

Poinsettia Court

by
Charlotte Walton

CHARACTERS:

(LADY) ROCHELLE DU CRIVILLE- 19, female, stubborn and hyper-aware of her image. Comes off as shallow in attempts to impress others. Daughter of Eugene and Noelle.

(LORD) ALEXANDRE DU CRIVILLE- 24, male, flighty free-thinker who doesn't care about his responsibilities. Seen as stupid at best and rude at worst. Son of Eugene and Noelle.

SABINE- 22, MTF, jaded and sarcastic. Comes from the *Guards du Corps* at Versailles. Has a brutal outlook on life and is willing to do whatever it takes to survive. Guards Rochelle. (*Young Sabine is played by the same actress*)

JULIEN- 21, male, gentle, self-sacrificial, and strong. Comes from a small regiment stationed elsewhere. Tries his best to see the best in humanity despite what he's seen in his service. Despises war and military life and often downplays his prowess in combat. Guards Alexandre. (*Young Julien is played by the same actor*)

(MARQUIS) EUGENE DU CRIVILLE- 65, male, father to Alexandre and Rochelle. Ennobled by his father's military prowess. Is desperate to keep his noble status. Can be strict and will go to great lengths to achieve his goals.

(MARQUESSE) NOELLE DU CRIVILLE- 40, female, mother to Alexandre and Rochelle. Kind, but can be oblivious to what truly matters. Beloved and often in agreement with her husband to her detriment.

RENO- 25, male, impulsive and charming. Dedicated to killing nobles in the name of the Revolution and his deceased father. Disguises himself under many aliases and personas to perform assassinations, but can often ruin them by being quick to anger.

JEAN-CLAUDE- 28, male, smart and intelligent. Infiltrates noble events with Reno. Great at debate and playing the long game, but is often eggheaded and unable to see the big picture.

ELIAS- 27, male, Executioner of Orleans and estranged son of a well-liked General. He cares most for his little sister and justice, and is obsessed with all things morbid despite his strong moral compass.

THE DUKE (DE GOUGOT)- 66, male, rich, old, and desperate.

MARIE- 23, female, Rochelle's best friend with many connections. Is married and loves it. Finds joy in matchmaking.

MENTIONED:

GENERAL COCTEAU- Former General to Sabine's regiment. Deserted his post with her after an incident at Versailles. Elias' father.

ADRIEN- Marie's child.

DE LANGUE- Reno's disgraced father.

COMMON WORD PRONUNCIATION GUIDE:

CRIVILLE- cree-vee
GOUGOT- goo-go
ORLEANS- oar-lawns
RENO- rehn-oh
GUARDS DU CORPS- guard-doo-cores
MONSIEUR- miss-sieu
SAUMUR- saw-murr

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES:

The 'screen' is to be somewhere integral and noticeable in the set. It represents the unknown, speculative, and taboo- anything you could hear gossip about. Events that are intimate or questionably true in nature happen behind this screen in silhouette only.

Costumes can vary, but Rochelle and Alexandre must have distinct colors that match their respective guards.

Take any lycanthropic 'transformation' as psychological in nature. Characters can have small changes to their appearance, but no drastic physical lycanthropy is within the story.

ACT ONE- FAÇADE

SCENE ONE.

1787. SPOTLIGHT on NOELLE and EUGENE-they dance allemande together blissfully, all smiles and grace. Slowly, lights up on a Rococo-style ballroom filled with guests.

From stage left comes ROCHELLE, arm-in-arm with RENO. From stage right comes ALEXANDRE, carrying two drinks- he bumps into A NOBLE and spills his drink on her. He bows and apologizes but she brushes him off. ROCHELLE escapes from RENO's grasp and approaches ALEXANDRE.

ALEXANDRE

Madame! Madame, may I beckon a servant for you? Madame?

ROCHELLE hits him on the back of the head with her fan. He turns around, shocked.

ROCHELLE

Would you quiet down? You look like some sort of peasant!

ALEXANDRE

Would you be a dear and hold this?

Before she answers, he hands her one of the drinks. She examines it while he tries to wipe himself clean of the spill.

ROCHELLE

Who's drink is this?

ALEXANDRE

What is it to you?

ROCHELLE

I take it you've no intent to share these with another.

ALEXANDRE

How can you be so sure?

ROCHELLE

I know you. Unless you *planned* on sharing a drink with the sleeve of an evening gown...

ALEXANDRE

(whispering)

Swear it to me that Father won't hear of this. He might have my head.

ROCHELLE

He will *certainly* have your head, dear brother. You spilled your drink on the sleeve of the Duchess du Duchovny.

ALEXANDRE gives her a 'who?' look.

ROCHELLE sighs.

ROCHELLE

Oh, what a shame. Our mother births a son and heir and yet...

She giggles to herself. ALEXANDRE hands the mostly empty glass to a SERVANT who passes by.

ALEXANDRE

You're one to talk. I don't see you courting Gougot.

ROCHELLE's face sours.

ROCHELLE

The *Duke du Gougot*. That's how you ought to say it.

ALEXANDRE

Well, have you spoken to him yet?

ROCHELLE glares at ALEXANDRE.

ROCHELLE

That matter's been settled.

ALEXANDRE

Great. So you're to be wed?

ROCHELLE

Oh, of course not! Who do you take me for?

ALEXANDRE

Someone avoiding her duty.

ROCHELLE rolls her eyes, then takes the drink from ALEXANDRE's hands.

ROCHELLE

How novel coming from you.

She takes a large, ungraceful swig of the drink and places it back in his hands.

ALEXANDRE

What are you doing? I needed that!

ROCHELLE

Oh, as if you were serious. Go make nice and leave me out of it.

She shoos him off, but he doesn't budge.

ROCHELLE

You haven't made a single impression! Not one friend! If anything, the only impression you've made is that you're a bumbling drunkard!

ALEXANDRE

(whine-yelling)

You haven't danced with Gougot! Simply *pretend* to enjoy his presence for a few moments and it'll be done away with! It isn't fair otherwise!

Some guests turn their heads. ROCHELLE motions to ALEXANDRE to quiet down.

ROCHELLE

(through gritted teeth)

He is the *Duke du Gougot*. Three syllables, my impetulant brother.

She thunks him on the head. He takes it like a child.

ALEXANDRE

Please dance with him. (beat) You understand, if it were up to me, I'd let you dance with every other man in this room, but Father will be upset...

ROCHELLE waves him off.

ROCHELLE

He won't be upset. My word, Alexandre, I've told you, it's *settled*.

ALEXANDRE

(semi-sarcastically)

I see... then introduce me to the useless hedonist you've made eyes at now.

ROCHELLE freezes.

ALEXANDRE

What stops you? Since I am such a helpless, bumbling drunkard, I'll need your help/

ROCHELLE shushes him by pressing her

fan to his mouth and narrows her eyes.

ALEXANDRE narrows them back.

ROCHELLE

Yes, dear brother. I'd be *delighted* to introduce you.

ROCHELLE weaves through the crowd to retrieve RENO. ALEXANDRE looks inside his cup and swirls it- ROCHELLE bumps into him, and he spills the rest of the contents onto the floor. He stares down at the puddle, defeated.

ROCHELLE returns with RENO, dragging him by the hand.

ROCHELLE

Monsieur, this is my brother, Monsieur Alexandre de Criville.

He bows to ALEXANDRE. ALEXANDRE doesn't return the favor, but ROCHELLE slaps him with her fan, and he bows.

RENO

A pleasure to meet you, Monsieur de Criville.

ALEXANDRE

Yes, and to you as well...

RENO

I am Monsieur Michel du Chalet. I've heard much about you.

ALEXANDRE

Pleasure to meet you, Monsieur.

ROCHELLE

(showing off)

He lives in Auvergne with his *father*, who's a *Duke*.

ALEXANDRE stares blankly.

ALEXANDRE

I've never heard of a Duke du Chalet.

ROCHELLE's lips press in barely-repressed
rage, but RENO laughs.

RENO

We live quite humbly, I must say, so a man of your stature must look right over us.

ROCHELLE

Besides, he's a rural sort of man. Right, darling?

ROCHELLE hooks herself on RENO's
shoulder adoringly.

ROCHELLE

(fondly)

It must be so quiet out there in the fields, hm?

RENO

Certainly.

ALEXANDRE

It must be nice.

RENO

Ah, but that's the trap! It becomes a curse so quickly, Monsieur.

ALEXANDRE/ROCHELLE

How so?

RENO

The silence kills a man's spirit, you see. Gazing on slow rolling fields is a respite from chaos, but when you live in that respite, you lose such passion! You become a blade of grass, rolling under the winds, surrendering to its whims. It becomes exhausting to never tire.

ALEXANDRE

I see.

RENO

It's what's become of my dear old father. He refused to come tonight. To him, such efforts are too far to bear.

ALEXANDRE

Is he truly to blame? I'd do much to trade places with him.

RENO laughs again and pats ALEXANDRE
on the shoulder.

RENO

Yes, because you've seen such liveliness. I envy the man who lives in such joyful mania!

He gestures to the room.

RENO

Count your blessings, my friend. Count them well.

ROCHELLE smiles.

ROCHELLE

You have such a way with words, Monsieur du Chalet.

RENO

Thank you, darling.

They gaze at each other like star-crossed
lovers. ALEXANDRE's lip curls in mild
disgust.

ALEXANDRE

Chalet-

ROCHELLE glares at him.

ROCHELLE

Monsieur du Chalet.

ALEXANDRE

Monsieur du Chalet- interrupt me if this is unbecoming, but I find living near Paris to be just as passionless if you decide to give in.

RENO raises an eyebrow.

RENO

Go on.

ALEXANDRE

Truly, if you think about it, it's the same here. If it isn't watching rolling grass, it's a simple allemande, a routine that entrances us all the same. In this case, silence is the escape from surrendering to such whims- a moment where one can find the truth in themselves. Many of these men have surrendered themselves to nothing but idle talk, the way grass surrenders to the wind. As far as I'm concerned, a man determined to surrender will find any means necessary to do so.

ALEXANDRE realizes his ramblings and stops short. Silence- then RENO laughs and claps him on the shoulder fraternally.
ROCHELLE rolls her eyes and fans herself.

RENO

Well aren't you bold!

ALEXANDRE

Surely you jest, Monsieur, I'm not-

RENO

You certainly *are*! You have such a way with words!

RENO extends his hand.

RENO

Come, Monsieur, I must introduce you to my friend at once. He's hungered for a mind like yours, and I will let him starve no longer.

RENO pulls ALEXANDRE away.
ROCHELLE reaches out in vain.

ROCHELLE
(shouting)

Where are you going?

RENO

I'll return, Madame!

ROCHELLE

No, Monsieur, you misunderstand-

ROCHELLE huffs as they disappear into the crowd. The dancing couples circle her- one of them being NOELLE and EUGENE. EUGENE shoots her a glance- SPOTLIGHT on the DUKE, who stands alone waiting for a dance. ROCHELLE reaches out to her father-

ROCHELLE

Father, I-

-the crowd pushes them away. She looks back at the DUKE for a second, and when he approaches, she turns away. The SPOTLIGHT drops.

ALEXANDRE chats with a couple of NOBLEMEN and JEAN-CLAUDE in the corner. RENO returns to ROCHELLE.

ROCHELLE

You were awfully kind to him.

RENO

It serves to please you, doesn't it?

RENO smiles mischievously, but ROCHELLE's face falls.

ROCHELLE

Is that all you did it for?

Beat.

RENO

No, no, certainly not. Your brother is a fine gentleman, truly.

He pulls her in close, and she obliges.

RENO

Don't fret, Madame du Criville. My affections lie with you.

ROCHELLE

You flatter me, but please, do call me Rochelle.

He cups her face in his gloved hands- the music changes to something much faster.

ROCHELLE

It sounds lovelier when you say it.

RENO smiles, backs up and offers his hand, full of masculine charm.

RENO

Madame Rochelle, may I have this dance?

She takes his hand gently.

ROCHELLE

(breathless)

Of course, Monsieur.

RENO swings her by the hand playfully- she giggles as he spins her around. He twirls her into his arms, and leans close enough to kiss, but not quite.

One twirl back out. One twirl back in. After a moment, he leans in close.

RENO

(whispering)

I find you utterly irresistible. A beast like this cannot roam free in such a crowded place.

ROCHELLE lets him play with her necklace.

RENO
(whispering)

Madame, if I may be so indecent...

He slips his other hand slowly over the back of her corset, leaning in closer and closer. ROCHELLE deliberates. RENO leans in for a kiss on the lips- she freezes.

SPOTLIGHT on EUGENE, who leans in close to NOELLE. ROCHELLE pushes RENO away by the chest, but he hovers right above her face. SPOTLIGHT down.

ROCHELLE
Not here, Monsieur. My father would have my head.

RENO smirks.

RENO
...There may be a place we can find some privacy.

ROCHELLE steals one last glance at her parents and her brother.

ROCHELLE
(smiling)
Lead the way.

They giggle and exchange subtle affections before slipping behind the screen. They kiss passionately behind the still-active ball. ROCHELLE begins unlacing her corset.

Across the stage, NOBLEMAN #1 grabs the shoulder of NOBLEMAN #2 and shakes it.

NOBLEMAN #1
I've told him several times that there is no such thing as a true Third Estate insurrection- any such thought is inherently impossible to conceptualize in our modern state!

NOBLEMAN #2
I don't find this decent to discuss at this time, sir.

NOBLEMAN #3

When is there a viable time, do you suppose? We are fortunate to be in the presence of each other's brilliance- there is no better time than now!

NOBLEMAN #3 nudges an absent-minded
ALEXANDRE.

NOBLEMAN #1

What do you say, young man? Your father's quite shrewd, you must take after him.

ALEXANDRE freezes. The silence fills the
room, just for a moment.

ALEXANDRE

I haven't a clue what to say.

He shrugs. The group erupts with laughter-
ALEXANDRE looks around in confusion.

ALEXANDRE

What is so funny?

THE NOBLEMEN laugh harder.

NOBLEMAN #1

Look! He's like a child caught in the act!

ALEXANDRE

I am no *child*.

He folds his arms and pouts like one. JEAN-
CLAUDE scoffs at him.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Children ought to be seen and not heard, gentlemen. What a fine example of that clause!

He presents ALEXANDRE like some sort of
host. THE NOBLEMAN laugh harder.
ALEXANDRE tries hard to look
unbothered.

ALEXANDRE

I'm not a child! I simply do not wish to partake in such middling conversation.

JEAN-CLAUDE pats him on the shoulder.

JEAN-CLAUDE
(sarcastically)

I'm sure, I'm sure.

ALEXANDRE

As you should be! I am perfectly capable of discussion- I simply abhor such a ridiculous notion!

THE NOBLEMEN stop laughing.

NOBLEMAN #1

What, pray tell, is so ridiculous to you?

ALEXANDRE

You truly believe the Third Estate is incapable of insurrection? As if they don't sharpen their pitchforks in front of your clueless faces? I find it quite preposterous that I'm considered *immature* for looking beyond my nose! If that makes me a child, then so be it!

THE NOBLEMEN speak in hushed voices.

ALEXANDRE
(coming down)

I'd rather be a child than a *fool*.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Tell me, Monsieur, what wisdom lies in throwing a tantrum? Does it lie deep beneath the hollow expanse of your mind? Is it some juvenile wisdom unbeknownst to us adults?

