

CÉSAR

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

MARCEL PAGNOL

TRANSLATED and ADAPTED
by MICHAEL JOHNSTON
with the permission of the Pagnol Estate

Revised Translation © September 2013

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CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

- CÉSAR patron of the Bar de la Marine
- HONORINE retired fish seller and mother of Fanny
- BRUN Chief Inspector of Customs
- PANISSE master sail-maker and husband of Fanny
- ESCARTEFIGUE former ferry-boat captain
- PRIEST Father Elzéar
- FANNY wife of Panisse
- DOCTOR Venelle family doctor
- CÉSARIOT son of Fanny
- FERNAND business partner of Marius
- MARIUS son of César
- STOKER former ferry-boat stoker, now odd job man
- DROMARD college friend of Césariot

The action takes place around twenty years after *Fanny*, its predecessor in 'The Marseilles Trilogy'.

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The action of this play takes place some eighteen to twenty years after the previous plays in the trilogy: Marius and Fanny.

ACT ONE

PANISSE'S LIVINGROOM. There is one door and French windows. Panisse lies very still, propped up in a bath chair, eyes closed. Beside him stand Escartefigue and Honorine, quietly wiping their eyes. César enters through the French window on tiptoe. He walks over to Honorine and speaks in a low voice.

CÉSAR: Elzéar says he'll come at once. How is he now?

HONORINE: He hasn't wakened at all. The doctor's gone off for the moment but he's coming right back. He says not to disturb him.

CÉSAR: What did he think?

HONORINE: He could pop off any moment without as much as a last "dammit".

Brun enters on tiptoe.

BRUN: Any change?

HONORINE (*shaking her head*): He's sleeping.

BRUN: Probably best; a good sign, you know.

Escartefigue blows his nose. At this moment Panisse begins to talk quietly, as if in his sleep. One cannot hear what he is saying until the final word, "... finished."

BRUN: He's saying something.

CÉSAR: I thought he said "finished". (*He approaches the bath chair.*) Not at all, Honoré: you're getting better, because you're talking again.

BRUN: What were you saying?

PANISSE: The game ... of boules ... Did you ... get it finished?

CÉSAR: Well of course not! We were too busy with you. So, it still stands at 13 to 9.

BRUN: If that's your biggest worry, it's all very positive.

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PANISSE: I wouldn't count on it, Monsieur Brun. Not yet anyway. (*He sees Escartefigue wiping his eyes.*) Félix Escartefigue, you know it's forbidden to cry in the presence of the dying!

CÉSAR: Listen to you! Dying, indeed! You're the very picture of health.

PANISSE: Perfectly possible, César. But death's a disease that can carry off people in perfect health. That's why it's such a surprise. Well whatever I think, I'm breathing a bit better now. Honorine: put a pillow at my back please.

HONORINE: No, no. That's not allowed.

PANISSE: Of course it's allowed. I allow it. This is *my* house.

HONORINE: What do you think, Monsieur Brun; can I?

BRUN: That rather depends on what the doctor said, doesn't it?

HONORINE: He said he wasn't to be moved.

PANISSE: And he also said that when the crisis was past, I would be right as rain. Right then, the crisis has passed.

CÉSAR: Maybe so, but you need to take precautions – not to have another one.

PANISSE: I'll do just that. But right now I've had a splendid idea. Honorine, open that cupboard over there and you'll find some bottles of the white wine I keep for special occasions; Château de Mayragues; and there are glasses in there too.

CÉSAR (*alarmed*): Honoré, you're not planning to drink a glass of white wine?

PANISSE: But it's for you. I'm getting it out for you, and to cheer up Escartefigue and Monsieur Brun. Naturally I'll have to have a sip of it with you, as one must.

BRUN: Dammit, Panisse old friend, the doctor was very insistent ...

PANISSE: The doctor said lots of things and I'm going to remind you of the most important one. He said: above all don't let him get upset about anything. It could be fatal. So there you are. He even told me not to get worked up about Galimberti's dishonoured banker's draft. (*He begins to get worked up.*) Dammit, 65,000 francs I accepted in perfect good faith and he should have

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settled on the fifteenth of the month. Who would have thought it of him, the blackguard!

CÉSAR: Honoré, calm down, for pity's sake! You may be on the mend but have a care.

PANISSE: There's only one thing that will calm me down and that's a glass of white wine.

BRUN: I'll pour it myself. Rest easy, there's a good fellow.

Wine is poured out all round and Panisse, propped up by pillows, exchanges toasts with his friends.

CÉSAR: Your very good health!

PANISSE: What an appropriate toast! It suits the moment admirably.

The door opens and the priest comes in.

CÉSAR: Well, well, Elzéar! Fancy seeing you here!

ESCARTEFIGUE: Hallo, hallo! And how are you, Elzéar?

PRIEST: Just as you see me! The good Lord keeps me in one piece as yet.

PANISSE: Did Fanny come and get you then?

PRIEST: Not at all! I haven't seen her for around three weeks, and she's not been to Mass for a couple of Sundays, I regret to say.

PANISSE: So, why are you here?

PRIEST: Because I heard that, yesterday, right in the middle of a boules contest, you were suddenly taken ill. As I was passing your door, it seemed a good opportunity to look in and get the latest medical bulletin.

CÉSAR: As we'd expect of you.

PRIEST: And I'm happy to bear witness to the fact that if you really are ill then it scarcely shows.

PANISSE: Oh yes! I'm sick, but it doesn't show. What shows is you're an old fibber, and that shows very clearly.

CÉSAR: Honoré! One doesn't speak to a priest like that!

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PANISSE: I know perfectly well he's lying for the sake of friendship. The fact is Fanny came to get you. Come on, spit it out Elzéar.

PRIEST: Before God, I can only repeat I haven't seen her for a couple of weeks because she hasn't been to Mass.

PANISSE: Good for her! Well if it wasn't her then it was César, because I think I know where *she* is. Let's say no more about it. In truth I was thinking about you yesterday, Elzéar, especially yesterday evening, and if I'd been able to speak I would have sent for you. I really thought it was all up.

PRIEST: Then since I'm here now shall we put that to good use? (*Speaking to the others*) Kindly leave us, Honorine, gentlemen.

PANISSE: Hold on there, Elzéar. Is it an inflexible rule I have to be alone with you?

PRIEST: It's the usual thing, Honoré. I do admit that the early Christians made their confessions in front of the whole congregation but, after all, they were saints.

CÉSAR (*already at the door*): Which, of course, meant they had precious little to say.

PANISSE: God knows I'm no saint but, even so, I'd be very happy if you all stayed. (*To the priest*) It's like this Elzéar, when you shoo everybody out, it doesn't create the best impression. Before they've even got down the stairs they'll be saying, "What has he got to say up there I wonder? What must he have done with his life; all that thieving, deceiving and fibbing!" And they'll imagine such terrible things. Well, I've no great list for you. I've even tried to do some good things. The fact is the things I've done worry me more than I mind about spilling the beans in front of everyone; except perhaps Honorine. I haven't committed any crimes but I just might find myself mentioning things one ought not to say in front of a lady – even though it was ladies I did them with.

HONORINE (*modestly*): Just in case then, I think I *would* rather leave.

She exits, closing the door. There is a pause. The priest kisses and dons the symbols of his priesthood.

PANISSE: Off we go then, Elzéar. Put me through it!

PRIEST: Honoré, confession is a serious matter. That's why we must give this friendly event an *air* of solemnity. (*A pause*) Honoré, repeat after me: "Bless me father, for I have sinned".

PANISSE: Bless me father, for I have sinned.

PRIEST: May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips so that you make a sincere and complete confession of all your sins. In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; Amen.

All cross themselves.

PRIEST: Well now, Honoré, taking it all together, I'd hazard a guess you haven't always led an altogether Christian life? I have no doubt you've failed to observe the Commandments, and neglected your obligations to yourself and to God. I sincerely hope he will forgive you. So let's begin, have you done any ill during your lifetime?

PANISSE: No question. One can hardly live at all without doing something wrong, even if one didn't actually intend to. Have *you* never done anything bad, Elzéar?

PRIEST: Without doubt I have. I'm only a man. But, just for the moment, it isn't me that's confessing; it's you. What sins have you committed?

PANISSE: That's hard. I mean, it depends on what you would call a real sin.

PRIEST: It's not me that decides, Honoré. It's God's Commandments. (*He looks round.*) Since we have your invited audience, let's use them. César; come over here and read them for us; one after another. It may even help you to remember them yourself.

César, in some confusion, fumbles to put on his glasses and take the open Bible from the priest before reading, awkwardly, the individual commandments.

CÉSAR: "I am the Lord your God: you shall have no other gods before me."

PANISSE: That's no problem. I have never had any other gods, Elzéar; word of honour.

CÉSAR: "You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain."

PANISSE: Dammit, that's difficult. God knows how often I've used his name. I swear I've lost count. But Elzéar, I swear to God I meant no disrespect.

PRIEST: You're still doing it!

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PANISSE: Forgive me! What I meant to say is that anytime I swore any sort of oath, I was never referring to the Good Lord Himself. It simply meant I was angry about something. And besides, when you think how God Almighty is so powerful, you can't imagine for one second that I intended to provoke Him.

PRIEST: All right! Let us continue.

CÉSAR: "You shall not bear false witness!"

PRIEST: In other words, a commitment to what is real and true, even when it's against our own interests.

ESCARTEFIGUE: That's a tough one; no doubt about it.

PANISSE: Father, I cannot tell a lie. I have told lies.

PRIEST: Often?

PANISSE: More or less non-stop! Several times a day at least. When I'm playing cards, for instance: or when I come home from a day's fishing. And, above all, to customers! You have to understand, Elzéar, if you always told customers the truth then business would be impossible.

CÉSAR: You'd never have sold that boat to Monsieur Brun, for a start!

PRIEST: Tell me about that.

BRUN: Oh please, it's not worth bothering about. As the alleged victim, I never laid a complaint and, besides, it wasn't a fib; it was just a tall story.

PANISSE: Thank you, my dear friend.

CÉSAR: Well you missed out there. I mean, if he'd been drowned you could have saved that up and confessed it last, as the *pièce de résistance*!

PRIEST: Last warning, César! Read on!

CÉSAR: "You shall not commit adultery."

PANISSE (*giving a deep sigh*): Dammit, that's a difficult one for married men.

PRIEST: It's a major sin and one that weighs heavily.

CÉSAR: Which is why so many seem bowed down by it.

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PRIEST: Quiet, César! So, Honoré, speak! Unburden your conscience.

PANISSE: I'm embarrassed to talk of such things in front of you.

PRIEST: In this parish, Honoré, you would find it very hard to shock me. I've almost certainly heard worse and often. Speak up now.

PANISSE: Well, yes then. I have done that ... that sin. And what makes it worse I've done it with great pleasure.

CÉSAR: It stands to reason. Dammit, if sins made you suffer then you wouldn't do them, and we'd all be saints.

PRIEST: How many times have you sinned?

PANISSE: Often and with great gusto!

ESCARTEFIGUE: Hey! Hey! Bravo!

PANISSE: When I was a young man, you understand. Before my first marriage I had a little girl-friend who was truly extraordinary and ...

PRIEST: But you confessed all that, I would sincerely hope, before you were married.

PANISSE: That's true, so can we skip all that then?

ESCARTEFIGUE: Nothing to stop you telling us now if you like! It'd be interesting.

PRIEST: Félix Escartefigue, remember your manners, please.

Escartefigue lowers his eyes, grinning.

PANISSE: Then, during my first marriage, it did happen again. But I told you about that before my second marriage.

PRIEST: True, but since that last confession?

PANISSE: Well, since I married Fanny ... (*There is a long silence. All eyes are on him*) ... it did happen again.

CÉSAR: You were unfaithful to Fanny?

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PANISSE: I fear so ... Fanny has always had a great deal of affection for me ... But, as for passion, well not a great deal ... And I can understand that ... So, she and I, we've not, well not very often, you know what I mean. And that's how I came to be tempted.

PRIEST: And what form did this temptation take?

PANISSE: It took the form of one of my workers.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Which one?

PANISSE: The little redhead.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Dammit to hell! I thought she never would!

PRIEST: Honoré! May I remind you that confession should never implicate another soul! That's an inflexible rule. And as for you Félix, I must ask you to leave immediately.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Did I say something wrong?

CÉSAR: Don't argue with the boss, Félix. Get up and go!

ESCARTEFIGUE: Fine, fine! (*He exits.*)

PRIEST: Did your sin last long?

PANISSE (*with a shrug*): Say, five or six minutes ...

