I like it. When do we start?

MÈRE At once. After they've broken up, Jean-Michel will need a rest, and I'll send him away to my home in Paris. There he will marry his cousin, Paulette. She is his first cousin and has rickets and is often incontinent. But the family name will go on!

JONATHAN Let me at him! But what about Suzette? How can I truly make her mine once and for all?

MÈRE You can only win Suzette by telling her you are leaving her. She wants what she can't have, and she doesn't want what she can get. (Almost to herself.) I have two very *odd* children. They must take after their father.

JONATHAN How can I ever bring myself to tell her I don't want her?

MÈRE Krepe, do you trust me or not?

JONATHAN Oh, Madame, I do trust you.

MÈRE Good. Then do exactly as I say. I'll help you.

JONATHAN (A hint of sex.) If only Suzette were more like you! (Backing off.) Excuse me, Madame.

MÈRE We'll win this battle yet! (Sound from kitchen.) *Shhhh!*

(She and Jonathan busy themselves to look casual, as Alistair enters from the kitchen.)

ALISTAIR Can I get you anything, Madame? Sir? I apologize for the noise. I'm preparing something delicious. One of Madame's favorites. *Pets de nonnes*. (Pronounced pay de nun.)

JONATHAN *Pets de nonnes*. What a pretty name. What does it mean?

ALISTAIR (Not wanting to say.) I'm afraid I can't say, sir. Delicate little bite-size pastry puffs.

JONATHAN Can't say? (Looks at Mrs. D'avignon.)

MÈRE Nuns' farts.

JONATHAN /  
ALISTAIR (Embarrassed.) Madame!

MÈRE Oh, you Anglo-Saxons, how silly you are! Nuns fart! But delicately.

(Entering Suzette from Up Right.)

SUZETTE (Stretching, yawning.) Good morning, everybody! *Mmmm*, something smells good in the kitchen!

ALISTAIR Would you like me to bring them, miss? I've been at them for hours, and at last they're ready.

SUZETTE (Sniffing.) What are they? No, surprise me, Alistair!

ALISTAIR I'll do my best, miss.

(Alistair exits to the kitchen.)

SUZETTE Oh, I see that Jean-Michel and Curzon aren't down yet. I guess they had a "tiring" night. (Points to ceiling.)

MÈRE (Makes disgusted noise.) I go to *jardin*! (She goes to the French doors, stops, looks back at Jonathan, then gives him a little hand signal to approach Suzette.) (Under her breath.) Tell her! Tell her! (Exits.)

JONATHAN I have something momentous to tell you, Suzette.

SUZETTE Oh?

JONATHAN I don't know how to say this, but I've been thinking over our marriage, and I've decided . . .

SUZETTE Yes?

JONATHAN I've decided I shan't marry you.

SUZETTE Shan't?

JONATHAN In fact, I'm going away. (Wrings his hands involuntarily.)

SUZETTE Away?

JONATHAN I might even join the French Foreign Legion.

SUZETTE (Doing exercises.) I don't think they'll take you.

JONATHAN Then I'll find something else. I hope this news isn't too difficult for you.

SUZETTE (Twisting from side to side.) Difficult? I think it's fabulous.

JONATHAN (Faltering in his resolve.) Suzette? (Madame's hand appears at the French doors, waving Jonathan on.) Yes, darling, you see I don't really love you, and never did.

SUZETTE That's lovely, just lovely, Jonathan! (Suddenly changing.) Now just a minute here! What do you mean you don't love me? Of course you love me. I've seen you grovel.

JONATHAN    Whatever was there is gone. In fact, there's someone else.

SUZETTE        Someone else? Who?

JONATHAN    Her name is . . . Paulette. She lives on the Continent.

SUZETTE        My cousin Paulette? You can't mean it. She's — She's got rickets!

JONATHAN    There's a lot to be said for rickets. I'm sorry if I'm being cruel.

SUZETTE        I can't believe it. (She sinks down on a sofa.) You don't *want* me, Jonathan?

JONATHAN    I'll be in Paris with Paulette very soon.

SUZETTE        (Crushed.) How soon?

JONATHAN    (Almost letting down.) How soon? (Looks to Madame.)

MÈRE            (Prompting, but keeping her voice down.) By tomorrow.

