

as I curdle and die before you, a victim of my own cancerous grief. Denied its expression, I will surely be poisoned by it, and collapse at your feet, a spent cipher, a corpse. (*Dr. Royer-Collard turns to Monsieur Prouix.*)

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Excuse us a moment, won't you, Monsieur Prouix?

MONSIEUR PROUIX. But of course. (*He withdraws. Dr. Royer-Collard addresses Renée Pélagie.*)

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I beg you — be succinct.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I have fallen prey to yet another abomination in this unending Cavalcade of Woe which I am doomed to call "my life."

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. And how might I assist you?

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. You are new to Charenton, are you not?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I am.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Perhaps you are not yet familiar with my husband, and his unusual case.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. He is a patient here, I presume?

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Quite.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. His name?

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I cannot bring myself to say it, Doctor. Its cost has been so dear. (*She hands a calling card to Dr. Royer-Collard. He reacts.*)

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. With all due respect, Madame, all of France is familiar with your husband.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. No one knows his reputation better than I, Doctor.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I assume that you've come to plead for clemency on his behalf.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Oh you do, do you?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I'm afraid I can offer nothing more than sympathy. I have the strictest orders, in a writ signed by Napoleon himself, to contain the man indefinitely.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. It is my dearest hope, Doctor, that he remain entombed forever, that he be deprived all human contact, and that when at last he perishes in the dank bowels of your institution, he be left as carrion for the rodents and the worms.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I stand corrected, Madame.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I have paid in blood, sir, for the mere fact I am his wife, and he my husband.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I see ...

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I don't know which has plagued me more. His grotesque résumé of crimes, or their notoriety. When he mutilated that poor beggar, her backside forked through like a pastry shell, no one was more mortified than I. His orgy in the school yard — those pitiful children, that lethal pox — well, it rent the fabric of my heart. *But I was no less moved when, on a country weekend in Chambéry, our hostess, upon learning I was his spouse, spat a mouthful of Côtes du Rhone upon my breast.* In that moment, all his cruelties coalesced into the single liquid projectile issuing from her lips.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Ironic as it may seem, moral outrage often finds its expression in coarse gesture.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Everywhere I go, the same scenario ensues! The other evening, at the opera, I was seated in my box, a few scant meters from the stage. In the midst of her aria, the soprano spotted my face in the crowd. She stopped, mid-note. The orchestra ceased its play, and the diva cried, "Look! Here in our midst, *Satan's bride!*" Slowly, a thousand opera glasses turned to stare in my direction. I holted to the door. Stricken, I hauled myself into the nearest church. There, I pleaded for absolution from my husband's sins. When I left, the very pew in which I sat was yanked from the floor by a trio of priests, and carried into the courtyard. There, as they intoned the sacred rite of exorcism, they burned the very wood I had sullied with my behind! (*She dissolves into a spasm of tears.*) Oh, Doctor, forgive my hysteria, hut I am a woman plagued!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Careful Marquise! Women who take to screaming in these hallways often land themselves in leg irons.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I am no stranger to such contraptions, Doctor.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. You, too, fell prey to his appetites?

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. It's as though my body were his conscience in corporeal form, scarred beyond all repair.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. What specifically compelled you to pay this visit today? (*Renée Pélagie composes herself.*)

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I dared hope that my husband's incarceration would allow him to fade from the country's memory. I could then find freedom in his obscurity. Oh, to take tea again! To be invited on a garden stroll! To once again know the unfettered glory of walking down the street without insult. Without falling debris.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I wish it for you, my poor Marquise.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. But something prevents this happy turn of events.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. What, exactly?

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Are you aware, sir, of the charge which precipitated my husband's latest arrest?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I am. He authored a scandalous novel. A tale so pornographic, that it drove men to murder, and women to miscarry.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. And are you further aware, that now — even within these fortified chambers — his writing continues, unchecked?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. What?

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Charenton provides a haven most agreeable to his Muse. Endless hours to write, without interruption, save for his meals. Stacks of paper at his disposal, rivers of ink, and always — *always* — a ready quill.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I assure you, Madame, this is the first I have heard of such goings-on.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I thought my husband had been placed here at Charenton, in lieu of prison, so that he could be cured of his corrosive habits.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I recognize our failing. I even know its cause.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Yes?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. It pains me to admit that our reputation is one of laxity. A certain Abbe de Coulmier, administrator here, has a constitution more suited to nursing babies than tending the insane. He has removed the wicker dummy, the wire cage, and the straitjacket — tools many consider es-

sential to our trade — and replaced them with musical interludes, watercolor exercises, even Marivaux.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I had no idea that art offered salvation from madness. I was of the opinion that most artists are, themselves, quite deranged.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. That is the very reason the Ministry has named me to this post. To enforce a more stringent atmosphere.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I pray that for your sake and mine, you succeed at your assigned task. (*A pause. Dr. Royer-Collard frowns.*)

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. It's not so easily done, Madame. We require blacksmiths, to cast new shackles. A battalion of guards. Thumbscrews and pillories, to keep the patients tranquil. I'm afraid our resources are already strained.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. That is your worry, sir, not mine.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. On the contrary, Madame. If you were to buttress your entreaties with, perhaps, the means to oblige them ...

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I am not a wealthy woman.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Your husband's legal records routinely cross this desk. Is it not true, that the recent sale of his mansion at La Coste has granted you a sudden windfall?

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. A trifling nest egg, hardly a fortune.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. If you are truly determined to step out of the long, dark shadow of your husband's celebrity ...

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Oh, hut I am!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Words alone are insufficient.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. It's beyond perversity. That honor should carry a price-tag!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Picture it. A summer's picnic, linens strewn, an array of succulents, old friends once again deigning to kiss your hand. "Why, Marquise! Enchanted to see you! Welcome back from your long, dark descent into the abyss of infamy!"

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Don't toy with me Doctor!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Now is the time to secure your epitaph. Renée Pélagie de Montreuil ... or "*Satan's Bride.*" (*A torturous moment for Renée Pélagie.*)

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Quite the contrary. It yielded some alarming contraband. (*He gestures to the items on his desk.*) Two razors, a purse filled with salt, a wooden prod, newly greased, and a small, iron vice-grip of indeterminate usage.

COULMIER. I am no less than stunned, Doctor.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. These knick-knacks are of minimal concern, since they pose no threat to the Asylum's general population. However, stashed under a floorboard, we recovered this. (*He pulls a sheath of papers from his desk.*) A manuscript, some twelve hundred pages long, ready for printing.