PRIEST: How many *months*?

PANISSE (*sadly*): Almost a year. After that, she got married and she didn't want to any more.

PRIEST: You seem to regret that.

PANISSE: At the time, I did regret it. Now, of course, I regret that I regretted it. And right now, having to tell you about it, I regret it very much. But you don't know the worst of it ... When she didn't want to do it any more ... No, I think it would be better if I didn't finish my confession. I can see it's upsetting you.

PRIEST: I'm listening to you, my dear Honoré, with all the compassion that a priest can offer to every poor sinner. Go on with your confession.

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PANISSE: Well then, when *she* didn't want to any more, I took up with another one.

CÉSAR (*quietly, but admiringly*): Ai-ai-ai!

PRIEST: And now, have you told me everything?

PANISSE: Everything, and from the bottom of my heart. But there's one more thing I want to tell you, and since it isn't just *my* secret it's better I only tell it to you.

PRIEST: As you wish. Leave us please, gentlemen. (*César and Brun exit, smiling at each other.*) And what might that secret be?

PANISSE: Elzéar, when you were dragging out of me all my untruths just now, there was one I couldn't mention in front of everybody else, and it's an untruth that sorely troubles me since it's been going on for twenty years. It's an untruth that weighs on me every day, and every hour of every day.

PRIEST: And that is?

PANISSE: You know perfectly well, and Fanny must certainly have told you at confession.

PRIEST: You know I have no recollection of anything I hear in confession.

PANISSE: Of course, of course. But I know you know perfectly well. Never mind, for form's sake, I'll tell you anyway. The truth is ... my son is not my child, and almost everyone knows it. And my worst fear, my worst fear in all the world has been that someone would blurt this out to him, by accident or by wicked design. The boy, of course, would never believe it and, who knows, he might even strike anyone who *did* tell him. But if he did just believe it, then he would think that I had lied to him all my life, and was still lying to him from beyond the grave. Or he might even imagine I never knew, or that I was a cuckold and his mother a strumpet. So; now he *has* to be told the truth. It's just that *I* could never do it. I'm too emotionally involved in the whole story and; since I'm telling you the truth, so help me God; I've been a father to him all his life and I want to die his father. But there's a problem: I know my boy; he's headstrong, and he's quite capable of taking the news badly, standing on his dignity, and making a silly gesture like refusing his inheritance. So it has to be done well after my estate is sorted out and when he's finished his schooling at the Polytechnic.

PRIEST: And you want *me* to take on this task?

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PANISSE: Not exactly. When the moment comes, I want you to say to his mother that *she* must tell him and that it was my last wish that she does so. I've written a little letter for him. Just four lines to tell him his mother has never ever lied to me, or misled me. When the moment comes, I want you to hand this letter to Fanny with my message. Here it is. (*He slips a small envelope out from under his pillow, kisses it tenderly and tenders it to the priest.*)

PRIEST (*making the sign of the cross*): In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I absolve you of your sins. Amen.

Panisse crosses himself. The lights dim. Music swells and fades as the lights come up again.

Scene 2.

The same. The doctor is listening to Panisse's chest. He straightens up and takes off his stethoscope.

DOCTOR: Now you listen to me, Honoré. I want your whole attention. The crisis has passed. You've had some damage to a little artery in the heart. But it seems Nature's defences have played their part well and the arterial tissues are sorting themselves out. Listening to it, it all sounds pretty near normal. *but ...*

PANISSE: But?

DOCTOR: I simply can't give you a guarantee you won't have another crisis, in a month, or in a year. That rupture shows your blood vessels aren't in good condition. I'm going to prescribe a regime for you to follow *to the letter*, and, who knows, you might live another ten to fifteen years. I'll come round again tomorrow with the consultant because I know too well you never listen to me. But you must rest, and I mean *rest*, for the next few days, because if you had any daft idea about getting up to go and finish that game of boules, you could die so quickly you wouldn't even have the time to say "Dammit".

PANISSE: You know, that's beginning to irritate me. That's four or five times I've heard someone say that; you, César, Monsieur Brun. Dammit, why shouldn't I say "dammit"? If that's what your worry is, I'll say it all the time. Dammit, dammit, dammit! There you are then. No risk now of my dying without saying it.

DOCTOR: Calm down, dammit! Think of your poor blood vessels.

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PANISSE: And to think I've spent my life doing what I can for all kinds of vessels: cutters, schooners, three-masters; and now vessels are letting *me* down. Anyway, as soon as they get here, tell them to come up.

DOCTOR: Who d'you mean?

PANISSE: Fanny and the boy, of course. She's gone to the station to fetch him.

DOCTOR: Who told you that?

PANISSE: A little bird.

DOCTOR: If your little bird's that smart, get it to tell you not to stick your beak in any more white wine. (*He picks up the bottle*) I'll be in to see you tomorrow.

PANISSE (*smiling and putting his hand on his heart*): Dammit.

Césariot enters diffidently while Fanny stands in the doorway.

CÉSARIOT (*whispering to the Doctor*): Well then; what's the news, Doctor Venelle?

DOCTOR: His morale is fine. The crisis is over but we have to take great care. (*He holds out a prescription to Fanny.*) This is for drops he needs to take every night. Send for them straight away.

FANNY (*comes over to take it*): I'll go for them. Can Césariot talk with him?

DOCTOR: Yes. Yes. He guessed you were at the station. Now I must go.

Fanny and the Doctor exit. Panisse smiles as he waits. The door closes.

PANISSE: Where's your mother gone?

CÉSARIOT: She's taking a prescription next door to the pharmacy.

PANISSE: So much the better. I want a word with you.

CÉSARIOT: Dear papa! (*He kisses his father tenderly.*) I had an anxious night on that train.

PANISSE: And what about me? I pictured you in the train corridor when I could hardly breathe and I told myself just to hang on until you arrived. I've something very important to tell you. I've been thinking to tell you for a long time but one always imagines there will be time later. Last night taught me a

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lesson. Sit down, my boy, and listen to me. (*Césariot puts a chair beside the bath chair and sits.*)

CÉSARIOT: Papa, maybe this isn't the moment. I don't want to tire you out.

PANISSE: It won't take a moment, and then I'll feel a great burden lifted. (*A silence*) My greatest concern is her, you know. She's not yet even forty ... If the Good Lord does things according to the usual plan, she could be a widow for another thirty years at least, and all these empty years will be my fault.

CÉSARIOT: Fault! What fault? If you die before her, she'll never think you did it on purpose! And besides, you know I'll always take care of her.

PANISSE: I know it and I happily trust her to your care and attention. But Césariot, it's a fairly safe bet that one day *you'll* get married. You'll have a wife, children, *and* your wife's family, and so on. She'll become just the mother-in-law and then a grandmother. She's much too young just for that. So, what I want to say to you is that if, later on, she meets some man who pleases her, someone you think would make a worthy husband for her, you mustn't try to prevent things happening, because of some sort of loyalty to my memory.

CÉSARIOT: Dear papa, I know what a kind and generous man you are but we're talking about a future which is still a long time away. We're not there yet!

PANISSE: *You're* not there yet, but *I'm* certainly getting closer. And when the time comes I might not be capable of telling you my last wish. But *this* is the last. The lawyer has a large envelope waiting with your name on it. It's a list of all our assets, the assets of Honoré Panisse and *Son*. Dammit, we're a great deal better off than you could ever imagine. Even your mother has no real idea. So, in case she does get married again, I'm insisting on a separation of my estate, into what's properly hers and what must be yours. That's absolutely essential. Women aren't always reasonable in these matters, so I've taken the necessary precautions.

CÉSARIOT: Please don't make yourself upset, papa. I understand, and I'll do exactly what you ask. Trust me!

PANISSE: Well that's that then. It's all done and I feel better for it. If I die, I won't die in a bad mood. Now, your mother will be back here any moment. Give me the little mirror in the drawer over there.

Césariot gives him the hand mirror and Panisse looks at himself.

PANISSE: Just take a look at that! It's amazing how one can age in such a short time. Get the hair brush and that little black crayon.

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Césariot does as he is bid.

PANISSE (*grinning*): You'll have to brush my hair for me.

Césariot carefully and lovingly brushes his hair. Panisse holds the mirror at arm's length and uses the crayon to gently touch up his eyebrows and his moustache. They hear Fanny call out 'Hello'.

PANISSE: Fanny's coming. Quick! Hide all this. (*Césariot does so swiftly.*) Now; put a couple of pillows behind me. (*Césariot props him up.*) Right, whatever happens, I'm ready. I'm ready now.

Stage lights go down. There is music and a gauze curtain comes across in front of Panisse and Césariot.

Scene 3

A STREET IN TOULON, played in front of the gauze curtain. Marius, in dungarees, is walking across the front of stage as Fernand, in a dapper outfit topped off with a grey bowler, limps on from the other side, using a stick. He has one fashionable shoe and the other foot is encased in a felt slipper.

FERNAND: Bonjour, young Marius!

MARIUS: Bonjour, old crock! What's up with you this time?

FERNAND: Gout! I can't take a single step without excruciating pain.

MARIUS: It didn't seem to stop you going round to the worst drinking hole in Toulon last night and playing the fool – again.

FERNAND: Who says? Oh, all right then! You can bawl me out later. Listen: there's something in the paper that might interest you. In the death notices, your father gets a mention.

MARIUS (*alarmed*): My father?

FERNAND: Calm down! He doesn't get star billing. The principal part is played by ... hang on; I've got it all here. (*He pulls the paper out of his pocket and begins to read.*) "Madame Honoré Panisse and her son Césariot, the Widow Honorine Cabanis and the Widow Claudine Foulon have the sad duty of informing you of the cruel loss they have suffered through the death of Monsieur Honoré Panisse, master sail-maker of the Vieux-Port of Marseilles, who has piously passed away in the bosom of his family, aged seventy. Please pray for him!"

MARIUS: Panisse is dead?

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FERNAND: Well, at seventy, what can you expect? But listen though: underneath there's another notice. This one's in large letters with lots of white space. *That* must have cost them a fortune. Listen: "Monsieur César Olivier of the Bar de la Marine; Monsieur Albert Brun, chief inspector of customs; Monsieur Félix Escartefigue, ferry-boat captain (retired); and Doctor Félicien Venelle have the sad duty of informing you of the cruel loss they have suffered as a result of the death of Monsieur Honoré Panisse, master sail-maker, who, for over fifty years, did them the great honour of being their dear friend."

MARIUS (*very moved*): Panisse is dead ... Poor Panisse ... and poor ...

FERNAND: Did you know him well?

MARIUS: Did I know him? He was the man I told you about years ago.

FERNAND: The one who pinched your wife and child?

MARIUS: It was more my fault than his, Fernand. And if he did me wrong then, he did everything he could to make it up to me afterwards. Remember when Peugeot gave us that extended credit for tooling up the garage, and I thought it was because of my good looks. Well, about a year later a sales rep let drop that it was him, Panisse, who gave them his personal guarantee. In the end, it never cost him a centime. We paid it all off. But if we'd defaulted, he would have had to pay the lot.

FERNAND: Well then, our duty's clear. The funeral's tomorrow.

MARIUS: No, not that. That I couldn't do. I wouldn't want to meet up with my father, Escartefigue and all that crew. They wouldn't be all that keen to see me either, for all kinds of other reasons. No, it would give me too much grief. Come on, I'll see you home safely.

They walk and limp off stage. The lights dim and there is music while the rear stage is reset.

Scene 4.

THE BAR DE LA MARINE. A few days later. As they have done for years, César, Escartefigue and Brun are gathered round a table to play their daily game of Manila. César shuffles the cards and starts dealing while talking angrily to the others.

CÉSAR: Monsieur Brun, I think I can claim to know my own trade.

BRUN: It stands to reason.

ESCARTEFIGUE: That, nobody can deny!

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CÉSAR: And I'm telling you that every aperitif is made from a plant of some kind or other: lemons, grapes, gentian, sage, aniseed, orange peel, wormwood, and all that sort of stuff. And plants are *all* remedies. I've got a big book on the subject: "Good Health from our Friends the Plants". They cure *everything*! So what does that make an aperitif? I'm telling you, it makes it a cold tisane, like camomile tea. Now you might *then* ask me, "But what about the alcohol?"

BRUN (*obliging him*): But what about the alcohol then?

CÉSAR: And what do you suppose alcohol might be, eh? Only the essence of the fruit of the vine; the prince of plants. And what do people say when someone feels ill?

ESCARTEFIGUE: I dunno. What *do* people say when someone feels ill?