He laughs more. NOBLEMAN #3 pokes him.

NOBLEMAN #3

Go hurry and find your caretaker- it should spare us the trouble!

They laugh more. ALEXANDRE clenches his jaw, looking up at JEAN-CLAUDE-

JEAN-CLAUDE

You've left such a stain on your father's good name just now. The poor man. Raised by a ignoble man to end up raising another one.

ALEXANDRE

(through gritted teeth)

I am nothing like my father, I'll have you know.

JEAN-CLAUDE laughs dryly.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Well, idiocy is a fickle disease. Perhaps it's high time you rid yourself of it.

ALEXANDRE walks center stage-
ROCHELLE and RENO are nowhere to be
found. He pokes around an endlessly
moving crowd until he falls right into the
SILHOUETTE SCREEN.

ROCHELLE and RENO, interrupted, stop
behind the SILHOUETTE SCREEN and
look out together. RENO tries to continue,
but ROCHELLE pushes him away-

ROCHELLE

(distantly)

Monsieur, stop- Monsieur, we mustn't, something's coming-

ALEXANDRE runs behind the
SILHOUETTE SCREEN- ROCHELLE
gasps.

LIGHTS DOWN. Pitch black. Sounds of
struggle, something animal, and then--
ROCHELLE screams, and all goes quiet.

SPOTLIGHT on NOELLE and EUGENE,
dancing to silence, blissfully ignorant. A
SERVANT cuts through and taps EUGENE
on the shoulder, whispers something into his
ear. They hurry off-stage.

SCENE TWO.

The stage is empty, except for ROCHELLE and
ALEXANDRE lying still behind the SILHOUETTE
SCREEN. ROCHELLE wakes slowly, groans in agony.

She rises and sees ALEXANDRE lying still.
She screams, then quickly tries to shake him
awake.

ROCHELLE

Alexandre! Alexandre, do you hear me?

ALEXANDRE doesn't respond.

ROCHELLE

Alexandre, wake up!

Silence. ROCHELLE falls onto his chest,
sobbing.

ALEXANDRE
(weakly)

Why are you crying?

ROCHELLE continues to cry.

ROCHELLE

How can you not?

She lifts herself back up, sits on her knees.
ALEXANDRE raises a weak hand to meet
hers.

ALEXANDRE

Dry your eyes, dear sister.

She continues to cry, holding his hand.

ROCHELLE
(quietly)

What have I done?

Silence. ALEXANDRE sucks in a sharp
breath.

ALEXANDRE

Where is Chalet?

ROCHELLE looks around.

ROCHELLE

I don't know. Oh Lord, I've dragged him to Hell like the devil I am!

ALEXANDRE

Or perhaps it's just the opposite. The Devil plays nicely with young angels.

He breathes heavy once more, then lets out a laugh.

ALEXANDRE

(singing breathily; delirious)

Ah ! vous dirai-je, maman/Ce qui cause mon tourment?

ROCHELLE

You're delirious.

ALEXANDRE

You're bruised.

He grabs her arm.

ALEXANDRE

It tore up your nice dress Mama just bought. You've stained the whole thing red, too. (pause) She'll be mad.

That's when it hits her- she places a hand over his torso.

ROCHELLE

Lord, you're bleeding...

ALEXANDRE continues to sing.

ALEXANDRE

(singing)

Depuis que j'ai vu Silvandre/Me regarder
d'un air tendre/Mon cœur dit à chaque
instant/"Peut-on vivre sans amant ?"

ROCHELLE

We must find Father.

ALEXANDRE laughs sharply.

ALEXANDRE

And how should we explain such brutal disaster?

He laughs again. ROCHELLE panics. A SERVANT enters stage right, holding a lantern. She creeps up to them both, peeks behind the screen-

She screams.

A SERVANT

Come quickly!

THE SERVANT reaches behind the screen and helps lift both ROCHELLE and ALEXANDRE up. LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE THREE.

EUGENE stands in front of two cushioned chairs. Behind him, stage left, there's a desk. ROCHELLE calmly sits in one chair, waiting. ALEXANDRE staggers in stage right with a big scratch right down his face. They watch him slowly sit down in agony, really milking the moment for all its worth.

EUGENE

Oh, will you just sit?

ALEXANDRE sits down flat with ease.

EUGENE glares at him.

EUGENE

I asked you both to execute very simple tasks. Madame de Turenne was kind enough to invite you, and now I've got letters to send and bridges to rebuild- bridges that wouldn't have been burnt, mind you, had you *done what I had instructed*.

EUGENE sighs. ALEXANDRE shoots ROCHELLE a subtle look like 'I-told-you-so'.

EUGENE

She won't show her face around us again, of that I'm certain. I try in vain to present our family as worthy, and still we're outcasts- the damned black sheep of Orleans! Even your mother refuses to look at you, Alexandre, with that wound on your face-

He gets wound up- retains his composure.

EUGENE

In simplest terms- pray tell, what happened?

ROCHELLE and ALEXANDRE stare at the floor, away from each other.

EUGENE

(shouting)

For God's sake, one of you must know!

He glares down at ROCHELLE. She risks looking up- he's caught her gaze.

ROCHELLE

It was such a tragedy, Father, and they injured poor Alexandre and I-

EUGENE

Who did such a thing?

ROCHELLE fidgets with some ruffle on her dress.

ROCHELLE

It was all a blur, Father, but from what I can recall...I was apt to leave the ballroom to find a servant, you see, I had to attend to such...*fervent* emergency, and yet in my hurry, I lost sight of the servants altogether, yes, *all* the servants, and was relegated to find such necessities myself. Once outside, I encountered two tall men, and assuming they were such servants, I approached them, and...

She wipes a tear away.

ROCHELLE

Oh, Father, it was awful- they held a gun to my head, so close I could see down the *barrel*, Father, and they said they'd kill me if we didn't comply! Of course then poor Alexandre hurries out, and sees such a terrifying scene...in his attempts to save me he was threatened as well, and they took us off to the stables to take us to God knows where...

She starts to cry again. She grabs
ALEXANDRE's hand tightly, almost
threateningly.

ALEXANDRE

That's when the servant found us.

EUGENE

This is true, Rochelle?

Silence hangs in the air. He looks down at
her, reaches out and cups her face, wipes a
tear.

ROCHELLE

I couldn't find it in me to lie, dear Father.

He lets go of her.

EUGENE

What did they look like? If you are sincere, we must find these men, certainly. They
could be out, threatening others as we speak. Hell, Rochelle, they could come back for
us!

ROCHELLE

I couldn't remember their faces even if I tried, Father, I was so *frightened*!

EUGENE

And surely the servants you speak of must have let them through Madame de Turenne's
courtyard, yes? This is such a disgrace, my dear Rochelle, if you speak the truth!

ROCHELLE

-but Father, I/

EUGENE

Such things must be dealt with, Rochelle. There's no pride in leaving things be, no justice
in watching from afar. If these men hurt my son and my daughter, what sort of man
would I be to give them mercy? *Mercy* is for the Lord and the foolish.

ROCHELLE puts her head down.

EUGENE

To hell with those damned servants, letting such evil in.

ROCHELLE goes to speak, but decides not to.

ALEXANDRE

Father, if I may, the servants/

EUGENE

I will speak with you at another time, Alexandre.

ALEXANDRE

But Father/

EUGENE

(impatiently)

Another time.

ALEXANDRE goes quiet. You could hear a pin drop.

EUGENE

If that's all, I've much to do, then.

He sits down at his desk, his head in his hands, and sighs.

ROCHELLE leans over and whispers something to ALEXANDRE- EUGENE doesn't seem to catch it.

EUGENE

Out with you both. Your mother will send a servant to tend to your wounds.

They get up slowly- ROCHELLE leaves outright, waits stage right. ALEXANDRE approaches his father's desk as EUGENE begins to set up his quill and ink.

ALEXANDRE

Father, I fear I've offended/

EUGENE

(not looking up)

Be well, my son.

ALEXANDRE

Father, please, may I/

EUGENE

Be well. (beat) Send in Landau.

ALEXANDRE gives up and goes stage right to meet ROCHELLE. They speak in hushed, inaudible whispers as they exit. LANDAU, a servant, enters stage right, as another SERVANT enters stage left and stands in front of the SCREEN.

EUGENE writes and signs a letter- and hands it off to LANDAU.

EUGENE

Off you go.

LANDAU hands the letter to the SERVANT and exits. The SERVANT recites EUGENE's letter.

Behind him, the SILHOUETTE SCREEN lights up- SABINE and JULIEN displayed sitting back to back, like storybook figures.

SERVANT
(writing)

Dear General Cocteau, I pray this letter finds you in good health. I require your assistance in finding two healthy, capable candidates to mind my son and daughter. They were helpless victims of a potential kidnapping, and since then neither I nor my wife could find any solace in sleep. Perhaps if we knew they had a good, faithful eye watching, this poison shall be kept at bay. If you're inclined to refuse, you may recall the predicament you're in... In the case that you agree, I could consider your name cleared. Do inform me of your decision at once. Signed, Marquis de Criville.

He exits the stage with the letter, leaving only the silhouettes of SABINE and JULIEN. They too, part ways. Lights down.

SCENE FOUR.

Two chairs split by a table sit stage left. A chaise, an armchair, and an ottoman sit stage right. ROCHELLE and ALEXANDRE meet behind the SILHOUETTE SCREEN.

ROCHELLE
(sharply)

Mind your words, dear brother. Remember what we agreed upon.

ALEXANDRE

Yes, dear sister, but...it would behoove you to present yourself in a friendly manner.

ROCHELLE

Why should I? I never asked for such a curse to befall me!

ALEXANDRE

I wouldn't call it a curse.

ROCHELLE

An ever-present watchful eye to report on my *every move* could be nothing else! (beat)
What sort of Father would condemn me so...?

ROCHELLE sniffs, about to cry.

ALEXANDRE

The Devil endures an eternal punishment from the Lord for his hubris...

ROCHELLE

What are you implying?

ALEXANDRE

You said it yourself, dear sister. An act of passionate hubris brought us to the gate of Hell. Why not embrace it wholeheartedly? Why not dance in the flame?

ALEXANDRE giggles. ROCHELLE pushes him. Back to rage.

ROCHELLE

You despicable soul, Alexandre, you know what anguish has befallen me since the ball, and you taunt me with it so!

ALEXANDRE

Only because I burn beside you, dear sister.

ROCHELLE

You do no such thing. Father respects you. He merely tolerates me.

ALEXANDRE laughs.

ALEXANDRE

Father hasn't spoken a word to me since we visited Turenne's. Perhaps we have differing views on what *respect* is.

ROCHELLE pauses, unsure of what to say.

SABINE/JULIEN (OFF STAGE)

Thank you, Marquis de Criville.

They turn toward the noise.

ALEXANDRE
(sarcastically)

Our punishment awaits.

ROCHELLE
(exasperated)

Off with you! Now off you go, Alexandre, go!

She pushes him away. They come out from behind the SILHOUETTE SCREEN- ROCHELLE rushes stage left, takes a seat and waits.

ALEXANDRE heads stage right, then ungracefully collapses onto a chaise. They're in two separate rooms.

SABINE, in full guard attire, enters stage left. She does not sit, but lingers around ROCHELLE. Simultaneously, JULIEN enters stage right, doing the same. An awkward silence passes.

LIGHTS DIM on SABINE and ROCHELLE.

ALEXANDRE
(to Julien)

Hello. What might your name be?

JULIEN

I didn't think it would concern you.

ALEXANDRE

(sternly)

You have quite an unflattering assumption of me, then. Such gall.

JULIEN

Oh, no, sir, pardon me, I didn't mean to-

ALEXANDRE cuts him off with a shrill giggle.

ALEXANDRE

You made quite the face! How funny! Come, sit.

ALEXANDRE invites him to sit. JULIEN does, hesitantly. LIGHTS DIM on them, LIGHTS RISE on ROCHELLE and SABINE.

SABINE

Hello, Lady Criville. I am to be your guard. Should you need to call for me, I am-

ROCHELLE

I've no interest in what to call you.

SABINE

(dryly)

...May I sit?

ROCHELLE huffs.

ROCHELLE

No, you may not.

Behind ROCHELLE, SABINE rolls her eyes. LIGHTS DIM on ROCHELLE and SABINE, rise on ALEXANDRE and JULIEN.

ALEXANDRE

Now, before I tell you some simple rules, I must remember your name. Julien, is it? What a name.

JULIEN

Is it now?

ALEXANDRE

Certainly. That's what I shall call you by.

JULIEN

(under his breath)

Yes, sir, that *is* what a name is for...

ALEXANDRE

What did you say, Julien?

JULIEN

Nothing, Monsieur Criville.

ALEXANDRE

Monsieur?

JULIEN

... Your title, sir.

ALEXANDRE

First rule, then- call me by no such titles. I find them to be laborious. I am Alexandre, and you are Julien.

JULIEN stammers awkwardly, but concedes.

JULIEN

Understood, Mons- Alexandre.

ALEXANDRE

Good. Second rule-

LIGHTS UP on SABINE and ROCHELLE.

ALEXANDRE/ROCHELLE

Under no circumstances shall you enter the left wing of the estate. That is where I and my [sister/brother] rest, and is no place for someone not of our intimates.

LIGHTS DIM on JULIEN and ALEXANDRE.

SABINE
(incredulously)

How should I guard you then?

ROCHELLE

There is a closed corridor that leads to the wing. You may stand guard there.

SABINE

How shall I reach you if you require assistance?

ROCHELLE

I won't.

SABINE sighs.

SABINE

I take it you know nothing of my qualifications, Lady Criville. As a former *Guard du Corps*, I believe it's a waste to/

ROCHELLE

/Whatever regiment you were in simply doesn't concern me, does it?

SABINE takes a deep breath.

SABINE

I've entered the doors of *His Majesty's* chambers, and yet the daughter of a Marquis won't trust me?

ROCHELLE

Why should it matter? It isn't as if we were friends.

SABINE

(under her breath)

No, thank the good Lord.

LIGHTS UP on ALEXANDRE and
JULIEN.

JULIEN

And should you need assistance...?

ALEXANDRE

Well, then, I shall come to you.

JULIEN

I see.

ALEXANDRE

Does this disappoint you?

JULIEN

No. But it matters not what I think.

ALEXANDRE

I suppose so.

ALEXANDRE flashes a smile at JULIEN.
Hesitantly, he flashes one back.

ALEXANDRE/ROCHELLE

Third rule. If you must accompany me, what you may or may not become privy to is no business of yours. It is your duty to be sworn to secrecy, for the sake of the Crivilles, until death.

LIGHTS DOWN on SABINE and
ROCHELLE.

ALEXANDRE

Before you go, Julien, remember this.

ALEXANDRE smiles and grabs JULIEN by
the wrist. It's wide-eyed and mischievous.

ALEXANDRE

Your duty is simply to keep appearances. Worry not for my wellbeing. I can handle myself just fine, yes?

JULIEN

So you wish for me to... *leave you be*?

ALEXANDRE

Correct, Julien. You could take a day trip to Paris without me and I wouldn't care a whit. As long as the Marquis pays no mind, all is well.

JULIEN sighs.

JULIEN

It should surprise you- you sound like my former General.

