

# A NIGHT AT THE GRAND-GUIGNOL

Four One-Acts:  
One Night of Horror and Comedy

1.

Progress

2.

The Lighthouse Keepers

*[An Intermission]*

3.

The Lovers

4.

The Final Kiss

*Translations by Richard J. Hand and Micheal Wilson*  
*Additional Writing by Emmalias*

## OPENING MONOLOGUE

*PRESHOW: The Professor, acting as House Doctor, checks in with audience members to ensure that they're healthy enough for what they're about to behold. At some point, it's time for class to begin. Professor reveals himself and begins the lesson.*

PROFESSOR: Alright folks, let's get started. Welcome to TDHT 666, 'Introduction to Le Théâtre du Grand Guignol'. It's wonderful to meet you all; I'm so pleased to be making my first above ground appearance in the Department of Theatre and Dance since Chancellor Khosla deemed it necessary to build this little theatrical marvel right on top of my office 60 some years ago. Recently I've heard so much rumbling from above... it'd been so quiet in this theatre the last year or so I thought the campus had been abandoned due to some sort of apocalyptic plague! How silly of me. I've been tantalized by the muffled screams of men falling off of boats, college applications, and worst of all, Panic at the Disco! I simply had to dig my way out; rats and racoons simply weren't cutting it anymore- I kept hearing something about special cookies...

Enough about me- you're here for a lesson, and here it is. The syllabus! This course will be broken up into four distinct units: *Progress*, *The Lighthouse Keepers*, *The Lovers*, and *The Final Kiss*. Each unit will highlight a different aspect of the glory of the Guignol. YOU!

*Professor picks someone out of the audience.*

Can you tell me what the Grand Guignol is?

*Professor responds depending upon their answer: rage, or exhilaration/joy.*

Can you read out the "COURSE DESCRIPTION" found in your syllabus?

*The audience member selected reads out the brief history and explanation of the Guignol from their program.*

Good. Underneath that you'll find the breakdown of the program. At the bottom of the page there was supposed to be the late work policy, but they told me I had to change it after the 4th student went missing from class fall quarter 1960... let it be known- late work will not be accepted. Finally, I want to give a brief content warning: this course will address horrors which some of you may not be able to face with comfort. I am about to present you with images of human monstrosities, gruesome tormentors, and the destruction of the human form. There will be blood and realities of death far worse. If you

consider yourself to be squeamish, weak of the mind or heart, or if you have a propensity to light headedness I ask you to leave now. Last time I taught this course someone perished from fear in that very seat...

*He gestures to an audience member.*

Knowing how long it takes Michael Francis to read an email, I doubt it's been cleaned. We can't have the whole theatre smelling of death... yet. You've been warned of the horrors you are about to behold- this is your last chance to excuse yourself. Everyone take a look to your left. Good. Now your right. One of the three of you will not survive this class. I mean that quite literally. Death and gore will seep through these walls. Prepare yourself to be witness to great horror, students...

*A cell phone repeatedly 'bing's in the front row. An audience plant is contentedly texting. Professor grabs them and throws them down on stage.*

And for the love of god, turn off your cell phones.

*Professor kicks the texting student out, violently.*

Unit One: Progress.

*Corrie enters to his work station.*

What is a more human horror than an act of war? Human destruction of humanity. Civilian bodies torn limb from limb by the expansion of gas and heat. We humans work so hard towards advancement; day after day of sweat, tears, blood. Waiting patiently for that one moment- the day nothing can stop us- the day we can say-

*Professor exits as 'Progress' begins.*

## PROGRESS

(1922)

by

St. John Ervine

Characters:

Henry Corrie

Hannah, the servant

Mrs Meldon

*The scene of the play is laid in the study of Professor Henry Corrie in a remote village in the north of England on a spring day in the year 1919. The room is tidy enough, with the tidiness of a house dominated by a bachelor who is dominated by his work rather than by domestic comfort; and on the large table near the centre of the room there is a litter of scientific apparatus employed by Professor Corrie in the experiment in which he is now engaged. On the walls of the room are a number of diagrams, showing sections of very large bombs. There is a model of a big bomb on a stand underneath one of these diagrams. There are sectional diagrams of aeroplanes and airships to be seen, and also fairly large models of aeroplanes and airships.*

*Professor Henry Corrie, aged between fifty and sixty, is sitting at the centre table watching a chemical process in a large retort. He has cold, humourless eyes, and his mouth, if it were not concealed by a thickish beard, would be seen to have cruel lines about it. He does not, however, impress the casual visitor as a cruel man - indeed, he seems to be a harmless, kindly, inconsequent person, completely absorbed, of course, in his work. It is when he is angry that something of his cruelty is observable - he is inclined to utter wolfish snarls if he is thwarted or hindered in any way. But the most certain sign of his fundamentally cruel character is his absorption in his scientific work. Nothing is of greater importance to him than that, and a human being is of less consequence to him than the success of even a minor experiment.*

*He regards the retort very closely, muttering to himself as he does so. Sometimes his mutterings are of satisfaction, sometimes of anxiety, and once of rage that turns again to satisfaction. A knock is heard on his study door, but he does not hear it. It is repeated. He leans forward to glance more closely at the retort, and then, with a shout of pleasure, rises up and contemplates it. The knock is heard for the third time.*

CORRIE (*bending over the retort and ending the experiment*): Ah, at last, at last! By Heaven, I've done it at last. (*A very loud knock on the door. He turns round in a puzzled fashion.*) Eh: Oh, oh! Come in! Come in! (*The door opens, and a servant enters.*)

SERVANT: Mrs Meldon...

CORRIE: Yes, yes, Hannah, what is it?

HANNAH: Mrs Meldon wants to know whether you'll come downstairs to tea or have it up here?

CORRIE: Has she got back?

HANNAH: Yes, sir. She expected you to meet her at the station, sir. She waited a long time in the cold, and then got Marshall to drive her up.

CORRIE: I meant to go, but I was busy, and then I forgot. But she's quite capable of coming home by herself.

HANNAH: Yes, sir. Will you come downstairs to tea, sir, or have it up here?

CORRIE: The drawing-room's so cold! ... Tell Mrs Meldon I'll have it up here. I've news for her. Tell her I've good news for her. My experiment is ended, and it's a success.

HANNAH: Is it, sir?

CORRIE: Yes - but it's no use telling you about it. You wouldn't understand.

HANNAH: No, sir.

CORRIE: But I'm a proud man, Hannah. Perhaps you'll understand that. Go and tell Mrs Meldon.

HANNAH: Yes, sir.

CORRIE: Don't forget to tell her that my experiment is a success. Or, no! - you'd better not tell her. I'll do that myself. You're sure to make a mess of it. She'll be as pleased as I am.

HANNAH: She's not very happy to-day, sir.

CORRIE: Not happy? Why? I'm happy, aren't I?

HANNAH: Well, you see, sir, it's three years ago to-day since her son was killed in the War! ...

CORRIE (*almost forgetting his grievance*): Oh, yes, I'd forgotten that. Of course, one can't keep on thinking about these things! ...

HANNAH: She does, sir.

CORRIE: I'm sorry I didn't meet her at the station. But I had to attend to my experiment, Hannah. I wish she wouldn't dwell on Eddie's death. It's not right for the living to think so much of the dead. She's a woman, of course, and a mother - a bereaved mother. We must make allowances, Hannah. That's all. Now if I tell her about my successful experiment, how would that do?

HANNAH (*dubiously*): I don't suppose it would make her feel any worse than she is now, sir.

CORRIE: Well, tell her to come up here and have her tea with me. See? And I'll tell her about my experiment.

HANNAH: Very good, sir. (*She turns to go.*)

CORRIE: Oh! - and, Hannah, tell her I'm very sorry I couldn't meet her at the station. That'll break the ice a bit. Then when she realizes how important my work is and how much depends on it, she'll be all right.

HANNAH: Very good, sir. (*She goes towards the door. Then she stops and turns towards him.*) She really isn't happy, sir. Her nerves aren't at all right. You see, she can't forget, sir!  
 (*But the professor is back at his table, intently regarding his experiment, and, except for a grunt, he does not reply. Hannah goes out. The professor makes some calculations on paper, and then sits back in his chair regarding them with delight. His manifestations of joy are interrupted by the entrance of his sister, Mrs Meldon, aged about forty-three. She is dressed in black, partly because she is a widow, but chiefly because of her son's death. She is a sensitive-looking woman, now plainly suffering deeply from her memories, but her nervous sensibilities give her a strength on occasions which is hardly credible. She is not a fretful, complaining woman who behaves as if she were the only person in the world who had suffered a bereavement, and when, in the course of the play, she speaks of her loss she does so with grave and beautiful dignity.*)

MRS MELDON: Henry!

CORRIE: Eh? (*Turning.*) Oh, my dear Charlotte, I'm sorry I did not meet you at the station! ...

MRS MELDON (*seating herself by the fire*): It doesn't matter, Henry. Only I thought you were coming - you said you would - and I waited a long time in the cold! ...

CORRIE: Yes, I'm sorry about that, but, you see, I was busy, Charlotte. I've succeeded at last. I've got just exactly what I wanted, Charlotte. Absolutely *the* thing. This will bring fame and fortune to me. I shall be rich now, but more than that, I shall be famous. My name will live forever. When I saw how well the experiment was going, I said to myself, 'Charlotte won't really expect me to meet her just when everything's going so right, and after all, she's a grown-up woman and she knows the way home as well as I do!' So I didn't go. I stayed here and did my work. I knew you'd understand. And it's a success, Charlotte, the greatest and most wonderful success I've ever had.

MRS MELDON: Oh, yes.

CORRIE (*dashed*): Well, you don't seem very excited about it.

MRS MELDON: Of course, I'm glad it's a success, Henry, whatever it is, but, you see, you've never told me anything about it.

CORRIE: No, that's true. I've always believed in keeping secrets to myself. Tell no one anything until you are obliged to, that's my principle. No one knows that I have been working at this thing - except myself. The secret of successful invention, Charlotte, is reticence! But now, I can tell you what it is. The component parts are still my secret and will remain such until I can get a binding offer from some government!.

MRS MELDON: Government! Is it a government matter?

CORRIE: I should think it is. I shall offer it first to the British Government, of course, but if they won't pay my price, I'll offer it to somebody else. Too many inventors have been let down by the British Government, Charlotte. But they will not let me down. No. I can take care of myself. But then, when they hear what my invention is, they'll jump at it.

MRS MELDON: Will they?

CORRIE: Of course they will, though you're quite justified in feeling sceptical about them. It was very hard to get them to use tanks in the War - very hard. These cavalry generals had to be forced to use them. They ought to be horse-knackers, instead of soldiers. And tin hats, too! Look what a time it was before that damned War Office could be persuaded to use 'em! ... But I'm sorry, Charlotte. I ought not to be talking about the War to you - especially to-day.

MRS MELDON: I don't mind, Henry. And, after all, the War Office isn't the War!

CORRIE: No, that's true.

MRS MELDON: What is your invention, Henry?

CORRIE: Ah, Charlotte! There's something interesting to talk about (*Hannah enters with a tea-tray.*)

HANNAH: Here's the tea, sir.

CORRIE: Damn! Oh, all right! Put it down there! (*Hannah arranges the tea-tray in front of Mrs Meldon. The professor, meantime, is back at his table and his retorts and his formulae. Now and again he exclaims to himself.*)

MRS MELDON: Has everything been all right, Hannah?

HANNAH: Yes, ma'am. Gage, the gardener, brought up the wreath you ordered for the War Memorial, ma'am. I've got it in the kitchen now. Shall I fetch it for you?

MRS MELDON: Yes, do, please, Hannah. (*And then Hannah, having finished with the tea-table, goes out.*)

MRS MELDON: Come and have your tea, Henry!

CORRIE: All right! (*But he does not stir.*)

MRS MELDON: Come along, Henry!