JONATHAN    By tomorrow.

SUZETTE        You're leaving tonight then?

JONATHAN    (So moved he can't answer, looks to Madame again for help.)

MÈRE            (Prompting.) Yes, tonight.

SUZETTE        Oh, no! You've changed, Jonathan. Even your voice is different. More masculine.

(Reaction from Madame D'avignon.)

(Enter Alistair with a tray of pastries and a tea glass.)

ALISTAIR      Is something the matter, miss?

SUZETTE        No. Everything is splendid. (She sobs and runs off Up Right.)

ALISTAIR      Is Miss Suzette unwell?

(Madame enters from the terrace.)

MÈRE            Mind your own business, Alistair.

ALISTAIR      Yes, Madame.

MÈRE            That'll be all.

ALISTAIR      I brought Mr. Krepe's tea and the pastries I've prepared. They're still warm. (Offers tray.)

MÈRE We haven't got time to eat now. Leave eating to the vulgar. (To Jonathan.) Now I'll go to work on Suzette. You keep out of her sight and try to humor Curzon if you see him.

JONATHAN *Maman*, you are so competent!

(Madame and Jonathan grasp hands for a moment, before he exits to the garden.)

ALISTAIR (Almost to the kitchen door.) Madame's English?

MÈRE What about it?

ALISTAIR I've worked for you for several years, Madame, and you've never spoken English so well before.

MÈRE So what?

ALISTAIR It would have facilitated matters if you had.

MÈRE I am the Marquise D'avignon! And I'll speak however I like, and you'll speak when you're spoken to. Remember your place, Alistair!

ALISTAIR My place? My place? I bring snacks and nobody eats them. I bring drinks and nobody wants them. And now I've gone and made *pets de nonnes* and nobody touches those. I can't stand it anymore. I am reaching my limit!

(Alistair seems about to break down.)

MÈRE We'll deal with this mutiny later! I've got to save my daughter's marriage! Go prepare a luncheon for everyone! *Go!* (Exits.)

(Enter Curzon.)

(Alistair exits, agitated.)

CURZON What in the world was that all about?

(Enter Jonathan from the garden.)

JONATHAN Just the man I want to see!

CURZON Why?

JONATHAN I was just reading one of your books in the garden, and I was amazed.

CURZON I'm amazed too. I didn't think you could read.

JONATHAN (Pressing on.) In fact, I couldn't put it down.

CURZON Did you have glue on your hands?

JONATHAN I wonder if you'd let me have your autograph.

CURZON (Suspicious.) What are you going to do with it?

JONATHAN Treasure it.

CURZON You can't sell it yet. Maybe when I'm dead.

JONATHAN Please! (Gets a slip of paper out of his pocket.) Won't you?

CURZON Is this some kind of trick?

JONATHAN No trick.

CURZON Then why not let me autograph your wooden leg instead of the book. We could carve it in. That way it would be permanent.

JONATHAN My leg?

CURZON Yes, I'll love to whittle on that. Maybe the good one as well.

JONATHAN But I . . . (Remember Madame's instructions.) All right.

CURZON Well, if that's all right, why don't I just autograph your other member while we're at it?

JONATHAN My other member? (Gulping.) Would that make you happy?

CURZON *Ecstatic!*

JONATHAN Madame? (Looks around for assistance, but there is none, choking.) Well, have a go then.

CURZON I don't get this, but you're on. Got a pen?

JONATHAN You want to use a pen?

CURZON Of course. One with a — I know! Madame's quill!

JONATHAN Her quill? With that little sharp nib she uses?

CURZON Where is that thing? (Looks for the quill.) I saw it around here somewhere. (Finds it.) Ah, here it is! What a nice point! (Tests the point with his fingertip.) Ouch! (Sucks his finger.) Oh, look. I got a prick!

JONATHAN (Making a fearful face.) Prick? Maybe my leg would be enough . . . Would that make you happy?

CURZON Very unhappy.

JONATHAN I see. Unhappy, huh? All right then, I guess we should proceed.

CURZON (Getting into it.) Lie on the sofa!

JONATHAN The sofa? (Sits on it.) Here?

CURZON Now stretch it out.

JONATHAN Stretch it out?

CURZON Way out.

JONATHAN (Gulping.) Way out?