ALEXANDRE

I'm not surprised in the slightest. After all, they let men like me join, don't they?

ALEXANDRE throws his head back and laughs. JULIEN cracks a smile.

ALEXANDRE

I only ask that you keep me company during my nightly stroll. That's when Father shall see us most.

JULIEN

It's of no trouble, Monsieur-

ALEXANDRE shoots him a look.

ALEXANDRE

First rule.

JULIEN hesitates.

JULIEN

Alexandre.

ALEXANDRE smiles and chuckles, childlike and mocking.

ALEXANDRE

Now, despite what I've said, my father wills it that you accompany me while he and I hunt. It will behoove you to be silent in his presence- he has been quite the devil since the incident.

JULIEN

The incident?

ALEXANDRE

Nobody's told you?

JULIEN waits, ready to hear it.

ALEXANDRE

...Well, let's be off then.

ALEXANDRE leaves, and JULIEN follows quickly behind.

LIGHTS UP on SABINE and ROCHELLE.

SABINE

I mean no disrespect, but these rules sound like the makings of a child.

ROCHELLE

It's nothing a former *Guards du Corps* couldn't achieve-- since you're so proud.

SABINE

I am not *proud*, it was simply pertinent information/

ROCHELLE

/Final rule!

She stands to meet SABINE's gaze.
SABINE narrows her eyes back, like a
challenge.

ROCHELLE

My word is *final*. We are not, and shall not be considered, equals. You are subservient to my word and my judgement. Understood?

SABINE

Lady Criville, you do understand that my actions are based upon the word of your father and my own experience/

ROCHELLE

/Shall I instate another rule? Guards shall be seen and not heard. No speaking of any kind unless deemed fit. Will this be necessary?

SABINE thins her lips with barely contained
rage.

SABINE

No, it shall not be necessary, Lady Criville.

ROCHELLE

Good. Very good.

She straightens herself up.

ROCHELLE

Unfortunately, under my father's will, you shall be accompanying me on a visit today. Remember what I said and remember it well- I care nothing for your past. You disregarded such nonsense when you accepted my father's offer.

SABINE bites her tongue.

ROCHELLE

Now, come, I wish to return home before nightfall, and it is already quite late...

ROCHELLE hurries off stage. SABINE trudges behind her.

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE FIVE.

THE DE ROTHES' estate- it's the same flavor of rich as the Crivilles'. A round table with tea and two chairs sits center stage. It's framed by two doorframes, both closed.

MARIE DE ROTHE, a little older than Rochelle, picture-perfect blonde, sits on the chair on the right.

ROCHELLE enters through the doorframe stage left, and SABINE follows, standing guard at the door. ROCHELLE hurries over to MARIE, who stands to greet her. ROCHELLE crushes her in a hug.

MARIE

Oh, Rochelle, how *glad* I am to see you!

She holds ROCHELLE at arm's length, admiring her before kissing her on both cheeks. They sit.

MARIE notices SABINE and fans herself. SABINE averts her eyes.

MARIE

(whispering)

Who is this you've brought with you?

ROCHELLE's smile falls. She looks over at SABINE, who stares back blankly.
ROCHELLE turns her back to SABINE like a child throwing a tantrum.

ROCHELLE
(curt)

My father demanded I have a guard.

MARIE

Why, isn't that novel?

ROCHELLE
(building in volume...)

I'm glad someone gets some amusement from it.

MARIE

Well, you must feel quite safe!

ROCHELLE
(rising more...)

I'm sure *you* think so...

MARIE

Oh, Rochelle/

ROCHELLE
(loudest!)

/I want not to speak of it, Marie!

Silence.

ROCHELLE
(quieter)

You are my only solace, dear friend, do *not* make me regret the journey.

MARIE blinks in surprise.

MARIE

...Then we shall not speak of her.

MARIE glances quickly at SABINE, who shoots her something like a death glare.
MARIE freaks and turns back to ROCHELLE as if nothing happened.

MARIE

Apologies for the delays. It's been a madhouse here, dear Rochelle.

ROCHELLE

Is it Adrien?

MARIE

When is it not?

ROCHELLE giggles.

MARIE

My mother's tearing her hair out to find him a potential suitor.

ROCHELLE

A suitor? He's a child!

MARIE

Yes, well, it's better to have such things sorted now, I suppose.

ROCHELLE

Poor little Adrien.

MARIE

Oh, he won't mind. It's good for him. He isn't what concerns me in the slightest. No, it's the potential suitors... or lack thereof. Not just any woman could be a de Rothe.

ROCHELLE does a scanning gesture to
MARIE, up and down.

ROCHELLE

Clearly.

MARIE giggles and slaps the fan away
playfully.

MARIE

It takes much work to abide by our principles. I hope the poor girl that my mother chooses will rise to the challenge. (beat) I regret wasting years dreading marriage when it could have been so *simple*.

ROCHELLE

Where's the fun in simplicity? Surely you aren't about to lie and say you *hated* gallivanting along with André and Lyon and/

MARIE

They asked *me* to dance. I have little interests in trysts.

ROCHELLE

(sarcastically)

Yes, and I'm blonde.

ROCHELLE smiles. MARIE tries to pretend to be mad, but it falls through.

MARIE

Since you're so quick to speak of affairs, you must have had quite a good time at Madame Turenne's, then.

ROCHELLE

...It was certainly eventful. (beat) It reminded me of you, in many ways.

MARIE

Oh, so it was beautiful?

ROCHELLE

It was *stunning*.

MARIE primps her hair. It gets a small laugh from ROCHELLE.

MARIE

Was it charming? Could you hardly bear the sight? Was it such a sordid affair that it made your heart flutter?

ROCHELLE

(melodramatically)

It was such an enticing party that it drove all the men to madness!

MARIE gasps and grabs her fan to cover her face. They giggle like schoolgirls. SABINE scrunches up her face in complete confusion and mild disgust. Ew. Too much for her.

MARIE

Well, if it was as you say...did you meet anyone?

MARIE leans in, smiling devilishly.
 ROCHELLE ignores her and pours some
 tea.

ROCHELLE

Well...

ROCHELLE thinks, and thinks, and sips
 from her cup, and then-

ROCHELLE

No.

MARIE

Oh, Rochelle, you've lost your touch! Don't you remember how men used to trip over themselves to dance with you?

ROCHELLE

Whoever said they stopped?

MARIE

Then surely at least one man must have caught your eye! You're nearly twenty, don't you think it's time to consider such things? Does the idea of a lovely set of children disgust you so?

ROCHELLE
 (dryly)

That husband of yours has truly done a number on your psyche. You should consider consulting a doctor for your hysteria.

MARIE

Hysteria? No! I've simply... found my calling.

ROCHELLE

Your *calling*? Now you sound like my *mother*!

MARIE

Is that so bad? When you're married, the world changes colors...it's such a beautiful thing, to be husband and wife, and it saddens me so to see you drift along as such a... wasted beauty!

ROCHELLE scoffs sardonically.

ROCHELLE

My beauty is surely not wasted.

MARIE

Well, it could be soon.

ROCHELLE freezes, shocked by her tone.

MARIE

I don't say it to discourage you. I say it as a friend. I'm sure there are plenty of good, lively men who will love your darling face.

Silence again.

ROCHELLE

My father's wish is for me to marry the Duke du Gougot.

MARIE

He's the short one beyond the Seine, yes?

ROCHELLE

If only that were his only flaw.

MARIE

Oh, Rochelle.

MARIE, sensing the tension, leaves
ROCHELLE the space.

ROCHELLE

If it were up to my father, he'd have me locked up in my bedroom until my wedding day, and I'm sure if they hand me off to that decrepit old man, he'd do nothing but the same.

MARIE

Bold assumptions. You know Monsieur Gougot is nothing but kind.

ROCHELLE

Do kind men live alone? Do kind men bribe young women into bedding them? His advancements are nothing but a predator circling its prey!

MARIE

You take any advancement as a threat, Rochelle.

ROCHELLE

I take *his* advancements as threats, as they are! They're threats against my future, against my better judgement. If I say I wish to stay unmarried, what is it to anyone but myself? Surely the Criville name rests on more than just my laurels!

MARIE

So you concede your name to your brother's doings? You'd bring such a fate upon him?

ROCHELLE rolls her eyes.

ROCHELLE

My brother brings such a fate upon himself.

MARIE grabs ROCHELLE by the hand.

ROCHELLE flinches, but doesn't pull back.

MARIE

Rochelle, I sympathize with you deeply, but no longer can we stay dauntless children, I'm afraid. Now we must raise them. (beat) Your father knows Orleans society well. When they grow tired of the toil in Paris, their eyes wander homeward. It would do you well to take the offer of a Duke- if only to ease your worries.

MARIE reaches to smooth ROCHELLE's gown.

MARIE

Doesn't it sound nice to you? Duchess du Gougot?

ROCHELLE shies away.

MARIE

I heard the Queen has her eye on him. It could be nice, couldn't it? To live in Versailles... right hand to the Queen herself...

MARIE trails off- like she's got an idea.

MARIE

Come with me.

ROCHELLE

Where?

MARIE

To Versailles. The *Bal du Poinsettia*.

ROCHELLE pauses.

ROCHELLE

What?

MARIE

I want you to see what you could have- who you could *be*.

ROCHELLE

But I'm not invited.

MARIE

Nonsense. I'll insist.

ROCHELLE

You have an audience with the Queen?

MARIE

My father did. My mother does now. It would only take a correspondence to recommend your attendance.

ROCHELLE considers.

ROCHELLE

This is madness.

MARIE

If it won't get you to marry the Duke du Gougot, at least you may find yourself a good, lively man, and if you find neither... well, at the very least you can say you enjoyed yourself.

She cups a hand on ROCHELLE's cheek comfortingly. ROCHELLE reluctantly leans in, and MARIE smiles at her, coaxing her into it.

ROCHELLE

If you insist.

Despite herself, ROCHELLE smiles back.

MARIE

To think you would deprive the world of such a face...

ROCHELLE's face sours.

MARIE

A shame. Men would die for you, if only you let them.

ROCHELLE pushes MARIE away abruptly.

ROCHELLE

Don't say such a thing.

MARIE

I'm only complimenting you/

ROCHELLE

/Must you be so violent? I want no man to *die* for me/

MARIE

/It was only a compliment, Rochelle, I/

ROCHELLE

/and certainly I have not deprived a soul worthy of my love/

MARIE

/Truly, what is this about?

ROCHELLE pauses.

ROCHELLE

I have *changed*, Marie, something within has been *stained*, and I am not worth the love I desire. Not anymore.

MARIE

If the love you desire won't, someone will love you. Someone *does* love you. Someone will marry you.

MARIE sits next to ROCHELLE and tries to comfort her.

MARIE

You have a man who is willing to wait for your love, and yet here you are, denying him. How could you blame another soul for your own sin?

ROCHELLE looks at her, betrayed.

ROCHELLE

You call that love?

MARIE

I call it loyalty. I call it devotion. These are rare blessings, Rochelle, ones I can't bear to watch you kill in such vain efforts to/

MARIE grabs both of ROCHELLE's hands in hers- and ROCHELLE rips her hands away, accidentally scratching a gash in MARIE's hand.

MARIE looks at her in shock as blood trickles down her hand. ROCHELLE freezes, chest heaving.

SABINE steps in.

SABINE

Madame, if I may, clearly pressing the matter is upsetting to Lady Rochelle. Her affairs are her own to be mindful of. I suggest another topic.

ROCHELLE turns to SABINE.

ROCHELLE

Have you already forgotten your place?

SABINE's face falls, shocked.

SABINE

What?

ROCHELLE

Out! Get out!

SABINE

I cannot leave, Lady Rochelle-

ROCHELLE

You are under my word, and I beg you to *leave!*

SABINE clamps her jaw shut.

SABINE

(with barely suppressed malice)

I will be outside.

SABINE closes the 'door' and stands behind it. ROCHELLE turns to MARIE, who hasn't moved.

ROCHELLE

I must go.

MARIE
(flatly)

Call for Tomas, will you?

A beat. MARIE can't even look at her.

ROCHELLE

I will.

ROCHELLE closes the 'door' behind her, where SABINE waits.

SABINE

If I may interject, your attitude/

ROCHELLE

/I don't want to hear it from you!

SABINE

I'm simply defending you.

ROCHELLE

I do not need defending.

SABINE

Is that not my job?

ROCHELLE

Your *job* is to know your damn place. You know nothing about me.

Standoff.

SABINE

I care nothing for you. I simply stepped in as per my duty.

ROCHELLE

I should have you discharged-

SABINE

You and I both know there's not another soul in France who'd replace me.

Silence.

SABINE

I come from the *Guards du Corps*. I am not a stranger to the lengths men will go to to satisfy their basest of desires. Beyond that, I, of all people, know what it means to be a slave to the orders of others. I simply wish to do as instructed and protect you from such a fate.

ROCHELLE pauses.

ROCHELLE

I told you, I care nothing for your past.

She leans in.

ROCHELLE

They may have given you orders in your regiment that caused you great pain. It may hurt your heart until the day you die. (beat) You must know that is none of my concern.

SABINE sucks in a breath, holding back
rage.

ROCHELLE

It's getting dark.

SABINE

I'll call for the carriage.

SABINE exits. ROCHELLE looks down at
her hand, streaked with MARIE's blood. She
gasps.

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE SIX.

The Criville's garden. Beautiful flower arrangements spill
out of marble vases. A bench sits center stage, something
for them to walk around.

ALEXANDRE and JULIEN enter.
 ALEXANDRE leads the way, a bayonet
 strapped to his back. JULIEN trails behind.

ALEXANDRE
 (like an excited child restraining
 themselves)

...And when I took the shot, it *flew* past several bushes, Julien, and I was worried it should miss, with the foliage in the way, and it would certainly frighten the deer- but the poor little creatures didn't see it coming anyways, *the stupid poor things*, and the shot hit right between their sweet little eyes... oh, it pains me, but the deer careened to the floor and Father was to send the courtier after it but I insisted 'no, no I shall get it'/

JULIEN

/You shot the deer head-on?/

ALEXANDRE

/and I ran through the bushes to find the deer and for a moment I, myself, felt like the poor thing, and it made me consider what sort of tragic end it would be if someone were to strike me with a bullet between the eyes in such a way/

JULIEN

/Alexandre/

ALEXANDRE

/but my father seemed so pleased so it didn't deter me, and there I was cradling this poor deer in my arms, trying to avoid the blood... coating my hands...

ALEXANDRE trails off, lost in some train
 of thought. JULIEN stops short and sighs.

JULIEN

You sound like a great shot. You could be quite the soldier.

ALEXANDRE snaps back to reality.

ALEXANDRE
 (collecting himself)

Unfortunately I have no such inclinations.

JULIEN

You've just told me about your excellent marksmanship. You'd waste such a skill?

ALEXANDRE

Aiming the gun is easier than firing it.

ALEXANDRE giggles to himself, like something was funny. He takes a seat on the bench.

JULIEN

You are a much better shot than I.

ALEXANDRE

Glad to know this is who's to guard me.

JULIEN goes stiff.

JULIEN

(frantically)

You can rest assured that I-

ALEXANDRE

I'm only teasing!

JULIEN

If you're such a skilled shot, then why not join the military? Many men your age have their own regiments already.

ALEXANDRE sighs.