CORRIE: Eh? Oh, all right! In a minute!

MRS MELDON: Your tea will get cold if you don't come now!

CORRIE (*getting up and coming to the tea-table*): Oh, how women do fuss! Your sex is most extraordinary, Charlotte. Always willing to break off things for other things. No application. No concentration. No capacity for complete, impersonal devotion. That's why no women have ever been great artists or scientists. Because they will not forsake everything and follow - well, whatever it is they ought to be following!

(*Hannah returns, carrying a bunch of flowers to which a label is attached.*)

HANNAH: Here it is, ma'am.

CORRIE: What's that?

MRS MELDON (*taking the flowers from Hannah*): I ordered it from Gage to put on the War Memorial. It's for Eddie! ...

CORRIE: Oh, yes, yes!

MRS MELDON: I shall take it down there after tea, Will you come with me?

CORRIE: I'd like to, of course, but I really must finish up these things.

MRS MELDON: Very well, Henry. (*to Hannah*) Thank you, Hannah. I'll keep the flowers here. (*Exit Hannah.*)

MRS MELDON (*to her brother*): They're very beautiful, aren't they, Henry?

CORRIE: Oh, yes! Quite nice! You know, Charlotte, this invention of mine -

MRS MELDON: Will you have some more tea, Henry?

CORRIE (*vaguely*): Oh-h-h-h! (*then definitely*) Yes. Half a cup! (*He hands the cup to her, and she fills it and returns it to him while the following speeches are uttered.*)

CORRIE: I was saying this invention of mine will revolutionize warfare.

MRS MELDON: Will it abolish warfare?

CORRIE: Abolish war!.. My dear Charlotte, don't be childish!

MRS MELDON: I'm very interested in that subject. It seems to me more important than anything else in the world, Henry. You don't realize how deeply women like me feel about this ... this organized butchery of boys. Look at me! I had a husband and a son when the War began. I had neither when it was over. I am a most lonely woman ... cruelly alone! ...

CORRIE (*a little annoyed by what seems to him sentimental harping on one string*): I know, of course, that the War hit you very badly, Charlotte - what with Eddie being killed and Tom taking his death so badly! ...

MRS MELDON: Tom died of a broken heart, Henry. That may sound sentimental and unscientific to you, but it's true. I sometimes wonder why I was not granted the mercy of death - why I should be compelled to live on alone! ...

CORRIE: Oh, come, come, Charlotte! Not alone! No, no, not alone! You're happy enough with me, aren't you? Your only brother! ...

MRS MELDON: You're not a very good substitute for a son, Henry!

CORRIE: Well, no, I suppose not, but, still, there's no need for despair. Let me tell you about my invention. (*He puts his cup down and prepares to explain.*)

MRS MELDON: Will you have some more tea?

CORRIE: No, thanks! Now, Charlotte, when I say that war ought to be revolutionized, I mean that it ought to be made more expeditious. The war we've just had lasted for a ridiculous period. Five years - or nearly five years. Perfectly preposterous. It ought not to have lasted more than five weeks.

MRS MELDON: Have you invented a means of restricting the duration of wars?

CORRIE: Well - yes, I think you might put it like that. What the combatants ought to aim at, in war, is to get the first blow in so hard that the other side immediately succumbs to it.

MRS MELDON: I see.

CORRIE: That means that the weapons of war must be made immeasurably more horrible and devastating than they now are.

MRS MELDON: More horrible! Is that possible?

CORRIE: Yes. Oh, yes! We haven't yet reached the limits of horror in war! Oh, dear me, no!

MRS MELDON: My son was nineteen, Henry, and he was killed in a fight of which he knew very little. That seems to me a horrible thing!

CORRIE: Oh, a mother's feelings, of course, but look at the matter from a broad point of view. Put your own feelings aside! ...

MRS MELDON: I can't do that, Henry. The whole war for me comes down to this one thing, that my son, a boy new from school, was taken away from me, just when his life was beginning to open out, and killed. I'm not a clever woman, Henry. I can only feel things as they touch me and mine. Eddie was my only son, my darling, my heart's joy I expected so much from him - and he's gone, and there's nothing ... nothing ... nothing!

CORRIE (*being very gentle with her*): Yes, I know, Charlotte, but you really ought not to dwell too much on your sorrow. It isn't good for you. You ought to take a broad point of view. Imagine yourself a statesman! ...

MRS MELDON: If Eddie had been a statesman, he would not have gone to the war. He would have compelled some other person to go

CORRIE: Oh, now, don't be bitter, Charlotte; don't be bitter!

MRS MELDON: My dear Henry, I'm beyond being bitter. Do you know what I discovered to-day?

CORRIE: No.

MRS MELDON: You know I've never really known how Eddie died. I found out to-day.

CORRIE: I wish you wouldn't think so much about it.

MRS MELDON (*with sudden passion*): I must think about it. I can't help thinking about it! ... I met a young man in town to-day who had been in the same battalion as Eddie, and he told me about it. Poor lad, it slipped out before he realized that I hadn't known before! ...

CORRIE: People oughtn't to talk so much about the War. Much better forget about it!

MRS MELDON (*recovering herself*): You remember the C.O. of the battalion wrote to me and said that Eddie had been killed by a piece of shell and that he had been buried behind the line somewhere?

CORRIE: Yes, I remember.

MRS MELDON: That comforted me very much. It made things easier to think that he wasn't... mutilated... that even when he was killed he was still my dear and beautiful boy... a soldier, buried by soldiers, in a soldier's grave! ... But he wasn't buried, Henry!

CORRIE: Wasn't buried?

MRS MELDON: No. There was nothing to bury. The shell came and... and... there was nothing. (*They are silent for a moment or two.*) Don't you think *that* is horrible, Henry? There was no decency in his death! ... Oh, my God! My God! You tell me to take a broad point of view about that! My son! ... They'd been in a little, shallow trench, Eddie and his men, sitting there for eight days and nights, waiting and waiting and waiting; and then a shell came right into the middle of a group of them and destroyed them... utterly destroyed them. Five of them .. nothing left.... nothing left! (*She sits back in her chair and both of them are silent. Then the professor goes to his table and sits down before his papers and retorts.*)

MRS MELDON: What is your invention, Henry?

CORRIE: Oh, I think we'd better not talk about it! You're upset! That chap ought not to have told you about Eddie.

MRS MELDON: He thought I knew. What is your invention?

CORRIE: I'll tell you another time.

MRS MELDON: I'd like to know now. Something to make war more expeditious! To end it quickly!

CORRIE (*swinging round to her*): Really, Charlotte, this is a most humanitarian invention. I don't believe, mind you, that wars will ever end. No. We're altogether too pugnacious, we human beings. So the only thing to do then is to make war so horrible that no nation will engage in one unless absolutely driven to it. That's where I come in. I'm going to make war horrible, *really* horrible!

MRS MELDON: Yes.

CORRIE: I've got something here, Charlotte... the formula for a bomb that will make war not only stupendously horrible, but will end it almost as quickly as it began.

MRS MELDON: On that table? (*She rises and goes to him.*)

CORRIE: Yes. I've made tests and I've worked out the formula with mathematical precision, and I've discovered a combination of gases and explosives that will obliterate thousands at once. Thousands!

MRS MELDON: Thousands?

CORRIE: Yes.

MRS MELDON: Obliterate them ... just like Eddie.

CORRIE: Oh, my dear Charlotte, you really must not be so morbid. We've got to deal with the world of fact, and if this country is going to maintain her position in the world, she will have to use every device she can employ to keep her there. I consider that I'm performing a highly patriotic act in offering this discovery to my country. Now, listen! By means of my formula, we can make a bomb, a big bomb, not one of those little footling things the Germans used to drop on London, but an enormous bomb, full of corrosive gas, which will be dropped from a powerful aeroplane or airship - that has to be settled yet - but it's not really my job, Now, when the next war breaks out! ...

MRS MELDON: The next war?

CORRIE: Yes, I should say we'd have another in twenty or thirty years, wouldn't you? Not more than fifty, anyhow. Well, when it comes, our ultimatum will consist of a number of airships or aeroplanes dropping these big bombs on the country with which we're at war - just in the way the Japanese declared war on the Russians by blowing their ships to pieces. Only ours will be much more effective than that. The Japanese only sank a few ships. We'll utterly obliterate whole cities ... perhaps a whole nation.

MRS MELDON: Yes.

CORRIE: When this bomb falls, the explosion will devastate a wide tract of the district in which it falls, and at the same time will release a powerful, spreading gas, without colour or smell, which will spread over a wide area and poison every person who inhales it. They won't know that they've inhaled it until they see their bodies rotting. And nothing will save them then! With a single bomb we could wipe out the population of a city as big as Manchester. Single bomb, Charlotte!

MRS MELDON: But that would mean everybody - men and women and children.

CORRIE: Oh, yes. After all, nowadays, there is no logical distinction between a civilian and a soldier. What's the difference between the girl who makes munitions and the man who uses them in the trenches? You know, Charlotte, it's a terrific thought, to think that I can sit here at this table, with a formula written out on those sheets of paper which will enable a few men to go up into the air and wipe out a whole city. And I'm the only man in the world who knows how to do it.

MRS MELDON: Aren't there men like you in other countries using their brains for the same purpose?

CORRIE: Yes, but I don't imagine anyone will discover as powerful a weapon as this. If I had made this discovery in 1914, the War would have been over before the end of that year, and there probably wouldn't be any Germans left now. They'd be an extinct race.

MRS MELDON: Perhaps an enemy of this country might make a similar discovery, Henry, and use it on us.

CORRIE: We'll have to take the risk of that. Anyhow, my discovery will be available to our people, and if a war does come along, we've only got to get our bomb dropped on them before they get theirs dropped on us, and the trick's done.

MRS MELDON: I suppose it was someone like you who invented the kind of shell that destroyed Eddie... that obliterated him!

CORRIE (*rising and patting her on the shoulder*): Now, now, don't go back to that subject, Charlotte. Come over here by the fire, and try and take a more cheerful view of life.

MRS MELDON: Cheerful view! My dear Henry, I sometimes wonder whether, in spite of your cleverness, you aren't really the stupidest man on earth.

CORRIE: Oh, come!

MRS MELDON: I'm not clever. It seems odd that I should be your sister, a quite ordinary, commonplace woman, with nothing in my life but my love for my husband and my son. But when I hear you telling me to take a broad statesmanlike view of my son being blown to pieces, I begin to think that you're a fool, Henry - just a dull, unimaginative, bloodless fool. And when you ask me to rejoice because you've invented a bomb that will destroy a whole city in a few minutes, I think you're ... you're mad - wickedly, horribly mad.

CORRIE: My dear Charlotte! ...

MRS MELDON: One moment, Henry. I want you to try and realize my point of view, the point of view of an ordinary woman without any pretensions. Think of Eddie as I think of him! ...

CORRIE: This isn't good for you.

MRS MELDON: Oh, yes, it is. I go back now to the very beginning, and I think of Tom and me, very young and foolish, I suppose, but very happy, too, Henry, and our queer pleasure and fright when we knew that Eddie was coming. And I think, too, of myself, sometimes at night, awake, with Tom lying asleep beside me; and how I thought about the little child I was going to bear him, and how I loved it and loved him for being its father, and how sure I was that it would be a boy! I was frightened, too, sometimes, because I thought I might die and never know my son, who would grow up and have no knowledge of me. And then he was born, such a dear, little, clutching child, so terribly dependent on me. Tom was very pleased and proud, but never so pleased and proud as I was. We both watched him grow - you know how handsome he was!

CORRIE: Yes, he was a good-looking lad.

MRS MELDON: And we made plans for him. He was to be great and liked. people did like him; even you liked him, Henry, didn't you?