COULMIER. Another? So soon? (*Dr. Royer-Collard passes the manuscript to Coulmier.*)

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I defy you — in the name of God, France, and all that you hold moral and true — to read it, unmoved. (*Coulmier begins to read it. Lights rise on the opposite side of the stage, revealing The Marquis, seated in his quarters. His hair is elaborately coifed, and his ruffles are somewhat worn. He writes, quill in hand, reciting as he works.*)

THE MARQUIS. Dear Reader, it now falls upon me, your chaperone through the dark waters of the soul, to impart a tale of such mirthless cruelty and moral torpor that I can barely bring my voice above a whisper. So come, perch upon my knee, so you don't miss a word. (*He giggles. Coulmier glances nervously at Dr. Royer-Collard.*)

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Gird yourself. That's mere preamble. (*Coulmier continues to read.*)

THE MARQUIS. On a jutting cliff outside the city of Marseilles, there stood a monastery of most sinister design. To the gullible eye, its windowless facade suggested a simplicity well-suited to modest worship. But the true reason for its austerity was far graver — to conceal from the world at large the atrocities occurring within. (*He spins his tale with all the unfettered glee of a mischievous child inventing a lie. He registers delight at each grisly escapade, giddiness at each perversion.*) It was here our young hero first sprang into the world, borne of a defrocked priest, and a wayward nun. Once the baby was freed from its mother's sin-ripened womb, its parents were duly skewered for their offenses. Bereft and wailing, the child was

alone. His only parent was the church, his only playmates its grim practitioners. Soon, he blossomed into boyhood. On his chin, soft down, and between the orbs of his dimpled ass, a blushing rosebud begging to be ... plucked. Would that he were carrion before vultures! Would that he were a quivering faun trapped in a lion's gaze! *Would that he were anything but a comely boy surrounded by priests!*

COULMIER. I can smell its incipient odor, Doctor.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. What's that, Abbe?

COULMIER. Blasphemy. The last refuge of the failed provocateur.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Just wait. He brings new vigor to an old standard.

THE MARQUIS. So great was his beauty, so pungent was his youth, that the black-robed friars had christened him with the name "Ganymede." The youth soon became unsurpassed in the field of debauchery. Oh, dear Reader, what evils a man can commit when reason demurs to lust! For these were Ganymede's teachers: an aged Monk so withered and limp that frottage was his highest aspiration; an Arch Bishop whose aperture was so fetid and of such slack diameter that it resembled the seat of an untended privy more than any human hole — (*Coulmier swoons, dabbing at his brow.*)

COULMIER. Look at me; I'm awash in perspiration.

THE MARQUIS. A lapsed Prelate who, when Ganymede felt Nature's rustlings, insisted that he use his gaping maw as its receptacle —

COULMIER. Heaven forfend!

THE MARQUIS. And most atrociously, a Viennese Cardinal and his participatory horse.

COULMIER. Participatory?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Picture it!

COULMIER. Nature herself was never more abused!

THE MARQUIS. Ganymede weathered these requests with the cool detachment of one already dulled by life's demands. He had no time to pursue the twin luxuries of Faith and Piety; his only aim was to survive. And to do so, he knew he must offer his flesh, naked on a plate, for the frantic lapping

of a hundred unholy tongues. This is what a life spent in the bosom of the Church had taught him ...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Endless pages of philosophy follow. *(Coulmier begins frantically flipping through the pages.)*

THE MARQUIS. — No God — blah, blah — dominion through force — blah, blah — the inevitability of chaos — blah, blah, blah —

COULMIER. But what of the boy's fate?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Swept away by the story, are you?

COULMIER. It's necessary to know his end, to gauge the full measure of The Marquis' depravity.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Page seventy-three. I've folded the corner. *(Coulmier regards Dr. Royer-Collard for a moment.)*

THE MARQUIS. Soon Ganymede was adopted by the Duc de Blangis, a rank old pedophile with a penchant for gutter trade. "What soft skin you have!" cooed the Duc, when the boy lay exposed before him. "So womanish! So suitable for lechery! I will not have it wrinkle or coarsen; rather, I'll preserve its sheen forever!" With that, the Duc uncorked a vial of linseed oil. He dribbled it over the child's nude body, filling each crevice, each moist valley, till Ganymede shone like an eel. Then he wrapped the boy in freshly harvested donkey hide. "Here you'll stay," the Duc commanded, "until you've absorbed each drop. Only then will we commence with our debauch!" Accustomed to the most vile abuses, the boy found such treatment a happy respite. The hide was warm and soft, and daily the Duc fed him the most astonishing foods. Marzipan, hot sugared pastries, cream-filled cakes and glacés. "Mon Dieu," sighed the boy, "I could live this life forever!" Soon, however, Ganymede realized the appalling truth.

COULMIER. What cruel twist has The Marquis in store?

THE MARQUIS. The calculating Duc had not cured the enveloping hide, and so — as the boy's body, gorged with desserts, grew swollen like a great, pink bladder — its casing began to shrink.

COULMIER. Dear God!

THE MARQUIS. "Please," beseeched the boy, "Split the hide, so I might breathe free!" The Duc merely laughed, and si-

lenced his victim with a few spoonfuls of mousse. The boy could suffocate or swallow, so swallow he did, increasing his girth and thereby increasing his torment. Soon, the child was prepared to strike any bargain. "Free me from this leather prison, and you can use me as your slave!" "Don't you see, little one?" purred the Duc. "My delectation has already begun." In time, Ganymede's back arched in a circle, and his shoulders met. He felt his rib cage close upon itself, like a lady's purse, snapped shut at the opera. With that, the Duc de Blangis released his loins, the hot-seed of his tumescence spiraling through the air like molten lava from some belching volcano —

COULMIER. ENOUGH! *(The Marquis shrugs; the lights on him fade.)*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. That's only the first chapter.

COULMIER. Already he's catalogued every known vice — and some hitherto unknown!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. And that page is followed by eleven hundred and fifty-seven more.

COULMIER. Astonishing.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Imagine if this wound its way among the inmates.

COULMIER. I'd sooner introduce a match to tinder.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. This man is licentious. *Turpitudinous.*

COULMIER. And *prolific!*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. And to think, only moments ago, you labeled him a triumph of rehabilitation.

COULMIER. I'm driven to distrust my own capacity for judgment.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. You treat him like a man, Ahbe; therein lies your error. In faculties, he's nothing but an errant child. Each time you coddle him, you invite more of his dark mischief. Don't you see? He's all but begging to be strung up by the toes.