ALEXANDRE

Trust me, dear Julien, they've tried to make a soldier out of me. Countless hours spent aiming toward targets, toiling over what regiment goes where and what landscape harbors the enemy advantage... tales of glorious victory and defeat from the mouth of my father... it is *such* a chore.

JULIEN smiles half-heartedly.

ALEXANDRE taps the seat beside him, beckoning him.

JULIEN

Most men delight in tales of glorious victory. The Romans longed for nothing more.

ALEXANDRE

Yes, and then Rome fell.

JULIEN pauses.

JULIEN

...That it did.

ALEXANDRE laughs and pats JULIEN on the shoulder. JULIEN tenses at the shoulder under the weight of the gesture.

ALEXANDRE

Oh, but you must know more than I. My father plucked you straight from the barracks, didn't he?

JULIEN sits down.

JULIEN

It wasn't quite like that/

ALEXANDRE

/It must have been a struggle to adapt.

JULIEN

Quite the opposite/

ALEXANDRE

/Coming from such fervor to such... boredom/

JULIEN

/Weren't you bored by the notion of war?

ALEXANDRE smiles.

ALEXANDRE

I'm bored with everything, Julien.

JULIEN

Hm.

They take a moment. ALEXANDRE pulls the bayonet from off his back and places it in JULIEN's hands.

JULIEN

What's this about?

ALEXANDRE stands up and beckons JULIEN to follow suit. JULIEN does. ALEXANDRE sidles behind him and points somewhere in the audience, arm extending over JULIEN's shoulder.

ALEXANDRE

Do you see the vase over there?

JULIEN squints.

JULIEN

What about it?

ALEXANDRE

Shoot it, right in the center.

JULIEN turns to face ALEXANDRE and
hands him the bayonet.

JULIEN

I mustn't, Alexandre. I'd ruin half the garden.

ALEXANDRE

Not if you make your mark.

ALEXANDRE shoves the bayonet back in
JULIEN's hands.

JULIEN

Why?

ALEXANDRE

I will shoot for it next. Then we'll see who's aim is better.

JULIEN

I told you- your aim is superior.

ALEXANDRE

Then I'd like to see for myself. It's boring otherwise.

JULIEN sighs.

JULIEN

I'd damage the vase. Your father will have *both* our heads.

ALEXANDRE

He's been far angrier.

Pause. JULIEN tries to pass the bayonet off again, but ALEXANDRE stops him again.

JULIEN

You truly won't relent, will you?

ALEXANDRE smiles proudly.

ALEXANDRE

Aren't soldiers supposed to take orders well? Now...

ALEXANDRE brings JULIEN's arms up, readying him to aim. JULIEN lets him.

ALEXANDRE

On your marks...

JULIEN squints and adjusts his aim ever-so-slightly. It's like something was triggered.

ALEXANDRE

Fire!

JULIEN adjusts a bit more, and right as his finger grazes the trigger-

ROCHELLE (OFF STAGE)

What in God's holy name are you doing?!

JULIEN flinches and the gun fires. BOOM. ROCHELLE and SABINE enter, ROCHELLE storming up to ALEXANDRE as SABINE lazily trails behind.

ROCHELLE

You imbecile!

JULIEN places the bayonet on the bench haphazardly, returning to a rigid pose with hands clasped behind his back.

ALEXANDRE

It was only a friendly game between men, dear sister.

ROCHELLE

What friendly games do you play with *guns*?

ALEXANDRE ignores her and runs to the edge of the stage, peering into the distance.

ALEXANDRE

(to JULIEN)

You made the shot! Brilliant!

JULIEN follows his gaze. So does ROCHELLE, and reluctantly, SABINE.

ROCHELLE

That's Grandmother's vase.

ALEXANDRE

Yes, and Mother always hated it. Now she can part with it without fault. Quite the solution, yes?

He smiles at her. He's genuinely proud of himself.

ROCHELLE

And how shall we explain why it's broken?

ALEXANDRE looks around.

ALEXANDRE

Our lovely neighbor's dog could do such a thing.

ROCHELLE sighs.

ROCHELLE

That old mutt.

JULIEN

Your neighbor?

ROCHELLE

(to Julien)

Do not speak out of turn!

ALEXANDRE

(to Julien)

Yes, our neighbor. His lovely little dog has the same murderous instinct as he. He lets the damn thing loose.

JULIEN raises an eyebrow.

JULIEN

Murderous?

ALEXANDRE

He's an executioner. It runs in his veins. Red blood of a devil, I say.

They all fall silent, caught in 4 distinct trains of thought.

ALEXANDRE

I think he enjoys killing. He must inherit his father's will. His father, that old miser General, terrified me as a young boy- and poor Rochelle, you were certainly brought to tears at the thought of him!

ROCHELLE

I was not.

ALEXANDRE

Oh, but you were! Father would insist on visiting him and you would weep and cry, even clawing at his coattails with your tiny hands/

ALEXANDRE mimics grabbing at a coat to JULIEN, who tries his best to look unamused. SABINE smiles in her typical half-hearted way, and ROCHELLE swats at her.

ALEXANDRE

And you had nightmares of him, rocking back in forth, howling in fear at night- 'the Devil approaches! He lives next door!'

ALEXANDRE pitches his voice up to imitate her. SABINE lets out a sharp laugh, and ROCHELLE crosses her arms.

ALEXANDRE

You even wet the-

ROCHELLE
(practically screeching)

-Stop it! Enough!

ROCHELLE shoves ALEXANDRE, who
finds a little too much joy in the memories.

ALEXANDRE
Oh, Rochelle, don't fret, he's long gone.

ROCHELLE
It wouldn't matter to me either way.

She huffs and crosses her arms like a child.
ALEXANDRE giggles to himself.

ALEXANDRE
Sure it would.

ALEXANDRE pauses and looks up.
ROCHELLE follows his gaze. JULIEN and
SABINE exchange confused looks.

ROCHELLE
The moon is rising...

ALEXANDRE
(in a hurry)
It's getting dark, dear Julien, so we must be off to bed.

JULIEN
Understood. I'll secure the perimeter.

SABINE goes to escort ROCHELLE, who
glares back at SABINE.

ROCHELLE
You remember my rules, yes?

SABINE backs off.

SABINE
Yes.

ROCHELLE

Very well. Do what you must.

ROCHELLE leans over and whispers something in ALEXANDRE's ear, and they exit.

JULIEN sits down on the bench while SABINE stays standing, shoulders raised in alert. JULIEN watches her for a while, then-

JULIEN

Have we met before?

SABINE turns her face from him.

SABINE

No.

JULIEN

You look familiar.

SABINE

It must be another woman you're thinking of.

JULIEN laughs.

JULIEN

Certainly not. I don't see many women in my line of work.

SABINE

You come from a regiment, I assume.

JULIEN

Nothing special. Fifteen hundred men or so. You?

SABINE pauses.

SABINE

I was merely trained by my father.

JULIEN

He must have been quite the fighter.

SABINE

Why must you flatter me? What is it you want?

JULIEN

I see your father raised a skeptic.

SABINE

You're a soldier. You of all people should understand.

JULIEN

I never understood paranoia. Most people are forthcoming even before they speak.

SABINE laughs sharply.

SABINE

People are forthcoming with their bodies, not their souls. You see only what you wish.

JULIEN

Not in my eyes. I see beyond.

SABINE

No. You know nothing of my soul- or else this conversation would be quite different.

JULIEN pauses. SABINE sits down on the other side of the bayonet.

SABINE

You're being quite humble for a soldier trained at Saumur.

JULIEN

What/

SABINE

/And your 'simple regiment' works well below your capabilities. It drives you mad, doesn't it? Working with such shallow souls?

JULIEN stares at her in disbelief.

SABINE

Every so often, when you find a moment of peace, you remember how close you were to Versailles, to rubbing shoulders with nobles, and how it was torn from you from a malnourished soldier boy weaker than you who, worst of all, considered you a friend.

JULIEN has a moment of realization.

JULIEN

It can't be...

SABINE

How cruel. All our suffering brought us to the same place, my dear Julien.

JULIEN

Why are you here? And dressed like... *this*?

SABINE

I'm not dressed as anything, and Lord knows I would rather be anywhere but here. These people are such...

She doesn't finish. She gazes out in the distance, until something catches her eye.

SABINE

The servants' quarters face south, yes? Upon the stables?

JULIEN

It seems so.

SABINE

And the old miser, Eugene...

JULIEN looks confused.

SABINE

Their *father*. His quarters face north, if I'm correct.

JULIEN

What is it to you?

SABINE

If the living quarters are there, and the children's rooms are underneath their father's, there must be a blind spot through the gardens. If we plan carefully, we could take a horse from the stables and escape through-

JULIEN

Escape? Are you daft?

SABINE

You mean to tell me catering to a child in man's clothing brings you satisfaction?

JULIEN

Of course not, but it beats sleeping three to a bed.

SABINE huffs.

JULIEN

I'm sure you and General Cocteau slept well in your gold-plated soldier's quarters, but even now, you sleep in a clean bed and eat like a king. I don't run from blessings like that.

SABINE laughs dryly.

SABINE

No, you do not. You simply let others rob you of them. (beat) I wasn't very strong. You could have beaten me and left *me* to die- but that would mean honoring *your* strength, wouldn't it?

JULIEN

It would mean I lost all sense of righteousness.

SABINE gets up.

SABINE

Rochelle would be thrilled if I escaped, but you and that Alexandre boy seem to get along. Treasure such happiness before it betrays you as I have.

SABINE exits. JULIEN picks up the bayonet, stares at it, and straps it onto his back. He exits.

SCENE SEVEN.

The next afternoon- there's a dining table. In the center of the table is a giant cooked chicken, bones and all.

Enter SABINE, stage left. She looks around and quickly steals a grape. Once she pops it in her mouth, enter JULIEN, stage right. He stands on the opposite side of the room, at attention.

JULIEN

Good afternoon.

SABINE

Good afternoon.

Enter NOELLE and ROCHELLE stage left.
They enter silently and frostily, the kind of
awkward silence you leave after a fight.
NOELLE sits beside the head of the table,
while ROCHELLE takes a seat on the
opposite side.

NOELLE helps herself to various pastries.
ROCHELLE sits quietly and takes nothing.

NOELLE

Eat, darling.

ROCHELLE

I'm not hungry.

NOELLE

Nonsense. Eat something.

NOELLE gestures to the food at the center
of the table.

ROCHELLE
(petulantly)

I will eat later.

NOELLE

What's gotten into you?

ROCHELLE examines her fork.

ROCHELLE

Mother, I'm simply not hungry.

NOELLE

You have been nothing but sullen-faced and downtrodden. Your face hasn't been so sour
since you were a child scared of that vile old man nearby.

ROCHELLE

This conversation is surely not going to help with my sour expression, is it?

NOELLE takes a very delicate bite.

ROCHELLE

You and Father worry far too much. I can be left to my own devices.

NOELLE's cutlery clatters as she drops them suddenly.

NOELLE

(growing in intensity)

You were nearly stolen in the night by strange and awful men who would surely do unspeakable things to you had a servant- a *servant*, no less- not intervened. Pardon me for losing sleep over your welfare.

Silence. SABINE and JULIEN exchange concerned looks with one another, but refrain from speaking.

ROCHELLE

I find myself comforted by the presence of my guard, Mother. Truly, there is nothing to worry yourself over now.

NOELLE

You mustn't lie to your mother. Such lies are a sin.

ROCHELLE

Yes, they're a sin I haven't committed.

NOELLE continues eating. ROCHELLE stares at her empty plate.

ALEXANDRE (OFF STAGE)

...And wouldn't you know, I've been practicing my English, Father, and they say I'm improving steadily, with a *great big intellect*, as they put it-

Enter ALEXANDRE and EUGENE stage left. EUGENE stops short at the sight of NOELLE and ROCHELLE already eating (or not.)

EUGENE

I see you've both taken the liberty of starting this meal for us.

NOELLE stops eating.

NOELLE

Apologies, darling. I simply thought...

She glances at ROCHELLE, who refuses to look at anyone.

EUGENE

Rochelle, my daughter, why is your mother eating without you?

ROCHELLE

I'm not hungry, Father.

EUGENE

Hunger pains are a response to a preexisting starvation. A healthy young woman must eat. None of this nonsense.

NOELLE

I've tried to persuade her all morning-

EUGENE

Persuasion is unnecessary. As your father, I insist you eat.

EUGENE sits down at the head of the table, next to NOELLE. ALEXANDRE approaches the table cautiously- he goes to sit across from ROCHELLE, but hesitates and decides to sit next to EUGENE instead.

ROCHELLE glares at ALEXANDRE from across the table.

EUGENE

Sabine, please serve her a plate.

SABINE's face scrunches in bewilderment.

SABINE

But that is surely not my j/

EUGENE
(tersely)

/I insist.

SABINE hesitates, clenching her jaw, but she gives in and takes the plate from under ROCHELLE.

ROCHELLE

She does not have to do *anything* for me, I am perfectly capable on my own/

EUGENE

/That is enough out of you.

SABINE creates a plate with a variety of savory pastries and foods of all shades and places it in front of her. ROCHELLE turns to face her and SABINE prepares for a scolding-

ROCHELLE turns her gaze and looks down at the plate.

NOELLE

My son, have you been well?

ALEXANDRE

Yes, Mother. I was telling Father about my prowess in English.

EUGENE

Such skills will do you well, son. It's a shame you refuse to use them.

ALEXANDRE

I use them plenty, I assure you.

EUGENE

You certainly do not use them well.

ALEXANDRE takes a small pastry dejectedly.

EUGENE

No matter. We have much to think about in the coming days.

ALEXANDRE looks up.

EUGENE

I've received a formal invitation to the *Bal du Poinsettia* at Versailles. We must go/

ALEXANDRE slumps back down.
ROCHELLE straightens up.

EUGENE

/and we must do *well* for ourselves. I expect much of you both.

ALEXANDRE

Father, I hardly believe we could make headway in Versailles/

EUGENE

/And furthermore, I've come to a decision. Alexandre will not be attending as he is.

ALEXANDRE's shoulders relax.

EUGENE

You, Alexandre, will be attending this event as the Marquis de Criville.

Silence. ALEXANDRE goes slack-jawed.

NOELLE

Darling, were you not the one to insist he is unprepared for such a title?

EUGENE

He is plenty prepared. Perhaps he will apply himself given he has no other choice.

ALEXANDRE

Father, truly, are you sure this is wise?

EUGENE

No. (beat) Prove to me that I must be wrong.

ALEXANDRE sighs. EUGENE looks directly at him and puts a hand on ALEXANDRE's. ALEXANDRE flinches, but doesn't move.

EUGENE

My father had faith in my abilities. He believed I would do him proud. (beat) I proved him wrong. By God, I won't allow the same fate to befall me. I won't allow that fate to befall *you*. I know what it means to go hungry. I've seen what it's like to live without our blessings. And now, with the King going so far as to denounce the Parliament...

They stare into each other's eyes, father to son. Something unspoken is said.

EUGENE
(to Sabine and Julien)

Guards.

SABINE and JULIEN wake up a little bit.

EUGENE
I'm expecting your attendance as well. I trust you will enact necessary action to protect my children. Furthermore, I require both of you to use your prowess to assist them in their preparations for the ball.