CORRIE: Yes, I... I liked him. He was an attractive boy. But don't you think-

MRS MELDON: And then he was ill. You remember how we all thought that he would die, and Tom, poor Tom, who never could express himself very aptly, went about as if he were stunned. I can't tell you what I thought then, Henry. I just can't tell you, but oh! I prayed for him, Henry - prayed for him so that my whole mind was a prayer. Well, he got better, and seemed to grow stronger, and at school he did very well. I can see him now, the first time he played in a cricket match, very pleased with his blazer, and how excited he was when he came to tell me that he had made ten runs. Ten runs he made, my little son, in his first cricket match. All the other boys of his age were very respectful to him, and I was so glad when he let me walk about with him, just as if he hadn't had a triumph. And Tom was frightfully pleased, too, and gave him a sovereign! ... *(Her tears overcome her, and she raises her hands to her lips in a gesture of grief.)* My little boy! ...

CORRIE: This is distressing you, my dear. Don't talk about it any more.

MRS MELDON *(recovering herself)*: He hadn't been at Oxford long when the War began, and then he went off and enlisted. We didn't know whether to be proud of him or to be angry with him, but chiefly we were proud. I loved him in his clumsy uniform and his great, rough boots, just as much as I loved him later on in his officer's uniform. And when he went off to France, I tried to be worthy of my son and not to cry. It was frightfully hard to smile, Henry, but I did smile. I felt that that was what Eddie would wish me to do, not to shame him before the other people, and so I smiled and made a little silly joke about the fear of the Germans when they heard of his arrival. But I was in terror, Henry, and all the time that he was away I was in terror. The sight of a telegraph messenger made my heart sink! ... And then he came home on his first leave, and my little son wasn't my little son any more, but a strangely grown man, young to look at, but full of extraordinary knowledge. I felt shy with him. He'd seen so much and knew so much. And then I think I felt prouder of him than ever before, because he was a man and I could depend upon him. We were very happy during that leave, Henry, so happy that I hardly had time to be miserable because it would so soon be over, and when he went back, although I cried a little when he wasn't looking, I didn't mind so much as I thought I should, because I persuaded myself to believe that he wouldn't be killed. When he had his second leave and was a captain, I was sure that he would come home to me, quite safe. Even Tom, who had always felt we should lose him, began

to believe that he'd come home again. But he didn't. Immediately he got back to France, he had to go into the line, and eight days later he was killed - just obliterated, as you say, by men who had never seen him, who didn't even know that they'd killed him. And all my years of love and hope and desire and pain - gone! I'd nursed him and cared for him and taught him little lessons and been proud of him - and then in a moment my beautiful son was ..... obliterated, Henry! *(There's a slight pause while she recovers herself.)* You see, don't you, Henry, that I can't take a broad view of that. I can only see my son's body mutilated and destroyed. That's all.

CORRIE: Well, of course, I quite see your point of view, Charlotte. It is hard. I admit that. But we have to keep our feelings under control. And after all, there's the consolation that Eddie did his duty to his country. I dare say he accounted for a good many Germans! ...

MRS MELDON: That doesn't comfort me, Henry. I can't get any pleasure out of the thought that some poor German woman is suffering just as I'm suffering. No, Henry, I feel that I should want to take sides with her against men like you!

CORRIE: Men like me!

MRS MELDON: Yes. People with broad views. Because you're such fools. Someone like me, not clever, creates a beautiful thing like my son, and you, with all your cleverness, can only destroy it. That's why I think you're a fool, Henry.

CORRIE *(nettled)*: Well, of course, Charlotte, with your views, I can hardly expect you to appreciate me or my work, but I fancy that my countrymen, if they have any sense, will know how to value me. My bomb will make my name known to the most ignorant men in the country. People will talk about the Corrie bomb, just as they used to talk about the Mills bomb during the War. I shall have to ask for a large lump sum in payment of the invention, because a royalty wouldn't pay me at all. Mills got a royalty on each of his bombs, but then they were small and hundreds of thousands of them were used. My bombs will be big, and one of them will suffice for a city. Yes, I shall have to ask for a large lump sum. Now that they're spending several million pounds on a battleship that is generally believed to be useless, I'm entitled to ask for a very large sum for my bomb which will certainly decide the war. I wonder how much I ought to ask for? Charlotte, how much ought I to ask for? They won't give me what it's worth, that's absolutely certain. They might pay a quarter of a million. Charlotte, what would you ask for if you were me?

MRS MELDON: I should ask for my son.

CORRIE: Now, now, now, Charlotte, not again, please. Not again We must think of the future, not of the past. I don't want to ask for too much, because I shan't get it, and I don't want to ask for too little, though I shall probably get that anyhow. What do you think, Charlotte? Do you think it would be better to let them name a price?

MRS MELDON: I don't know.

CORRIE: Well, you might take a little interest in the matter. It's very important to me. They ought really to give me a title, too. Supposing I say a couple of hundred thousand pounds and a peerage! ...

MRS MELDON: Why not say thirty pieces of silver?

CORRIE (*thoroughly angry*): Really, Charlotte, you're insufferable! You're absolutely insufferable! I put up with a great deal from you because you're in distress, but there are limits to endurance, you know. You haven't congratulated *me*, even perfunctorily, and you've made yourself and me thoroughly miserable by this... this moaning over what can't be helped. You've even made Hannah miserable. My dear Charlotte, I'm talking to you now for your good. You really ought not to let your mind dwell on things in the way you do. It isn't good for you, and it's very unpleasant for me and for others who associate with you. Your boy was killed- so were other people's boys - but we can't spend the rest of our lives in lamentation. I have my work to do! ...

MRS MELDON: Your bomb?

CORRIE: Yes.

MRS MELDON: Which will make the bodies of men and women and little children rot if it does not blow them to pieces.

CORRIE: The fortune of war, my dear Charlotte. After all, what does it matter to a man whether he is blown to pieces by a bomb or stabbed to death by a bayonet? As a matter of fact, the bomb is the more merciful of the two. It isn't any use being sentimental about these things. The purpose of war is killing, and the side which kills the most people in the shortest time is going to win the wars of the future. My bomb will enable those who possess it to conduct a war in a rapid and efficient fashion. No reasonable person can deny that I have performed a service to my country in inventing this bomb for its use, and

even you, if you were not distracted by what you heard this morning and the fact that this is the anniversary of Eddie's death, would agree with them.

MRS MELDON: No one but you knows the secret of your invention, Henry?

CORRIE: No - not that I am aware of.

MRS MELDON: If you were to destroy your invention, never reveal its secrets, thousands of boys like Eddie might live without fear of being destroyed?

CORRIE: Oh, I don't know. It's a fantastic thought, that, but there's nothing in it. Other people will invent things even deadlier than my bomb.

MRS MELDON: But, Henry, if you were to suppress your invention!

CORRIE: Suppress it!

MRS MELDON: Yes, if you were to destroy your formulae, and people were to know what you'd done, perhaps you'd do a great deal to change people's hearts! ...

CORRIE: My dear Charlotte, most sensible people would think I'd gone off my head. A few cranks and religious maniacs might praise me, but the average person would think I was a fool- besides being damned unpatriotic.

MRS MELDON: Henry, I beg you to destroy your invention.

CORRIE: You what?

MRS MELDON: I beg you to destroy it. Let that be your memorial to Eddie! ...

CORRIE: My dear Charlotte, I begin to believe that grief has unhinged your mind. Destroy my invention! ...

MRS MELDON: Your bomb will destroy life, Henry. I beg of you to destroy it! ...

CORRIE: Rubbish, woman, rubbish.

MRS MELDON; Then I will destroy it for you! *(She goes to the table where the retorts are and hurls the table over so that the retorts are smashed.)*

CORRIE: What the hell are you doing?

MRS MELDON: I'm destroying your foul invention.

CORRIE *(laughing harshly)*: That won't destroy it. I've got it all in my head. All that you've done, Charlotte, is to make a mess on my door. Damned silly, I call it. *(He stoops down and begins to clear up the mess.)*

MRS MELDON *(standing behind him)*: It's all in your head!

CORRIE: Of course it is. Anybody but a fool of a woman would have realized that. Making a confounded mess like this!

MRS MELDON: It's all in your head?

CORRIE: Yes, yes. Don't keep on repeating yourself, but come and help to clear up this mess you've made.

MRS MELDON: Henry, won't you do what I ask you?

CORRIE: Don't be a fool. *(Looking round.)* Give me that cloth over there so that I can mop up this stuff.

*(He continues to collect the pieces of broken glass, etc., while she goes towards the table where the cloth is. When she reaches the table, she sees a long knife lying there, and half unconsciously she picks it up and looks at it.)*

CORRIE *(impatiently)*: Hurry up. What on earth are you doing?

MRS MELDON: I'm looking at something - this knife!

CORRIE: Well, you can look at it afterwards. Fetch the cloth now. Here's Eddie's wreath under the table. You've made a mess of it, too!

MRS MELDON: Eddie's wreath! *(She comes towards him, the knife in her hand.)*

CORRIE: Yes.

MRS MELDON: If you were to give up your invention, Henry, I wouldn't mind about the wreath. Your offering would be better than mine.

CORRIE: Well, I shan't. Give up my invention for a lot of damned sentiment! Not likely!

MRS MELDON: It'll destroy life, Henry.

CORRIE: What's that got to do with it? Give me that cloth. *(He snaps it out of her hand, but does not see the knife in her other hand.)*

MRS MELDON: You won't destroy it, Henry?

CORRIE *(almost in a snarl)*: NO!

MRS MELDON *(raising the knife above him)*: Then I ....

*(With a queer moan of despair, she slashes the knife across his throat. He sways a moment, uttering a choking sound, and then, clutching at the air, he pitches forward on to his face. She stands above him, looking down on his body in a dazed way. She is crying hysterically, and suddenly she stoops and picks up the broken wreath. She holds it to her breast, and stares distractedly in front of her.)*

MRS MELDON: Eddie, dear, I had to, I had to, Eddie! ...

CURTAIN

## TRANSITION TO LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

*The Professor enters with a mop and broom; he begins cleaning up the mess left over from the end of 'Progress'.*

PROFESSOR: Well, I told you this class would be cut throat. What? No laughs? I thought that joke would kill! I get it- jokes about murder aren't funny... unless they're properly executed. That concludes Unit 1. A story of humanity, a story of destruction. Chilling thing, the horror of a family destroyed. Speaking of destruction of humanity, we're moving forward through the course to discussion of monsters. Bodily horrific creatures covered in sweat, slime, and pustular sores. Dare I ask? Dare I bring the conversation of these horrors to the room? Of course I will. YOU!

*He selects another audience member.*

I'm going to ask you a question which may be triggering; you may feel heat rise in your ears or face. You may sweat. You may faint. You may begin bleeding from your eyes... are you in good health? Did you do your symptom screener today? Did you *really* do your symptom screener today? Do you have your green thumb to prove you aren't dying? Do you feel ready to experience true horror?

*He gets very close to the individual. He takes a deep breath, building up the tension.*

How is your relationship to your father?

*A gasp, or maybe a stumble back. If they don't answer:*

No, really. How is your relationship with your father?

*He makes them answer. He waits as long as he needs to.*

Good. Thank you. We walk in a world of monsters. Fathers. They tell jokes, and grill burgers, and sometimes they force you to study the academia of French Horror Theatre when you just wanted to study bio like everyone else at UCSD! ...hm.... UNIT TWO! "Fathers: Monsters among us". YOU!

*Another victim is chosen from the audience.*

If you were stuck in a lighthouse with your father would you yank out every single nail from every molderin' nail-hole and suck off every speck of rust till all them nails sparkle like a sperm whale's

pecker, and then carpenter the whole light station back together from scrap, and then do it all over again? Would ya? If I told ya to you would. Ah, Lighthouses.

Little known UCSD fact: a boat is actually the most convenient way to travel to campus! No need to find parking... parking. Shit. Does anyone know if they're still selling parking passes for this quarter? It's just occurred to me that my B lot permit expired Winter of '65... I'm going to need to take care of that. Basically: Lighthouses! Fatherhood! The ever looming contemporary threat of developing some sort of horrible illness! Students, prepare yourselves for emotional frights and unrelenting action; claustrophobia! Isolation! Testosterone! And the sun is setting over it all as the clock strikes...