CURZON Your body.

(Jonathan stretches out, afraid.)

CURZON Now your trousers.

JONATHAN My trousers? (Reluctantly unzips his own pants. Looks for Mrs. D'avignon.)  
Madame?

CURZON Ready? (Holds the quill high.)

JONATHAN As I'll ever be.

CURZON Here I come! (Advances waving the quill, kneels beside Jonathan, poised to  
autograph his penis.)

(Jer, still in disguise, enters at the same time as Jean-Michel from Up Right. They  
spot the semi-recumbent figures.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL /  
JER (As one.) What's going on here?

JONATHAN (Jumping up.) He was just giving me . . .

CURZON (Jumping up, waving the quill.) An autograph . . .

JONATHAN On my prosthesis.

JEAN-  
MICHEL Is *that* what you call it in English?

JER (Forgetting his accent.) Disgusting!

JEAN-  
MICHEL Dan, what does this mean?

CURZON Mean?

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Jonathan?

JONATHAN    It wasn't what it looked like. I'm a normal, healthy man. I'm no pervert!

JER            (No accent.) A likely story.

(Curzon looks at Jer, suspicious of who he is. Jer sees the look and goes back into disguise.)

JEAN-  
MICHEL        (To Curzon.) Does this mean you and Jonathan are an item?

JONATHAN    I'm nobody's item!

(Jonathan is having trouble getting his zipper to zip.)

JER            (Nervous, assuming a French accent by mistake.) You zay you are not, but how we know zis?

CURZON       Listen, this is all a misunderstanding. (Wiggles the quill, trying to look dignified.)

JER            Jean-Michel, I am zo sorry for you. Your future bruzzer-in-law and your lovair!

CURZON       I thought you had an Italian accent. Southern Italy, no?

JER            *Non*, South of . . . France.

CURZON       You sure it's not South of Market?

JEAN-  
MICHEL        Never mind, never mind. The important thing is what zis all means. I thought it was Jer I had to worry about, and all the time it was Jonathan.

JONATHAN    (Not fully zipped, in a dither.) What? Damn this zipper!

JEAN-  
MICHEL        I suppose you two will be moving in together.

JONATHAN    (Loudly.) I am a full-time heterosexual! Me — a homo?

(He yanks on his zipper, wiggling it in front of the two men.)

(Enter Suzette, followed by her mother, Up Right, overhearing his last speech and seeing his odd behavior.)

SUZETTE      Oh, Jonathan! Did I hear correctly?

JONATHAN    Suzette!

MÈRE *Homo?* What have I done to deserve this! Now *both* my children want to marry homosexuals!

JONATHAN Madame, Madame . . . (Still struggling with his zipper.)

SUZETTE Jonathan, now I see why you didn't want to marry me.

JONATHAN You don't understand, Suzette! (Covers his fly.)

SUZETTE How you must have suffered all these years, hiding your real feelings. It's so brave of you finally to come out of the closet. I just want you to know that you have my complete blessing.

JONATHAN Just because my z-z-z-zipper is open it doesn't mean that I —

MÈRE I told you to make Curzon happy, but you didn't have to go this far! You fairy!

CURZON /  
SUZETTE /  
JEAN-  
MICHEL

JONATHAN (Together.) Your English!

EUNICE (Entering Eunice from kitchen.) Well, Well, here's a happy little group!

(Enter Alistair from kitchen.)

ALISTAIR (Very dignified.) Luncheon is served! (He furiously begins throwing bite-size pastries at everybody except Eunice, but even she has to dodge.) How do you like my nuns' farts, everyone? Are they delicate enough for you? Bat that with your wooden leg, Mr. Krepe! And as for you, Madame, stick these between your *knees*!

(They all try to dodge Alistair's pastries with appropriate shrieks and cries.)

(The pastries can be made of foam rubber, or use marshmallows.)

MÈRE Alistair, what has gotten into you!

ALISTAIR (Out of ammunition.) You people! Madame, in case you didn't notice, I'm no longer in your employ!

MÈRE What do you mean? Who'll look after me?

ALISTAIR (Drawing himself up.) As a movie star once said, frankly, my dear —

SUZETTE — Oh, Alistair, you are so brave! Take me with you!