SABINE
Sir, I hardly believe this is an appropriate/

EUGENE
/What is it to you what is appropriate?

SABINE
I don't believe I agreed to tutor your daughter.

EUGENE
Then I'll send you off to the *Guards du Corps* again. I'm sure Versailles would welcome you with open arms. I've heard General Cocteau loved you most, Monsieur Sabien.

SABINE's eyes widen and she goes silent.

EUGENE
Pardon me. *Sabine*.

SABINE steps back into her post.

EUGENE
Glad that's sorted. Sabine, would you be a dear and serve me a plate?

He holds out his saucer to SABINE. She grits her teeth and accepts it gingerly, placing food onto it in angrily-powered scoops. She places it in front of him and he nods, digging in.

EUGENE
Eat, my darling Rochelle. It would do you some good. Your guard served you well.

He gestures to SABINE with a fork.

EUGENE

It's a shame, Sabine. You would make a fine wife.

ROCHELLE looks back at SABINE, and
SABINE can't even meet her gaze.

An awkward silence lingers. EUGENE
scrapes at his plate indecently.

NOELLE

What shall we buy you, Rochelle? I'm afraid none of your clothes will suffice.

EUGENE

Preferably something simple.

NOELLE

(laughing)

Simple? This is Versailles, dear, not your hunting trips! (beat) Besides, should she not look her best for the Duke? If I recall, I wore my finest when I met you!

NOELLE giggles behind a napkin.

EUGENE

Surely you don't think I fell in love with you over a damned *dress*.

NOELLE

Well, it couldn't have been my personality!

They both laugh. Nobody else does. After
they come down, EUGENE finishes his
meal in silence, and wipes his chin with a
cloth.

EUGENE

Delicious as always. Sabine, be a dear and clear the table.

SABINE

I refuse.

EUGENE glares at her.

EUGENE

You must be quite brave to believe you're in any position to refuse.

SABINE

I know you can't send me back. You won't, because you need me. That's why you've kept the General and I hidden-

EUGENE stands to his feet, approaches SABINE, and pushes her down to her knees. She fights, but he wins. He leans down and whispers in her ear.

EUGENE

You want to bark like a hound, then crawl like one.

Everyone freezes. SABINE tries to get back up, but EUGENE shoves her down, enough to have her stay there. He straightens up his clothes and attitude.

EUGENE

Remember, I only want the best for my darling children. If you must call for me, I'll be in my quarters. Hopefully you will mind my words and *prepare* for such an event. And you-

He points to ROCHELLE.

EUGENE

Apologize to that blonde friend of yours. She did us quite the favor.

ROCHELLE nods. EUGENE comes over and kisses her on the forehead- she tolerates it. He hugs her. ALEXANDRE watches, forlorn.

EUGENE

(to NOELLE)

My dearest, find a servant to prepare my things for me.

NOELLE nods and exits. EUGENE gestures to SABINE to start cleaning. SABINE, on her hands and knees, struggles to rise. ALEXANDRE extends a hand, but she refuses it.

ALEXANDRE and ROCHELLE nod.
 SABINE slowly goes to pick up the leftover
 plates- when she gets to ROCHELLE's,
 EUGENE stops her.

EUGENE
 (at Rochelle)

And for the love of all that is holy, *eat*, before you end up like your guard here.

ROCHELLE flinches and pulls the plate
 back. EUGENE eyes her one more time and
 leaves.

Silence.

ALEXANDRE
 (looking down at his plate)

It's repulsive.

ROCHELLE

The scent of sugar, it simply-

She takes a second to gag. SABINE takes
 this moment to take the plate from under her
 again, but ROCHELLE pushes her hand
 away.

ROCHELLE
I will dispose of our plates. You may be excused.

SABINE
 Lady Rochelle, you-

ROCHELLE
I said you may be excused!

SABINE sighs and puts the plates in a neat
 stack near ROCHELLE.

ROCHELLE
 You've done enough work for today. I won't hold you any longer.

ROCHELLE looks at her a little softer.
 SABINE backs off and exits.

ROCHELLE's attention shifts to
ALEXANDRE, who stares at the chicken in
the center of the table.

ROCHELLE

Brother, you don't seem well...

She trails off and looks at it, too. It's the
only thing worth stomaching.

The siblings exchange glances, and then--

ROCHELLE

(to herself, realization)

You feel it, Alexandre...

ROCHELLE and ALEXANDRE lunge over
the table and rip the chicken apart with their
hands, shoveling the meat into their mouths
sloppily. It's grotesque in a funny way.

ALEXANDRE

(through a mouthful of food)

It's divine.

ROCHELLE

It should be fresher.

ALEXANDRE

We could hunt one. *I* could hunt one. Find its very heartbeat and crush it in my hands.

ROCHELLE

And then?

ALEXANDRE licks a chicken bone and
throws it down on the table.

ALEXANDRE

We'd feast for *hours*. There wouldn't be a thing left to crave.

ROCHELLE

There *is* something I crave more than anything, dear brother. (beat) You know of it, don't
you?

They stare at the absolute carnage left
beneath them.

ALEXANDRE pauses. He definitely knows
what ROCHELLE is talking about. He
shovels one last fistful of meat into his
mouth.

ALEXANDRE
(chewing)

This can be enough for us for now, can't it?

SCENE EIGHT.

On stage, there's a table with two drinks. On stage,
MARIE enters alongside ELIAS. They sit on either side
of the table, two diplomats.

ELIAS

Clara, as it stands, is without much of a future. Perhaps the union of both Clara and your
bright young man Adrien will do them both some good.

MARIE

I see...

ELIAS

So out with it then- let's agree on it.

ELIAS outstretches his hand. It's calloused
and stained red. MARIE recoils.

ELIAS

What gives you pause, Madame?

MARIE stares at his hand.

MARIE

Forgive me, Monsieur Cocteau, but...

She can't finish the sentence. ELIAS waits
patiently.

MARIE

Surely you know of your family's reputation, do you not?

ELIAS sighs.

ELIAS

I'm well aware of what most of society thinks of me.

MARIE

Then you must know why I have to decline your offer.

ELIAS

Madame, if you will- it may be unsightly, but there is no shame in the blade of justice.

MARIE

No, sir...

She turns away from him.

MARIE

...But there is shame in the mess it leaves behind. I cannot allow Adrien to be sullied by such notions.

ELIAS looks dejected, but tries to hide it.

ELIAS

Madame, I made my own decision years ago. So did my father before me. (beat) My sister Clara did not make any such decision. I refuse to watch her life be squandered on the sins of her kin.

MARIE sighs loudly. It replaces a 'no.'

ELIAS

(pleading)

All this hesitation- is it not an unjust punishment against an innocent child, Madame? Even if I have dirtied my hands, dear Clara has done no such thing. Surely there is nothing for her to prove.

MARIE

I have nothing to offer her. (beat) Such is the world we live in, Monsieur.

ELIAS

Well, what am I to do?

MARIE opens her mouth to say something,
but-

TOMAS
(barging in)

Madame, pardon the interruption, but Lady Criville and her guard have arrived.

MARIE stands up, shocked.

MARIE

Rochelle is here?

MARIE turns to ELIAS. He nods.

ELIAS

I will wait.

Without any hesitation, MARIE exits with TOMAS.

The screen lights up- behind it, RENO and JEAN-CLAUDE walk together, RENO leaning on JEAN-CLAUDE.

ELIAS puts his head in his hands. After a few moments, SABINE enters- awkwardly.

SABINE

Pardon me.

ELIAS looks up, expecting her to leave. She doesn't.

ELIAS

Yes, pardon you.

SABINE

I've been sent to retrieve you. Countess Marie requests your leave.

ELIAS sighs.

ELIAS

She told me to wait here.

SABINE shrugs.

SABINE

Women are fickle.

ELIAS laughs.

ELIAS

Are you not a woman?

SABINE

I can acknowledge my own misgivings.

They both laugh together like two people
that have never laughed before.

ELIAS

Who may you be?

SABINE

Sabine, guard of Lady Rochelle de Criville.

ELIAS' eyes widen in recognition.

ELIAS

Oh, that must be who I've heard so much about! How interesting!

SABINE

You've heard of me?

ELIAS

Sure I have. I'm not so far, you know. (beat) I would introduce myself, but I am sure Lady Rochelle has made mention of me.

SABINE

She hasn't.

ELIAS extends a hand to SABINE. She sees
the same blood-red stain and takes his hand
confidently.

ELIAS

Well then, Lady Sabine, I am Elias de Cocteau, Executioner of Orleans.

SABINE suddenly freezes. ELIAS looks at
her curiously.

ELIAS

Don't let it frighten you. Those who walk with death come in peace.

He smiles.

Lights down. ELIAS and SABINE switch places with RENO and JEAN-CLAUDE. RENO looks worse for wear with a new scar on his eye, and hooks an arm around JEAN-CLAUDE, who keeps a diligent eye on him.

JEAN-CLAUDE

You truly should not turn your cheek to such a valued ally over such a simple disagreement.

RENO

It is not *simple*, Jean-Claude.

JEAN-CLAUDE

He merely asked for your compromise.

RENO

Compromise is a gentler word for defeat, you fool. History is in the making and you tear me from it for the sake of your own!

JEAN-CLAUDE

You think this is my fault? You could hardly stand, you imbecile!

RENO

I can handle myself!

JEAN-CLAUDE lets go and RENO stumbles. He fumbles and falls to the floor.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Then my time here is through.

RENO

Don't you dare.

RENO struggles to rise to his feet, and eventually, JEAN-CLAUDE gives in and helps. He sits RENO down at the table, but doesn't sit down himself.

JEAN-CLAUDE

While you wasted time, I heard De Calonne wants to call an assembly after the *Bal du Poinsettia*. Our boys aren't thrilled.

RENO

What does that have to do with us?

JEAN-CLAUDE

Surely noble representatives will attend, won't they? Perhaps we could sway their resolve in court.

RENO pauses.

RENO

You aren't suggesting I do so, are you?

JEAN-CLAUDE

Look at the state of you. (beat) I'm suggesting I go instead.

RENO slams a fist onto the table.

RENO

You damn bastard.

JEAN-CLAUDE

If I recall, you left the damn Criville bitch instead of killing her like you should have. Why should I trust you to do well now?

RENO

I was attacked, you fool! Besides, *you* were responsible for keeping that Criville boy still!

JEAN-CLAUDE

Perhaps the plan itself was flawed. (beat) What would your father say?

This was enough to infuriate RENO, who lunges himself at JEAN-CLAUDE. They fight dirty and messy, and although JEAN-CLAUDE has the advantage, RENO manages to wrestle him to the ground.

RENO holds a gun to JEAN-CLAUDE's temple. He does his best to look unbothered, despite the threat.

RENO

You listen to me- what should stop me from shooting you now?

JEAN-CLAUDE smiles weakly.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Your father cannot save you. You could not save your father. Now you have me. Why not listen to my word?

RENO

Your word means nothing if you don't act. That boy will be Marquis and make you look like a damned fool. Kill him now and deny the problem.

JEAN-CLAUDE

What, you want to invade their home? You have some sort of death wish to think that should work. (beat) Besides, all revolutionaries must have funding. To waste a perfectly good opportunity is proof you're unfit to hold discussions with these noble representatives. Perhaps that is why your father was denied by the King.

RENO drags JEAN-CLAUDE in closer.

RENO

Don't speak of my father like that. He saved you from a lifetime of servitude.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Could you consider this sort of life a better alternative?

Muffled talking and footsteps approach.
RENO heaves and lets JEAN-CLAUDE go.
JEAN-CLAUDE struggles to his feet, but stands, while RENO catches his breath.
JEAN-CLAUDE watches for a moment.

JEAN-CLAUDE resolutely helps RENO back up. They swap places once again with ELIAS and SABINE.

SABINE

I understand it is uncouth of me to suggest it, but I fear for the wellbeing of me and my compatriot. As executioner, it could be easy to-

ELIAS

What strange behavior have they exhibited?

SABINE leans in.

SABINE

It's an unspeakable evil. Something that lurks within that Criville bloodline, I'm sure of it.

ELIAS laughs.

ELIAS

Trust me, Madame, I know them well. The Crivilles were good friends to my father.

SABINE

But/

ELIAS

/Indeed, the Marquis is...

He trails off.

ELIAS

Despite his hardened exterior, he....he was quite generous after my father's passing. I would be remiss to act against him now. (beat) Unfortunately, I cannot help you with your request. It might do you well to take this up with Parlement.

ELIAS tries to leave. SABINE stops him.

SABINE

If you must know, I am a woman of pride. I do not request favors and I certainly do not *beg*, but... I cannot stay here any longer, sir, he threatens my wellbeing, and I need *you* to rid me of their presence-

ELIAS

On what basis?

SABINE pauses, weighing her options.

SABINE

(whispering)

If I told you I could bring you to your father, would you believe me?

ELIAS can't bring himself to speak. She brings him in closer by the shoulders like a twisted waltz. ELIAS, lost in thought, lets her.

SABINE

(whispering)

He and I deserted our regiment in Versailles some years ago.

I have reason to suspect the Marquis is well aware of this and is extorting both my skills and his friendship to benefit his own. He's to have me return to Versailles knowing very well that it would spell my doom.

She leans in even closer, some sort of a threat.

SABINE

And now if I deigned to speak a word of this to Parlement, no doubt we'd all be thrown into the Bastille and sliced at the neck.

ELIAS

Why should I believe you?

SABINE

Your father requests his sons call him Edgar, after his great-grandfather who died during the Fronde. Your little sister is named Clara after your aunt, who you were tutored by as a child and often stayed with, but she went mad and died. He kept a gold necklace in his leftmost pocket, and he wrote letters to Clara frequently when he had the chance/

ELIAS

/And never wrote to me.

SABINE

I wasn't going to say it.

ELIAS sighs.

SABINE

If I could be...*free*... of the Marquis, I would gladly take you to him.

ELIAS

I could have you killed for even suggesting such a thing.

SABINE

I know.

They stare at each other.

ELIAS

You've killed before. I can see it.

He leans in closer to her, examines her face.

ELIAS

Symmetrical sides.

He leans her head to the side, examines her neck.

ELIAS

The sinew in your neck is strong. It would take great force to slice through it. You would give me quite a hard time. (beat) Surely, you know this, don't you?

SABINE recoils, disgusted.

SABINE

Will you kill the damn man or not?

ELIAS lets go of her.

ELIAS

I will agree to help you escape, but I make no promises of what may come to the Marquis.

SABINE

What are you afraid of?

ELIAS

I should ask you the same thing. (beat) As I'm sure you agree, it isn't about fear. It's about justice. Despite my position, I take no pride in killing others.

SABINE laughs dryly.

SABINE

Of course not. You just take pride in the cleanliness of their disassembly.

ELIAS frowns.

ELIAS

We do not have to resort to baser instincts to resolve this problem. A mere distraction would suffice.

SABINE

...How can I know he won't come back for me? He knows of what I've done.

ELIAS

If you should bring me to my father, I will personally see to it. (beat) I may be... publically scorned, but I certainly do not lack resources.

SABINE

I need assurance that I and your father will be safe from him.

ELIAS sighs.

ELIAS

If it comes down to it, I shall do what I must.

SABINE

Your kindness will not be wasted. I'll do my best to persuade Lady Rochelle to make arrangements for your visit.