*The Lighthouse Keepers begins.*

## THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

*(Gardiens de phare, 1905)*

by

Paul Autier and Paul Cloquemin

Characters:

Bréhan

Yvon, his son

*(The action takes place on the top floor of the Maudit Lighthouse, on an isolated rock, two leagues from land. A simple room, circular or with cut-off corners, a door to the right. On the left, a bunk; in the center, a table and two wooden stools.)*

*(As the curtain rises, Bréhan is busy wiring up an electric switch on the left-hand wall.)*

BRÉHAN: Five o'clock. Soon it'll be too dark to see anything. I'll be finished in a minute, thank goodness... the mechanism seems to be in good condition. All the same, they're wonderful things these electric lamps! In the old days it used to take ages... Now a turn of the wheel... *(Bréhan gives it a turn and the footlights get brighter.)* Great! All the filaments are alight! There ... *(Bréhan turns it in the opposite direction and the footlights get dimmer.)* We're all ready for lighting-up time.

YVON *(appearing from the right)*: Phew!

BRÉHAN: Are you all finished down there?

YVON *(a coil of rope over his shoulder)*: Yes, I've refilled the tank and come all the way back up... two hundred steps to the top... I'm done for! *(He throws the coil of rope to the left of the bunk.)*

BRÉHAN: You're lucky they didn't build this lighthouse even higher.

YON: Being stuck fifty metres up in the air is quite enough for me, thank you!

BRÉHAN: What weather! Just listen to that wind!

YVON: For sure! *(Pause)* It's going to be a long night. *(Sitting on the bunk and stretching out)* I'm bored! I'm so bored!

BRÉHAN: Already?! *(Taking the coil of rope which Yvon left by the bunk, he walks in front of him and goes to the door on the right.)* And it's not even seven hours since we started our shift. Never mind, a month will soon pass, eh, my boy? Life here isn't as much fun as it is in the village, eh? You'll miss those parties at your cousin Santec's place, I expect. So many people went to those! Yes, indeed! And here we are all alone! *(Bréhan sits down on the stool to the right of the table.)*

YVON: Alone... just the two of us all alone... separated from all of Christendom by more than six miles of sea.

BRÉHAN: Hey, listen to that... What a storm! Can you hear that noise?

YVON: Yes. *(Pause)* I've never felt quite so isolated as I do today.

BRÉHAN *(smiling as he pours himself a drink)*: The fact is that there's not another living soul for miles. The Maudit Lighthouse, the bleakest in all of Brittany- that's how it was described to me when I got this job twenty years ago. Bleak- that's for sure. The nearest those administrators have come to this place is when they've been out for a spot of fishing! *(A prolonged rumble of thunder)* Ah! They probably have a right old laugh about it, while they're putting their feet up in front of the fire. Ah well, here comes the thunder, the sound of the big bass drum! *(He puts the goblet to his lips. Pause.)*

YVON *(sitting on the bunk)*: Father, if one of us were to die, what would become of the other?

BRÉHAN *(stopping drinking, goblet in his hand)*: What are you talking about? Dying without the last rites? God wouldn't allow such a thing to happen. Dying without seeing your mother again? While she's waiting for us across the water? Without embracing her... *(He places the goblet on the table.)* What's the matter with you? In the three years since you took over here from your brother, Pierre, God rest his soul, I've never seen you like this... *(Reassuringly)* You're not going to die and neither am I. *(He takes the goblet, empties it in one gulp and places it on the table. Pause.)*

YVON: Poor Pierre. If only he had stayed.

BRÉHAN If he had stayed, he wouldn't have ended up as shark food. Poor boy!

YVON: Mother will never get over it. The day before we left I caught her reading that letter again from the captain of the ship Pierre was sailing on to the South Seas.

BRÉHAN: Ah, that letter, I know it off by heart. *(Reciting)* 'During a south-south-easterly storm, I ordered a change of course. Your son was the first to climb the rigging. Halfway up he lost his footing and disappeared into the swell. God took him.'

YVON: My fate might have been the same. I used to have a life of freedom, a life without boundaries, a life of danger, instead of being a prisoner like a rat in a trap.

BRÉHAN *(getting up)*: A life of danger, that may be fine, but working here is a hundred times better. *(He takes a step towards Yvon.)*

YVON: Still, it's tough being shut up.

BRÉHAN: Pah! Every thirty days, when we go home for a month, we can be proud of ourselves. Thanks to our lighthouse, a good many return to port who otherwise... *(He goes to examine the lantern on the left-hand wall.)*

YVON *(standing by the bunk)*: This pride you talk of, father. I used to feel it. You remember how happy I was on my first tour of duty, when I was given the job of working with you after I left the navy. Well, since we got back, I haven't felt the same. I don't know...

BRÉHAN: Don't worry, it'll pass.

YVON: Yes, it'll pass... tomorrow. *(Pause, during which he moves to the right.)* A nor'westerly. It's going to be one hell of a night!

BRÉHAN *(kneeling in front of the lantern and opening it)*: Listen to those seagulls outside! What a racket! That means stormy weather. *(Pause. Yvon goes to the door on the left.)* Calm down, Yvon! *(Taking the lantern downstage to the wall on the left)* Will you stop wandering about?

YVON: No! This is all too much. I need to keep moving!

BRÉHAN *(approaching Yvon)*: Oh, I wonder whether it might be another kind of sickness you're suffering from. The kind that ends in wedding bells.

YVON (*standing at a right angle to the bunk*): You've guessed right, father. Marie is going to be my wife... we got engaged the other day.

BRÉHAN: Of course! That's what your problem is. Don't think about it anymore. (*He turns towards the lantern downstage right by the wall.*) Mind you, you certainly kept that one quiet. (*He kneels down in front of the lantern, back to the audience.*) I'd never have guessed otherwise. She's got taste, though... our Yvon. and a lighthouse keeper as well... she'll never have cause to be jealous, anyway.

YVON (*standing in front of the bunk*): Stop teasing me, father... We love each other very much.

BRÉHAN (*standing up and going over to Yvon*): I'm not teasing you. I'm looking forward to you giving me a strapping young grandson who can look after this lighthouse when my old bones are resting with my ancestors in the village graveyard.

YVON (*sitting down on the bunk*): That's all a long way off yet!

BRÉHAN: Yes, there's plenty of time for that. I'm in no hurry to book my ticket to the afterlife. (*He goes centre stage and looks up.*) What's got into those birds out there? The way they're pecking at it with their beaks, they'll end up breaking the glass. (*He picks up his sou'wester and puts it on.*) And it wouldn't be the first time either! (*He makes his way towards the door.*) Nevertheless, in this weather, you can't just leave them to it! Thankfully they don't like humans, so if I just open the door... Shoo! Go on, get out of it! (*Exit Bréhan.*)

YVON: What on earth's the matter with me? I'm cold ... I'm so cold. and at the same time, here (*He taps his chest.*) I'm burning, simply burning. I've never felt anything like this before. The old man's going to worry... I feel so restless. (*He gets up and moves stage right.*)

BRÉHAN (*entering*): Brrr! What weather! I'm absolutely drenched! The great storm four years ago was the last time it was as bad as this. (*He takes off his sou'wester and his oilskins.*) At least our lighthouse is built on solid foundations. Nothing's going to blow it down, that's for sure! Just think of those poor boats out there. You just try struggling against a wind like that. (*He picks up a lantern from the floor upstage left and carries it over to the table.*) But our light will shine tonight and they'll see their way safely home, eh, Yvon? (*He sets about polishing the lamp.*)

YVON (*to the far right of the stage*): Yes. (*Pause*) Father, what are you doing?

BRÉHAN: What does it look like? I'm polishing. A good seaman must always be prepared.

YVON: Just leave it be. Leave the lantern alone.

BRÉHAN (*surprised*): But why?

YVON (*brusquely approaching Bréhan to take the lantern*): For the last time, will you just leave it?!

BRÉHAN: What's got into you?

YVON (*without taking his eyes off the lantern, with his back to the audience, moving left*): The glare from the brass is hurting me. It's like red-hot needles being driven into my brain.

BRÉHAN: Don't be ridiculous! Have you gone mad?

YVON: I don't know... I don't know anymore . . . I'm scared.

BRÉHAN: Scared?

YVON (*standing stage left*): Yes, scared... This is all beginning to get to me... being alone here for months... for years... (*turning*) oh, I envy those sailors in the ships out there, heading for port, towards civilization... whereas us. (*He moves to the footlights on the right.*)

BRÉHAN: Don't get yourself worked up like this! You'll tire yourself out and then you'll be falling asleep on duty tonight.

YVON (*collapsing onto the stool*): So much the better! Sleep! If only I could sleep!

BRÉHAN (*standing to the right of Yvon*): Shut up, Yvon, don't talk like that... falling asleep on duty! You're putting your very soul in danger! (*Seriously*) If a ship were to founder on the rocks through negligence whilst we were on duty, we would have the deaths of every single person on our hands. Right, let's get the oil. Let's get cracking!

YVON: I'm just going to get some fresh air. Maybe that'll make me feel better. (He gets up and goes towards the door.)

BRÉHAN: Watch out and be careful, the wind's strong out there! *(Exit Yvon.)*

BRÉHAN *(moving centre stage)*: Poor boy! Hopefully it won't get any worse, or we'll be in a right mess here. In weather like this no boat would be able to get near the lighthouse and the local doctor with his boneshaker and his old grey mare certainly couldn't get out to Maudit tonight. Just think, if you fell ill, you could die out here for want of a doctor. *(A cry is heard.)* Ah! What was that? I thought I heard a cry... no... *(Cupping his ear with his hand)* I can't hear it anymore. Nothing. You're going senile, you old fool. *(He approaches the table. Another cry is heard.)* No, no, I didn't imagine it. *(He returns to centre stage.)* But there's only Yvon and me here ..My God, what on earth could have happened? *(Enter Yvon. Bréhan moves centre stage.)* Yvon, what did you cry out for?

YVON *(stopping)*: Did I cry out? Yes, maybe I did. I seem to be doing things in spite of myself today.

BRÉHAN: Come here, you're soaked to the skin.

YVON *(moving downstage)*: There's something wrong, isn't there?

BRÉHAN: Has that awful storm made you feel worse?

YVON *(moving centre stage)*: Yes, I'm burning up. Here, feel. And I'm thirsty... so thirsty.

BRÉHAN: Don't drink anything! It'll just make your fever worse.

YVON: But just give me some water . . . a little water.

BRÉHAN: No.

YVON: Give me some water. I want some.

BRÉHAN *(picking up the jug of water from the floor and carrying it over to the table)*: Don't be angry.

YVON *(standing in front of the bunk)*: I'm sorry. But you don't know what it's like. You can't know. I'm not myself anymore. I don't know what's happening to me... it's as if something has taken control of me... I want a drink! Oh, I want a drink!

BRÉHAN (*pouring some water into a goblet and passing it to Yvon*): Ah well, drink then... but just sip it. (*He puts back the jug.*)

YVON (*taking the goblet and immediately putting it down again*): Ah! What's wrong with me now? This is something else... I'm thirsty, I want to drink, but I can't.

BRÉHAN (*returning to the table*): You see, it's the fever!

YVON: But I want to drink... I'm thirsty, I want to drink as if my life depended on it, for God's sake! (*He goes to pick up the goblet.*)

BRÉHAN (*stopping him*): Leave it. You can have a drink a bit later.

YVON: Yes... a bit later. Keep it away from me... far away from me. (*He sits down on the bunk, his head in his hands. Pause.*)

BRÉHAN (*filling his pipe*): Are you feeling any better?

YVON: Please, don't fuss about me. Oh, this rain ... this rain!