ALISTAIR I don't think I can do that, miss.

SUZETTE But I admire the lower classes so much. And I'll have money.



- ALISTAIR      Actually, I've had a little chat with Ms. Ashley, and she's very interested in my memoirs! I have seen more filth and scandal in the stately houses of the great and have far more desire to tell it than Madame ever could! Ms. Ashley has already given me a substantial advance (Shows check.) Which — coupled with the money I'll eventually earn from *Titillations of the Titled* — should keep me very handsomely for the rest of my life.
- EUNICE        Quite true. One way or the other, I got what I came for.
- SUZETTE        But we could be so happy together, Alistair.
- ALISTAIR        But I don't love you, miss. I merely like you.
- SUZETTE        That's perfect! I can only love a man fully if he doesn't love me.
- ALISTAIR        Well, in that case . . . (Extends his hand; she takes it.) I have to admit I have noticed your charms.
- JONATHAN       Suzette, what are you saying? You're going to marry *me*!
- SUZETTE        But I can't, now that you're *that* way.
- JONATHAN       I'm not that way and you know it. Didn't I prove that to you the other night?
- SUZETTE        (To Alistair.) He's right, Alistair. I'm not a virgin and I don't want children. Perhaps I was overhasty about us. (Goes back to Jonathan.)
- ALISTAIR        I have no desire for children, having waited on so many. And, appearances to the contrary, I'm not a virgin myself. (Pulling Suzette back.)
- SUZETTE        (Goes back to Alistair.) Oh, we're so utterly compatible!
- JONATHAN       But, Suzette, I want you, I love you! I didn't mean what I said before about not marrying you! (Down on his knees.) Please, please, please, don't drop me!
- SUZETTE        Oh, that did it, Jonathan! You always say the wrong thing. You're such a sap to conventional thinking!
- JONATHAN       (Hanging his head.) I guess I am. . . . I'm heartbroken.
- JEAN-  
MICHEL        Why? You still have Curzon.
- CURZON        Jean-Michel, you know that nothing happened between us, and even if it did, it was only sex. If all I wanted was sex I wouldn't bother with a relationship with you. I can get sex anywhere! I wonder how many men in "relationships" can make that statement!
- JEAN-  
MICHEL        Oh, darling, you're so dark and bitter! It's making me feel so hot. Lately you've been so happy I almost didn't recognize you.

- JER Don't trust him, Jean-Michel. He's not what he seems.
- CURZON And what are you? (He pulls off Jer's beret, smears the drawn-on mustache, revealing Jer as himself.)
- JER No, it's not me!
- CURZON Who is it then?
- JER Mrs. D'avignon's publisher!
- JEAN-MICHEL *Maman*, what do you know about this?
- MÈRE (Hating to be in the wrong.) Nothing.
- JEAN-MICHEL I think you do.
- MÈRE I do not know this man! He is an imposter.
- JER You're not throwing me to the wolves, Madame. She was in on the whole thing. She wanted me to break you two up. She gave me this disguise.
- MÈRE He's lying.
- JEAN-MICHEL They look like papa's clothes. *Maman*, it's time I said something to you.
- MÈRE Said what? Remember my stroke. Remember!
- JEAN-MICHEL I don't think you really had a stroke, *maman*. You've just used your health as a convenient weapon to keep me from being who I am. But now it's time you faced the facts of life — like a true Frenchwoman! I am not going to continue the family's name by having children. Considering our genes, I'm not so sure our family should be carried in — carried out — carried on! I'm going to live with Curzon, if he'll have me, and we're going to make the best goddamn love affair any two people can manage despite you and despite the world! (Holds out hand.) Dan? Do you have a care for me?
- CURZON What can I say? You were splendid. (Takes Jean-Michel's hand.) Yes, my dear, frankly I *do* give a damn!
- MÈRE (Giving in.) This time I think I've really lost him.
- EUNICE I've got something to say here. If this man here isn't really a publisher, then that means I was conned into buying Curzon's novel. There was no auction. I was had! The deal's off.
- CURZON Oh, my God! (Hold his head.) Oh, no!