ELIAS laughs.

ELIAS

You think too highly of me. (beat) It's unlikely they would invite me over any time soon.

SABINE thinks for a while, then-

SABINE

Have you heard of the *Bal du Poinsettia*?

Lights down on main stage. Behind the screen, RENO and JEAN-CLAUDE 's silhouettes are facing each other, RENO on ELIAS' side, JEAN-CLAUDE on SABINE's.

JEAN-CLAUDE

You want to kill Rochelle Criville at the *Bal du Poinsettia*?

RENO

Versailles is falling. If we manage to convince those in court that none of them are safe... think of the crowd that would flood into our assembly. *Finally* there will be consequence to an action- and the Second Estate will crumble under the weight of their greed.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Have you truly thought this through?

RENO pauses.

RENO

I have thought about this since the day I was denied my rightful title. My father was a good man who deserved to die in his rightful home, but he suffocated in a small bed he built himself, praying aimlessly to a deaf God. If I don't do this now, there is no justice, for him and for the legacy he left behind. (beat) You know you and I owe him this statement.

JEAN-CLAUDE sighs, but doesn't refute.

JEAN-CLAUDE

...What makes you think the Crivilles will be there?

RENO

All nobles are the same. (beat) If there's something to crave, they'll gorge themselves sick on it, until there's nothing left but bones.

Silence.

RENO

You understand, my friend. You and I will usher in the reign of the people.

RENO extends a hand. The lights go up dimly on stage to reveal SABINE extending a hand.

Pause. At the same time, ELIAS and JEAN-CLAUDE accept and shake the hands offered to them.

SABINE/RENO

So it shall be.

SABINE and ELIAS exit stage left, RENO and JEAN-CLAUDE exit stage right.

SCENE NINE.

Behind the screen. ROCHELLE and SABINE walk toward stage left, SABINE leading ROCHELLE.

ROCHELLE

I would like to thank you.

SABINE doesn't reply.

ROCHELLE

Nothing to say?

SABINE

I'm letting you finish.

ROCHELLE sighs.

ROCHELLE

Marie agreed to remaining impartial to my potential betrothal. She said your words gave her perspective. I must give you my thanks for your efforts.

SABINE and ROCHELLE walk in awkward silence for a moment, then-

ROCHELLE

I... If I may, I require your help.

SABINE

Do I truly have a choice in the matter?

SABINE stops and turns to face ROCHELLE.

ROCHELLE

I could retract my thanks.

SABINE

What is it you want?

ROCHELLE

My father invited the Duke to come stay in a few days. I need you to promise that, should he make any... *uncouth*... advances, you will interfere. (beat) Lord knows nobody else would.

SABINE freezes up. They stare at each other, air thick with anticipation.

ROCHELLE

Please.

Beat.

SABINE

As you wish. It is only my duty to protect you, Lady Rochelle.

ROCHELLE sighs. SABINE continues walking. Lights dim as they walk off stage from behind the screen.

SCENE TEN.

The Criville's living room. Two chaises and a piano. SABINE and JULIEN stand on opposite sides of the room, while EUGENE and ALEXANDRE sit on one chaise, with NOELLE and THE DUKE on the other.

ROCHELLE stands by the piano. A MUSICIAN sits, anticipating. ROCHELLE passes him a look and she nods. ROCHELLE sings *À la claire fontaine*.

Once she's finished, everyone politely claps. ROCHELLE smiles and curtsseys.

NOELLE

Lovely, darling, just lovely. She's learned well, hasn't she, Monsieur le Duc?

THE DUKE smiles.

THE DUKE

I suppose so.

ROCHELLE's smile fades.

EUGENE

It was kind of you to come this evening, Monsieur.

THE DUKE

Oh, it's nothing. The pleasure of seeing your darling girl is enough to satisfy a man for life. Much more fulfilling than the mess out in Paris, I tell you.

They all, minus ROCHELLE, ALEXANDRE, and the guards, laugh.

EUGENE

You are attending the ball at Versailles, right, Monsieur?

THE DUKE

Yes, yes, of course.

EUGENE

My daughter Rochelle/

NOELLE

/Say, is it true that the Queen herself considers you a close friend?

EUGENE bites his tongue. THE DUKE
pretends to be humble.

THE DUKE

Oh, I wouldn't say a close friend...Her Majesty is quite benevolent. She may only be taking pity on an old man.

NOELLE

What is there to pity? You are as lively as ever! And handsome, if I say so myself.

She places a gentle hand on his thigh. He
preens under her attention. It's all very
awkward.

THE DUKE

Such kind words coming from such a beautiful woman... I can hardly breathe!

They both laugh. EUGENE doesn't.

NOELLE

Why, Rochelle, if you had to guess, how old do you think Monsieur le Duc is?

ROCHELLE straightens up, putting on her
best fake smile.

ROCHELLE

Surely it would be rude to guess, no?

THE DUKE

I would take no offense from your answer.

ROCHELLE waits a moment, then-

ROCHELLE

You must be fifty-five.

THE DUKE and NOELLE look at each
other for a moment and laugh again.

THE DUKE

You charmer!

They laugh more. EUGENE sighs and pinches his temple. THE DUKE pulls ROCHELLE down to his level and whispers in her ear.

THE DUKE

(whispering)

If you must know, I'm sixty-six, but that should not stop me.

ROCHELLE shudders in disgust, while THE DUKE laughs and wheezes. NOELLE laughs fake gleefully.

EUGENE

Monsieur le Duc, if it excites you, Rochelle would be honored to accompany you to the *Bal du Poinsettia*.

THE DUKE smiles.

THE DUKE

Is this true, young lady? Am I to present you to court as my wife?

ROCHELLE looks down at him, where he's taken her hand in his. She looks to SABINE in fear- EUGENE catches on and stares at SABINE. Faltering, SABINE turns away.

ROCHELLE

Monsieur le Duc, if I may-

Spotlight on them. He stands to meet her gaze, and slides his hand further up her arm. ROCHELLE squirms under his touch.

ROCHELLE

I must inform you that I...

EUGENE

Rochelle. Mind your words.

ROCHELLE hyperventilates as all eyes are on her. THE DUKE watches her falter.

THE DUKE

I would be a very lucky man, my darling. Don't fret.

He puts a hand on her cheek.

THE DUKE

To think someone as frail as I could deprive the world of such a face. It would be a man's pride and joy to call you his own.

He leans in to ROCHELLE, who in an instant, pulls away.

ROCHELLE

I refuse your hand, Monsieur.

THE DUKE's face falls. NOELLE rises to approach him.

NOELLE

Monsieur, she truly doesn't know what she means, the poor girl has been out of sorts-

THE DUKE
(flatly)

I understand.

ROCHELLE turns to face THE DUKE.
There's tears welling in his eyes.

NOELLE

Please, Monsieur, if you will, let me speak some sense into her.

NOELLE reaches to THE DUKE but he denies it.

THE DUKE

No matter.

He clears his throat. He's trying not to cry.

THE DUKE

It's late, is it not? The moon is bright. I must take my leave at once.

NOELLE falls all over herself to try and stop THE DUKE from leaving, to no avail. He slams the door behind him.

Silence. NOELLE fixes herself up. EUGENE sits forward and puts his head in his hands.

Silence.

EUGENE
(quietly)

Do you know what you've done?

ROCHELLE

I couldn't bear it any longer!

EUGENE rises and stands in front of ROCHELLE, towering over her.

EUGENE

It is no concern of mine what you cannot handle! For once, it would suffice for you to think of *us* before you make decisions!

ROCHELLE bursts into sobs.

EUGENE

You selfish creature, born of the Devil, I say- damning your family to Hell for the sake of your childish whims! You will live to see us fall, is that what satisfies you?

She cries more. EUGENE leaves. In a fit of rage, ROCHELLE turns to SABINE.

ROCHELLE
(through tears)

You were supposed to protect me! Why have you gone silent when I most needed your voice?

NOELLE puts her hands on ROCHELLE's cheeks and turns her head toward her.

NOELLE
(whisper)

These are the sacrifices we must make, do you understand? You and I mustn't falter now.

NOELLE wipes a tear from ROCHELLE's cheek. ROCHELLE shrugs her off and runs off stage.

Silence. Then-

ALEXANDRE

I will retrieve her, Mother.

NOELLE

My son, wait-

He exits. SABINE bites her lip, and after deliberation, exits. JULIEN follows not long after.

SCENE ELEVEN.

Somewhere in the garden. SABINE enters stage left.

SABINE

Lady Rochelle?

ROCHELLE (OFF STAGE)

Leave me be!

SABINE

You know I mustn't.

ROCHELLE

Leave!

SABINE sighs, hesitates- and exits.

ALEXANDRE enters stage right, holding something underneath his coat.

He stops in front of the screen, where the lights go up to reveal ROCHELLE, sitting in disarray.

ALEXANDRE
Rochelle, come out.

ROCHELLE
You mustn't see me like this.

ALEXANDRE
Come out.

ROCHELLE
No!

ALEXANDRE walks up to the screen.
ROCHELLE doesn't move. ALEXANDRE
takes one more look around and goes behind
the screen.

ALEXANDRE
I brought this for us.

He holds up ELIAS' dog by its scruff.
ROCHELLE gasps.

ROCHELLE
Surely that isn't-

ALEXANDRE
Our neighbor's damned dog has caused us enough strife, yes? Let us not deny ourselves
anymore, dear sister.

ROCHELLE shoves him.

ROCHELLE
I mustn't!

ALEXANDRE
Nobody will know.

Silence. SABINE and JULIEN enter stage
left- but quickly hide and watch as they
realize they're intruding.

ALEXANDRE
Has the beast not eaten you alive as it has eaten me so?

ROCHELLE nods.

ROCHELLE

It has. It wants to. It must be some divine punishment for what I had done. A beast to create another. (beat) Do you think that man I foolishly loved has passed? Have I taken a man's life? And to think, such a curse has befallen you... have I truly doomed us all?

ALEXANDRE takes her hands in his.

ALEXANDRE

That beast took a man's life along with ours. It's the fault of no one. It simply means we are of the stronger kind who may carry such a burden and live.

ROCHELLE takes the dog. She cradles it.

ROCHELLE

Its heart is beating so fast...

ALEXANDRE

You hear it as well?

She nods.

ALEXANDRE

What a marvelous thing. The senses of a beast bring such beauty. Perhaps we've approached this wrong. This could be a blessing! A reminder from God that such hunger is the result of having the notion to satiate it! If we must sacrifice our happiness... should we not feel as much of it as we can muster first? (beat) If life is what starves us so, let us revel in death.

ROCHELLE laugh-cries, and
ALEXANDRE grabs the dog by the head.

ALEXANDRE

Satiate the beast, my dear sister. Then we shall face God's light once more.

They rip it apart from both ends-
ALEXANDRE takes a knife and slices it
down the middle. Its guts fall to the floor.
They lean down and eat it. Once they're
done, they pour the blood into their mouths,
like wine. JULIEN and SABINE watch on
in horror. As ALEXANDRE and
ROCHELLE feast, the lights dim to a close.

ACT TWO- VÉRITÉ

SCENE ONE.

Blank stage. A crowd singing *Ça Ira* plays softly in the background.

YOUNG JULIEN and YOUNG SABINE run in stage left in plainclothes. SABINE has short hair and a masculine appearance. They're both heaving with exhaustion. The music slowly fades away.

YOUNG SABINE

Are you sure this is right?

YOUNG JULIEN

I can't move anymore. I'm practically boiling alive.

He lies on the floor splayed out. YOUNG SABINE sits hesitantly beside him.

YOUNG SABINE

What if they find us? They'll kill us!

YOUNG JULIEN

I might be doomed.

YOUNG SABINE

You'll be fine. You're their darling boy.

YOUNG JULIEN

I am not.

YOUNG SABINE

Are too.

YOUNG JULIEN

...You think so?

YOUNG SABINE sighs and curls up.

YOUNG SABINE

I *know* so.

YOUNG JULIEN sits up and reaches out to comfort YOUNG SABINE, but she shies away. YOUNG JULIEN lies back down.

YOUNG JULIEN

Go back to drills if you want, but this is one of the last times we can run from our duty without getting shot. I say we make it count.

Silence. Then-

YOUNG JULIEN

Do you think the Queen is how they say she is? Do you think she's nice?

YOUNG SABINE

I hardly doubt she'll be talking to us long enough to find out.

YOUNG JULIEN

Does that bother you?

She considers.

YOUNG SABINE

No. (beat) It doesn't matter anyways.

YOUNG JULIEN

I think it does. All people deserve respect.

YOUNG SABINE laughs.

YOUNG SABINE

What kind of soldier are you? How can you expect to respect others when you're ordered to shoot them in the face?

She laughs some more.

YOUNG SABINE

They're stupid to send you off to Versailles when this is how you think.

YOUNG JULIEN

I suppose so.

He pauses a second, then realizes-

YOUNG JULIEN

What do you mean?

YOUNG SABINE

You can't be so stupid. (beat) They're sending you to Versailles to join the *Guards du Corps*. I heard them talking about you.

YOUNG JULIEN sucks in a breath.

YOUNG JULIEN

(shakily)

So they are...

YOUNG SABINE

You make it sound like a punishment.

YOUNG JULIEN sits back up to face
YOUNG SABINE. They're having some
kind of unspoken conversation.

YOUNG JULIEN

It is a punishment.

YOUNG SABINE

You're pathetic.

YOUNG JULIEN stands up. YOUNG
SABINE rises to meet him.

YOUNG JULIEN

Pathetic? (beat) If I'm pathetic, so be it! I never wanted to fight!

YOUNG SABINE

You certainly do it well for a pacifist!

YOUNG JULIEN

I wish I didn't! You are so eager and willing to kill and injure but I am not of that kind!
(beat) You might find peace in war, but I find nothing in it at all.

YOUNG JULIEN takes a moment to collect
himself.

YOUNG JULIEN

If anything, I... find it boring.

YOUNG SABINE laughs.

YOUNG SABINE

Of course you do. Look at you.

She gestures to his body.

YOUNG SABINE

You overpower these men tenfold every single day, and when you fall into what they run for, it bores you? When you are gifted the idea of a golden roof over your head and feasts to gorge yourself on, it disgusts you? You don't deserve it! You don't deserve it at all!

YOUNG JULIEN

We *all* deserve comfort.

YOUNG SABINE

You deserve what you *earn*. If it were up to me, I would choose anyone else here to go to Versailles. It isn't worth wasting a blessing on someone who turns a blind eye to the God who gave it to them.

YOUNG JULIEN

It isn't about that.

YOUNG SABINE

Then what is it?

Silence. YOUNG JULIEN turns his head.

YOUNG SABINE

Show me you deserve it.

YOUNG JULIEN

What?

YOUNG SABINE

Fight me. Prove to me you deserve it over anyone else.

YOUNG JULIEN hesitates.

YOUNG JULIEN

I don't want to hurt you.

YOUNG SABINE

Hurt me. I don't care. (beat) Maybe then, it won't bore you.

They prepare to spar- YOUNG SABINE throws the first jab. It's clear YOUNG JULIEN is pulling his punches and dodging. This infuriates YOUNG SABINE, who hits harder every time she manages to make contact.

YOUNG SABINE

Come on! Hit me! Do something!