CÉSAR: They say, "Quick, fetch him a drink of something!" A drop of rum, a spot of cognac, some green chartreuse. Down the hatch! Case proved; another remedy. Naturally one shouldn't drink too much. But that's the same for all remedies. It says it on all the medicine bottles "Do not exceed the prescribed dose".

ESCARTEFIGUE (*surveying his hand*): Bid forty in spades.

CÉSAR: Fifty; clubs.

BRUN: Pass.

CÉSAR: And our old friend?

He turns towards the empty place of Panisse as though expecting a reply. He sees the cards dealt still lying on the table and the empty chair. All three men sigh deeply. Brun puts his hand to his mouth. Escartefigue wipes away tears. César puts his own cards down on the table. A silence ensues.

CÉSAR: This time, we have to admit it. He really is dead. It hadn't sunk until now. Not even at the funeral.

BRUN: The empty chair speaks more clearly than the tomb, as the poet said.

There is a silence observed in memory of Panisse, with heads bowed, and then César turns over "Panisse's" cards.

CÉSAR: Take a look at that! He's got three trumps!

ESCARTEFIGUE: What a hand! Just think what he would have done with that?

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CÉSAR (*in scientific mode*): Let's look at it then. I think *I'd* have led with the seven of spades because it's the only one and I'd surely have picked up the trick.

BRUN: But what would *he* have done, d'you think?

CÉSAR: For sure, he wouldn't have passed. He'd have played the manila; seven of diamonds.

BRUN: Faultless!

ESCARTEFIGUE (*playing a card*): That would have outplayed my card; look!

CÉSAR: He was always a lucky player, and I don't think he's finished yet!

Brun plays a card. César picks up the trick and puts it in front of "Panisse".

BRUN: Now I'll lead with the king. What's his answer to that, d'you suppose?

CÉSAR: He's thinking. (*He studies "Panisse's" cards.*) He'll play a trump. Lucky devil. (*He plays a card from "Panisse's" hand.*)

ESCARTEFIGUE: It's not fair. If he played his seven of hearts, I'd have got him cold.

CÉSAR: He doesn't trust a move like that.

Escartefigue plays and then César who lifts the trick and gives it to "Panisse".

CÉSAR (*playing*): Manila; *two* of diamonds!

ESCARTEFIGUE: But you're mad! You can see he's going to trump that.

CÉSAR (*with authority*): Ah but, if he hadn't been dead, I wouldn't have *known* that!

ESCARTEFIGUE (*playing*): True, true! Right then. Ace of spades. But with his hand, I'm throwing it away.

CÉSAR: I can hear him laughing already.

BRUN: And I'll have to throw away my poor little diamond. There.

César picks up this trick and gives it to "Panisse".

CÉSAR: And now, what would Honoré say? You know what? He'd stop us right there, lay down his hand to show us his three master trumps and two

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master spades and just say, “the rest are mine, I think”. And we’d be cleaned out.

He puts all the cards in front of “Panisse” then collects the matchsticks from in front of all three other players and gives them to “Panisse” as well. The other players raise their glasses in a toast to the winner.

End of Act 1.

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ACT TWO

TWO YEARS LATER in the month of September.

Scene 1

In the LIVINGROOM of the late Honoré Panisse, his widow Fanny is reading. The French windows to the garden are open and Fanny has her back to them. The door to the hall is closed. Father Elzéar comes in quietly through the French windows.

PRIEST: Bonjour, Fanny.

Fanny starts slightly, then smiles and stands up to greet him. He seems very pale and nervous.

FANNY: Bonjour, Monsieur le curé! I hope you are coming to have lunch with us.

PRIEST: Alas, no. I've promised to eat with Monsignor Lefebvre, although, by comparison, he keeps a very poor table.

FANNY: Do please sit down, even so. You've looked a little out of sorts these past few months.

PRIEST: I haven't been too good for a while. The Monsignor has actually instructed me to take a sabbatical in a sanatorium for clergy. I'm going there – as soon as I can get away.

He sits while he talks.

FANNY: Let's hope it's simply a case of exhaustion.

PRIEST: My dear child, we are all in God's hands. He chooses the hour for each one of us. And where is your clever son today?

FANNY: He's gone fishing. He enjoys it so much.

PRIEST: Then it's back to Paris again?

FANNY: Not for another fortnight. His course starts in October.

PRIEST: I had thought when he graduated, and top of his class, that was an end of studies.

FANNY: Yes and no. He *has* graduated but now he wants to qualify as a Naval Architect because that was something his father was especially keen for him to do.

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PRIEST: So how long will that take?

FANNY: Three more years, at least.

PRIEST (*thoughtful*): That's a long time.

FANNY: Not at his age.

PRIEST: I confess I was thinking about myself.

FANNY: But why?

PRIEST: I rather fear that within *less* than two years, our Father in Heaven will have sent out a search party for me.

FANNY: Oh no!

PRIEST: Alas yes! But there's a special reason for my concern and I need to tell you about it now. (*Pause*) The fact is, just before he died, your Honoré charged me with a message for you and a letter for Césariot. He wanted me to wait until the boy had finished his studies but – the way it looks now – I may not live long enough to do that. I have to assume our dear Honoré was thinking about Césariot's studies at the Polytechnic, and that means I must talk to you now and not in another three years.

FANNY: Does that mean your message is very serious?

PRIEST: Yes, but entirely to the credit of Honoré. In the big things of life, he was a completely honest man.

FANNY: How well I know that!

PRIEST: Then you know too that, all his life, he felt remorse for concealing the truth from the boy.

There is a silence as he looks at her.

FANNY: I know what you're going to tell me.

PRIEST: His dying wish was that you tell Césariot that Honoré was not his natural father.

FANNY: But why tell him *now*, when he's so happy with his life?

PRIEST: First, so he doesn't find out from someone else. We're very lucky that it hasn't happened already. And secondly, so that he knows you never lied to your husband. Here is the letter from Honoré which you must give to him. (*He hands it to her. She looks at it for a moment.*)

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FANNY: When?

PRIEST: As soon as possible, please.

FANNY: I've thought long and often about our deception ... It wasn't a crime, after all. It was in the child's best interests.

PRIEST: Perhaps – but he's a child no longer; he's a young man. And it seems to me he has a right to know these things. He's at an age to understand; and to forgive. That was certainly Honoré's view. He was afraid divine justice would consign him to Purgatory because of his deception. I don't personally believe there is such a place or that a God of mercy would send souls He had created to spend time there. But I do believe the heavenly chastisement for our earthly sins may be nothing other than the awful memory of our errors and faults which we see all too clearly when we're in Heaven. So who knows; an honest man's soul may still be suffering because of what he called his daily lie. So, by telling Césariot the truth, you can deliver him – not from some great torment – but from constant regret and remorse.

FANNY (*sighing*): Very well. Since it was my husband's wish, I shall do it – just as soon as the right opportunity presents itself.

PRIEST: You can wait a little but *remember* all our lives are in God's hands.

FANNY: If I find the right moment ... (*Offstage, from beyond the French windows, Césariot calls out, "Mama!" She is caught off guard.*) Oh my goodness, he's coming!

Césariot enters, carrying a pannier of fish. Fanny has to hide the letter in her corsage.

CÉSARIOT: Bonjour, Monsieur le Curé!

PRIEST: Bonjour my son: I see you've had a good catch.

CÉSARIOT: I was fishing with Bruno. He knows all the best places, whatever the season or the weather. Are you staying to eat some of this with us?

PRIEST: Not today. I've already told your mother I'm lunching with the Monsignor but thank you for that second spontaneous invitation.

CÉSARIOT: Actually, I was just planning to come and see you, to ask you to say a Mass the day after tomorrow ...

PRIEST: For the second anniversary; of course.

CÉSARIOT: You've already thought about it. Thank you for that.

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PRIEST: It was already in my diary and if, by any chance, you *had* forgotten, I would have said the Mass anyway.

CÉSARIOT: Thank you again. I'll take these fish to the kitchen. Grandma's bouillabaisse tonight then, mama?

Fanny nods and smiles and Césariot exits. The Priest stands and comes towards Fanny who gets up and takes his hand.

PRIEST: Now I must go before the thought of that bouillabaisse leads me into temptation. God's blessing on you, my dear child.

FANNY: Take care of yourself, dear Elzéar, and come and see us again – soon.

He kisses her hand and then gives her a priestly blessing, murmuring "Pax vobiscum" before walking slowly out through the French windows. Fanny goes over to her bureau and opens a drawer. She is about to take the letter out of her corsage when Césariot re-enters behind her. As he speaks, she starts and snatches her hand away from the corsage and shuts the drawer quickly.

CÉSARIOT: Mama! ... Why is it I have the impression you're keeping something from me?

FANNY: Me?

CÉSARIOT: Yes! Some little mystery, that's certain.

FANNY: What *can* you mean?

CÉSARIOT: I've got good eyesight, you know. As I came in just now, as soon as you spotted me you quickly tucked something away. It could have been a letter.

FANNY: What are you thinking?

CÉSARIOT: I'm thinking, on the one hand, since it was clearly Father Elzéar who brought it, that it's probably something completely innocent. And yet ... and yet, *he* wasn't looking altogether comfortable either. Most peculiar, in fact!

FANNY (*laughing*): You think a *priest* is bringing me secret messages from some man?

CÉSARIOT: Neither 'some man', nor even 'some lover', but could it be from someone with more honourable intentions ...?

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FANNY: You couldn't be more wrong but, even so, I'm very touched you should be so obviously jealous and protective of your mother.

CÉSARIOT: That would be a perfectly natural feeling but, truly, it's not jealousy. But since we've broached this delicate subject I think now's a good time to tell you what papa thought about that.

FANNY: And what would *you* know about such matters?

CÉSARIOT: The day before he died, papa said to me, "Césariot, I am putting her care into your hands. For me, she's been a perfect wife but she's still a young woman, too young to stay a widow for over thirty years. And when you go on to get married, she'll be demoted to mother-in-law and then grandmother. I want you to understand: she gave me the springtime of her life but that's no reason why she should sacrifice her summer and her autumn too. So, if, one fine day, she were to meet a man who pleased her, someone who you feel would make her a suitable husband, you mustn't let your natural jealousy or some sense of loyalty to me get in the way of a match." There you are. That's what he said to me as I sat beside him, that day I dashed home from Paris. (*Pause.*) However, he did lay down a couple of conditions. First, this unknown man mustn't be any younger than you. He had this fear that young widows, who've had older husbands, could be tempted to choose much younger men, to sort of restore the balance in their lives, if that makes any sense. And the other thing you know already: there would be a separation of the estate so that you would enjoy a very comfortable life, whatever happened, but you couldn't give your new husband controlling rights over the business. So, if and when this lucky man comes along, I couldn't possibly criticise you since you would be carrying out papa's own wishes.

Fanny kisses him on the cheek.

FANNY: There's no question of that at present, Césariot.

CÉSARIOT: Then show me the letter!

FANNY: Later.

CÉSARIOT: Why are you keeping it from me? Is he younger than you then?

FANNY: Who?

CÉSARIOT: Your mystery letter-writer.

FANNY: The letter isn't addressed to me.

CÉSARIOT: Then who?

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FANNY (*with a sigh of resignation*): We had to get here one day, I suppose, and it might as well be now. (*Fanny brings the letter out and hands it to her son.*) The letter is for you.

CÉSARIOT: For me! (*He takes the letter and looks for a long time at the envelope.*) That's papa's writing.

FANNY: He wrote it on his death-bed.

Césariot continues to stare at the letter and then at his mother.

CÉSARIOT: I'm frightened to open it.

FANNY: I'm not frightened of what's in it, I assure you.

He still hesitates then rips open the envelope and unfolds the paper. He reads it in stupefied silence then gasps and reads it out loud.

CÉSARIOT: Listen! ... "My dear boy; please believe everything that your mother will tell you. She has never in her life lied to me and I have always known that I was not your natural father. Signed, Papa." (*He rereads the letter silently one more time.*) Mama, tell me he was delirious!

FANNY: No. He wanted you to know the truth. You are not the son of Honoré Panisse.

Césariot goes to sit at the table, with his elbows on the table and his face in his hands. There is a silence while he composes his thoughts.

CÉSARIOT: I'm thinking about something Papa said to me years ago – Papa who says he isn't my father but who'll always be *my* papa. One day he said: She's intelligent, she's devout, and she's clean as a whistle. Clean and pure," he said. "I couldn't choose better words for your mother."

FANNY: I hope that's true.