COULMIER. It chills me to think, sir, that our institution might perpetuate the very horrors The Marquis himself so painstakingly describes.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. What is most reassuring to the lu-

THE MARQUIS. I'll write dainty stories then! Odes to Virtue!  
 COULMIER. I'll have Valcour collect the items in question.  
 THE MARQUIS. What of my faithful readers?  
 COULMIER. You've written enough for one lifetime.  
 THE MARQUIS. What of the little seamstress?  
 COULMIER. She'd do well to steer clear of your influence.  
 THE MARQUIS. I have a proposition!  
 COULMIER. You always do.  
 THE MARQUIS. She's a luscious morsel, Madeleine. What pulsates beneath those skirts is worth succor! I'm certain I could convince her of the benefits inherent in granting favors to a superior ...  
 COULMIER. I don't know who you insult more: her or me.  
 THE MARQUIS. THEN BUGGER ME!  
 COULMIER. Don't make me ill ...  
 THE MARQUIS. YOU CAN PLUNDER EVERY PORE, AND LOB MY KNOB BESIDES! ANYTHING!  
 COULMIER. Good day, Monsieur. (*He heads for the door. The Marquis drops his desperate pose, and coos.*)  
 THE MARQUIS. Oh, Cupid. My little minx ...  
 COULMIER. Yes?  
 THE MARQUIS. Where there's a will, there's a way. And a maniac is matchless for invention.

## Scene 6

*Dr. Royer-Collard, Monsieur Prouix*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Ah! Monsieur Prouix! And how is my new house faring?  
 MONSIEUR PROUX. I've come to thank you for loosening your purse-strings. The rather dramatic increase in funds behooves us both.  
 DR. ROYER-COLLARD. It better. I've been forced to devise the most creative financing imaginable ...  
 MONSIEUR PROUX. Your chateau shall undoubtedly be my

masterwork!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Yours is an enviable profession, Monsieur Prouix.

MONSIEUR PROUX. Mine, sir?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Yes indeed. You fabricate the design — each plank, each joist, each pilaster — but you leave the execution to others. Your own grand plan is put into action ... and you never hoist a stone, or drive a nail. That's the true measure of a man's authority, isn't it?

MONSIEUR PROUX. Well, sir. When you put it that way —

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Is my wife pleased with your progress?

MONSIEUR PROUX. Yesterday, the silk brocade arrived for the walls of her toilette. She was in the throes of delight. Did you know, sir, that her eyes match its color? I flatter myself that the chateau shall be a tribute to her beauty; its golden cornices, the hue of her hair. Its alabaster stone, the tint of her bosom. Its portals, spread ever wide, as frank and inviting as her very nature ... (*Coulmier enters.*)

COULMIER. Pardon me, Doctor, but I was summoned at your behest.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Yes of course. Monsieur Prouix. You'll have to complete your little rhapsody another time.

MONSIEUR PROUX. Happily sir. Your servant, sir. (*Monsieur Prouix backs out of the room, bowing.*)

## Scene 7

*Dr. Royer-Collard, Coulmier, Madeleine, The Marquis.*

COULMIER. I'm sorry to interrupt, Doctor, but your mis- sive had an urgent tone.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. A curious phenomenon has beset Charenton. It seems that the bed sheets, curtains and towels — usually so pristine — have acquired of late a burgundy tincture. Some of the patients find this most distressing. Accus-

their discovery, attempted to wash away the words! And so the vats were polluted!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Why would a demure young girl such as yourself, not to mention your aging Mother, indulge in such pornography?

MADELEINE. It's hard day's wages, sir, slaving away at the behest of madmen. What we've seen in life, it takes a lot to hold our interest.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. But why would you want to heap such ghastly fantasies atop an already ghastly existence?

MADELEINE. We put ourselves in his stories, sir. We play the parts. Poor blind Mama, a countess. Me, a courtesan. We've acted them all, you see, regardless of sex — each atheist, each barbarian. And in our dreams, sir ... it's us doing the killings.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. *You?*

MADELEINE. Revenge our only motive; rage our only Master.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. To what end?

MADELEINE. If we weren't such bad women on the page, Doctor, I'll hazard we couldn't be such good women in life. *(Lights fade on Madeleine.)*

COULMIER. He is indeed a maniac, and matchless at that!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. You assured me that his writing had ceased.

COULMIER. I hoped it had.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. The time has come to adopt more punitive means.

COULMIER. If only I trusted their efficacy!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. When a child pilfers from the candy dish, what do we offer for his reformation? Do we remove temptation altogether, depriving him *and ourselves* of sweet-meats?

COULMIER. No, sir.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Do we numb him with philosophy? Great diatribes wherein we debate the nature of good and evil?

COULMIER. I suppose not, sir.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Do we promise him an everlasting afterlife, plucking harps, should he return the bonbon to its

rightful seat? *Or do we toss him over our knee, yank down his breeches, and thrash him with the rod?*

COULMIER. The latter, unfortunately. And so he learns to fear punishment, rather than to pursue virtue for its own reward.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. You're a sentimental man.

COULMIER. A practical man, sir. Given The Marquis' unusual tastes, a sound thrashing on bare flesh may not qualify as a "deterrent."

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I will not be embarrassed a second time.

## Scene 8

*Coulmier, The Marquis.*

THE MARQUIS. My lilac, my dove!

COULMIER. I am not here for sport.

THE MARQUIS. You've come to continue our debate?

COULMIER. Hardly. From now on, you will sleep on a bare mattress.

THE MARQUIS. What, and freeze to death?

COULMIER. And for good measure, we'll seize the curtains, the towels and the rugs.

THE MARQUIS. My room, stripped bare?

COULMIER. And nothing but water at every meal.

THE MARQUIS. No, you can't! Deny me anything but the grape!

COULMIER. I am sorry. It's decided.

THE MARQUIS. My circulation — I am not a young man! And my insomnia — alcohol is my only elixir!

COULMIER. Please. That's quite enough.

THE MARQUIS. ONE DROP NIGHTLY, THAT'S ALL I ASK! SHOW MERCY, PLEASE!

COULMIER. Your meat shall be de-boned. You'll have nothing you might fashion as a quill.

THE MARQUIS. *Why this sudden torture?*

COULMIER. I have not been emphatic enough with you, Marquis. Your degrading habits continue, unabated.

THE MARQUIS. It was only for her.

COULMIER. For whom?

THE MARQUIS. The girl. To entice her back to me. Those splendid afternoons when — for a brief, shining moment — she toppled these stone walls, and set me free.

COULMIER. Her visits, too, will be curtailed.