She lunges at him full-force. He takes the punch and falters- that's enough for her to gain the advantage. The lights dim around them as the fight turns into a one-sided beating against YOUNG JULIEN.

YOUNG SABINE

Fight back! Hit me!

YOUNG JULIEN

No-

He's hit hard enough to fall to the floor. CRACK- he falls on his arm and it breaks. He can't move it. He winces in pain.

YOUNG JULIEN

Sabien, wait, I-

YOUNG SABINE doesn't listen. She continues to beat him down as the lights get dimmer and dimmer...

YOUNG SABINE

(through sustained effort)

I don't want your fucking pity! You can't even show me enough respect to fight me fairly!

Blackout.

YOUNG SABINE

It should have been me, Julien! It should have been *me*, goddammit! All this time, I wade in your shadow, just to be sent to the *barracks* and live in squalor- I don't deserve this!

While SABINE kicks JULIEN while he's down in the dark, the screen lights up to reveal ROCHELLE and ALEXANDRE finishing the remains of the dog before hugging and comforting each other.

EUGENE (AS A GENERAL) (O.S.)

Julien! Sabien!

Lights up- blinding. SABINE stops dead. JULIEN lies injured on the floor.

EUGENE (AS A GENERAL) (O.S.)

Julien!

SABINE looms over him, then looks back before bolting off stage.

SCENE TWO.

There's a vanity on stage right and a chaise on stage left. ROCHELLE and ALEXANDRE leave from behind the screen bloodied- ALEXANDRE goes to sit on the chaise and ROCHELLE runs to her vanity, covering the blood down her front.

Lights down on ALEXANDRE. She takes a deep breath in before sitting at her vanity, examining all the blood on her face and chest. She cries to herself as she wipes her makeup off, and slowly undresses down to her undergarments. She tries to wash the blood off, but it won't come out.

Lights down on ROCHELLE. ALEXANDRE lounges and stares at the blood on his hands, and quickly licks his hand clean. JULIEN bursts in suddenly- ALEXANDRE jumps.

JULIEN

Your father is looking for you.

ALEXANDRE

Did you forget the rule?

JULIEN stops and looks at ALEXANDRE,
who shoots him a 'get-out' look.

JULIEN

Apologies, Monsieur.

JULIEN catches himself-

JULIEN

Alexandre.

JULIEN exits. ALEXANDRE sighs and
takes a deep breath before collapsing onto
the chaise.

SCENE THREE.

In the garden. ROCHELLE sits on a bench by herself.
She tries to wipe something off of her hands that we can't
see.

SABINE enters, and approaches her from
behind.

SABINE

Lady Rochelle.

ROCHELLE jumps.

ROCHELLE

Don't scare me so!

SABINE doesn't acknowledge it.

ROCHELLE

What? You have no sarcastic remark for me?

SABINE

There isn't time for that. Your father insisted I brief you on what you're to do at the *Bal du Poinsettia*.

ROCHELLE

I'm still to attend?

SABINE sighs.

SABINE

It comes as a surprise to both of us. Now up with you.

ROCHELLE

Who are you to give me orders? (beat) I do not need your help. Go spend some time with your guard friend/

SABINE

/Please, Lady Rochelle. Cooperate.

ROCHELLE ignores her.

SABINE

I understand that you are upset with me, but as I said, I am no stranger to the lengths men will go to satisfy themselves. Your father is no exception. He made it very clear where I stand. One more word out of turn spells certain death. Because of this, I could not afford speaking on your behalf. (beat) Although, it seems to me you did just fine on your own.

ROCHELLE faces her.

ROCHELLE

You promised.

SABINE

I know.

Silence.

ROCHELLE

He can be so cruel, can't he?

SABINE

As most men are.

The SCREEN lights up- EUGENE stands with his hands behind his back. SABINE stands back up and extends a hand.

SABINE

Your father is watching. Let's pretend we care.

ROCHELLE reluctantly accepts. They get into gavotte position- SABINE spins ROCHELLE to face her.

SABINE

Now, when the gavotte begins, men will approach you here-

SABINE puts a hand on ROCHELLE's waist.

SABINE

And they will follow your lead.

ROCHELLE

And how do you know so much of this?

SABINE

I guarded our Majesty. I've attended many formal events.

ROCHELLE

I didn't assume your position required you to dance.

SABINE sighs.

SABINE

There are plenty of things about me you haven't assumed.

They start to dance- slowly. ROCHELLE effortlessly takes the lead.

SABINE

Perfect form. You should be training me. Why am I expected to teach you?

ROCHELLE sighs with another spin.

ROCHELLE

You know very well that all he wants us to do is keep each other occupied.

They dance more in silence. ROCHELLE leans in close. They're awkward with unspoken tension.

SABINE

Lady Rochelle, I...

She trails off. ROCHELLE listens.

ROCHELLE

Yes?

SABINE

I apologize for not defending you. I will do so from now on.

ROCHELLE and SABINE dance in silence
for a while, then-

ROCHELLE

It doesn't matter now. I'm *ruined*. (beat) I'm going to flaunt myself in court as a beast in sheep's clothing.

SABINE

You can't believe that there's no other men willing to court you. It's foolish.

ROCHELLE

It's not about courting a man. It's about courting the *right* man.

SABINE

And the Duke is the right man for you? An old man who longs to steal the soul of a young, beautiful woman in her prime?

ROCHELLE

You think I'm beautiful?

SABINE looks away awkwardly.

SABINE

I'm not blind, Madame.

ROCHELLE smiles to herself with
melancholy. SABINE clears her throat.

SABINE

Well, what are we to do now?

They dance some more. SABINE starts to
see ROCHELLE lose the lead.

SABINE

You're losing the rhythm. One, two, three...

SABINE tries to take control- ROCHELLE slips and nearly falls. SABINE catches her. They stare at each other for just a moment-

SABINE

I told you I would protect you.

SABINE helps her back up by the hands. ROCHELLE doesn't let go for a moment, but catches herself and dusts her skirt off.

ROCHELLE

...Thank you.

SABINE

Of course, Lady Rochelle.

ROCHELLE sits back down on the bench. SABINE hesitantly sits next to her.

SABINE

If you must know...

She leans in close.

SABINE
(quietly)

I'm scared as well.

ROCHELLE laughs dryly.

ROCHELLE

What could you possibly have to fear?

SABINE

If I was an excellent soldier, why do you think I ended up here?

ROCHELLE stops.

SABINE

In Versailles, if my old regiment were to see me... they will certainly not be fond of my return, Rochelle.

ROCHELLE

What have they got to do with it? You chose to leave, did you not?

SABINE doesn't answer.

ROCHELLE

Well now you must tell me, Sabine. What have you done?

She leans in closer to SABINE. SABINE turns and they're face-to-face- close enough to touch. Neither moves or makes a sound.

ALEXANDRE (O.S.)

Certainly, sir, if we saw it, it'd be gone by now.

SABINE and ROCHELLE jump away from each other abruptly. Enter ALEXANDRE and ELIAS, with JULIEN trailing not far behind. ALEXANDRE catches a glimpse of ROCHELLE and stops.

ALEXANDRE

Rochelle, my darling sister, Monsieur Cocteau is here regarding his *precious little dog*. Have you happened to see it around here?

All four of them- ROCHELLE, ALEXANDRE, SABINE and JULIEN- freeze up. ROCHELLE puts on her best 'everything-is-fine' face.

ROCHELLE

Oh- I cannot say I have, Monsieur, my apologies.

ELIAS looks suspiciously at SABINE, who doesn't react.

ELIAS

That's a shame. I appreciate your time, Monsieur Alexandre.

ALEXANDRE

Yes, very well. Rochelle, Father wants to see us inside, so...

ALEXANDRE moves closer to
ROCHELLE.

ALEXANDRE

Monsieur, my guard Julien will show you off- as you might know, there's much to attend to before our departure, according to my father. All sorts of...

He looks at ROCHELLE. She gives him
nothing.

ALEXANDRE

Ballgowns and... and titles, and such.

ELIAS

...Are you talking about the *Bal du Poinsettia*?

ALEXANDRE smiles.

ALEXANDRE

Why, yes I am. Should I see you there?

ELIAS looks at SABINE, who gives him a
'say-it-now' look.

ELIAS

Yes! My lady Rochelle, if it would please you, I would like to share a dance with you.

ROCHELLE freezes.

ROCHELLE

Oh... Monsieur, that's very kind, but/

ELIAS

/Please, don't misunderstand, it's nothing more than a display of our families' strong union. It would be my honor.

ROCHELLE looks at him hesitantly.

SABINE

It could do you well, Lady Rochelle. He is a well-respected man in Paris.

SABINE leans in.

SABINE

(whispering to Rochelle)

And he could certainly scare off even the most persistent of Dukes.

ROCHELLE smiles.

ROCHELLE

I will share a dance with you, Monsieur, if that pleases you so.

ELIAS

It shall.

Awkward, painful silence.

ALEXANDRE

Well, then, let's all be off, the carriages can't wait much longer, and it is already late/

SABINE

/Oh, Monsieur de Cocteau, about your dog...

Everyone turns to look at SABINE.

SABINE

/Before you leave, we can look for it together in the gardens, simply to be truly sure it isn't here.

ALEXANDRE

...But it isn't. You told us so.

SABINE

I'd like to be sure. It would do us well to be absolutely positive it isn't hiding somewhere around here.

ELIAS

I agree, if it wouldn't be a pain.

ALEXANDRE thinks.

ALEXANDRE

Alright. I understand. Julien, would you wait for them and escort him once they finish their search?

ROCHELLE

But *brother!*

ALEXANDRE

Father wants us in the carriage sooner than later. Would you like to face his wrath again?

ROCHELLE bites her lip.

ROCHELLE

Alright.

ROCHELLE takes one last look at SABINE,
who is readying ELIAS to look for his dog.

ROCHELLE

Farewell, Monsieur de Cocteau. I'll see you there.

ELIAS

See you then, Lady Criville.

ALEXANDRE and ROCHELLE exit.
JULIEN watches from afar as SABINE pulls
ELIAS stage right and whispers-

SABINE

Excellent. That'll leave her in the perfect position if you play your cards right.

ELIAS

I hope so. There's always a chance she'll still decline.

SABINE

She won't. I'll make sure of it.

ELIAS

And if Lord Alexandre intervenes?

SABINE looks over at JULIEN, then pulls
JULIEN aside with ELIAS. They stand in a
huddle.

SABINE

Julien, I'll offer you one last time- do you want to leave this place?

JULIEN looks at ELIAS, and then back at
SABINE.

JULIEN

What is this?

SABINE

I'll leave without you if you don't give me your word this instant.

JULIEN thinks.

SABINE

Think of what we saw. Think of how little you mean to them. Think of what lead you to this point in the first place. Do you want to do this again? Play the fool after someone else's betrayal? Don't be pathetic.

JULIEN sighs. He's lost in thought.

JULIEN

...What do you want me to do?

SABINE leans in close.

SABINE

Partners will be chosen for the group dances at 8 pm sharp. Once Elias provides the signal by dancing with Lady Rochelle, that is when you and I will leave through the leftmost wing of the Palace. All other exits will be closed and closely guarded. Until then, you *must* protect Alexandre at all costs. Do not let him out of your sight. One wrong move spells our certain death. Understood?

SCENE FOUR.

Versailles- everything is bigger and bolder. A crowd of elaborately dressed patrons mingle with each other. MARIE talks to THE DUKE. ELIAS stands in the corner, watching the ball.

Cutting through the center is JEAN-CLAUDE and RENO, dressed in their finest, nearly unrecognizable.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Quite the turnout. Do you think this could still work?

RENO

It has to.

A PRINCE passes. RENO bows.

RENO
(under his breath)

And keep your damned voice down.

JEAN-CLAUDE rolls his eyes, but obliges.

RENO
I'll look for the Criville bitch. You look for the boy. Remember-

JEAN-CLAUDE
Yes. I know. (beat) He'll agree to it, I guarantee.

They give each other a nod and separate.
RENO goes from woman to woman in
search of ROCHELLE. MARIE bows to
THE DUKE and he exits, while she talks to
a CROWD OF GIRLS center stage.

From stage left, ROCHELLE and SABINE
enter. From stage right, ALEXANDRE and
JULIEN enter. ALEXANDRE and JULIEN
wallflower in the corner, while SABINE and
ROCHELLE meekly make their way
through.

ROCHELLE
So many people...

SABINE
Keep your head up, Lady Rochelle.

SABINE reaches a hand out to ROCHELLE
behind her. ROCHELLE smiles and takes it,
weaving through. She passes MARIE, who
notices her and ditches the crowd.

MARIE
Rochelle!

ROCHELLE turns around abruptly, letting
go of SABINE's hand. ROCHELLE and
MARIE rush to embrace each other.

MARIE

Oh, darling, I am so glad you've made it! Isn't it grand?

ROCHELLE

I can hardly believe it! Thank you, Marie, *thank you truly* for giving my family and I such a blessing.

MARIE cups ROCHELLE's face affectionately.

MARIE

Don't thank me yet, my lovely. There's more to come.

ROCHELLE

What do you mean?

MARIE

(to the crowd she was speaking with)

It was lovely speaking with you all, darlings, but I must pardon myself!

MARIE grabs ROCHELLE by the arm forcefully.

MARIE

Come with me!

ROCHELLE

Wait-

SABINE tries to take ROCHELLE back, but MARIE expertly weaves her through the crowd and drags her off stage. SABINE stumbles through people clumsily, offending them, but still loses sight of ROCHELLE. She panics.

Spotlight on ELIAS, who is bumped into by RENO.

RENO

Pardon me, sir.

ELIAS

No, no, pardon me. I was in your way, after all.

They look at each other for a second.

RENO

I'm being rude, aren't I? Please excuse me. I am Comte de Maestre. A pleasure to meet you.

He bows.

ELIAS

I am Elias de Cocteau. A pleasure to meet you as well.

RENO looks around.

RENO

Would you happen to know a Rochelle de Criville? She's invited me tonight, but I simply can't find her.

ELIAS

Lady de Criville? You're looking for her as well?

RENO

Yes. I'd like to share a dance with her.

Lights dim on the ball. The screen lights up-
THE DUKE and ROCHELLE are behind it.
THE DUKE pulls a terrified ROCHELLE
into his arms.

THE DUKE

I'd like to do this in front of everyone, but I understand these things take time for young girls like you. I'm willing to be patient.

ROCHELLE struggles. He keeps her close.

THE DUKE

No need to worry. I know you worry yourself in front of others. It's alright now, darling. It is only you and I.

He leans in close. ROCHELLE freezes in fear as he wraps her in a kiss and slides his hand down her front.

She bats at his arm as hard as she can, and when that doesn't work, she claws at his hands enough to get him to let go. He does and she stumbles backward, heaving and shaking.

He grabs her arm to stabilize her, then reaches out to wipe a tear from her cheek.

THE DUKE

Why do this to yourself? Why deny yourself what you truly want?

ROCHELLE sobs to herself and pushes his arm away. He grabs her arm back and tugs her in again.

THE DUKE

(raising his voice)

Goddammit, if you want to marry me, prove it! Decide!

ROCHELLE

(yelling)

I have decided! I refused you! Please, leave me be!

THE DUKE freezes.

THE DUKE

...You mean to tell me you haven't changed your mind?

ROCHELLE

(crying)

Where would you get such a notion?