CÉSARIOT: Then he went on, "Whenever I see a newly painted white boat, or newly-washed sheets stretched out on the line in the sunlight; every time I see a meadow full of marguerites, I think about your mother." That's what he said to me ... So what am I going to think about *any* woman from now on when I know that even my own mother can be a liar?

FANNY: Césariot! He told you himself I *never* lied to him.

CÉSARIOT: All right ... yes ... fine! But what he surely meant was you confessed to him and then he forgave you?

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FANNY: No!! He married me in order to give you his name. He knew *everything*.

CÉSARIOT (*after another silence*): Forgive me! Of course that's true. I apologise. But ... this secret ... I don't suppose you were the only ones who knew?

FANNY: No.

CÉSARIOT: Grannie knows?

FANNY: Yes.

CÉSARIOT: Great-Aunt Claudine?

FANNY: She knows too.

CÉSARIOT: And my godfather, I suppose.

FANNY: Yes.

CÉSARIOT: So, when all's said and done, there was a fair amount of public discussion about this whole story and I've lived my whole life in ignorance of the little games being played round me: all the little whisperings and sudden shushing as I came into the room; all these panics and alarms in case I found out. Poor Papa must have felt himself in an impossible position in all this. What kind of a charade you must all have made him play!

FANNY: My dear, that role was the one he chose for himself in full knowledge of the facts. And every *day* of our married life he made a point of thanking me for the gift of a son. You were the pride and joy of his life.

A silence.

CÉSARIOT: You should have told me sooner. I loved him very dearly but I think I could have loved him even more. I could have thanked him myself for his love, and his generosity. And now ... and now, it's too late. (*He hesitates for a moment then blurts out his question.*) And the other man? My natural father?

FANNY: What I've told you has cost me a great deal to say. I've told you because Father Elzéar came to me just now with Honoré's letter and a message for me. Honoré wanted me to tell you that you were not his son and he wrote to you himself to say so. But he didn't say I had to tell you anything else. What good would that do?

CÉSARIOT: Then he's dead?

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FANNY: For me, yes.

CÉSARIOT: Which is as good as saying he's still alive.

FANNY: I suppose so. I haven't seen him for nearly twenty years.

CÉSARIOT: Well, after all, what's it to me! I've no wish to know the name of some rich young man who seduced a little cockle-girl then abandoned her when he found out she was having a baby. It just makes the son of some rich shit!

FANNY (*shocked*): Césariot! That's not true! He wasn't rich but he *was* honest. When he left me, he had no idea I was going to have a child because I didn't even know myself.

CÉSARIOT: You didn't know him very long then? It was some casual affair. You could do that: you, my own mother?

FANNY: No, my dear, no. I knew him for a long, long time. He was a handsome young man, and he was in love with me.

CÉSARIOT: And were you in love with him?

FANNY (*weeping*): If I hadn't truly loved him, you wouldn't be here today to reproach me like this.

CÉSARIOT (*compassionately taking her in his arms*): But if you loved each other so much, why did he leave you?

FANNY: He wanted so desperately to go to sea. All he really wanted was to be a sailor. It was like a sort of madness that consumed him.

CÉSARIOT (*speaking very carefully*): You mean like Marius, César's son?

FANNY (*collapsing in her son's arms*): Like Marius, César's son. It was him.

They stay locked in silent embrace; both are weeping. The lights dim as the music swells.

Scene 2.

BAR DE LA MARINE. César enters and down the remains of a glass of white wine before picking up his broom and contemplating the job in front of him. Just then, someone offstage raps on the closed shutters.

CÉSAR: Who is it?

CÉSARIOT (*offstage*): It's me!

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CÉSAR: Who's *you*?

CÉSARIOT (*offstage*): Me, Césariot.

CÉSAR: At this hour, just a moment!

César opens the door and we hear the shutter open and close before he and Césariot come in. Césariot is pale, nervous and speaking in a clipped and aggrieved manner.

CÉSAR: What's up? Has there been an accident?

CÉSARIOT: No; but I need to talk to you. Close the shutter!

CÉSAR: His royal highness orders me to shut the shutter!

CÉSARIOT: If I knew how it shuts, I'd do it myself. But I'm too well brought up to issue orders to my grandfather.

César shuts it and looks at the young man with some concern.

CÉSAR: You mean 'godfather'.

CÉSARIOT: No I don't. I called you 'grandfather' because you *are* my grandfather.

CÉSAR: Now, who told you that!

CÉSARIOT: My mother. She's told me today.

CÉSAR: What kind of a silly story is this?

CÉSARIOT: Don't play games with me, or pretend you haven't known for a long, long time.

CÉSAR: If it's true then it's you who's telling me.

CÉSARIOT (*handing César the letter*): Right then! Here's Papa's last letter. The one he gave Father Elzéar so he could give it to me after I'd finished my studies.

César, fearful and fumbling with his specs, reads the letter.

CÉSAR: It doesn't say anything about Marius in here!

CÉSARIOT: Mama has told me everything.

CÉSAR (*heaving a huge sigh*): Ayayaïe! Well, here we are in a real sentimental disaster. All right; it's less serious than a car smash, or a dose of

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typhoid maybe ... but look, when you think of all the misfortunes that might hit us at any moment ... what I'm trying to say is ... you've got to realise you've been very lucky. Whatever! But yes; you *are* the son of a boy of twenty and that, frankly, is why you're so damned handsome. First a young father and then a millionaire Papa: it couldn't be better if it had been planned! I mean, look! Brought up like the cock o' the walk, private school, lycée, a top graduate of the swankiest college in France, your own car, a boat, first-class on the train, made-to-measure suits, silk ties, and so on, and so on. But think about this for a moment: if my own son hadn't been such a seafaring simpleton, you'd have been helping me behind this bar right now, washing the glasses and making up orange and lemon curaçaos for the customers. I'm inclined to think that if anyone has lost out from all this, it's me – and I'm not complaining, am I?

CÉSARIOT: Nor me! I'm not complaining. I'm just stating the facts.

CÉSAR: You may be stating the facts but you're not saying much; even if you're thinking double what you're saying.

CÉSARIOT: You're right, but twice nothing is still zero.

CÉSAR: Don't you try to confuse me with mathematics! Just tell me, frankly, what has all this done to you?

CÉSARIOT: It's changed everything.

CÉSAR: But what is it that's changed?

CÉSARIOT: All my ideas; all my opinions, about everybody; above all about my mother.

CÉSAR: Oh yes? Have you just found out your mother was a young woman once. That's not something to get worked up about, is it?

CÉSARIOT: I'm *not* worked up; just astonished. Surely you can understand that.

CÉSAR: Of course I can understand it. It's just that I get the sneaking feeling you would have been less put out if you'd discovered you were the son of a duke, or even an archbishop. Well that's not how it is. You're the son of a handsome waiter and the prettiest seller of sea-urchins in Marseilles. Yes sir, that's just the way it is.

A silence.

CÉSARIOT: Is your son still at sea?

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CÉSAR: No. When he came back the first time, your mother was married – because of you of course – and you were already born. So, off he went again to the South Seas, and he was away another five years. Then he felt he'd had enough of palm trees and coconuts, so he came back and set himself up in Toulon with a friend.

CÉSARIOT: Running a bar, I suppose.

CÉSAR (*amused*): No fear! He's a partner in a garage.

CÉSARIOT: Does he come over to see you from time to time?

CÉSAR: Well, no. He didn't want to come to Marseilles and risk embarrassing your mother or Panisse.

CÉSARIOT: Out of politeness then?

CÉSAR: Call it politeness if you like, but the fact is he's completely abandoned us; me, the bar, and our modest clientele. From time to time, I used to go over to Toulon but, with a bar to run, it wasn't easy to get away. And then, more to the point, there was the woman he was living with; a real vulgar, insolent do-nothing. Any time I went over and offered the least remark she would bite my head off, so, one day, I'm afraid I told my son how I saw things.

CÉSARIOT: And was that how *he* saw things?

CÉSAR: You may well ask! I got a quarter of an hour's satisfaction from telling him and then, can you believe it, he said I'd got it all wrong! Yes sir; my own son! I mean, I left at once and gave the door a good slam and, d'you know what, the next day I got a letter from him. Naturally, I assumed it would be an apology but not at all. My son told me that to prevent further upsets of a similar nature, it would be better if I didn't visit them in future. So, straightaway, I wrote back to tell him, in these circumstances, it would be wholly inappropriate for him to visit me. And, the fact is, I haven't seen him at all for the past six years.

César briefly hides his face in his apron then takes a deep breath and shakes off the threat of tears. Another silence. Césarriot walks up and down, looking around the bar.

CÉSARIOT: Did your father run this bar too?

CÉSAR: He certainly did; and my grandfather. And it was my *great-grandfather* who opened it, in the reign of Louis-Philippe; yes Sir!

CÉSARIOT: A real dynasty then.

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CÉSAR (*perplexed by the word*): Whatever that is.

CÉSARIOT: So this is it! The cradle of my race and the stately home of my ancestors! This zinc topped bar is the altar at which we've worshipped all these years, and these bottles of aperitifs are our household gods. What a joke! (*He bursts into wry laughter.*)

CÉSAR: All that education may have improved your brains but it seems to have damaged your heart.

CÉSARIOT: Why do you say that?

CÉSAR: Because that mucky laugh of yours has hurt me – deeply. I haven't even got the strength to weep.

CÉSARIOT: It's not you I'm laughing at. It's me! Come on, godfather. If I've caused you any pain I'm truly sorry.

CÉSAR: It's not your godfather you've hurt; it's your grandfather.

CÉSARIOT: I'm very sorry, Grandpa.

CÉSAR: Thank you. That makes me feel better ... Well, what do you plan to do now?

CÉSARIOT: I plan to go home to bed, because tomorrow at five in the morning Gaston is coming for me and we're going hunting.

CÉSAR: I meant: what are you planning to do about Marius? Aren't you even curious to see him, even from a distance?

CÉSARIOT: Not in the least.

CÉSAR: Would you like to see some photos of him when he was your age?

CÉSARIOT: What good would that do?

CÉSAR: Some other time, perhaps.

CÉSARIOT: Why?

CÉSAR: After all, we're talking about your father.

CÉSARIOT: Biologically, perhaps.

CÉSAR: No question of "perhaps"! It's a fact.

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CÉSARIOT: Since my mother has said I'm the son *of* Marius and because you can confirm it, then it's a fact. But for me, and for ever, from the depth of my heart I will always be a son *to* Papa. . . . Goodnight, Grandpa.

CÉSAR: Goodnight, my boy.

César moves towards embracing him but finds Césariot's hand extended. They shake hands and, with César opening and closing the shutter, Césariot leaves.

CÉSAR (*reflectively*): Son *of*? . . . Son *to*? . . . Does it make any difference in the end? Don't ask *me*.

César picks up his brush again, and sweeps himself off stage.

Scene 3.

THE SAME. Seven in the morning, a few days later. César is drinking a glass of white wine with Escartefigue and the Doctor at a table stage right.

CÉSAR (*solemnly*): Monsieur Escartefigue, by saying that you have beaten all your previous records and said the daftest things yet. You have ripped up the protective hedge previously established around your stupidity and replanted it a good hundred metres further out in order to spread your feeble mind over a larger territory than I could have imagined possible.

BRUN (*entering as he speaks*): That ringing declaration has at least the merit of total clarity.

ESCARTEFIGUE (*annoyed*): César, you've carried out sentence before coming to proper judgement. Listen, Monsieur Brun . . .

CÉSAR: . . . Monsieur Brun agrees with me.

BRUN: Very likely, but I don't yet know what you're talking about.

CÉSAR: Then do sit down and I'll tell you. Young Césariot is going off this morning, in just a few minutes on his boat, with that good-for-nothing former ferry-boat stoker as crew. Now *he* says the object of his trip is to visit a *friend*. And according to me, '*friend*' can only mean *girl* friend.

ESCARTEFIGUE: And I'm saying if an upright young man says he's going to visit a *friend* there's no reason to leap to the conclusion it must be a *girl* friend. Why shouldn't we believe him?

CÉSAR: Because? Because? Because, for the sake of modesty – and his mother – he's lying! I've told you already but the significance of the word seems to escape you. Modesty is a delicate plant; a subtle thing; a thing to

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admire and to applaud. Modesty is the complete opposite of Escartefiguery! For example, it's only a certain modesty that has me refrain from sharing with you a little secret which is, quite possibly, the reason for Césariot's trip. (*Emphatically*) This is a secret which I cannot reveal. (*Much less emphatically*) Well, not out in public anyway.

ESCARTEFIGUE: There's only us here!