THE MARQUIS. Her gentle sway may be the final lifeline cast to me. Let me seize it, so I might at last be towed into the warm, cerulean waters of a Virtuous Life!

COULMIER. The purplest prose is always the least sincere.

THE MARQUIS. It's a potent aphrodisiac, isn't it, my dumping?

COULMIER. What's that?

THE MARQUIS. Power over another man.

COULMIER. It pains me to censure you. It is not my nature. I am, as you know, a charitable man.

THE MARQUIS. Most.

COULMIER. You're lucky it falls to me to reprimand you. If it were up to the Doctor, you'd be more than castigated. You'd be flayed alive!

THE MARQUIS. A man after my own heart!

COULMIER. He'd not share your wine, laugh at your vulgarities, and humor you with argument —

THE MARQUIS. You're his sycophant, aren't you? He cracks the whip, and you dance. Don't be shy, Coulmier. Jig for me.

COULMIER. Why, you scornful little weasel —

THE MARQUIS. Follow the steps he's taught you; you'd best not improvise....

COULMIER. The Doctor and I have our differences, but on this point we uniformly agree: *you are a baneful miasma, and you must be purged!* (*The Marquis begins to dance.*)

THE MARQUIS. Ah-one and a two and a three and a four, ah-one and a two and a three and a four —

COULMIER. Good day, Marquis. (*He turns to leave. The Marquis stops dancing, and hisses.*)

THE MARQUIS. Psst. Plug-tail. My little skin-flute ...

COULMIER. What now?

THE MARQUIS. In conditions of adversity, the artist thrives.

## Scene 9

*Dr. Royer-Collard, Coulmier, Madeleine, The Marquis.*

*Madeleine cowers in the office of Dr. Royer-Collard. He slaps a switch across the surface of his desk.*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. If your mother lacks either the means or intelligence to punish you for your foolishness, then perhaps it's my duty to parent you in her stead.

MADELEINE. No, sir! Please, sir!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I've no compunction, young lady, about driving my point home with a few, swift strokes of the birch. (*Coulmier enters.*)

MADELEINE. Dear Abbe! You're a man of God, sir. Show me one small drop of His infinite mercy ...

COULMIER. What's this, child? Shivering like a leaf? Surely you've done no wrong.

MADELEINE. He means to whip me senseless!

COULMIER. Is it true, Doctor?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. It all depends, Abbe, on her cooperation.

MADELEINE. I've such pale, thin skin! I bruise quickly, and in the most repellent hues!

COULMIER. Shh, child. Gather your wits. I'll see that you come to no harm.

MADELEINE. It's true what the lunatics say, Abbe. You are the kinder man.

COULMIER. Pray, Doctor. What's happened here? And why is this poor girl undone?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. This morning, I sent Valcour to the

COULMIER. May you spend eternity in the company of your beloved Anti-Christ, turning on his spit! (*He makes for the door.*)

THE MARQUIS. My suckling ... my lip leech ...

COULMIER. WHAT?

THE MARQUIS. My truest quill lies betwixt my thighs. When it fills with ink and rises to the fore.... Oh, the wondrous books it will write!

## Scene 11

*The Marquis, Madeleine.*

THE MARQUIS. Madeleine!

MADELEINE. Marquis! Your every inch, exposed!

THE MARQUIS. This is how your employer chooses to keep me. Like a Roman sculpture, undraped!

MADELEINE. I'm ashamed to look!

THE MARQUIS. Surely you've seen a man naked?

MADELEINE. No, sir. It's only been described to me, in your books.

THE MARQUIS. Then you've had a most painstaking teacher. I've devoted many a page to the male form. Its rippling hill-sides, its undulating prairies, and its crested mount ...

MADELEINE. Is your body, then, somewhat ... representative?

THE MARQUIS. For a man my age, and victim of my calumnies.

MADELEINE. I must say, sir, in your novels, you stoke the most unrealistic expectations. (*The Marquis crosses his legs.*)

THE MARQUIS. You're far crueler than I, my sweet.

MADELEINE. I risk terrible danger, coming to see you this way.

THE MARQUIS. Your life, and your mother's besides.

MADELEINE. It was guilt which ushered me here, stronger than any commandment. How you must hate me.

THE MARQUIS. Never!

MADELEINE. But surely you know it's I who betrayed you to Dr. Royer-Collard. I gave him your soiled bed sheets, and your shirt besides ...

THE MARQUIS. And I love you the more for it.

MADELEINE. How can that be?

THE MARQUIS. I may be a scamp, a chancre and a blight, my blessed Madeleine, but I am not a hypocrite! Don't you see, that by informing against me, you affirm my principles?

MADELEINE. I'm afraid I don't understand.

THE MARQUIS. You were willing to sacrifice me on the block to achieve your own gain ...

MADELEINE. Hence, my sorrow!

THE MARQUIS. In the animal kingdom, does the tiger spare his sister the doe? Not when he's hungry! That, Madeleine, is natural order! A carefully orchestrated cycle of consumption which we all too often violate with our false codes of law and morality. But you! You rose above such petty constructs, and fed yourself upon my very carcass.

MADELEINE. And so I am endeared to you?

THE MARQUIS. I stand before you, not in rage, but awe.

MADELEINE. You're a queer one, all right.

THE MARQUIS. Can you smuggle a paper and quill to me?

MADELEINE. If only! Mother and I, we're weak with boredom, our evenings spent in silence. For a while, I smuggled home old newspapers from the scullery, and read their accounts of the Terror. She found those too barbaric, and pined for your stories instead.

THE MARQUIS. Never fear, my angel. I have a plan.

MADELEINE. Let me be its agent, I beg you, as penance for my wrongs against you!

THE MARQUIS. Take note, beloved, of this chink in the stone. I'll whisper a new tale to my neighbor, the lunatic Cleante. He'll in turn whisper it to his neighbor, Dauphin. Dauphin will impart the tale to the retard Franval, and he will impart it likewise to the noisome Bouchou —

MADELEINE. Whose cell lies next to the linen cabinet!

THE MARQUIS. Precisely!

MADELEINE. And there, armed with a quill of my own, I'll receive your story through the wall, and commit it to paper!

THE MARQUIS. Voilà!

MADELEINE. Oh, Marquis! How ingenious you are!

THE MARQUIS. Imagine! My scandalous stories, whipping through the halls of this mausoleum, like some mysterious breeze! A string of tongues, all wagging in service of my prose.

MADELEINE. But with men whose minds are so weak, will your art survive such a journey?

THE MARQUIS. My heinous vision, filtered through the minds of the insane. Who knows? They might improve it!