He lets her go like she's nothing.

THE DUKE

Your friend is a liar. I knew it was useless to invite you here.

ROCHELLE stops crying for a moment.

ROCHELLE

...Marie...?

THE DUKE

She told me you'd made up your mind to marry me. Like a fool, I believed her. (beat)
Enjoy your time tonight, Lady Criville. Her Majesty won't bless you twice.

He leaves. ROCHELLE tries to collect herself, but can't stop herself from breaking down.

Lights down on the screen. Lights up on the ball and SABINE, who makes her way to ELIAS and RENO.

SABINE
(to ELIAS)

Have you seen Lady Rochelle?

RENO turns around.

RENO
You're looking for Madame de Criville as well? (beat) Well, isn't she popular tonight!

ELIAS ignores him.

ELIAS
(to SABINE)

Is she not with you?

SABINE pulls ELIAS close.

SABINE
She's *gone*. That damned de Rothe took her away.

They both run off together, leaving RENO alone. He waits for one more moment before running off on his own. Lights dim on them. Lights up on JULIEN and ALEXANDRE.

ALEXANDRE
It's all the same.

JULIEN
You're not enjoying yourself?

ALEXANDRE

It is like last time. There's nothing to sink my teeth into. All these people, so devoid of life...

He looks around. Couples are beginning to pair up. The crowd forms a large hole where dancers begin to fill the space. JULIEN watches as there's no sign of where ELIAS was supposed to be. JULIEN's eyes widen.

JULIEN

(in a sudden hurry)

Alexandre, if I may/

ALEXANDRE

If you may what? What has you so concerned?

JULIEN panics.

JULIEN

I- I must go- I'll return, Alexandre, simply stay put-

Before ALEXANDRE can argue, JULIEN cuts through the crowd and exits. ALEXANDRE tries to follow him through the crowd, and JEAN-CLAUDE trails him.

The crowd splits down the middle- lights down on the dancers, spotlight on ALEXANDRE trailed by JEAN-CLAUDE, holding a drink.

JEAN-CLAUDE catches up, places a hand on his shoulder. ALEXANDRE freezes.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Excuse me, sir.

ALEXANDRE

Pardon me.

ALEXANDRE starts walking- then turns around. He squints- something isn't right.

ALEXANDRE

Have we met?

JEAN-CLAUDE

That shouldn't matter.

ALEXANDRE

Then it won't.

ALEXANDRE tries to leave, but JEAN-
CLAUDE doesn't let him go.

JEAN-CLAUDE

What's the rush, sir? Come, be merry.

He offers the drink to ALEXANDRE.
ALEXANDRE looks down at it.

JEAN-CLAUDE

We have many things to discuss, you and I.

ALEXANDRE

I appreciate the sentiment, but I don't have time to/

JEAN-CLAUDE leans in closer.

JEAN-CLAUDE

/You should have time, Marquis de Criville. All good Marquis do...

ALEXANDRE lets his guard down- JEAN-
CLAUDE slips the drink into
ALEXANDRE's unsuspecting hands.

JEAN-CLAUDE

...Unless you're a bad Marquis. Are you?

ALEXANDRE

I don't understand.

JEAN-CLAUDE

I've heard you are wise to the incoming revolution. There are ways you can help.

ALEXANDRE

I hardly have the notion to do such a thing.

JEAN-CLAUDE

I don't say this to be cruel, Monsieur, but... I understand that you are quite unpopular here in court.

ALEXANDRE

What gave you that notion?

JEAN-CLAUDE

You haven't spoken to a soul all night. Nobody can recall anything about you. What do you have to prove to those who couldn't bother to introduce themselves?

ALEXANDRE looks down into his drink to avoid looking at JEAN-CLAUDE.

JEAN-CLAUDE

The revolution is imminent. They're calling an assembly after this event. With your help, you could truly be an invaluable ally. You could speak at the assembly as a noble benefactor, and provide us your financial aid as the Marquis-

ALEXANDRE

I care nothing for your lofty revolutionary goals. I must take my *leave*-

JEAN-CLAUDE stops him by force.

JEAN-CLAUDE

If you cannot prove yourself to them-

He gestures to the ball.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Then prove yourself to us. We will save you.

ALEXANDRE steps back.

JEAN-CLAUDE

(whispering)

Tonight, one of your kind will die. If you want you and your family to leave Versailles alive, you will do as I say. Otherwise I cannot guarantee that you will be spared. (beat) The revolution comes *tonight*, and if you must be a bad Marquis to be a good samaritan, then it's well worth it.

ALEXANDRE's eyes widen.

ALEXANDRE

How should I believe such a-

JEAN-CLAUDE

Have you seen your sister? And where is your guard?

Realization hits.

ALEXANDRE

I- even if I were to help, I am in no position to do so. Despite what may have been announced, my father has the power. I merely hold the title. Now, let me *go--*

He tries to leave again. No dice- JEAN-
CLAUDE is stronger.

JEAN-CLAUDE

Are you so blind that you can't see the pedestal you're standing on? You, regardless of what you may feel, hold the chains of those shackled beneath you from the moment you are born. By God, it isn't right, but at least do the noble thing and *accept* it.

ALEXANDRE tries to break from his grasp,
but can't.

JEAN-CLAUDE

You said it yourself- the bourgeoisie sharpens their pitchforks underneath your noses as you whine and complain, and either you march in the revolution or be trampled beneath it. (beat) Your father has as much power as we are willing to give him. You have as much power as he is willing to give *you*. Use it.

ALEXANDRE

If you gave us this power, you have given me *nothing but a curse*.

JEAN-CLAUDE holds ALEXANDRE
steady by his forearms- ALEXANDRE
breaks the glass on his knee and slices JEAN-
CLAUDE's face, which gives him the
opportunity to run behind the screen.

JEAN-CLAUDE runs behind him, comes
around the other side-

JEAN-CLAUDE

You devils from Hell, you siphon the life out of all those beneath you, and you *curse* it, as if it were a burden you carry/

He barrels into ALEXANDRE, sending the
glass shard out of his hand. They try their
best to overpower the other.

JEAN-CLAUDE

/I have toiled my entire life underneath a merciless fool like you, killing blue blood for red, only to realize that we all bleed red- it's only that you and your noble kind don't have to bleed at all...and one day I will make sure you all bleed the way I have.

They fight for control, a clumsy, passionate back-and-forth, but ALEXANDRE overpowers him and throws him to the ground. While JEAN-CLAUDE struggles underneath him, he reaches for the glass shard.

In a slow, calculated way, he traces a finger on JEAN-CLAUDE's face, licks some of the blood- and proceeds to stab him wherever he can find, feral and blind, and leans down to rip out a bite. Once he's satiated, he sits up and sighs.

He comes out from behind the screen covered in blood, and JULIEN enters stage left, searching. He sees ALEXANDRE and balks.

JULIEN

Alexandre!

He rushes over, but ALEXANDRE doesn't react.

JULIEN

What happened?

ALEXANDRE licks his fingers clean of the blood slowly, then takes off his ruined coat and drops it to the floor. JULIEN watches in horror. He's regained some of his sense.

ALEXANDRE

Listen to me, Julien. You know well what happened to the executioner's dog. You know well what beast my sister and I have within us, and you have this whole time, so let me tell you this now...

He leans in close.

ALEXANDRE

...I will not hesitate to do what's necessary if I believe you'll become a threat.

ALEXANDRE corners JULIEN.

JULIEN

I don't know what you mean/

ALEXANDRE

/The other night, you saw me with blood on my hands and clothes, and yet, you weren't scared or concerned in the slightest. Surely you must have seen my sister and I in the garden. (beat) Did you think I wouldn't notice something like that?

JULIEN freezes. ALEXANDRE takes some of the blood and runs it down JULIEN's face and clothes.

ALEXANDRE

Now you and I are accomplices. Don't say anything that could condemn the both of us.

A GUARD leaves the ball and enters behind the screen. He sees the carnage-

GUARD

What is the meaning of this?

ALEXANDRE

(acting terrified)

We were attacked, sir, it happened so fast-

The GUARD kneels down to see the body of JEAN-CLAUDE- ALEXANDRE enters behind the screen, shoots him in the head.

Lights down on the screen. Sounds of crowds talking and faint music rings out.

Lights rise on the screen again to reveal ROCHELLE sitting on the floor, crying. MARIE creeps behind the screen and stands beside ROCHELLE. She kneels down and pulls her into a hug- ROCHELLE struggles to free herself.

ROCHELLE

Get off of me!

MARIE reaches out to her again, but
ROCHELLE stands up and moves away.

ROCHELLE

Why would you say such a thing...? Why would you do this to me?

MARIE says nothing.

ROCHELLE

How many times must I refuse for it to mean something? He's defiled me, Marie. He's taken my *worth* from me.

MARIE

No, my dear, you're worth much more than a man's touch. (beat) These are simply... sacrifices that needed to be made.

ROCHELLE

For you or for me?

Beat.

MARIE

Don't be ridiculous. Think, Rochelle, you, your father, your family... you would be able to live here *forever*. Marriage, or whatever Monsieur du Gougot had done to you, is hardly a sacrifice when you think of what that man could offer us/

ROCHELLE

Us?

MARIE turns to face ROCHELLE.

MARIE

He promised Adrien a position in Parlement when he becomes of age. Surely you know what good that does us. (beat) I gave you all that I could. I figured it was time you could reciprocate.

ROCHELLE

You didn't *give* me anything. You traded- you *sacrificed*- my dignity.

MARIE takes in a deep breath.

MARIE

Why do you think you could even deign to show your face in a place like this? What makes you believe you could get what you want on your own, when I have coddled you as my own countless times?

ROCHELLE braces herself as MARIE
backs her into a corner.

MARIE

If it must be this way, I refuse to indulge you anymore, you ungrateful, *selfish*!

ROCHELLE slaps MARIE. Silence.
ROCHELLE, unsatisfied, shoves MARIE to
the ground, and while MARIE cries for help,
tries to tear her apart and hurt her any way
she can, until the cries stop.

ROCHELLE stands back up. She stares at
her hands, covered in blood, and then down
at MARIE- she cries. She walks out from
behind the screen- the crowd clears out, and
all that's left is ROCHELLE, center stage,
alone, covered in blood.

RENO enters stage left. ROCHELLE, in her
shock, blankly looks up at him.

RENO

I found you.

ROCHELLE

... Monsieur du Chalet? Is that you?

He stops.

RENO

You recognize me?

She looks up at him, wide eyed.

ROCHELLE

I thought you were dead...

RENO

You've been thinking about me?

He towers over her, and she smiles- but from his coat he pulls a gun and places it on her forehead. He leans down and whispers in her ear.

RENO

I've been thinking about you, darling Rochelle.

She freezes in fear.

RENO

You must understand what I've been dealing with... the insatiable hunger, the long hours lying awake at night, the rage that surely eats you alive with every passing day. The weight of the beasts' burden, the shame of knowing it comes from within. To hell with a wolf's bite- the rage was within us all along.

He presses the gun in closer.

RENO

You nobles have never hungered, never starved, never *wanted*. It must be so hard for a girl like you to survive like this. Let us indulge each other-- and finally, I won't have to starve.

ELIAS enters stage left, behind RENO. He has his sword out of the holster, ready to swing. SABINE enters not long after, ROCHELLE, in her shock, gasps- distracting RENO.

ELIAS has the floor for the killing blow- but he hesitates, and RENO takes the chance to shoot him in the shin. He careens to the floor, dropping his sword, and SABINE takes RENO's distraction as her cue- with one strict movement, she plummets ELIAS' sword into his stomach.

Beat. ROCHELLE and ELIAS watch on as SABINE stares down at RENO, who writhes around on the floor, spitting curses.

SABINE

Both of you. Run.

ELIAS struggles to get up, but can't.
ROCHELLE runs to SABINE, but SABINE
backs away. SABINE tears a piece of her
own coat off and ties it around ELIAS' leg
as a makeshift bandage. He winces.

ELIAS

Sabine- Sabine, please-

He holds onto her shoulders desperately.

SABINE

I won't let you die for this. Hold out.

She nods. He nods back.

ROCHELLE

They'll kill you.

SABINE

I know.

ROCHELLE
(through tears)

It was *my fault!* (beat) It was all my fault.

ROCHELLE tries to grasp at her again, but
SABINE doesn't let her.

SABINE

I tried to leave you. That's why he's here.

She points at ELIAS.

SABINE

It's all my fault now. So go.

ROCHELLE won't budge.

ROCHELLE

Why?

SABINE

I promised I would protect you.

SABINE leans in and embraces
ROCHELLE, hugging her softly.

SABINE

Let me keep my promise.

ROCHELLE cups SABINE's face and
kisses her softly on the forehead. She leaves
behind blood.

She takes one last look at SABINE, helps
ELIAS up-- and then leaves, not before
stealing one last look. The stomps of the
GUARDS get louder and louder until
everything goes dark, except for the
silhouette of MARIE's body behind the
screen.

SCENE FIVE.

ALEXANDRE sits in a chair center stage. Behind him
stands JULIEN. EUGENE stands behind the screen.

EUGENE

You must know what I'm going to say.

ALEXANDRE sighs.

EUGENE

You proved me right. I should have been wrong.

ALEXANDRE

There's still time, Father.

EUGENE

All the time in the world wouldn't change a thing, Alexandre. I've given up.

ALEXANDRE sits quietly.

EUGENE

I've sent some letters formally requesting a regiment for you to lead. It might do you
some good to understand what sacrifices must be made to live a worthy life.

ALEXANDRE

All lives are worthy.

EUGENE

Yet we waste so many. You are above the ranks of the wasted youths. You must do something with yourself. (beat) You are all we have left, my son.

ALEXANDRE doesn't respond.

EUGENE

I will see to it that you understand one day. That is all I may leave you.

EUGENE leaves, the screen goes dark. Faintly and softly, slow music plays in the background. ALEXANDRE sighs, smiles, and sinks into his chair with his eyes closed.

ALEXANDRE

Julien, do you hear that?

JULIEN

Yes, Lord Alexandre.

ALEXANDRE

It's lovely.

The music swells louder. ALEXANDRE hums along. Suddenly, his eyes open.

ALEXANDRE

Indulge me for a moment, Julien. Sate my boredom.

ALEXANDRE gets out of his chair and extends a hand to JULIEN. JULIEN takes it silently, and slowly but surely, ALEXANDRE and JULIEN get into gavotte position.

ALEXANDRE

Have you ever danced before?

JULIEN

Once or twice.

ALEXANDRE

Let me teach you.

ALEXANDRE takes the lead as they dance around in circles, just the two of them.

The screen lights up- SABINE is crouched down, hands tied behind her back, head hung. Her hair is cut short. ELIAS stands behind her, wielding a sword.

VOICE (O.S.)

We are gathered today to witness the execution of one Sabien Lameth, former member of the *Guards du Corps* at Versailles, tried for the murders of Marie de Rothe and Reno Gautier during the *Bal du Poinsettia*.

ELIAS raises his sword. The music gets louder. ALEXANDRE and JULIEN dance mindlessly, ALEXANDRE's eyes shut in bliss.

ALEXANDRE

Close your eyes, dear Julien. Indulge me.

JULIEN closes his eyes. ELIAS swings his sword down. LIGHTS DOWN.

FADE TO BLACK.