CÉSAR: What I mean is I can't tell you all at once. A secret, after all, is something one doesn't just blurt out. It's something one mentions in a whisper and to one person at a time. (*Taps the side of his nose*) Suffice to say Césariot has just learnt something which has him all shaken up. A great big secret he's known nothing about ...

DOCTOR: But we've *all* known about ...

BRUN: For twenty years ...

CÉSAR: For twenty years, exactly. So, it follows the boy is off to spend a week with his *girl* friend. He wants to get away from here and sort his ideas out; and maybe even tell her all about the romantic story of his life so far.

ESCARTEFIGUE: And why shouldn't he be off to share his news with a *boy* friend?

CÉSAR: Why would he want to be telling a man all this when it's much more fun to tell a *girl* friend – a lover, as he's got a perfect right to do – and, anyway, I couldn't be happier.

BRUN: And because the idea makes you happy, you want it to be true.

CÉSAR: Exactly!

ESCARTEFIGUE: Basically, you're just afraid he's still a virgin!

CÉSAR: Félix, you may be a crude boor, but this time you're right. That is what I'm afraid of. That's what I find ... disturbing.

DOCTOR: And apart from that, gentlemen ... it's a well known cure for teenage acne.

Lights down and music swells during the scene change.

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Scene 4.

LIVINGROOM CHEZ PANISSE. It's now nine in the morning. Césariot is having breakfast. Near him, on the table, there is an open suitcase into which Fanny is putting some clothes.

FANNY: Are you *really* going to Palavas? It all seems so sudden.

CÉSARIOT: Yes, of course! I need a few days to unwind; to let the facts sink in and then forget all you and godfather have told me. I've accepted it but there's no need to talk about it any further; or even to think about it.

FANNY: Let's not talk about it then. But tell me truthfully now! You're not going off to be with that Melina who had you wrapped round her little finger last year? She's just a little minx, an intriguer, and one day she'll announce she's pregnant just to get you to marry her.

CÉSARIOT: I haven't seen the girl since last year, so there's no danger on that score. I don't even know where she is these days.

FANNY: So, truly, you're going to Palavas, and no one's waiting for you there?

CÉSARIOT: Yes, Mama! Someone *is* expecting me; my friend Dromard: you *know* him. You saw him when you came to Paris for my graduation. He had lunch with us at Maxim's.

FANNY: Which one was *he*?

CÉSARIOT: The one with the little curly black beard. I can tell you, he had quite a crush on you.

FANNY: Don't talk such nonsense.

CÉSARIOT: He told me so himself, more than once. "Your mother is ravishing. You'd think she was your sister!"

FANNY: So what's his address at Palavas?

CÉSARIOT: Canary Villa.

FANNY: That sounds silly. Canary Villa! Are you serious?

CÉSARIOT: His father had a shop once, selling birds.

FANNY: And is his mother a widow too?

CÉSARIOT: Yes.

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FANNY: At least *he* hasn't left his mother to her own devices. He invites his friends to come to his place instead of going to theirs.

CÉSARIOT: Now, how should I take that? Anyway, I'll bring him back with me to spend a couple of weeks here.

FANNY: Truly?

CÉSARIOT: Of course I will. He'll bring you flowers and he'll blush scarlet every time you speak to him.

FANNY: What's their telephone number?

CÉSARIOT: I've no idea.

FANNY: Then call me as soon as you get there to tell me what it is.

CÉSARIOT: No!!!

FANNY: Why ever not?

CÉSARIOT: Because it's ridiculous. I'm twenty years old but I just know you'll phone me every morning. It's like police surveillance. They'd all laugh at me. Give me a little room, mama. Don't go on as if I were only ten. I'll call you and I'll write to you.

FANNY: That would be lovely.

CÉSARIOT: Right! I'm going to say my goodbyes then I'm off.

Césariot heads for the bedroom exit. Fanny walks towards the French window.

FANNY: I'll give your crew a shout. He's late again.

The Stoker, bare-footed and wearing dungarees and a fedora, enters via the French windows.

FANNY: Here you are, you little gangster.

STOKER: Here I am: my little gangster's favourite moll.

FANNY (*smiling*): Don't you dare be cheeky to me!

STOKER (*grinning*): Oh please, Madame Fanny, don't be cross with me. You know I've nursed a secret passion for you for years and years. Is the captain ready?

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FANNY: He'll be here in a minute. He's just gone to say goodbye to his grandmother. Is everything ready?

STOKER: Yes, Madame Fanny! Everything is scraped, wiped, polished, and painted. The brasses are shining. The motor-boat has never looked better. With the greatest respect, she's almost as good looking as you. She only needs one turn of the starting handle and it'll be full steam ahead.

FANNY: Do you know where you're going at all?

STOKER: We're heading west once we're out of the harbour; in the general direction of America.

FANNY: Yes, but what port?

STOKER: I really don't know.

FANNY: You know but you're not telling me!

STOKER: Madame Fanny, if I know where we're going may the Good Lord strike me blind. On my parents' grave and all that I hold most dear in the world, I *swear* I do not know where we are going. Now do you believe me?

FANNY: All right, I believe you.

STOKER: Then you're making a grave mistake. We're going to Palavas-les-Flots, to visit a friend of César's.

FANNY: Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?

STOKER (*smiling sweetly*): For the pleasure of teasing you.

FANNY: Aren't you ashamed to have sworn a falsehood on your parents' grave?

STOKER: They're dead now. Can anything much worse happen to them? We're going to Palavas.

FANNY: Are you *sure*?

STOKER: Madame Fanny, let me be struck by lightning, let my pipe poison me, or let me lose my five senses ...

FANNY: Enough, enough! Here's what you're going to do then. Every day, you're going to phone me.

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STOKER: Okay ...

FANNY: I want news of my son because ... well, because I don't want to bother him during his little holiday which is why I'm not asking him to do it. Do you understand?

She hands him some money and he looks at it wide-eyed before pocketing it.

STOKER: Perfectly! And I suppose it's not *absolutely* necessary for me to mention this to him?

FANNY (*smiling*): No, not at all! Just tell me what he's doing. I can't go with him because of the business but, thanks to you, I can be with him in spirit.

STOKER: So you can, Madame. I'll tell you about all the people he meets and the fishing parties. And, of course, if he meets up with any pretty girls, you'd like to hear about that too?

FANNY: Well, of course! You know, he's still very young. I mean, did you know that Melina?

STOKER: Last year, you mean?

FANNY: Yes. Now, if you see her anywhere around, let me know at once.

STOKER: Count on me! I know that one. A real gold-digger, if you ask me.

FANNY: Exactly! That's what you need to tell Césariot. If you see *her* at Palavas, call me straight away!

STOKER: Look out, here he comes.

Dressed for the trip, carrying another bag which he hands to the Stoker, Césariot enters. The Stoker waits at the French window while Césariot kisses his mother.

CÉSARIOT: Au revoir, Mama!

FANNY: Au revoir, my dear.

With a little sob, she runs off.

STOKER: You know I'm not curious, and not one to ask too many questions but, well, what are you *really* doing?

CÉSARIOT: First of all, let's discuss what you're really doing.

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STOKER: Me!

CÉSARIOT: Yes, you!

STOKER: Not the same as you, then?

CÉSARIOT: No. I'm going to drop you off at Palavas.

STOKER: You're putting me ashore?

CÉSARIOT: For a week, give or take. You'll go to the Dromards at Canary Villa and you'll give them this letter (*which he produces.*)

STOKER: And where exactly do these rich canaries perch?

CÉSARIOT: I don't know *exactly* but the address is on the envelope, so you only have to ask someone for directions. Now, have you got that so far?

STOKER: I think so, yes. But then what?

CÉSARIOT: *Then* there are these two letters for my mother. You'll send them off from the Post Office in Palavas. Not at once, and not together, of course. Put the first one in the post tomorrow.

STOKER: Which one is that?

CÉSARIOT: This one, where I've underlined "Marseilles". Look. (*He shows the Stoker who nods.*)

STOKER: Okay. And the second?

CÉSARIOT: When I phone you.

STOKER: But where will I be when you phone me?

CÉSARIOT: At the Palm Trees Hotel, where you'll be staying. I've booked you in. It's on the quay at Palavas. Here's eight hundred francs for your expenses.

The Stoker looks first at the money, then at Césariot and finally looks around to make sure they are not overheard.

STOKER: Listen, Césariot; I need to tell you your mother has asked me to spy on you and phone her with the results of my espionage.

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CÉSARIOT: I was sure she would so I've already planned for that. Here are your three reports, numbered in order. (*Hands them over.*) If you read them carefully before you phone her, you'll see I've anticipated all her questions.

STOKER: She's already afraid you're not visiting pet canaries but some pet bird or other, like that Melina. Now I'm beginning to wonder if she isn't on to something.

CÉSARIOT: It's not Melina!

STOKER: So, is she good looking?

CÉSARIOT: Gorgeous!

STOKER: Do I get to see her?

CÉSARIOT: Not a chance!

STOKER: Not even a photo.

CÉSARIOT: One day, perhaps. I'll be back in three or four days to visit the Dromards. You'll stay on at the hotel.

STOKER: Stay away as long as you like. Don't worry about me. D'you think the hotel has some pretty chambermaids.

CÉSARIOT: Half a dozen, it says in the Guide Michelin.

STOKER: That's enough to be going on with. And is it the sort of hotel where you put your boots outside the door at night?

CÉSARIOT: Naturally.

STOKER: Dammit! If I'd known that, I'd have brought a pair.

CÉSARIOT: Have you no shoes?

STOKER: No. I've got a smart mechanic's uniform in the boat locker, though. But bare feet are more the thing on a boat. Still, you've given me so much money I could even go and buy a pair.

CÉSARIOT: Then let's go.

As they exit together by the French windows, the Stoker gives Césariot some useful advice.

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STOKER: Okay, but listen, when you're off on your own and you don't have me to keep an eye on you, remember to cut off the petrol when you switch off the engine. That carburettor leaks a bit and it'll just piss away the petrol if you forget.

End of Act 2.

ACT THREE

Scene 1.

THE SAME, a few days later. Fanny enters from the door and, turning back, speaks to someone offstage, then walks to centre stage to await her visitor.

FANNY: Yes, yes! Whoever he is, ask him to come in. Any friend of Césariot ...

In a moment, Dromard enters and makes a very correct bow.

DROMARD: Madame ...

FANNY: Bonjour, young man! Do come in. Any friend of my son is welcome here. Please sit down. Alas, Césariot hasn't been here these past few days. He's visiting a comrade from college. May I offer you some cherries in brandy?

DROMARD: That would be delicious. Yes, please.

Fanny puts the dishes for the cherries on the table.

FANNY: Are you in the same class as my son?

DROMARD: Yes, Madame, we've been in the same class for three years now.

FANNY: And are you planning to specialise as a Naval Architect, like him?

DROMARD: No, Madame. I want to make a career in the army. I'm joining the artillery.

FANNY: Do you live in Paris?

DROMARD: Actually, our family is from Valence but I know the coast along here very well. We have a little property where I've spent my summer holidays for years and years. We were there already but we all had to go off to a cousin's wedding in Valence. Now I'm just about to go off for an eight-day cruise to Corsica, which is how I happen to be in Marseilles, and I wanted to say hello to Césariot. Still, never mind, maybe I'll see him when I get back.

FANNY: So when do you join your regiment? October, I suppose?

DROMARD: Yes, October! And until then I'm going to relax on the beach. If you'll let him, I'd like to invite Césariot to spend a few days with us. It's very near ...

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FANNY: Where exactly?

DROMARD: Palavas-les-Flots.

FANNY (*suddenly suspicious*): Ah! And what did you say your name was?

DROMARD: Dromard, Madame. Pierre Dromard. I have, in fact, had the honour of being introduced to you already; one day last year.

FANNY (*calm on the outside*): Yes, indeed ... but didn't you not have a little black beard then?

DROMARD: I'm flattered that you remember me. Mama made me shave it off before she would let me go to the wedding.

César barrels in unannounced through the French windows. The presence of Dromard makes him pause but only for a second.

CÉSAR: Bonjour, Monsieur. (*To Fanny*) Fanny, has the Stoker phoned today?

FANNY: Even better! May I present Monsieur Dromard, who has come over from Valence and who's passing through Marseilles?

CÉSAR: Ayayaïe!

FANNY (*to Dromard*): Monsieur César is my son's godfather.

DROMARD: Delighted to meet you, Sir. How are you?

CÉSAR: Puzzled, quite frankly, Monsieur. Puzzled.

DROMARD: How so?