MADELEINE. I'll practice my hand, Marquis, and do your words justice.

THE MARQUIS. You can take them home to Mother, and on to my publisher besides!

MADELEINE. Only one thing troubles me ...

THE MARQUIS. Fear of discovery?

MADELEINE. No. Fear of the inmate Bouchon, the agent closest to me in the line.

THE MARQUIS. Why him, more than any other?

MADELEINE. He holds a torch for me. Once, when I was darning his stockings, he pressed me hard against the wall, and his stinking breath caused my eyes to run. It was the Abbe de Coulmier who saved me.

THE MARQUIS. What of it?

MADELEINE. Well, sir, given the potency of your stories, and the fragility of his brain ... it might cause a combustion; that's all.

THE MARQUIS. What are we to do, dearest? Shuffle the patients in their cells? That's not within our power. Now, accept the danger, or withdraw.

MADELEINE. I accept.

THE MARQUIS. Madeleine...?

MADELEINE. Yes, Marquis?

THE MARQUIS. A kiss per page. The price holds.

MADELEINE. But how can I? We're forbidden to meet.

THE MARQUIS. Which is why this time, my pussy-willow, I must request payment in advance.

MADELEINE. You're a caution, you are!

THE MARQUIS. Quickly, before we are discovered! *(They consume one another with kisses.)*

## Scene 12

*The Marquis, A Lunatic, The Voices of the Insane.*

*A crack of thunder. Rain begins to pelt the stone walls of Charenton.*

*Alone, The Marquis whispers into a crack in the wall.*

THE MARQUIS. Psst ... Cleante? Are you there? *(A voice answers.)*

A LUNATIC. Marquis? Is that you?

THE MARQUIS. Who else would it be?

A LUNATIC. I've the most wonderful news, Marquis! I'm no longer a man! This morning, I awoke a bird!

THE MARQUIS. *Quiet!*

A LUNATIC. Tonight, I'll fly through the bars of my cell to freedom!

THE MARQUIS. Listen to what I say, and report it post-haste to your neighbor Dauphin.

A LUNATIC. I've huge, flapping wings, and a beak for scavenging! And I can warble, too! *(The Lunatic begins to trill.)*

THE MARQUIS. CLEANTE!

A LUNATIC. Eh?

THE MARQUIS. I've news for you too, pigeon. This morning I awoke a cat.

A LUNATIC. A cat, Count?

THE MARQUIS. *(Dryly.)* Meow.

A LUNATIC. No! I implore you! Anything but that!

THE MARQUIS. If you don't do what I tell you, I'll claw through this wall, and eat you alive. I'll sink my little fangs

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I'm afraid I don't follow.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. At your insistence, sir, I provided the necessary funds for a host of refurbishments. (*She pulls out a list, and reads:*) Thirty-three brass hospital beds, each fitted with restraints, twelve branding irons, a bed of nails, a set of steel-tipped martinets, and — finally — a St. Andrew's Cross. And have you purchased even a single item? NO!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I can say, with the utmost sincerity, that every franc you've given me has been put to sterling use.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Perhaps I have a suspicious mind, Doctor. But that fortress you're constructing on the southern edge of town ...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. What of it?

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Well. People talk. Mirrors made from Venetian glass. Walls covered in Chinese silk. A balustrade pilfered from a Russian palace ...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Surely you recognize that my success in these halls is contingent upon my comfort. And that my *comfort*, in turn, depends on my *surroundings*. Every stone laid, each ounce of mortar spread, each molded crest abutting each window frame, hastens your husband's recovery!

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. You must admit it's odd. Your poor hospital can't even afford a whipping post. And all the while, you sit at home, sipping fumé blanc on a Grecian divan ...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I am appalled, Madame, to see a woman of your standing stoop to crass innuendo.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Either the Ministry rewards you with a king's ransom, or *someone has his fingers in my till!*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. You would enter my office, sally up to my desk, and accuse me of common thievery?

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I wouldn't call it "common," sir. Impudent. Shameless. Bald. But never "common!"

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. This room has played host to the most caustic minds. Still, I've never been so insulted.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I urge you to take concrete action to silence my husband, or expect a second visit from my lawyer of a far graver nature than the first. (*She barrels for the door, then turns with a flourish:*) Good day, sir!

## Scene 2

*Dr. Royer-Collard, Coulmier, The Marquis.*

COULMIER. The fire in the belfry has been doused. We quieted the horses in the stables. And the patients have all been firmly strapped back into their beds. Call me a fool, but I hope that you've summoned me this morning to relay *good* news.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. You're a fool.

COULMIER. Touché.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Your failure has cost an innocent life.

COULMIER. I beg your pardon?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. The seamstress, Madeleine Leclerc.

COULMIER. Madeline ... dead?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Last night, in the melee, the inmate Bouchon burst the confines of his cell and tortured the poor child until she expired.

COULMIER. *What?*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. She was discovered this morning, splayed like a newly hung carcass, in the laundry. Bouchon was so favorably impressed by The Marquis' tale that he chose to re-enact it. Lovingly, and with admirable fidelity to the author. Each laceration. Each swathe of the blade.

COULMIER. Poor Madeleine! To spend her last hours at the mercy of that ham-fisted *brute*, that *ogre* ...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. We mustn't blame Bouchon. If he possessed restraint ... conscience ... morality ... he'd have no need of us, would he? No, the fault lies elsewhere, I'm afraid. COULMIER. Of course.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. It is our duty, is it not, to protect malleable minds from pernicious influence?

COULMIER. I suppose it is.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. To admonish the individual, when

his habits impinge upon the safety of the whole?

COULMIER. Yes, Doctor.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. And when we falter at this charge?

COULMIER. Bedlam, sir. And death.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. If I seem severe to you ... tyrannical, even ... it's because we owe our dependents nothing less. We must provide for them what they cannot muster for themselves. *Dominion over the beast within.*

COULMIER. If you'll pardon me, Doctor, it was an endless night.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. How many other tragedies must befall Charenton before you embrace your duty here?

COULMIER. My head has yet to touch a pillow, my lips to taste a meal —

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Would that you had seen the girl's mother. Her face stained with tears, her eyes glazed, uncomprehending. I thank God, because of her blindness, she was spared the sight of her daughter's riddled corpse.

COULMIER. I'll make reparation to the family.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. There's another matter that you'd better address first.

COULMIER. Of course.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Might I suggest a stroll down the West Wing. Take a look at the operating theater. You'll find everything you need there.

COULMIER. That room's been locked for twenty years.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. The douche chair, the brazier slab, the fustigator, the Procrustean bed, and the abdominal wagon. They're all at your disposal.