BRÉHAN: I think God's left the tap running. (*He strikes a light.*)

YVON: Don't joke ... you're always joking. And put that light out, it's hurting my eyes.

BRÉHAN: Good God, what's got into you? (*He puts his lighter on the table.*) There. Are you happy now?

YVON: Yes, that's better. What a day! Will there be no end to it?

BRÉHAN: It's no longer than any other.

YVON (*raising himself up, about to take his jumper off*): I'm too hot ... I'm suffocating!

BRÉHAN: Look at you, you're shivering. Wrap yourself up.

YVON: No, I'm too hot.

BRÉHAN (*stopping him from getting undressed*): Wrap yourself up, I tell you! I'm your father and you'll do as I say! (*He makes him sit down again on the bunk.*) What on earth's the matter with you? (*Turning his back on the audience and looking at Yvon, who doesn't take his eyes off him.*) Why are you looking at me like that? I've never seen you like this before. there must be something wrong with you. (*He approaches Yvon.*)

YVON: Listen, father. There's something I want to tell you. It's...

BRÉHAN: What is it?

YVON: I'm worried...

BRÉHAN: Worried? Why?

YVON: The other day... when I was round at cousin Santec's house... I got bitten.

BRÉHAN: Bitten?

YVON: By the dog.

BRÉHAN: Which dog?

YVON: Toby.

BRÉHAN: The one they had to have put down?

YVON: They had him put down?

BRÉHAN: Yes, didn't you know?

YVON (*getting up*): But, he was . . . he went mad then! (*Sitting down again*) Then that's why I've been feeling odd for the past two days. This terrible sickness has been simmering away. And then now... it's boiled over. It's invading my whole body. It's overrunning me...

BRÉHAN (*taking hold of him by the shoulders*): You're wrong.

YVON: Look, when Guérec the butcher died of rabies, he had the same symptoms- fever, pains in the eyes, followed by thirst. And he couldn't drink. There you are, you see. It's all over. I have rabies, don't I, father? I'm going to die of rabies.

BRÉHAN: No, no...

YVON: I'll be rabid, rabid like a wild animal... never... never

BRÉHAN: Yvon!

YVON: Father! Father! Save me! Don't let me die!

BRÉHAN: No! No! I will save you!

YVON: I don't want to die! I want to live! I want to live!

BRÉHAN: Yes, yes... you will live, my son... you will live... there, it's all right. *(He sits him down on the bunk and sits next to him, Pause.)*

YVON: Tell me, father, have there ever been any lighthouse keepers who have died all alone, helpless and isolated.

BRÉHAN: Yes.

YVON: And the other one... his companion, what did he do with the body, day after day until someone came to relieve them? It's horrible.. I don't want that to happen.

BRÉHAN: Don't even think about it, Yvon.

YVON: But that's what it'll be like for you. with my body... no,no, that would be awful for you. I'm going to end it all now. *(He gets up and lunges for the door.)*

BRÉHAN *(getting up and holding him back by the shoulders)*: No please. don't do this to your old man.

YVON: Let me go!

BRÉHAN: Think of me!

YVON: You're the one who should think of me. Won't you let me finish it? *(He brutally pushes his father away.)*

BRÉHAN: No! Yvon!

YVON *(leaning against the wall, left)*: Oh! Water .. more water... everywhere there's water... I'm scared... I'm scared!

BRÉHAN *(returning to Yvon and leading him to the bunk)*: Yvon, my son, come here. Next to me ... I'll look after you, I'll make you better.

YVON: There's nothing that can be done. Not by you. Not by anyone

BRÉHAN *(making him sit down on the bunk)*: I'll swim ashore. I'll bring back help... a doctor...

YVON: You're mad ... swimming all that way in weather like this!

BRÉHAN : Yes, I'll go...

YVON: No...no ... don't leave me ... I don't want you to leave me. *(He makes him sit down next to him.)*

BRÉHAN: You're right.

YVON: It's the best part of a month before anyone will come.

BRÉHAN: I'll send a signal. Somebody will come.

YVON: In winter the storms go on and on and this place is so godforsaken ... nobody could get up to the lighthouse.

BRÉHAN: God will protect us.

YVON: God!

BRÉHAN; Don't blaspheme, Yvon! God is just, he remembers everything. I have risked my life enough times for my fellow creatures over the last ten years on the lifeboat... he owes me your life.

YVON: Yes... perhaps. *(Pause)* Oh, it hurts.

BRÉHAN: There's nothing.... There's nothing I can do for him. My boy... my son. *(He gets up.)* Ah! You're right. It's this lighthouse that's to blame for everything... Otherwise help would come, you'd be looked after.

YVON *(groaning)*: Oh, I feel awful... I feel so ill...

BRÉHAN *(returning to Yvon)*: Yes, my son, I know how you suffer... if your mother were here, she would speak to you, she would speak to you as only mothers know how... the way they speak to their children when they are ill. I don't know how to, you understand. *(He sits down on the stool.)*

YVON *(rolling over on the bunk)*: Mother!

BRÉHAN: My God! And so helpless!

YVON: Oh, mother...Mother...

BRÉMAN: My son . . . my poor son . . . *(He weeps silently. Pause.)*

YVON *(getting up)*: I don't want to die like a rabid animal... a terrifying death... no, no.

BRÉHAN *(also getting up)*: Yvon!

YVON: But I can't do it. I don't have the strength to...

BRÉHAN: Stop it!

YVON: You'll have to put me out of my misery. Put me out of my misery like a dog... That's what I am, an animal.

BRÉHAN: What is it you want me to do, my son?

YVON: You gave me life, take it back again. There's nothing else you can do for me.

BRÉHAN: Kill you?! Kill you, my own son?!

YVON: Father, you have to! Please, I beg of you. Have you no pity for me?

BRÉHAN: But I'll make you better...

YVON: Nobody can make me better... before long a wild animal will attack you and you will have to defend yourself... you have to live... for the sake of the lighthouse.

BRÉHAN: Shut up, shut up and don't talk like that.

YVON: I'm suffering, I'm suffering!

BRÉHAN: My God! My God!

YVON: Father! Father! Help me! It's getting worse! I can't bear it any longer... I can't bear it...

BRÉHAN: Yvon! My dear Yvon!

YVON (*walking up to Bréhan*): Go away! Go away! Quickly, get away from me! I can feel myself wanting to bite you. Look out! I'm going to bite you! (*He lunges at Bréhan and grabs him round the neck.*)

BRÉHAN: Ah, no!

YVON: Ah! Ah!

BRÉHAN: What are you doing? Let go! Will you let go?! In the name of God! I'll have to... (*Just as he is about to be bitten by Yvon, Bréhan strangles him. Yvon falls. Bréhan throws himself on the body.*) Yvon, my boy, my son, I've killed him. I've killed my son. (*He sobs. The wind grows stronger, the storm rages. He gets up.*) Yes, bastard sea! You bastard! Are you happy? Now you have my two boys. For twenty years at this lighthouse I have robbed you of your victims, but today you've taken your revenge, you bastard.

Oh, I hate you! I hate you! Yvon! Poor Yvon! *(He collapses in front of his son's corpse. Pause. The sound of a siren in the distance. He doesn't hear it. The siren again, this time closer. Bréhan pricks up his ears.)* Eh? What? A siren! A ship! *(Siren again and again, getting nearer.)* The lighthouse! I've forgotten to switch on the lamp. The ship will crash on the rocks! It'll be lost! They'll all be killed! I didn't switch on the lamp... they haven't come to rescue us. I want to stay with my son... my child. *(Sirens, increasingly strong.)* No, I can't..... I have to help them find a safe passage through. *(He slowly goes to the electric switch and turns it. The footlights come on, the siren stops.)* It is my duty... *(He returns to kneeling by Yvon.)*

THE END

### TRANSITION TO INTERMISSION

*The Professor enters, foaming at the mouth. He doesn't look so hot.*

Students, due to some unforeseen complications it seems I'm going to have to switch up the syllabus slightly. We're taking the midterm... right now. You have ten minutes. Begin.

*He makes his way off stage, clearly ill. Lights up for intermission.*

### INTERMISSION

### TRANSITION TO LOVERS

PROFESSOR AS HOST: Alright, we're back, students. Now that that's all taken care of, welcome to unit three. We've done so much work with horror and hatred. I think it's time we lighten the mood. The park! Picture this: the quiet part of a park on a summer evening. It is a pleasant evening, tranquil, the air is thick with sweet scent .... A dark mist hangs over the moon. Shadowy figures morphe in and out of sight in vague and strange silhouettes. And there! A pond? A lake? Who knows. You decide. Breathe it all in. It might be dark, and it might be sketchy to be in a park at night, but love is everywhere. In the clearing, in the undergrowth! It's all around us! Love and not fear- I feel like- I was in a place just like this, on November 17th, 18th and 19th at 7:30pm...

*He indicates the bench. With emotion.*

And now imagine... here is a bench. An old bench. Not too overgrown. Not too mossy. A very old bench. Large and smooth like a new desk ... A desk in a professor's office, perhaps in Galbraith Hall, next to my closest chums Professor Stalling and Mayer who totally respect my intelligence and recognize me as an equal...

Cambria Herera once said: If benches be the seat of love ... Make yourself comfortable.

*He pauses.*

Students, whenever a professor asks you to think about a bench beneath a tree next to a fountain- or anything else for that matter- you just know that it can only be a lesson in love. I don't even need to tell you that any minute now, on this exhilarating night at UC Straight Dude some guy will sit on this bench besides some chick. Riveting! One or both of them will probably be wearing that blue UCSD sweatshirt with the yellow text.... Stylish! Then they'll talk back and forth for a while, probably about their classes and registration, but they'll try to make it sexually charged.... Nobody on this campus ever talks about anything else.

*He looks across the park.*

THERE! RIGHT THERE! I told you so! Here they come! And they look like typical UCSD kids! Sad!

*The Man and the Woman enter slowly. They both look sad. The Woman is wearing lace and the Man is in a dinner jacket As they appear, the Host salutes the audience, discreetly steps*

*back and exits.*

**The Lovers**  
(*Les Amants*, 1901)  
Octave Mirbeau

---

Characters:

Host

Man

Woman

---

*A moonlit park. To the right, a stone bench beneath a tree with overhanging branches. The stage is empty. The Host, who could be the director of the theatre, enters stage left. He is dressed very formally in black with white gloves. He moves with elegant little steps as far as the proscenium and bows to the audience.*

HOST: Ladies and Gentlemen ... You see before you the quiet corner of a park one summer evening. It is a pleasant evening, tranquil, the air is thick with sweet scent ... Against the sky the foliage is bathed in moonlight and looks like black lace against purple silk. Between the shadows, between vague and strange silhouettes, you can see in the gloom, veiled by a silvery mist, the glimmer of water ... A pond? A lake? Who knows. You decide. But look at the setting - so misty, so divine! Love is everywhere. It is in the clearing and in the undergrowth ..... It moves all around .... invisible. It stirs the branches of the trees, very, very, gently .. Delicious.

*(He indicates the bench. With emotion.)*

And here is a bench. An old bench. Not too overgrown. Not too mossy. A very old stone bench. Large and smooth like an altar ... An altar where you could offer the holy sacrament of *love*.

*(Declaims.)*

If benches be the seat of love ... Make yourself comfortable.

*(Pause.)*

Ladies and gentlemen, whenever a curtain rises and you see a bench beneath a tree next to a fountain or anything else for that matter, you just know that it can only be a love scene. I don't even need to tell you that any minute now, in this exhilarating night - oh, the melancholy of a heart in love! - a young man, according to custom, will sit on this bench beside a young woman. Once there, both of them will

take turns in murmuring and moaning, weeping and sobbing, singing and extolling the virtues of things eternal...

*(Looks across the park.)*

What did I say? I can hear the leaves rustling .. and I can see two shadows slowly coming through the branches ... There they are .... Oh, how sad they look!