CÉSAR: It's nothing; nothing at all. (*He flaps his hands at Dromard in his confusion.*) So, you've left Palavas; and my godson; back there at your place? (*To Fanny.*) You can understand. He didn't want to come back at once and he's being made very welcome there, I'm sure ...

DROMARD: Where, at my place?

CÉSAR: At your villa in Palavas, of course. You know perfectly well you invited him over there for ten days. So, it follows he's there now. Of course he is!

DROMARD (*baffled but trying to play along*): Well ... evidently, yes, I do know this ... at least that's what you give me to understand. Ah yes, yes, you are absolutely right! *That's* what the cook was saying; when she phoned me the other day. It just didn't sink in at the time. (*Now beginning to lie*

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enthusiastically) That's what it is. He's over there at my house. The Canaries. Exactly.

FANNY (*brusquely*): I think that makes you as big a liar as my son, which is saying something. If they're all like you in the class, there will be quite a collection of little liars joining the military this autumn.

CÉSAR: Come on now, Fanny. If I were to give you my word he's there . . .

FANNY: You! I'm as sure as I can be that you're mixed up in this and you know perfectly well where he is. Fine! You help him get up to mischief if that's what you want. You push him towards young men's capers and all the consequences. He'll go far with you to push him along. (*Wickedly.*) After all, think who he takes after!

Fanny exits rapidly, slamming the door. Dromard is frozen rigid with embarrassment and César grins foolishly.

CÉSAR: She gets a bit like that sometimes. It's her character, you know; a little excitable. Yes, she does have an excitable temperament but you mustn't judge solely on that.

DROMARD: Monsieur César, Césariot is my very good friend and I don't want to land him, or me, any deeper in trouble. Can you please tell me what is happening?

CÉSAR: If you'll be just as frank with me?

DROMARD: Certainly!

CÉSAR: Well, the young scallywag went off three or four days ago in his motor boat, saying he was visiting *you* and staying at Canary Villa. Quite honestly, and for reasons I don't need to go into, I had the idea he was off for a spot of feminine consolation; the sort a fellow can't so easily enjoy at home, if you get my meaning. So then . . .

DROMARD (*interrupting*): Monsieur! Your godson is simply not that sort of person. In all the time we've been students together, I've never known him misbehave like that. And besides, he is very much in love with a girl from a very respectable family.

CÉSAR: So there you are then! He's gone off to meet *her*.

DROMARD: Oh no, not at all. If he is with a young girl, it can't be the young girl I was telling you about.

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CÉSAR: Well, I don't know. These modern girls! If she's really in love with him ...

DROMARD: I can honestly say I think she's *very* much in love with him. But we're talking about someone from a very rich and sophisticated family. Her name is Irène Bermond. You'll know the name; the liqueur producers.

CÉSAR: I'll say I do. Bermond is a name to conjure with and you can find it on bottles in every bar in France. Expensive stuff; but very, very good. I'll bet she's a stunner!

DROMARD: Delightful! She's eighteen and lives with her family at their chateau near Rambouillet ...

CÉSAR: Where did they meet?

DROMARD: At a tennis party.

CÉSAR (*in awe*): The boy plays tennis!

DROMARD: He does, and very well too.

CÉSAR (*probing*): But who's to say the young lady isn't down here, on the Cote d'Azur, at Saint-Tropez perhaps?

DROMARD: I say: because I saw her myself in Paris just a week ago and I was coming here to pass on messages from her. She's off to spend a month with her family now at Blonville.

CÉSAR (*as if savouring a fine wine*): Blonville! Rambouillet!

DROMARD: You know them?

CÉSAR: Only by reputation. Very impressive! Especially Rambouillet.

DROMARD: Why Rambouillet?

CÉSAR: The President of the Republic. Bang! Bang! (*He shoots a brace of imaginary pheasants.*) Magnificent! And Irène sounds like a very honest and serious name.

DROMARD: I don't know about that, but whoever marries *her* won't have anything serious to worry about.

CÉSAR: I couldn't agree more. Fine. But it still doesn't explain what he's up to. Listen, Monsieur Dromard, I suggest you beat a tactical retreat. Go out through the garden. I'll make your excuses. Come back again though, and sample my extensive range of Bermond liqueurs in the Bar de la Marine.

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DROMARD: I'll gladly take your advice. Thank you. Au revoir, Monsieur!

Dromard exits by the French window leaving César who stands for a moment shaking his head and then, with a broad grin, he enacts a little pantomime. With all the necessary actions, he accepts gun after gun from the keeper and slaughters half-a-dozen pheasants in quick succession. Then he speaks to the other imaginary members of the shooting party.

CÉSAR: Bang, bang! ... Bang, bang! ... Bang, bang! ... Bravo, Monsieur le Président ! ... Good shot, Monsieur Bermond! ... Bonjour, Madame Bermond! ... Enchanté (*and he kisses her hand*) Irène! (*Then he is suddenly pensive.*) Only, they don't sound like folk you could invite for a weekend at the seaside shack. Still, you never know. I mean, I'd be more or less family!

Scene 2.

The same. The following morning.

In the room are Honorine and Fanny. César enters through the French windows.

CÉSAR: They're on their way. They'll be alongside in a moment or two.

HONORINE: Oh dear! There's going to be such an awful row. I feel terrible.

FANNY: Calm yourself. I don't plan to say a word.

HONORINE: That's what you *say*, but if looks could kill ... And as for you, César, I can just tell you're going to have a stroke.

CÉSAR: Not at all! After all, he's twenty years old now. On the contrary, I don't propose to say a single word. We'll let him tell us all about his holiday ... and then we'll pose a few simple questions. Aha! Here comes the advance guard.

The Stoker enters through the French windows, carrying a couple of bags. He is wreathed in smiles and seemingly without a care in the world.

STOKER: Bonjour, ladies and gentleman! Here we are; safely home. Madame Fanny, Madame Dromard sends her very best wishes to you.

HONORINE (*stage whisper*): He's got a nerve!

FANNY (*boxing his ears as she passes*): Take that, you scoundrel. That's the sort of bonjour you deserve.

STOKER: Ayayaïe! Something's not right!

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CÉSAR (*grabbing him by the scruff of the neck and shaking him*): Little liar! I wonder the phone didn't blow up, the lies you told! Go on, hop it! But go out that way so you can't tip off your partner-in-crime ...

He bundles the Stoker out through the door. There is an expectant pause as they all look at the French window and in comes Césariot.

CÉSARIOT: Bonjour!

HONORINE: Bonjour, young man. (*She greets him with the usual French double kiss.*) Oh, you do have a dirty face!

CÉSARIOT: Bonjour, mama!

He goes to embrace her but she pushes him away.

FANNY: No thank you.

CÉSARIOT: Why not?

FANNY: I'm not in the mood.

HONORINE: She's been upset ever since you left.

FANNY: So why are you back so early?

CÉSARIOT: Because, after all, Dromard had to go off to Valence to a family wedding. He couldn't get out of it.

FANNY: That's such a shame because, according to your letters, you were having such a good time.

HONORINE: And what about Madame Dromard? Is she nice?

CÉSARIOT: Charming!

HONORINE: It must be very nice to have such delightful friends.

CÉSAR: And all that fishing!

CÉSARIOT: Wonderful! Especially the long line fishing ... and above all we had such good weather for it all.

CÉSAR: True ... but at this time of year that's not so remarkable. (*With animation*) What I would really have liked to have seen was that little masked ball.

CÉSARIOT (*surprised and wary*): Where was that?

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CÉSAR: At the Dromards! The Stoker told us all about it on the telephone.

HONORINE: My, but you do seem surprised! Don't you want to tell us about all the pretty girls you danced with?

CÉSARIOT: Now why should I want to conceal such a natural event?

CÉSAR: Did you make a good choice of costume? Where did you get the idea from?

CÉSARIOT (*letting go of reality*): An engraving ... well, a drawing, really.

HONORINE: You must have looked wonderful. Beyond words!

FANNY (*dryly*): What did you wear?

CÉSARIOT (*evasive*): Well, you know, it wasn't a real disguise: I mean to say, not a proper costume, if you follow me.

CÉSAR: No, but spill the beans. How were you disguised?

CÉSARIOT: I ... I ... that is ...

FANNY (*brusque*): You went as a liar, didn't you!

CÉSARIOT (*disconcerted*): What's that supposed to mean?

FANNY: That you're lying; that you're a lamentable liar; and that it humiliates me to see my own son floundering about in such filthy behaviour.

CÉSARIOT (*making one final attempt*): Who could have told you such a thing?

FANNY: Your own friend, Dromard! He was here yesterday. He came here from Valence specially to see you.

CÉSARIOT: Ah! How kind and how helpful! ... I must remember to thank him, most sincerely.

HONORINE: He didn't do it on purpose. You could easily have prevented all this.

CÉSAR: And of course, we told him you were off to visit *him*!

CÉSARIOT: That must have tickled him pink!

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FANNY: He was no more pink than you are right now. He even tried to lie about it to keep up your deception. He's another young hypocrite, that one. I sent him packing straightaway.

CÉSARIOT: I can picture the scene.

FANNY (*getting increasingly angry*): Now, young man, you'll oblige me by going to see the doctor this afternoon and having a thorough examination. Meanwhile, I want every stitch of clothing on your body so that I can have it thoroughly disinfected.

CÉSARIOT: Mama!

FANNY (*angry*): Go at once and strip off; then have a long hot shower!

Césariot shrugs and exits by the door. Everyone looks at each other.

CÉSAR: Fanny, you didn't have to make a scene over nothing at all.

FANNY (*even angrier*): Let me bring up my son the way I choose. You've no right to criticise me for what I do when everyone knows how you brought up your own! I'm going to get to the bottom of all this. You can all clear off! Now! I want to talk to my son – in *private*!

He meekly accepts his banishment and leaves by the French window which is left wide open. Fanny goes over to the door.

FANNY: Césariot! Come back here, at once!

She makes a point of closing and locking the French windows. Césariot enters and closes the door. For a moment, mother and son look at each other then they go straight to each other and embrace. Their conversation then continues more quietly than before.

FANNY: Why these ridiculous fibs?

CÉSARIOT: You're right! Ridiculous and pointless, like my little expedition.

FANNY: Where were you?

CÉSARIOT: Toulon.

Fanny puts her hand to her mouth. A silence.

FANNY: Did you see him?

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CÉSARIOT: Yes.

FANNY: Did you speak to him?

CÉSARIOT: Yes. I got him to check over the engine in my boat.

FANNY: Did you tell him who you were?

CÉSARIOT: No. In the end, it wasn't possible.

FANNY: Why not?

CÉSARIOT: I was so disappointed.

FANNY: In what way?

CÉSARIOT: He's not the sort of father one could feel proud of.

FANNY (*springing at once to the defence of Marius*): Because he runs a garage?

CÉSARIOT: Not at all. It's as honourable a profession as any other. But he's in partnership with a real scoundrel.

FANNY: His partner isn't *him*!

CÉSARIOT: I found out the police searched his garage looking for stolen cars.

FANNY: But they raid *every* garage for that reason.

CÉSARIOT: Very probably. But there's something else. His partner says the customs suspect him of smuggling cigarettes.

FANNY: But you can find contraband cigarettes in every bar in every port! Your own godfather sells them, right under the nose of Monsieur Brun.

CÉSARIOT: I didn't know that!

FANNY: Then I'm telling you now. Don't be such a prude.

CÉSARIOT: But that wasn't all. This man Fernand said they're shipping girls in from Algiers and not for the good of their health.

FANNY: It's not true! Who told you such a thing?

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CÉSARIOT: His own partner!

FANNY: I'd rather believe the man was making a fool of you; because if it's true that would be something too terrible for me to bear.

CÉSARIOT: Mama! You're not in any way responsible for the mistakes of your youth ...

FANNY: But I am, that's just the point, I am! It was me made him go off. I was so sure he'd come back soon, when he'd got the seawater out of his veins. But as soon as he'd gone, I regretted it bitterly. Then, of course, Doctor Venelle announced your arrival and I was completely out of my mind. My mother was sobbing, Aunt Claudine was beside herself with despair, and I was terrified of the gossip-mongers, of the jokes people would make in the street. My mother said to me, "If your father were alive today, he'd kill you!" Césariot, I was only eighteen! Now, today, twenty years later, I realise that it needn't have made any difference. Two years of waiting; what was that compared to a lifetime's happiness. Instead, I went and ruined my life but, in doing so, I ruined his as well.