COULMIER. It sounds less like a hospital, Doctor, and more akin to a chamber of horrors.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. How perceptive, Abbc.

COULMIER. Knowing my disposition toward such cruel measures ... *(Dr. Royer-Collard glares.)* Must you.... Mustn't we.... Must I.... I must ... *(Dr. Royer-Collard clears his throat.)* I must have the key, sir. I've long since misplaced mine. *(Dr. Royer-Collard hands Coulmier the key.)*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. When you lay your head upon the

pillow tonight, beg God's forgiveness for the death of poor Madeleine. You shan't have mine.

### Scene 3

*Coulmier, The Marquis.*

THE MARQUIS. Suppose one of your precious wards had attempted to walk on water, and drowned. Would you condemn the Bible? I think not!

COULMIER. Would that he had only injured himself, and not another.

THE MARQUIS. Am I to be held responsible for the actions of every half-wit here?

COULMIER. The man who loads the cannon and the man who fires it are both culpable, Marquis.

THE MARQUIS. It was fiction! It was not intended as "How-to!" Castigate Bouchon, not me.

COULMIER. Bouchon is not a man; he's an overgrown child.

THE MARQUIS. So I am to tailor my writing for imbeciles?

COULMIER. You weren't to be writing at all!

THE MARQUIS. A writer cannot answer for his audience!

COULMIER. He must, when he incites it to crime!

THE MARQUIS. The experience of art — MY LITTLE BULL'S PIZZLE — is a *collaborative affair*. The author provides the stimuli; the reader his response. All I can control is the art itself; my subject, culled from life, and told with an eye toward truth, or — at least — truth as life has taught me to perceive it. And you must concede, SWEETUMS, that life has taught me some very scabrous tidbits indeed! And so I record them! Dutifully! As any writer should! BUT — the *response* to my work. Well, POODLE, that's a fickle thing indeed. It may be prompted by the reader's race! His sex! His politics! The potency of the beer he drank with dinner! The angle of his bed! *Even the last time he diddled his wife!* In short, variables well

beyond the scope of the artist. What am I to do, POLICE MY READERS AS YOU POLICE ME? HA!

COULMIER. You wish to know the sum impact of your work upon the public, Marquis?

THE MARQUIS. Pray, tell?

COULMIER. INNOCENT PEOPLE DIE.

THE MARQUIS. So many authors are denied the gratification of a concrete response to their toiling. I am blessed, am I not?

COULMIER. I labored under the misconception that you felt something for the young girl. That in some dark, crusted, corroded corner of your heart, she touched you.

THE MARQUIS. She was flirtatious, to me and to others.

COULMIER. Don't you dare start on this course.

THE MARQUIS. Her breasts heaving under poplin. Her ass, like two melons, bobbling at the bottom of a sack ...

COULMIER. You'll do yourself no credit by pursuing this line ...

THE MARQUIS. Bouchon has done us all a favor, nipping temptation in the bud.

COULMIER. It is no secret, Marquis, that you loved her.

THE MARQUIS. Ha!

COULMIER. It was many a time you tore a hole in your topcoat, only to secure her services!

THE MARQUIS. Rubbish!

COULMIER. You bartered pages for a single kiss.

THE MARQUIS. Who told you this?

COULMIER. You doted on her!

THE MARQUIS. Was it she?

COULMIER. You worshipped her!

THE MARQUIS. Flattering herself, I suppose!

COULMIER. *You were her slave!*

THE MARQUIS. I WANTED TO FUCK HER, THAT'S ALL!

COULMIER. AND DID YOU?

THE MARQUIS. IT IS NOT YOUR PROVINCE TO ASK!

COULMIER. You're no stranger to rape, Marquis! And yet with her, you cooed. You courted. You begged.

THE MARQUIS. Go to hell!

COULMIER. WHY WAS IT YOU NEVER TOOK HER BY FORCE?

THE MARQUIS. WHO IS TO SAY I DID NOT?

COULMIER. Was it impotence?

THE MARQUIS. NEVER!

COULMIER. Was it polite deference?

THE MARQUIS. The only witness is Madeleine herself, and her lips — and her body — are sealed.

COULMIER. Was it HUMANE REGARD? WAS IT — GASP! — LOVE???? *(The Marquis chokes on Coulmier's last word.)*

THE MARQUIS. *I FUCKED HER A THOUSAND TIMES! WITH PNEUMATIC FORCE!*

COULMIER. We inspected the body, Marquis. She died intact. *(A stunned pause. The Marquis cracks — a tiny cry at first, which erupts into genuine sobbing. Finally, he speaks. His voice is barely a whisper.)*

THE MARQUIS. You will see she receives a proper burial. In the churchyard. At my expense. I implore you ... do not inter her sweet body in the same ground as the madmen and the devils who inhabit this accursed place. *(A pause.)*

COULMIER. Your terrible secret, revealed. You are a man after all. *(The Marquis looks at Coulmier a moment. Suddenly — sharply — he spits at him. Coulmier wipes away the indignity.)* All that remains now is your punishment.

THE MARQUIS. Your lily mind cannot compete with mine in this department.

COULMIER. For that I'm grateful.

THE MARQUIS. What "frightful torture" have you devised, kitten?

COULMIER. I have knelt in the chapel and consorted with God. I have asked him if I am justified in my measures. And he has assured me that I am.

THE MARQUIS. What will it be, my little dictator?

COULMIER. Blood has been spilled, and regrettably, I must spill more to stem its ruby tide.

THE MARQUIS. The logic of a true warrior. Congratulations.

COULMIER. Don't deride me, murderer.

THE MARQUIS. Well? Don't keep me in suspense. Fifty

lashes? A night on the rack?

COULMIER. Tonight, you'll be ... ah ... you will be ... visited by the ...

THE MARQUIS. You haven't the stomach for this, have you?

COULMIER. I have ... authorized ... the procedure myself ...

THE MARQUIS. You haven't the balls.

COULMIER. It is our sad duty, Marquis, to ... to ...

THE MARQUIS. Weakling! Runt! Crab louse!

COULMIER. Oh, dear merciful God ...

THE MARQUIS. Up in your office, buoyed by your cronies, it was easy to devise my undoing, wasn't it? *Wasn't it?* A regular parlor game. Each of you, chirping, like giddy magpies. "Solitary confinement! Perhaps we'll dock his dessert. Maybe a good spanking. Ouch!" But now, face-to-face with your victim, you're turning soft. After all, I'm not some stranger. I'm your *friend*, The Marquis. *(He extends his hand to Coulmier.)* I dare you. Stah my flesh. Which one of us will bleed? *(Coulmier stares at him a moment, and takes a few paces toward the door.)* Hal I knew it.