*(The Man and the Woman enter slowly. They both look sad. The Woman is wearing lace and the Man is in a dinner jacket As they appear, the Host salutes the audience, discreetly steps back and exits.)*

MAN: Ah! The bench ... That beloved bench ... *(He moves towards it, putting his arm around the Woman's waist. Tenderly.)* That old and beloved stone bench ... So often a witness to our rapture .... And our ecstasy ...

WOMAN *(aside)*: Not the bench again ...

MAN: You seem tired.. Would you like us to sit down for a while?

WOMAN *(distractedly)*: If you want.

MAN: Come along, then .... Give me your hand.

WOMAN *(aside)*: Always the same bench!

MAN: You are so beautiful! You are particularly beautiful tonight, my dear... And what a beautiful evening too. *(They sit down on the bench. The Woman, on the right, rather tensely; the Man leans towards her, takes both her hands and stares into her eyes. A lengthy silence.)* What a delectable evening ..

WOMAN *(still distracted and vague)*: Delectable.

MAN: Isn't it just!

WOMAN: Yes.

MAN *(poetically)*: Ah! What sweet mystery can compare with love? Every night, we come here ... The same things surround us every night ... the same starlight, the same dreamy moonlight ... and yet every

night I seem to discover pleasures that are new ... and stronger .... And... more... more mysterious than before... more unknown ... and so sweet ... so sweet! (*A bird squawks in fright and flies out of the tree above them. The Man stops talking abruptly. He is terrified and drops the Woman's hand, staring at where the bird flew from. Then he takes her hands again even more passionately.*) And so sweet. (*Silence.*) So very sweet! Wouldn't you say so?

WOMAN: What?

MAN: So very sweet.

WOMAN: Who?

MAN (*rather disconcerted*): But ..... I don't know ... the starlight ... The dreamy moonlight ... the birds in the trees .... (*suddenly enthusiastic*) And our passion ... Our wild passion!

WoMAN: Ah yes ... sorry ... so very sweet. (*She sighs.*)

MAN (*after a short silence, very upset*): Why do you have to say it like that?

WOMAN: How do you want me to say it?

MAN: I don't recognize your voice any more ... I don't recognize *you* any more. You've completely changed. (*Pause.*) My darling. (*Silence.*) My treasure. (*Silence. Insistent.*) Darling treasure of my heart's desire. (*Silence. He reaches over and grasps her tightly. She recoils slightly.*) Why don't you say something? What are you thinking about?

WOMAN: Nothing.

MAN: Nothing? Are you angry or something?

WOMAN: Angry?

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: Why should I be angry? Do you *want* me to be angry?

MAN (*tenderly*): Of course not ... I was just wondering ... I was only asking ... I beg you to tell me ...  
*Are you angry?*

WOMAN: Do I have any reason to be angry?

MAN (*very sad*): But you weren't saying anything. I was telling you ... telling you some things ...

WOMAN (*rather bitter*): 'So very sweet'.

MAN: Yes ... Well ... I was talking and you said nothing.

WOMAN: I'm not angry anyway.

MAN: Are you sad?

WOMAN: No, of course not. Should I be sad? (*She sighs.*)

MAN (*lively*): There's something ..... there's something you're not telling me!

WOMAN: No, honestly, there's nothing

MAN: I am not mistaken! My heart knows it! And my heart is never wrong! What is it?

WOMAN: Nothing.

MAN (*passionately*): Tell me! Tell me! What is it?

WOMAN (*injured, she stands up and walks stage left*): Nothing...Nothing, I tell you! (*She bursts into tears.*) Nothing.

MAN (*hurrying over to her*): You're crying! Oh, you're crying!

WOMAN: No, I'm not - I am not crying!

MAN: Yes, you are!

WOMAN: Let go of me!

MAN: I can hear you crying - why are you crying?

WOMAN: I'm just a bit emotional, that's all . Maybe it's the night... (*bitter*) Maybe it's the starlight .... The dreamy moonlight...and our passion! Nothing, you see ... I'm not crying. (*she sobs.*) This is ridiculous! I don't want ... I don't want to cry...

MAN (*searching for words*): My darling ... my beloved ... my sweetheart ... You are my sweetheart, aren't you? And I... I... I'm yours ..... (*Woman shakes her head sadly.*) Yes, I am! We belong to one another! Of course we do!

WOMAN (*shaking her head and wailing*): Yes, we 'belong' to one another ... Nothing more than that!

MAN: Listen to me. I don't want you to cry. There's really no need. You mustn't cry. You don't have the right to cry. When you cry ... it drives me mad ... I simply can't bear to see it ... Look - just answer me. Have mercy on me ... Have some pity ... Answer me (*Looks at his hand.*) Oh look! A teardrop has fallen on my hand, a precious tear from your beloved eyes ... on my hand!

WOMAN: No, I tell you, no!

MAN: Yes, yes!

WOMAN: A drop of dew, that's all...

MAN: Yes! A drop of dew from your eyes ... from your beautiful eyes ... on my hand. (*Kisses his own hand.*) Dearest .. dearest little teardrop ... on my hand (Pause.) Have I hurt you?

WOMAN: Do you think you have hurt me?

MAN: I obviously have ... but I don't know how ... I didn't mean to, I swear ...!

WOMAN: No, no.

MAN: Well... has someone hurt you? (*heroically*) Ah! If anyone ever tried to hurt you! (*very agitated*) Them, for example! (*He gestures threateningly at some distant figures*)

WOMAN: Calm down ... Stop it now. ... What good would that do... You don't understand... It's not your fault... You're a man and I'm a woman.

MAN (*tenderly and cynically at one and the same time*): Oh, come off it! If you weren't a woman, I'd -

WOMAN (*pushing him back*): Don't be so vulgar!

MAN (*clasping his hands together*): Oh!

WOMAN: It's very clear you'd never understand. Only a woman could understand. Only a woman would understand how I suffer. (*She takes a few steps.*)

MAN: Oh - you're suffering!

WOMAN: No, not quite ...

MAN: I know it - I knew you were suffering...

WOMAN: Let go - I'm tired of you - take me back to the house.

MAN: Please - I beg you! Tell me all about your suffering... Your beloved suffering ... Aren't I your ... your ... aren't I? (*quietly*) Your dearest friend? Not just your lover - not just the friend of your lips, your eyes .... your hair .... and every passionate and secret inch of your flesh-

WOMAN: Oh - that - obviously.

MAN: Aren't I also the friend of your thoughts ... your heart ... your soul? (*passionately*) Aren't I still deep inside your soul? Oh - how horrible! I beg you!

WOMAN: No - let go. Take me home. Nothing will change what I said. I was wrong to show you my feelings. I'd better be alone in my suffering.

MAN: Alone in your suffering? Ah - no! I will not allow it! Never! Never! I want to share your sorrow! I want all my share of your sorrow!

WOMAN: Don't keep asking ... I won't do it ... it's honestly better if I...

MAN (*exalted*): I want to share your sorrow! I want it, do you hear me? I want it all! All your sorrow! All your beloved sorrow! All of it, do you understand? To suffer *alone*? It's monstrous to hear you say such a thing ... Ah! No! A thousand times no! (*caressingly*) I want you to be happy!

WOMAN: Ah! How could I possibly be happy since...

MAN: Since what?

WOMAN: Since you don't love me any more.

MAN: God in Heaven! Don't love you any more!?

WOMAN: Without a shadow of doubt.

MAN: Why on earth do you say such a thing?

WOMAN: I say it because you don't love me any more.

MAN: But ... that's insane ... it's ... it's ... totally crazy ... It's madness .. total madness .. madness, I tell you ... I don't love you any more? Why that's *blasphemous*! It's .... it's insane! (*Reacting to a movement of Woman.*) Completely! I stand by what I said - it's madness... You're out of your senses.. Where on earth did you get that crazy idea ... that I... I... I don't love you any more?

WOMAN: All at once I saw the whole picture.

MAN: The whole picture ... the whole picture ... But that's not enough ... You're being too vague ... Be precise ... You must be more precise ...

WOMAN: You're not like you used to be.

MAN: What?

WOMAN: I think you're bored with me.

MAN: What? *What?*

WOMAN: You've started smoking again.

MAN: But I never stopped, sweetheart. Just think about it - you know it's true. I've never stopped smoking now, have I?

WOMAN: Nor like you smoke now ... before ... you'd never dare smoke... *afterwards* ...

MAN: Let me - ah - let me

WOMAN: And now ... you're letting yourself go.

MAN (*stupefied*): What? What do you mean?

WOMAN: You take no pride in how you look any more. You neglect your appearance.

MAN: What? What?

WOMAN: Things like that do not escape the attention of a delicate lady... a lady who loves -

MAN: Oh! I didn't expect that! That's really quite insulting, you know! Letting myself go? Everything else you've said, I can handle - maybe - but I draw the line at that. Let myself go. (*bitter and annoyed*) So, you think I'm dirty, do you?

WOMAN: Did anyone say that?

MAN: No - but you find me disgusting, do you?

WOMAN: Here we go - you and your exaggerations!

MAN: Come on now, in what way have I changed? This whole thing is extremely humiliating, believe me. Yes - I feel humiliated. Humiliated more than anything else. Very .... very humiliated ... (*affected dignity*) For my honour ... In the name of our love ... I demand an explanation ... I demand it. Because I am, after all, extremely humiliated.

WOMAN: I can't be more precise...

MAN: That's easy to say ... good grief!

WOMAN: There is .... Something a little shady ... Something not quite palatable ... which seems to grow the more it remains unexplained.

MAN; Something 'shady'? Me - a man of my standing, my reputation so well deserved, a man like me - 'shady' ... It's inconceivable .... absolutely humiliating. (*Silence.*)

WOMAN: I notice you don't deny it.

MAN: What? I don't deny it? You really are quite bizarre this evening .... Yes, I deny it. I deny it with every fibre of my being!

WOMAN: No! This is why I sense that you don't love me any more. Before, you would've gone into a rage.

MAN: But I am in a rage ... I am in a rage!

WOMAN: Not like before.

MAN: This is too much.

WOMAN: Nothing matters to you any more. Take this afternoon. I thought I was going to die.

MAN (*profoundly stunned*): Die? This afternoon? Come off it, I never saw you so happy ... So charming ... So joyful ... So loving ... Remember... in the drawing room ... Remember the drawing room .... The curtains closed ... The divan... My caresses ... Forgotten ...! Your kisses ... Meaningless!

WOMAN: What are you saying?

MAN: I'm reminding you that I held you in my arms ... And when my hand strayed underneath your lace. ... Ah! How beautiful you were ... swooning yet willing! I said-

WOMAN: Shut up! How vulgar you are!

MAN: And you thought you'd die? Die of happiness maybe!

WOMAN: Oh, you conceited oaf!

MAN: Well, what did you think you'd die of this afternoon?

WOMAN: You need to ask?

MAN: Yes ... I'm asking ... (*energetically*) I need to know.

WOMAN: You know only too well.

MAN: I swear -

WOMAN: Don't swear. It's not nice to swear.

MAN: I swear ... I've tried to remember ... I've racked my brains ... What happened this afternoon?

WOMAN: Let's say nothing happened, shall we? I mean, what's the point of talking about it. You never see anything. You never feel anything. It's best that I hide my feelings from you. What do my feelings matter to you anyway?

MAN: Now ... now ... now ... Let's not get in a muddle over this. It's not a question of your feelings ... this afternoon ... It's more a question of-

WOMAN: You see, you don't want to talk about it-

MAN: To tell you the truth, my darling, I haven't understood a word you've said ... You are behaving very strangely this evening.

WOMAN: Strangely? That's right. I am strange. Aht That's just what I need now - to be insulted!

MAN: Come on, now ... I didn't insult you ... I just said that you were acting a little strange this evening.

WOMAN: And you? What about you? Does it matter to you that every single minute you hurt my most delicate, intimate feelings.