CÉSARIOT (*stunned*): Did you *never* love my papa? (*He sits while she walks about the room.*)

FANNY: I loved him: tenderly, gratefully, with affection and I miss him just as much as you do. He took the place of the father I lost when I was only twelve. If I have regrets they're not for me but for the other person involved in your creation, regret that I was the cause of the chain of unhappy events his life has been. If you'd known him when he was your age, you'd understand what I'm saying. And even when we were younger, going to catechism classes, he was never like the other boys. The others were an awful bunch, swearing and saying awful things, making rude gestures to the girls. But him, *never!* He would protect me from the big ones' teasing and I just knew, from early on, that, one day, I was going to marry him. Later on, when I ran the sea-food stall, I'd watch him working in the bar. Now and again, he'd come out and we'd chat so happily to each other. And quite often, in the afternoon, I'd sit on the terrace with my legs up on another chair and his straw hat over my eyes pretending to sleep, and I see him come out and stand quite close with his arms crossed, just looking at me. And I'd be secretly looking back at him, with his blue apron, his bronzed arms and that quiff of hair that kept falling over his forehead. Nowadays, any time I go past the bar I can still hear those little wooden clogs of mine going click-clack ... But that was long ago and far away and is never going to come back. Alas! (*She sits and dabs her eyes. He stands.*)

CÉSARIOT: Now you've got me worried!

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FANNY: I'm sorry. Why should that be?

CÉSARIOT: Just because you said "alas"! I have the impression you might still love him ...

FANNY: What I love is only a memory: perhaps the memory of my youth.

CÉSARIOT: And of his! Because it seems to me that if you were to meet him today you wouldn't recognise him. He's not a bit like you describe him. Yes, he's got a pleasant temperament, but he's skinny and coated with sump oil.

FANNY: Which only goes to prove he *works* for a living. If it's only a question of money, is there some way we could help him – without his knowing, of course.

CÉSARIOT: No! Besides, he'd guess at once. And in any case, what good would it do? Besides, he doesn't seem to be hard up at all. Any sort of reconciliation is out of the question. Come on, mama; remember your husband's last words. He wanted you to begin life again but with an *honourable* man, one worthy of him and his memory. I admit to you I did wonder if papa had been thinking of Marius when he left these messages and that's why I went to look at him. Well, I've seen him now and he's not the man you once knew. Nothing's possible from that quarter. Let's not talk about it any more. (*He brings her to her feet.*) Come on! I'll go and have that shower and get cleaned up, but you really don't need to disinfect anything.

They walk off together through the door.

End of Act 3.

ACT FOUR

Scene 1.

THE BAR DE LA MARINE, some days later. The main door is wide open and everyone keeps looking outside. Escartefigue sits at the one table. The Stoker delivers him a fresh glass of white wine. César comes and stands in the doorway of the bar in pensive mood. Brun enters.

BRUN: Bonjour, gentlemen!

CÉSAR/ESCARTEFIGUE/STOKER: Bonjour, Monsieur Brun.

BRUN (*pointing outside*): What might that be lying here on the otherwise uncluttered terrace of my favourite bar; and is there, just possibly, an innocent explanation?

STOKER: That, Monsieur Brun, is a bowler hat. Why didn't you give it a good kick?

BRUN: I simply didn't feel the necessity.

ESCARTEFIGUE: You didn't feel that because you come from Lyon. Someone from Marseilles, when he sees a bowler hat in the middle of the pavement, just can't restrain himself. He shoots for goal! Wallop!

BRUN: Oh yes; and then what happens?

STOKER (*tapping the side of his nose*): The thing is, Monsieur Brun, underneath there's a great big brick. We call it a sod-catcher.

BRUN: A sod-catcher! It's a leg-breaker. Tell me, frankly, is it your hope that someone is going to get caught by this?

STOKER: Maybe more than one, if we're lucky.

BRUN: It's ludicrous!

CÉSAR: Idiotic.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Criminal!

STOKER: But great fun!

BRUN: I'm hard pressed to see what's funny about crippling an innocent passer-by. (*A pause.*) You're kidding me. There's no brick.

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STOKER: There's one way to find out. Go out and give it a kick. Up to you!

Brun hesitates then exits. The others crane forward and then show disappointment

BRUN (*offstage*): Well I'm damned.

He enters and sits at the table.

CÉSAR: Hey, look out! There's someone coming. (*He points up the street*).

ESCARTEFIGUE (*stage whisper*): Now he looks like just the right sort!

BRUN: You could be right. Oh dear, oh dear!

Pause; and then a cry of pain. Those onstage rub their hands in glee. Fernand enters limping and in pain and rests one hand on the table.

CÉSAR (*sympathetically*): Have you hurt yourself?

FERNAND: If I knew who the cretin was who set that booby-trap; because that's what it is, gentlemen, a booby-trap, I'd, I'd ... It was put there quite deliberately. And I was wearing my new kid-skin shoes!

BRUN: I hope you haven't broken anything.

FERNAND: You're damned right I have. I've broken my barometer.

BRUN (*staring at the injured foot*): You had a barometer ... in there?

FERNAND: Exactly! In my shoe! I had a perfectly calibrated corn in there. It could give me a weather forecast three days in advance. (*He gently feels the toe of his shoe.*) I can't feel it any more. Ow, ow, ow! (*He picks up Escartefigue's glass from the table and downs the contents in one gulp.*) Please forgive me, monsieur – a medical emergency. I can feel the pain all the way up to my shoulders. I'm going to be in pain for three days, minimum! It's cretinous. And it's criminal.

BRUN: I couldn't agree more.

FERNAND: What if I'd broken my leg?

CÉSAR: Now, don't exaggerate!

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FERNAND: And I'm telling you that a swift kick, delivered with the right amount of force could even result in death!

BRUN: In death! Oh, that's too much!

FERNAND: You don't believe me. Just you wait. *(He exits and speaks from offstage.)* You're going to see what'll happen: at the very least someone will be permanently crippled! *(He enters again with a grin)* And if we're lucky it'll be some old codger and we'll actually hear the bones snapping. Let's wait and see. *(Fernand sits down. The others, somewhat stunned into silence, exchange looks with each other and shrugs.)* Aha! Who have we here? Damn, he's stepped over it.

Césariot enters. He sees Fernand at once and comes over to stand directly in front of him.

CÉSARIOT: You! And just what might *you* be doing here?

FERNAND: Business!

CÉSARIOT: Are you here on your own?

FERNAND: I am old enough to be allowed out on my own, but, as it happens, my partner's visiting Marseilles, buying spare parts.

CÉSARIOT: My advice to you is not to stay here: even if your partner-in-crime sent you.

FERNAND: And what have I ever done to you that you speak to me in that tone of voice?

CÉSARIOT: It's the tone of voice one uses to speak to a cheap crook of your sort. *(To César)* Godfather, a word with you! It's important.

He steers César off stage. The others look at Fernand with astonishment.

ESCARTEFIGUE *(shocked)*: The way he spoke to you!

FERNAND: He was just having a joke with me.

BRUN: It didn't sound like a joke to me.

FERNAND: That's because you don't know him. But I know him pretty well, you know. He's from Martigues actually; he's a journalist.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Now there's a surprise! Césariot is a journalist now.

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FERNAND: Do you know him too?

ESCARTEFIGUE: I should say so. I've known him since he was born. That's young Césariot, the son of Monsieur Panisse.

FERNAND: Oh my God! You mean the son of Panisse, the sail-maker? The fellow who died a couple of years ago?

ESCARTEFIGUE: The very same.

FERNAND: Holy Mother of God! Then he's the son of Marius!

BRUN: How dare you suggest such a thing?

ESCARTEFIGUE: What wicked things folk say!

BRUN: And the dimwits that believe them.

FERNAND (*realising at last the damage he may have done*): Oh what a stupid fool I've been! Oh dear, oh Lord! The damage I must have done! This is a catastrophe! Gentlemen, this is very grave. I have very likely committed a crime. I appeal to your good nature, your honour and your discretion. I must speak to Césariot at once. *He exits through the door.*

As the others look on in astonishment, the lights dim, the music swells and the gauze curtain is drawn across the stage.

Scene 2.

Spots pick out Césariot and Fanny at opposite sides downstage, speaking to each other on the telephone.

CÉSARIOT: Hello mama, something very serious has happened. I'm down at the Bar de la Marine and I've just run into that individual I spoke to you about.

FANNY: What individual?

CÉSARIOT: Marius's partner-in-crime.

FANNY: Césariot, we agreed we would never speak of this matter again.

CÉSARIOT: I know, mama, but now this person is saying he was lying. I'd really like you to see him and hear for yourself.

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FANNY: I never had the least shred of doubt he was lying. Why should I need to see him?

CÉSARIOT: The thing is, mama, Marius is Marseilles too. He's come on business, to buy spare parts. I know where he is. I'm going to meet him. I need to speak to him first.

FANNY: Why?

CÉSARIOT: Trust me. Just go to godfather's now and wait for me there.

As the spots go out, both exit and then the lights go up on the front of stage, representing a street in Marseilles near the Bar de la Marine. Marius enters from stage left, head down, writing in a notebook. He pauses. Césarriot walks in from stage right. Marius finishes his note then closes the book and looks up to see Césarriot advancing towards him.

MARIUS (*delighted*): Well, well! We meet again, for heaven's sake! What are you doing *here*?

CÉSARIOT (*quite emotional*): Waiting for you.

MARIUS: But who told you I was ...?

CÉSARIOT: Fernand.

MARIUS: That's not always a good sign. And where's he?

CÉSARIOT: At the Bar de la Marine.

MARIUS: Even worse! What on earth's he doing there?

CÉSARIOT: Right now, I've no idea but that's where he is, talking to César and, more than that, what he's told us has made us all very happy.

MARIUS: But how do you know César?

CÉSARIOT: Don't you see it yet? I'm Césarriot!

MARIUS: Who!?

CÉSARIOT: I'm Fanny's son.

MARIUS: What are you saying?

CÉSARIOT: That I'm *your* son too

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The two men stand face to face in silence. As the realisation sinks in, Marius begins to smile, to grin and then, with a roar of delight, he embraces his long lost son. After a moment, he steps back and, taking his arm, they walk round the stage.

MARIUS: It's slowly sinking in; and now I feel I want to say all these fatherly things to you. Or find new things to say, because it's all been said before. But they just won't come.

CÉSARIOT: Me too! It's difficult.

Marius has a good long look at him and then, once more, they embrace and kiss each other tenderly on the cheek. A moment passes.

MARIUS: We must look at bit peculiar, the pair of us, going on like this out here on the street. (*But they do not let go of each other.*) Tell me, when you came to Toulon, were you *wanting* to see me?

CÉSARIOT: Yes.

MARIUS: Did you know then; that I was your father?

CÉSARIOT: Yes. Mama had just told me and I had this great urge to know you, but I was scared, in case it went wrong ... Then I was told such terrible things about you from Fernand I simply ran away and came home.

MARIUS: And then you repeated all these things to your mother?

CÉSARIOT: Yes.

MARIUS: And what did she have to say?

CÉSARIOT: She was very upset, but she didn't altogether believe ...

MARIUS: "Not altogether", but maybe just a little ... So, where are we going now?

CÉSARIOT: To your father's. He's waiting for you. Are you coming?

MARIUS (*momentarily hesitant*): If you really think ... Come on, let's go!

They exit arm in arm. Lights dim, music swells, the gauze curtain rolls back.

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Scene 3.

In the BAR DE LA MARINE. Fanny and César are listening to Fernand.

FERNAND (*in despair*): Madame, I assure you again, not a single word was true. I was just playing the fool. But even so, your son was partly to blame. He kept asking a load of nosey questions. I wanted to have a bit of a joke, so I made up all that rubbish just to stir things up. But not one syllable, not a single breath of it was true.

FANNY: I was sure of that!

CÉSAR: I don't know what's holding me back from giving you a good hiding.

FERNAND: But how could I possibly have known who I was speaking to?

Marius enters, followed by Césarriot.

MARIUS: Greetings to one and all – except that one, the biggest idiot on the face of this earth!

FERNAND: Listen Marius, you can say all that to me later and I'll listen with a good grace but, right now, I'm intruding on a family gathering so I'll make myself scarce.

He exits and there is a silence. Marius does not dare look at Fanny but she can't take her eyes off him.

MARIUS: Right then! I've come here because the boy asked me to come, and only because I need to get something off my chest. What Fernand's been saying to you is of no importance whatsoever. He likes to pass himself off as some great big gangster; that's the long and the short of it. As for my personal quarrel with you, Dad, the person who *was* living with me left a year ago with all my spare cash, but it was worth every sou to get shot of her.