COULMIER. Tonight, you'll be visited by the surgeon. He'll cut out your tongue. *(A pause. Finally:)*

THE MARQUIS. Then surely you'll grant me a final word.

COULMIER. Of course.

THE MARQUIS. I didn't forge the mind of man. Your precious God did that. Cramming it full of rancor and bloodlust. Like Zeus, thrusting all those winged demons, into the tiny confines of Pandora's box. Don't hate me just because I turn the key, and let them loose. "Fly, my darlings, fly! All the way to heaven, till you burst the clouds, and blacken the sun!"

COULMIER. I don't hate you, Marquis. More's the pity. *(He stands, fretful and spent. He swivels to go. Again, The Marquis coos after him.)*

THE MARQUIS. Abbe de Coulmier.

COULMIER. What now? *(The Marquis sticks out his tongue, and makes a clipping gesture.)*

THE MARQUIS. Snip, snip, snip. *(He smiles.)* Would that I were so easily silenced.

## Scene 4

*Dr. Royer-Collard, Monsieur Prouix, Madame Royer-Collard.*

*Dr. Royer-Collard sits in his office. He opens a letter from Monsieur Prouix, and begins to read it.*

*Lights rise on Monsieur Prouix, wearing a loose dressing gown. He sits at a small writing desk, and composes a note.*

MONSIEUR PROUX. "Most Esteemed Dr. Royer-Collard, At long last, your Chateau is complete. You'll find everything in its assigned place: the chintz draperies, the English bell pulls, even the ivory doorstops. Only one detail is missing ..." *(He emits a series of short, staccato moans, followed by a long sigh. Madame Royer-Collard crawls out from beneath the desk, wearing a corset and pantaloons. She repairs her lipstick.)* "Your wife." *(He leans down and kisses her hungrily. Madame Royer-Collard cracks a small riding crop in the air.)*

MADAME ROYER-COLLARD. You ohsequious men. Underneath all that scraping and bowing, you're such wolves.

MONSIEUR PROUX. "It would seem that — no matter how splendid her surroundings — she cannot resist the urge to cuckold her husband."

MADAME ROYER-COLLARD. Tell him I'm no fool! A prison's still a prison, with or without wainscoting and Baccarat chandeliers!

MONSIEUR PROUX. "And so, I have pirated Marguerite away to a safe haven ..."

MADAME ROYER-COLLARD. Ooh, ooh, ooh! Tell him — if he uncovers our whereabouts —

MONSIEUR PROUX. Yes?

MADAME ROYER-COLLARD. — you'll slit your wrist with a razor! And I'll plunge a hatpin through my heart!

MONSIEUR PROUX. You'd do that, rather than forsake our love?

MADAME ROYER-COLLARD. No. But tell him I would. (*A pause. Monsieur Prouix frowns.*)

MONSIEUR PROUX. I worry, Marguerite, that you don't really love me at all, but merely mean to use me to your own convenient ends, as a vehicle to escape your husband's tyranny.

MADAME ROYER-COLLARD. You're brighter than you look. Now write. (*Monsieur Prouix shrugs, and obediently writes:*)

MONSIEUR PROUX. "A ... hatpin ... through ... my heart ..."

MADAME ROYER-COLLARD. Sign it quickly. Then carry me upstairs, so you can ravish me again! *On linens for which he so dearly paid!*

MONSIEUR PROUX. Yes, Marguerite, yes!

MADAME ROYER-COLLARD. We'll stain the bedding. We'll dampen the chamois, and leave puddles of love all over the coverlet!

MONSIEUR PROUX. On the satin twill ... then, I beg you, on the teakwood floor of the salon ... and please, oh, please ... as a crowning gesture ... *on the ocelot rug in the foyer!* (*As if in answer, Madame Royer-Collard yowls like a cat. Monsieur Prouix signs:*) "Sincerely, Jean-Pierre Prouix." (*Madame Royer-Collard takes the pen from his hand, and adds an epithet:*)

MADAME ROYER-COLLARD. "*The ... Architect ... of Your ... Unhappy ... Fate!*" (*Monsieur Prouix smiles. He breaks into a laugh; Madame Royer-Collard chimes in. The lights on the couple fade. Dr. Royer-Collard sits, stalwart. He begins to tremble. Slowly, deliberately, he tears the letter into tiny shreds. Blackout.*)

## Scene 5

*Dr. Royer-Collard, Coulmier, The Marquis.*

COULMIER. The surgeon completed his grim task just as the sun was about to rise. So violent were The Marquis' protestations, that he prolonged his own pain. I have, as you requested, proof of our success. (*Coulmier places a small tin box*

*on Dr. Royer-Collard's desk.*) His tongue, Doctor. So long and serpentine I had to roll it 'round a dowel. Now our grisly business is concluded. We'll never again have to wield the scalpel against The Marquis, or any ward.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. You are aware, are you not, that even the patients are laughing behind your back?

COULMIER. What?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. How can they look to you as their Savior, when you inspire ridicule in lieu of respect?

COULMIER. Doctor Royer-Collard, I have fulfilled my duties and beyond. I stood, sir, at the surgeon's side, holding The Marquis fast to his chair, my knees weak and my head swimming, all in the service of Charenton. Now, I refuse to be further baited or debased.

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Do you know the condition of his room, Abbe?

COULMIER. His room?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Words!

COULMIER. Words?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Everywhere, words! On the ceiling. Written on the floor. Etched on the walls. A phantasmagoria of words.

COULMIER. No. No. No, no, no, no ...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. All in his unmistakable script!

COULMIER. But *how?*

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. He spat into his own excrement, and formed a kind of paint.

COULMIER. No, dear God, please ...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Finally, a medium worthy of his art. With his fingers, like a child, he decorated the room with language.

COULMIER. Has he no shred of decency?

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. I mustered the patience to follow its scrawl, and found this dense verbiage contained a story.

COULMIER. So the stench of this tale is twofold ...