- JEAN-  
MICHEL        Dan, are you all right?
- CURZON        I feel awful.
- JEAN-  
MICHEL        Oh, my darling, that's wonderful. I mean . . .
- CURZON        Jean-Michel, how are we ever going to last if I don't ever get some good news about my writing? . . . (Steeling himself.) But maybe I'm more creative this way. At least I'm writing what I want, not what others want me to write.
- JEAN-  
MICHEL        We'll work on it, darling. We'll work on it. I have an idea. Do you like children?
- CURZON        Well enough.
- JEAN-  
MICHEL        What do you say we adopt a son?
- CURZON        Adopt one?
- JEAN-  
MICHEL        Yes.
- CURZON        I think that's a wonderful idea.
- MÈRE         So the family name will go on after all? Suzette will be childless, but my gay son will have a child?
- JEAN-  
MICHEL        *Oui, maman.* We'll call him Curzon D'avignon.
- MÈRE         I will give you some money to support this child. A good nursemaid is essential. And a little more perhaps — for you, my son. (Slaps him gently.)
- JEAN-  
MICHEL        *Maman!*
- (They hug like long-lost relatives.)
- MÈRE         (Looking at Curzon.) Perhaps even a little more yet. For the arts.
- CURZON        Madame! (Bows slightly, acknowledging her patronage.)
- MÈRE         Oh, these modern times, I don't know how I can cope with them!
- SUZETTE       Perhaps Jonathan can help, *maman.* (Signals to Jonathan.) Don't be a slave to convention — not now!
- MÈRE         Jonathan?

- JONATHAN (To Suzette.) You're right! (Taking the chance.) Yes, perhaps I can help you, *maman*.
- MÈRE (Already knowing what he means.) Help?
- JONATHAN Have I been mistaken in everything? Have I been mistaken in thinking you might care for me a little bit?
- MÈRE Care for you? But aren't you a — ?
- JONATHAN Let me prove it to you the one way I know how!
- MÈRE (Girlishly.) Oh, Jonathan, such talk! But *oui*. (Points to the two of them.) *We!*
- (The embrace over her walker.)
- MÈRE You don't think there's anything wrong with us, do you? After all, you were going to marry my daughter.
- JONATHAN Let's not look at it too closely. Let's just enjoy our love, *maman*.
- MÈRE Oh, Jonathan, I'm mad about you! At last I can say it!
- JONATHAN What should I call you? *Maman* seems a trifle . . . suspect.
- MÈRE Call me Bertha.
- JONATHAN Bertha is such a pretty name!
- MÈRE (Musing.) My mother must have thought so when she gave it to me. Something has happened to it through the years. We must restore its beauty!
- JONATHAN Dare I say it now? I've always, always wanted you!
- MÈRE We have so much in common. Our politics.
- JONATHAN Your walker. My prosthesis.
- MÈRE But I don't need this anymore! (She tears off the black crepe and tosses the walker to one side.) Love has made me whole again!
- JONATHAN I'm afraid I'll need this for a while. (Pats his wooden leg.)
- JER Yeah, but what about me? I don't have anybody. I don't even have a job.
- ALISTAIR Madame will still be in need of a new manservant, I suppose.
- JER Yeah? She will?
- MÈRE Would you consider it? It won't be easy. It'll mean traveling all around the world.

JER            Manservant, huh? (Feels Alistair's uniform, smiles.) I guess I'll just have to tough it out. But I am a defrocked minister. It'll be good to take the cloth again!

CURZON        I have an idea, if you're all willing, that is, especially Jonathan.

JONATHAN    Yes?

CURZON        (Beckoning for the prosthesis.) Can we? Trust me?

JONATHAN    (Thinks about it.) Oh, why not!

(He puts up his wooden leg; all gather around it.)

CURZON        Okay, ready? For luck! For the future! One, two, three —

(And smiling and hopeful, the past forgive, the future promising, they all knock on Jonathan's wooden leg for luck, as happy as woodpeckers.)

*Blackout*

(The End.)

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### **When Bertha Was A Pretty Name**

5M 3W Full Length, Four Scenes, One Set.

Several couples and family members are down for the weekend. The hosts, two male lovers, are worried about Ma Mère, one's mother who does not approve of their love. Suzette is also not happy with her wooden-legged stuffy lover. This is a drawing-room comedy like those by Noel Coward and Somerset Maugham, but set in the present with modern issues about dealing with relatives and lovers.

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