MAN: I hurt your-

WOMAN: And you love me? Oh, for a man with courage! They often say that only a man with true heroism could love a woman as young, rich, beautiful and sought after as-

MAN: It's not a question of that.

WOMAN: And you think you have done all you need to for her, a woman who sacrificed everything for you, when you said ... between two puffs of a cigar .... that you loved her!

MAN: That's not fair, let me -

WOMAN: You love me? But are you ever interested in my happiness?

MAN: Of course ...

WOMAN: Had you only for more than a split second given your entire life to me ... a woman who has given everything to you - not just my life but my reputation ... my tranquillity .. my honour ... (*With a sudden romantic gesture.*) Yes! My honour!

MAN: But darling-

WOMAN (*interrupting*): Had you only avoided me, like a decent gentleman would have ... A gentleman who understands the modesty of a lady ... and respects a good family ... the terrible difficulties in being in a situation like mine. You? Never. I merely flatter your vanity ... your arrogance ... and, of course, you've used me like a trophy!

MAN: Oh! That's simply too much! Totally irrational - just like all women!

WOMAN: But you have used me like a trophy ... Can you honestly say that you haven't used me like a trophy?

MAN: Let me say something - let me speak, will you.

WOMAN: Restaurants ... summer fetes and garden parties ... boxes in the theatre ..... Who knows where else? And your friends... all those friends you dragged round to my house ... and who know every intimate detail of our personal life ... (*Man protests.*) Well, what do you have to say to that?

MAN: Be fair! Just think about it - my friends ... the restaurants ... the theatre .... they were all *your* idea! Sweetheart - you wanted all these things ... You insisted!

WOMAN: Me?

MAN: Yes... you ... In the name of love, of course, all for love.

WOMAN: Well, at least one thing's clear. You have absolutely no sense of decency.

MAN: Just think about it ... just give it a moment's thought. How many times have I had to tell you to curb your bold behaviour?

WOMAN: 'Bold behaviour'. That's a pretty choice of words -

MAN: Your *charmingly* bold behaviour .. How many times have I tried to stop you being too impulsive ... how many times have I warned you against being foolish?

WOMAN: This is horrible!

MAN: I have never *stopped* you ... Try to understand, my dear, dear darling; on the contrary... I was overwhelmed by you ... I was intoxicated! I said to myself 'What a noble spirit! What a free spirit! She loves me in spite of it all - in spite of gossip, prejudice, stupidity.' You were *sublime* ...

WOMAN: Really? Now that *is* impressive ... Your ignorance is beyond belief... So you think that I had a desperate need to scream to the world: 'This is the man I love! Look at him - he is my lover!?' It's only natural, isn't it? (*angry*) So that's how much you estimate me, is it? What do you take me for? I'm just a trollop, am I?

MAN: Think about what you've said, just think about everything you've said. Where's your proof?

WOMAN: My God! It's perfectly clear ... I was just a slut to you ... one of those miserable creatures ... You never tried to spare me the presence of such women ... Now I understand why ...! Ah! I see it all ... How wicked! How despicable! (*Hides her face in her hands and sobs.*) Oh, the shame!

MAN (*lost*): Ah - now you're crying again ... My God! My God! I'm lost for words - I don't know what to say.

WOMAN: Did I deserve to be treated so cruelly? Did I? You are so *cruel*.

MAN: Listen (*He takes her arms and gently leads her to the bench and sits her down.*) Listen to me ... I beg you. (*He very cautiously kisses her.*)

WOMAN: No... no ... I don't want you to ... never again ... You don't deserve it ... It's disgusting!

MAN: Don't cry. It *tortures* me to hear you crying.

WOMAN: Oh? What are you going to do about it? What can you possibly do?

MAN: Well ... yes ... I have wronged you ... my adorable love... and I didn't even realize it ... you've been terribly wronged... Yes, I admit it. But that's over now ... I'm deeply, deeply sorry! I beg you, please forgive me.

WOMAN (*through her tears*): I wish I'd never been born! I wish I was dead!

MAN: Don't talk like that ... please ... *Dead?* You really don't have the right to-

WOMAN: Yes! It's true! It'd be better if I were dead! Oh, now ..... all my hopes are dashed ... forever ... don't you see? I am nothing to you ... Your true love? No, just an object ... just a bit of fun, that's all .. I am nothing to you... my soul means nothing to you.

MAN: Your soul?

WOMAN: Yes, my soul... my poor, wretched soul ... What is it to you?

MAN: Ah, your soul! Don't blaspheme, I beg you! Your soul means everything to me!

WOMAN (*gentle and weak*): Nothing ... nothing.... nothing at all...

MAN (*strong voice*): Everything ... It means everything to me... Your soul is my life ... my reason for being ... my joy - it means everything to me.

WOMAN: You forget, my dear, that I am a woman.

MAN: No! I think of nothing else...

WOMAN: A woman ... You must understand that a woman can be like a child sometimes ... no more than a baby...

MAN (*rocking her*): A tiny little baby...

WOMAN: A tiny little baby ... a sensitive, vulnerable, weak little baby...

MAN: Oh, my baby, my baby, my darling baby...!

WOMAN: She needs to be cosseted, cuddled ... you have to sing sweetly to her soul ... and love her...

MAN: I will cosset you... I will cuddle you ... I will sing sweetly to your soul ... Oh yes .. I will sing to you so gently ... Oh yes... I will sing to you so gently-

WOMAN: Often?

MAN: All the time! All the time!

WOMAN: And then... Do you think I'm being silly?

MAN: No, of course not! How could you-

WOMAN: Do you think I'm stupid?

MAN: *You?*

WOMAN: Yes, yes, you do - you think I'm stupid, don't you?

MAN: Look ... (*He gives her a long kiss.*) My dear ... my darling ... stupid ... You? You are my sunshine ... my soul ... my everything ... my dear, dear everything ... (*cheerfully*) My little, ickle-wickle everything...

WOMAN: Because .. if you *did* think I was stupid-

MAN: You are my heartbeat! My life force! You are all that I see! I am always with you - I am always inside you ... Without you ... I'd be nothing... nothing... nothing at all. When we're apart I am lost ... I'm in despair ... like a traveller lost in a forest at night... like a dog lost in the crowd ..... Like like...

WOMAN: More ... tell me more ... It's so wonderful ...

MAN: Never a day goes by ... never a minute ... never a second... when I don't think of you... Every day, every evening, every night ... in my dreams... in my thoughts... in everything I do... Never a minute, do you see, never a minute when your heart, your soul...

WOMAN: More ... more...

MAN: Your heart... your soul... your eyes... your hands... your dear hands... your dear eyes...

WOMAN: Do you mean it? Swear!

MAN: Yes, yes, I swear! Your lips .. give me your lips ....

WOMAN (*almost swooning*): Oh, darling ... darling ... Never hurt me again ... never hurt your little baby again...

MAN: Ssh ... I swear ... Never again ... your soul ... your mouth ... your-

(*Silence and passionate kisses.*)

THE END

### TRANSITION TO FINAL KISS

PROFESSOR: That concludes Unit 3. Which means... Well, it means a number of things. The first is that today is now the last day to drop this course without a W. The second is that we've reached our final unit. Students, do you remember prior to unit one, when I told you that one third of you would not survive this course? As much as you may have thought I was kidding I am coming to you now with complete sincerity: Unit Four is not for the faint hearted. And I know- I know that from the beginning of this experience I've warned you of dangers and horrors, but this is different. Unit four is a true horror of an intensity which my words do not do justice. Both bodily and psychological horrors reside within, and both are acted upon with the most gruesome and malicious intent. As we move from one sort of love in Unit Three to... another... in Unit Four, I ask for your discretion. If the previous horrors of this evening have been difficult for your mind or body this Unit may destroy you. Even I do not choose to give too much of my daily energy to thoughts of *The Final Kiss*. Some things are better left outside of our knowledge. This will be our last exchange of words for the course, dear students. I do not think that anything I may conjure to say does justice to the atrocities of Unit Four. Prepare yourself. Mutter a prayer, excuse yourself. Some things are just too terrible for discussion... That being said, you have a 500 word discussion post and responses to two classmates due by midnight. Just to add to the terror. Good luck.

*Professor exits. The Final Kiss begins.*

**THE FINAL KISS***(Le Baiser dans la nuit, 1912)**by*

Maurice Level

---

Characters:

Doctor

Nurse

Henri

Jeanne

---

*(The room is very dark. Henri sits in a dressing gown with his back to the audience. His head is wrapped in bandages. He injects himself with a syringe of morphine. The door opens very slowly and the Doctor and Nurse step in.)*

DOCTOR: You do realize, Henri, that my professional standing does not allow me to condone this.

HENRI *(after a pause)*: Hello, Doctor.

DOCTOR: I've heard of too many people getting hooked on that stuff. And morphine addiction is not at all pleasant, believe me.

HENRI: But the pain ... it never stops...

DOCTOR: Can't you try *aspirin*?  
*(Henri glares at the Doctor who stops dead.)*

HENRI: This is all that can ease the pain. Torture. *(Silence)*

DOCTOR: So how do you find life in this halfway house? It's got to be better than the hospital. You're independent but they keep an eye on you. Make life tolerable.

HENRI: Yes-can get you *anything* you want. *(Gestures at syringe of morphine.)*

DOCTOR: Mm-I'm not sure what to think of-

HENRI: Absolutely anything.

DOCTOR: Come on, sister, let's get the dressing changed.

NURSE: Right then, gentlemen--this won't take a moment.

*(Nurse and Doctor tentatively approach Henri and stand either side of him. Henri still has not moved.)*

DOCTOR *(a quake in his voice reveals his nervousness)*: Let's... have a look then.

NURSE: Yes, sir. *(She unpicks the bandage and begins to coil it off. Henri tenses up, his hands gripping the arms of the chair.)*

HENRI: Easy, easy now.

*(The bandage is completely removed. Nurse and Doctor try to hide their grimaces. Silence.)*

NURSE *(trembling voice)*: There .. not so bad .. healing up ... it's much, much better now. Good news. Yes. Definitely. We can be quite optimistic-

DOCTOR: I know I haven't been a doctor for many years, but I've never seen anything as appalling as these injuries. And I hope I never see anything like it again. *(Henri's head lowers.)* Sulphuric acid. Vitriol. That's what caused this. An acid attack.

NURSE: They happen too often, sir.

DOCTOR: It's quite hideous. Thinking about a career change, sister?

NURSE *(forced brightness)*: Oh no, it's all part of a day's work... I suppose-

DOCTOR: Get a nice job in an office. Or be a nanny. I wouldn't blame you. Too often we see the dark side of life. *(Doctor braces himself and goes closely to Henri's face and then acquires a consummate professionalism.)*

DOCTOR: It's been the best part of a year since it happened. I'm afraid it will never get any better than what you see now. We've done all we can--and so has nature, I'm afraid. He was nearly blinded- his eyes are seriously damaged but mercifully he can see.

NURSE: That's good-in fact, it's great.

HENRI (*sullen*): But light. Light burns my eyes.

DOCTOR: It was so calculated. Often with this kind of assault, the perpetrator throws the acid from too far away or too quickly or they lose their nerve and their hands shake. But in this case, it was done with absolute precision. Every drop hit the intended target-this face. The attacker had a very cool head. Exceptionally cool.

NURSE: He wanted to maim him.

DOCTOR: He? It was a lady.

NURSE: Oh... a crime of passion... how very sad.

DOCTOR: Our patient's 'estranged' fiancée. They should've given her the death penalty. Put a new dressing on. (*She does so.*)

NURSE: They ... caught her?

DOCTOR: Oh yes, she was arrested. A great performance in court, so I hear. She got off lightly. A six-month sentence. She's probably free already.

NURSE: And he got a life sentence. How old is he?

HENRI: I'm twenty-five.

NURSE: Is that all? And your life has been ruined. (*Correcting herself*) Oh well, nothing to despair about-

DOCTOR: The annoying thing is Henri's altruism. He *forgives her*.