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. It plunges so deep into the acrid chambers of man's aching heart, that even the angels are left to weep, and the saints to gasp for air. (*Coulmier is sobbing, at*

## Scene 8

*Coulmier, The Ghost of Madeleine.*

*The charnel house.*

*Coulmier kneels before the casket containing the body of Madeleine.*

COULMIER. Before I take my leave, a final tarry here. To beg forgiveness, dear Madeleine, for your unkind end. Dear God, pity me! Hold her fast by Your side, so that — in heaven — we might be reunited. There I shall fall to my knees, and beg her mercy evermore. *(He leans over to kiss the coffin. It opens. Madeleine bolts upright. Her body has been restored; there's no trace of the horror which befell her at the end of the first act. Her body is bathed in a celestial glow. The trills of an angelic chorus waft through the air.)*

MADELEINE. Oh, Abbe! Freed at last from this pine box! Unearthed by your pleas!

COULMIER. What's this? Sweet Madeleine's specter? *(He falls to his knees. He takes Madeleine's hand, and presses her palm to his cheek.)* You're an angel, aren't you, sent to deliver me? I've committed such inhuman, such appalling acts ... tell me I've still some small hope of redemption.

MADELEINE. When I was stabbed through and through by the madman Bouchon, I fell into the very darkest slumber. When I awoke, I was nestled in the bosom of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It was as if the very earth had risen in the shape of a man, and gathered me in its tender embrace. *(The walls split, and a resplendent Figure of Christ appears, portrayed by none other than The Marquis.)* "Savior," I whispered, too awed to speak any louder, "If only you would kiss my wounds, and make them heal." And so He did. When His lips met the gash on my cheek, the flesh closed, new and rosy. When He pecked the bruise on my knee, it was gone. Soon, my body was again pristine, each mark of the lunatic's blade, abolished. But alas, sir,

Christ's potent kisses did not cease. His mouth no longer sought my lesions; it went after sweeter fruit.

COULMIER. What impiety is this?

MADELEINE. "Oh, Holy One," cried I, crossing my legs to thwart his advance, "I am not injured there."

THE MARQUIS. "You've so often worshipped at my temple —"

MADELEINE. — was his reply —

THE MARQUIS. "That now I long to worship yours."

COULMIER. Mademoiselle, if you wish to be spared the tortures of hell, then cease this abomination!

MADELEINE. I merely report these events! I am not their agent! And then — oh, Abbe! It was then I saw the mask slip from its perch upon his nose. This was no Son of God, but His Inverse. *(The Figure of Christ swivels his mask; now he is Satan.)*

THE MARQUIS. THERE IS NO GOD BUT ME!

MADELEINE. And then, Satan parted his vestments, to reveal his carnal staff.

COULMIER. I'll have no more of this ghastly tale!

MADELEINE. How it defied biology! Less like the fountain of man, and more fitting to a sea serpent! Such tentacles! Yes, 'tis true! His wand was triple pronged!

THE MARQUIS. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!

MADELEINE. With that blood-engorged Trinity, he plumbed my throat, my matrix, and that narrowest of strictures which Nature most conceals! My every breach was corked! The Devil's hot rain shot through me like quicksilver!

THE MARQUIS. IN NOMINE PATRIS ET FILII ET SPIRITU SANTU. AMEN. *(The walls close on the Figure of Satan. Madeleine's voice is now the voice of a skilled seductress.)*

MADELEINE. When my legs were opened, so were my eyes. Ooh, Abbe! Now in Death I can freely taste what in Life modesty so cruelly forbade.

COULMIER. You are not Madeleine! You're nothing but a succubus, disguised! *(During the following passages, Madeleine strokes Coulmier gently, her hands wandering across his body like moths along a wall. In spite of his best efforts to the contrary,*

*Coulmier is steadily aroused.)*

MADELEINE. *How you sucked me from death with a single kiss on the lid of my coffin. What other tricks does that sweet mouth know?*

COULMIER. Unhand me, I beg you ...

MADELEINE. *Don't you like my touch?*

COULMIER. There are vows, more potent than man's primal stirrings ...

MADELEINE. *Vows? To whom?*

COULMIER. To God.

MADELEINE. *What God?*

COULMIER. The one you have so clearly forsaken.

MADELEINE. *Oh, Abbe. What a solid ridge of bone. I'll draw it slowly into my own thin fissure. There, in a velvet vice, I'll milk it dry.*

COULMIER. I beseech you, not there ... *(He is enflamed.)*

MADELEINE. *Tell me, beloved. Who needs your God now? (She seizes Coulmier and kisses him. He breaks away urgently; his resistance is spent.)*

COULMIER. All right then, witch. I'll speak to you in the only language that you know. I'll drive my own stake through your wretched center, and pin you forever in the grave. *(He thrusts Madeleine into the coffin, and climbs atop her. Suddenly, in his arms, she goes limp. Her body is still, and breathless.)* What's this? All breath left her body? Oh, God. Her limbs ... the stench of her flesh ... *(He shrinks back from the casket, horrified.)* SPIRIT! ANSWER ME! DID THE MARQUIS BID YOU TO VISIT ME, OR DID YOU BURST — UNCHECKED — FROM MY OWN BRAIN? TELL ME, I BEG YOU! HAS HE SO LONG POLLUTED ME, THAT MY OWN DEMONS ARE NOW DISLODGED? *(Coulmier slams the lid of the coffin shut with urgent resolve.)* I am a priest. I don't have the capacity for such heresy. *(Coulmier beats both fists on the lid of the casket. He looks heavenward, and asks with murderous intensity:)* WHOSE FANTASY WAS THIS? WHOSE?

## Scene 9

*Coulmier, The Marquis.*

*By now, of course, The Marquis is in a state of hideous disrepair. Coulmier prays, quietly.*

COULMIER. Dear Heavenly Father. I could not render this last act if it weren't for the knowledge that I'll be setting this pagan free. That he will be liberated from a society he deems monstrous in design; and that, in turn, all France shall be free from his perdition. And so — with a single, tiny blow — let a greater good flourish from this grisly command. *(Coulmier stands. He turns gently to The Marquis.)* Your head — my poor, misguided man — upon the block. *(Blackout. A loud thwarp, followed by a wrenching tear. Next, a long roll, like a heavy ball cascading down an incline. Finally, a dull thud.)*

## Scene 10

*Renée Pélagie, Dr. Royer-Collard.*

*Newly atop Dr. Royer-Collard's desk, a tin box large enough to contain a human head. It rests heavily in the room, like an evil portent. Dr. Royer-Collard sits behind it.*

*Renée Pélagie enters, in resplendent dress.*

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. Good heavens, Doctor! Swing open the shutters! Never did heaven proffer a more beautiful morn!

DR. ROYER-COLLARD. Darkness befits the day's solemnity, Madame.

RENÉE PÉLAGIE. I haven't much time. Madame Miramond had me to breakfast in her garden this morning — oh, such a meal! Plum rosettes floating in cognac, profiteroles bursting