NURSE: No!?! How could he... *(Checks herself)* I suppose to err is human, to forgive divine!

DOCTOR: She attacked him in a vicious fit of jealous rage- ruined him, as you put it, subjected him to indescribable agony. And he forgives her. If anything, he even helped her get a light sentence.

NURSE: He must have loved her.

DOCTOR *(wry smile)*: Yes.

HENRI: I still do. *(Silence)* It was a... disaster. But nothing can right it now. My suffering is great. It was a terrible thing to do- she knows that. I forgive her.

DOCTOR: I will never understand.

NURSE: It's truly remarkable. *Love*. To forgive like that. No desire for revenge. Just forgiveness. Underneath the pain, you must have a great peace to forgive like that.

HENRI: Yes. Maybe. Yes. I'm tired now. Please go away now. Just leave me.

NURSE: Oh.

DOCTOR: Well, this is goodbye then, Henri. I'm sorry we were not able to do more for you. We will pop by again to see how you're settling in a week or two, maybe a month. Is that alright? *(Henri shrugs in indifference.)* I will have a word with the warden about the . . . *(Gestures towards the syringe. Henri looks plaintive.)* Oh, very well, but take it easy, old chap. Cheerio. *(He shakes Henri's hand and very subtly rubs his hand afterwards. Nurse gives a little bow and an embarrassed giggle. They exit. Henri stands up and turns and we see his bandaged face. He walks around the room somewhat impatiently, once or twice he feels something in his dressing gown pocket. He checks the time. He sits down like before. After a moment of stillness and silence, Jeanne silently enters. She stands there, Henri suddenly senses her.)*

HENRI: Who's that? Is it..? It is you. At last! It's you!

JEANNE: Yes, Henri, it is me.

HENRI: Are you alone?

JEANNE: Yes. (*Starts weeping*) Forgive me, forgive me.

HENRI: Stop. Don't cry. It's very difficult to *come back*. I know you didn't want to.

JEANNE: Didn't want to? When you asked me to? How can you think that? There's so much I wanted to tell you.... but I couldn't. and you are so *good*...

HENRI: Good? It's difficult to...

JEANNE: No, you *are* good. I feel so guilty. I wish I was dead for all the terrible things I've done to you!

HENRI: I'm not without blame though, am I?

JEANNE: Yes, you *are*.

HENRI: No. You did ... love me, didn't you?

JEANNE: Yes. Of course I did.

HENRI: Well, why did I leave you then?

JEANNE: No excuses. There aren't any. I don't deserve any. I'm not worthy of forgiveness. If you only knew how much I've cried...

HENRI: I know. Your lawyer told me... He told me of your suffering...

JEANNE: When you said 'I'm leaving you' I thought I'd go insane... It was my entire life... I lost my head. People can become ferocious when they're...

HENRI: Yes, ferocious. The remorse, the pity comes later... Too late...

JEANNE: I have been so contemptible.

HENRI: When I realized what you'd done to me with that sulphuric acid... that my whole life would be horrible and... finished... I mean I'm more reasonable now than when I first realized that.

JEANNE: But... you're not bli- You can see- they told me you can see.

HENRI: Yes. I can see. But light is agony. And it's getting worse and I may become... blind. Yes, blind. The doctors have done all they can to save my sight. They subjected me to days of agony. But I think it's getting worse.

JEANNE: You must hate me. *(She turns away and starts to cry.)*

HENRI: Me? I can hear you crying. I've cried too. And the tears caused me such pain. They came out of my eyes like molten steel. *(Silence)* When you live in the dark like I do, you have time to think, turn things over in your mind, come to terms ... So I don't cry anymore. You can see that. Actually, having you here makes me feel better. It brings back such memories!

JEANNE: Forgive me. I beg you to forgive me.

HENRI: Don't cry anymore. This is the last time we'll be together.

JEANNE: Why?

HENRI: Because ... *(Henri faces Jeanne head on for the first time, his eyes wide and staring between the bandages.)*

JEANNE: Ah!

HENRI: What is it?

JEANNE: Nothing... Nothing...

HENRI *(almost menacing)*: I'm frightening to look at, aren't I?

JEANNE: No.

HENRI: Frightening. You cried out...

JEANNE: No.

HENRI: Yes you did. I want you to come nearer to me. Do you know how much I'd like to feel the touch of your hands again? Would you... give me your hand? Just one touch would bring back so many good memories. *(She pauses then walks over and touches his hand.)* Thank you. It feels so good.. *(Jeanne suddenly looks uneasy for a moment.)* You're not upset?

JEANNE: Of course not.

HENRI: Or angry?

JEANNE: Why are you saying that?

HENRI: I thought you... pulled away. *(He sits on the chaise lounge.)*

JEANNE *(kissing his hand)*: No.

HENRI: I think we'll always be lovers, deep down... but... where's the engagement ring? You got rid of it?

JEANNE: No.

HENRI: Why don't you wear it?

JEANNE: Henri... I didn't dare to.

HENRI: You must. Promise me. You must wear it.

JEANNE: I promise.

HENRI: I'm so cold. Frozen. Will you let me caress your skin? I feel that I've never touched anyone before... I feel like a child.

JEANNE: Oh God, God.

HENRI: I'm so happy you're here- you have no idea how happy I am!

JEANNE: Me too...

HENRI: I wish you could stay... but I know it's impossible.

JEANNE: I'll do whatever you want.

HENRI: I'm hideous, aren't I?

JEANNE: No, Henri, I swear-

HENRI: If you removed my bandages you'd be horrified. People shudder when they look at me. Give me your hand. I want you to touch me.... I'm a thing without form... or name ...I have suffered... and I'm scared...

JEANNE: I didn't want to hurt you!

HENRI: Move your fingers across there-aagh! It hurts!

JEANNE: Stop...

HENRI (*holding her hand to him*): No. Feel around my mouth. The scars ... the skin is so fragile. When I eat I can sometimes taste blood in my mouth.

JEANNE: I beg you--it's too much--I can't .

HENRI: You understand that I've suffered.

JEANNE: Yes... yes...

HENRI: You're shaking. I can understand why.

JEANNE: I'm shaking because of the pain I've caused you ... because you cried out just then... because...

HENRI: Don't lie!

JEANNE: I'm not!

*(Silence)*

HENRI: Forget everything I've said to you. Just go.

JEANNE (deep sorrow): Forget?

HENRI: Yes. Look, tell me about yourself now... What are you going to do now you're out of prison?

JEANNE: I don't know. I haven't thought about it. It's just not important now.

HENRI: You must have some idea.

JEANNE: I'll rest for a few days then I'll go back to work. I might do some modelling if they want me.

HENRI: Why wouldn't they? You're young, pretty... You were always pretty... You still are. You're still beautiful.

JEANNE: I don't look at myself.

*(Henri pulls her close to him.)*

HENRI: I remember this dress. Your black dress.

JEANNE: Yes.

HENRI: Don't move, don't move... I like your perfume...

JEANNE: I'm not wearing any. I haven't for weeks.

HENRI: It's the scent of your body, your skin, your hair. *(Pause)* Are you scared?

JEANNE: No.

HENRI: You're trembling. Am I so disgusting?

JEANNE: No- I'm cold.

HENRI: You're not wearing a coat! It's November! It's grey and damp. The streets are muddy.

JEANNE: I didn't think- I came here so quickly.

HENRI: You're really shaking! We must warm you up.

JEANNE: No, it's alright.

HENRI: You'll have to go soon. Get yourself home.

JEANNE: There's no rush. All the same, I'd better not be too late... I've got a long journey... I'm staying a few days with a friend- she's waiting for me.

HENRI: Downstairs? I thought you-

JEANNE: No-she's at her house. But you understand. I don't want to keep her waiting too long.

HENRI: Stay a few more minutes.

JEANNE: A few minutes.

HENRI: I feel so calm since you got here. Do you love me?

JEANNE (*with great effort*): Yes... But I'd really better go now. I'll come again and stay longer next time.

HENRI: No- there will never be a next time. This is all too much for you. Only... because it's the last time... I'd like... I daren't say it...

JEANNE: Do ... tell me...

HENRI: I'd like ... No. It's impossible. Just go.

JEANNE: What?

HENRI: You'd never agree. *(Silence)* I want to kiss you. There- I've said it. One kiss. The last time. I'd be so happy. Happy for a long time. I'd ask for nothing else from you. You could go. Would you?

JEANNE: Yes. *(She hesitates then sits next to him and puts her head on his shoulder and pulls close to him. Henri seizes her.)*

HENRI *(ferociously triumphant)*: I've got you!

JEANNE: What!? Why are you holding me so hard!?

HENRI: I've got you! I'll never let go!

JEANNE: Look- I'm not struggling... hey, you're hurting me... let me go, please... I've got to go now...

HENRI: Leaving? Already?

JEANNE: Yes.

HENRI: No, no.

JEANNE: Okay... just don't hold me so hard. Let me go.

HENRI: Just one kiss... *(He presses his face towards her and she struggles and moves her face away, her lips pressed tightly together.)* You're so beautiful ... just let me kiss- *(Jeanne scratches Henri's cheek and he collapses on the chaise lounge in agony, deeply groaning. Jeanne stands up boldly and rearranges her dress. She looks over superciliously.)*

JEANNE: I shouldn't have come here. The lawyer told me not to.

HENRI *(very weak)*: Just go. Go. You can see the door. Go.

JEANNE: Such a mistake to come here. *(She adjusts her hair and touches her lips.)* You're still the same old cowardly little bastard, aren't you. Pathetic. *(Silence. Henri is completely still. Jeanne sighs as a wave of guilt runs through her.)* Henri? Are you alright. Look, I'm sorry I hurt you. There's just too much... I just shouldn't have come back. Look, are you okay? Henri. Should I call someone? *(Henri mumbles unintelligibly. Jeanne moves closer to him cautiously.)* Should I get one of the wardens? Henri.

*(Henri leaps and grabs her. They struggle in near-silent ferocity, Henri finally succeeding in pushing Jeanne to the floor, holding her in a firm arm lock. Both breathe heavily.)*

JEANNE: Okay... let's just take it easy...

HENRI: I'm going to punish you.

JEANNE: Punish? No- help!

HENRI: Shh!

JEANNE: Help me!

HENRI: *Shut up!* *(Jeanne is silent and looks mad with fear.)* Do you honestly think I got you here for a cosy little chat? To listen to you, to say nice things to you, to beg you for a final kiss? You've lost all sense of reason if you think I could ever forgive you for what you did to me. I will take my revenge.

JEANNE: No- you won't... What are you going to do?

HENRI: Simple. What you did to me. *(He pulls a glass bottle of acid from his pocket. Jeanne doesn't see this, she stares straight ahead, her eyes wide in paralysed terror.)*

JEANNE *(a whisper growing louder)*: You can't... You can't...

HENRI: Oh, be quiet. You must be punished like I was, you bitch,  
*(Henri opens the bottle of vitriol with his teeth.)*

JEANNE: No!

HENRI: We'll be the perfect lovers. we'll be *made for each other!* *(He pours.)*

JEANNE *(a terrible scream)*: Aagh! *(She collapses in agony and crawls across the floor, screaming and retching. Henri goes over to her and continues pouring acid on her face.)*

HENRI: Hurts, doesn't it.

JEANNE: My face, my face...

HENRI: Nothing can help you now

JEANNE: No, no! Aagh!

HENRI: Shh... Screaming won't help... and I don't want to kill you... that would be too much...

JEANNE: I'm burning!

HENRI; It hurts, doesn't it. It's *Hell*.

JEANNE: My skin! My skin! My skin!

HENRI (*removing his bandages*): It's over ... It's over ... It's over. It's over .

JEANNE: My skin! My skin! My skin!

HENRI: You're like me now... Like me! Like me!

(*Henri leans over Jeanne, giving her a deep and passionate kiss*)

THE END