CÉSAR: Well done, you! After all, she was the reason we got so angry with each other.

MARIUS: *You* were the one who got angry. Now tell me, where does the story come from that says I've been in jail?

CÉSAR: I can tell you that. One day about ten years ago, a man came into the bar. He was already drunk and laughing to himself. He said to me, "I know your boy very well. We were in prison together". Monsieur Brun and

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Escartefigue heard him too. I didn't even have the strength to throw him out. I just went into the kitchen and had a good weep.

MARIUS: What was he like, this man?

CÉSAR: I don't know his name but he said he was from Toulouse ...

MARIUS (*laughing heartily*): He wasn't lying to you ...

FANNY: Marius! What are you saying?

MARIUS: We did seven days in the cells together but it was on board ship during our military service. We came back from a boozy run ashore one Sunday evening and knocked over a Petty Officer. He's done well since then though, has Bertrand. They made him a Lieutenant in the Marines and gave him the Croix de Guerre for bravery in Algeria. Now, is there anything else I'm accused of?

CÉSAR (*subdued*): And I suppose it was for nothing you were taken to the magistrates' court.

MARIUS: *You* want to talk about American cigarettes?

CÉSAR: Yes, you were dealing in them wholesale and let yourself get caught by sheer stupidity.

MARIUS: No, not me. That was Fernand, again. He got a three month suspended sentence. And because they found three packets of cigarettes on my desk in the garage – which *I* didn't leave there – I was fined a hundred francs. That's all. (*He looks at César and grins.*) Of course, it's a venal sin to smoke contraband cigarettes from time to time. Don't you agree, papa?

CÉSAR (*embarrassed*): Well, I mean, my God, two packets, three packets: that wasn't worth bothering the magistrates' court about. They must be real savages in Toulon.

MARIUS: Oh I think they are! And a bar owner who keeps five or six packs under the counter to give some pleasure to his clientele; well, they probably wouldn't send him to pull an oar as a galley-slave, but they could very well shut down his shop.

CÉSAR: A bar isn't a shop: it's an establishment!

MARIUS: As you wish. Anyway, I need to tell you what's been happening lately. When you (*nodding to Césariot*) and I came back from looking at your motor boat, the police came looking for me. They were looking for a stolen

car and they'd already been through a dozen garages before they got round to mine. I'd had it there a week and changed the carburettor. Some Italian brought it in and I had the bill all ready for him. Anyway, I gave the police his description and they asked me to come down to the station and look at photographs. I picked him out straight away. But that meant I had to hang around to identify him so I didn't get to the garage and, while all this was going on, that fat-head Fernand was telling his tall tales to the boy and making him so upset he left without waiting for me. The little car thief confessed and the owner came round and picked up his car. The good news is he owed me two hundred francs for the carburettor but he was so pleased to get his car back he gave me a thousand. And that's the whole story. What really gives me grief is the wicked way your (*pointing at César*) imagination works, believing all these things about me. (*Angry now*) And another thing – why did this boy think to come round without telling me his name, like some spy? Was it because he expected to find someone he wouldn't be proud of?

CÉSARIOT: I didn't know how you would welcome me, or what sort of person you were.

MARIUS: Exactly! You were afraid you were going to encounter some sort of doubtful character. (*To César*) Why should an intelligent boy believe the cretinous inventions of someone like Fernand? Only because that was the sort of revelations he'd been led to expect, which just proves the way you must have been speaking about me ...

FANNY: No, Marius! No one spoke about you in front of him ...

CÉSARIOT: That's the truth, mama, but, even so, things I heard and saw make sense to me now. Like one day a long time ago, Monsieur Brun said to godfather, "So, poor Marius seems to have been up to no good then?" (*To César*) You put your finger to your lips and took him aside so as not to talk to him in front of me ... Then, another time, I said to mama, "What does he do, godfather's son?" and I wondered why she blushed. She told me he was a sailor and a long way away. And she went on blushing, so naturally I began to wonder what kind of person this sailor was that people spoke about behind closed doors, made mama blush, and never came to visit his father.

MARIUS: And *why* did I never come back home? Because of Honoré, because of your mother, and because of you! My prison sentence, the *real* one, was not being able to live in Marseilles. I accepted that. After all, I was partly responsible. Not totally but, even so, and if I had known you were going to be born, I'd never have gone away. But *nobody* knew! And I've had to carry the can for all of this. (*He turns to speak to his father.*) As for you! When you knew what was happening, why didn't you write to me, and why did you ever let the marriage take place? You knew perfectly well I'd come

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back and ... and if she'd gone ahead and had the baby anyway, he would have had *our* name!

César is, for a moment, lost for words and makes perplexed gestures before he can speak.

CÉSAR: Honorine was weeping buckets ... Fanny was going to throw herself into the sea ... Panisse could take care of the future.

MARIUS: And that's the point, isn't it. That's the real point. Like the poor wretches you all were, you believed the answer was money, lots and lots of lovely money. And who had lots and lots of money? (*He turns to Césarriot.*) When I came back here, you were one year old. And I asked them all for the return of my wife and child. (*Now addressing César and Fanny.*) But in the name of that child, you lot sent me packing. (*To Césarriot*) They didn't love *me* any more: you'd taken my place and their love for you made them desperate. I was the one they saw as menacing peace and prosperity, *their* peace and *their* prosperity. I was the enemy. And when you're frightened of something, you're ready to believe anything bad that's said about it. They believed I was some kind of outlaw because they *needed* to believe it. It took away the pain of their remorse.

CÉSARIOT: What possible remorse could they have?

MARIUS: All these years, as far as everyone else out there in the Vieux-Port was concerned, I was a no-good rascal, and they, all of them and above all Panisse, were saints: Saint Honoré! The whole world revered him: he'd given his name to a child! And not just a child: a little bastard. But, dammit, you could just as well say that I'd donated a child to the Panisse dynasty. I won't hear a word against Honoré. He was a straightforward and good man. But in this whole story, what sacrifice did *he* make? At fifty, he's offered a pretty young bride. You call that a sacrifice? I know dozens who'd make it tomorrow, and twice a week if necessary. (*To César*) And you were just as happy to see me go off, because if I had married Fanny, I would have become head of that family and *I* would have had the final say on everything to do with the child. But with Panisse, knowing what you all knew, you were able to satisfy your life-long craving for controlling things. And as for you, Fanny: as for you ...

FANNY: You're not going to say I've been happy ...

MARIUS: No! You've had nothing to laugh about. You've sacrificed yourself on the family altar. But look at you: you've become a lady. Oysters? You don't open them, you *eat* them! You've been sacrificing yourself under the tender gaze of your maid and a nanny, sitting in a comfortable chair, in

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front of a warm fire. And every day, at a well-provided dinner table, you sacrificed yourself with a healthy appetite ...

FANNY: It's all true, and I told myself often enough. But what was I supposed to do? Give up the advantages my unhappiness brought me?

MARIUS: Certainly not: take them all! Like they say, when the wine is drawn, you have to drink it – especially if it's a good year. And as for your mother, she got all she ever wanted: family honour, no more getting out of bed at four in the morning, and a great big wireless set. Every one of you got something out of this, but each one felt just a pinch of remorse, so you painted me black to give you your excuses. If there's a victim in this story, it's me!

CÉSAR: You're a funny kind of victim. We don't see you for ten years and you come back here just to bawl us all out.

MARIUS: And haven't I the right? Haven't I the right?

CÉSARIOT: The right! The right? That's a fine word.

MARIUS (*with anger*): What are you saying?

CÉSARIOT: You speak of rights but there are also responsibilities.

MARIUS: Hold your tongue! Your father's speaking and I can speak in my own defence.

CÉSAR: He's had a son for five minutes and, already, he's bawling him out.

MARIUS: Don't tell me you're surprised a father speaks to his son that way!

CÉSARIOT: As far as what I've done, you're right to criticise. But you can't just condemn everybody.

MARIUS: I have a *perfect* right because the solution they all chose was no solution at all: after all, it never worked! The family honour wasn't saved. No one said out loud, "Poor Fanny has had a little bastard" but what they did say was, "Clever little Fanny hasn't done at all badly, has she? She's had her child personally autographed by an old man with money". And what's the result of all this today? My son doesn't have my name. My wife in all but name is a widow while I'm still living, and my father is a poor old grandfather in secret. And look at all four of us ...

CÉSAR: ... Yes, we're all dumped in the unmentionable: but whose idea was it to run away to sea. I remember all that oceanising you boasted about!

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Fanny starts to weep.

MARIUS: Please don't cry Fanny. I didn't come here to cause you grief: Heaven knows you had enough of that up till now. If I've spoken about all these things, it's because of him (*gesturing towards Césariot.*) Our little personal histories only matter to us, because we're his parents. But it matters to me that he knows his father isn't some dishonest scoundrel. (*Taking his son by the shoulders*) Listen; forget anything and everything they've ever told you. You're old enough to make up your own mind. You've seen my work. What I do, I do to the best of my ability. So, all right, I'm no professor; I'm not a qualified engineer, a polytechnician like you. And when you got me talking on the boat – and now I can see it was some sort of exam you were setting me – I may have said some things about the theory of marine engines that you could correct. But when you have teachers it's all too easy. They've got the science; they've got ways of telling you, and it comes pre-digested. I've had to learn it all the hard way; trial and error, on my own. I didn't have much science but what I have wasn't given to me: I had to find it. So now then, son, when you feel like you want to see your dad and maybe go for a spot of fishing, you know where to find me: The Marius Olivier Garage, 22, Admiralty Court, Toulon. My number is in the book. I bid you all good day.

He starts to leave.

FANNY: Where are you going?

MARIUS: Back home. Or at least, the place where I live.

He exits. Lights dim and music swells.

Scene 4.

BAR DE LA MARINE some days later. A clock chimes eleven. César is sitting at the bar table munching olives and drinking white wine. From offstage, Césariot calls out.

CÉSARIOT (*offstage*): Are you in there?

CÉSAR: Césariot?

Césariot enters, resplendent in his uniform of the École Polytechnique.

CÉSARIOT: Grandfather, I have to leave in an hour for Paris; there's a special course and it's starting a week early so I don't know if I can get back here before the end of the autumn term. I absolutely have to speak to you first, and without anyone eavesdropping. (*He looks round to see that the bar is empty.*)

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CÉSAR: Now you've got me worried!

CÉSARIOT: In what way?

CÉSAR: Maybe you've uncovered another family secret.

CÉSARIOT (*smiling*): It could be.

CÉSAR: This time someone has told you I'm really your nephew?

CÉSARIOT: That would be great fun. I'd give you a hoop to bowl along the quay, or maybe you'd prefer some Colonial stamps for your collection. But no, it's not that at all.

CÉSAR: And so ... what is it?

CÉSARIOT: I'm just a bit embarrassed to say.

CÉSAR: What's left to be embarrassed about now?

CÉSARIOT: Does your son plan to come back to work in the bar?

CÉSAR (*shaking his head*): Sadly ... no. He's even suggested selling the place – under the pretext that I'm getting too old to run it on my own ... or that no waiter would ever want to work here – which isn't true, by the way, it's just that I wouldn't want anyone myself. Anyway, he wants me to go and live with *him*.

CÉSARIOT: That doesn't seem an altogether bad idea. In any case, it's a kind offer.

CÉSAR: Kind – but daft! A sailor's idea. I'm never going to leave this bar. I want to die here, in the middle of mixing a round of orange and lemon curaçaos. And if it can be done, I want to be buried under the bar counter. Do you really want me to leave Marseilles?

CÉSARIOT: You might be very happy in Toulon.

CÉSAR: It's not Toulon any more. He telephoned me this afternoon to say his big deal's gone through. He's sold his share in the garage and bought a little boat-builder's yard in Cassis, so he can repair marine engines and that sort of thing.

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CÉSARIOT: Cassis! I don't altogether like the sound of that. It means he can be here to visit you much more often and when we go for holidays in Cassis we'd be running into him every day.

CÉSAR: And so?

CÉSARIOT: And so ... having him around again is clearly affecting my mother, and in a way I find disturbing.

CÉSAR: Disturbing for whom?

CÉSARIOT: For me!

CÉSAR: But that's none of your damn business! These are matters for grown ups.

CÉSARIOT: Sad to say, I *am* a grown up now, and I have the responsibility of protecting papa's memory. I don't want him ridiculed.

CÉSAR: You can't ridicule the dead. But if I've got your drift, you might just be scandalised by the idea of some sort of getting together of your mother and your father.

CÉSARIOT: Exactly! It's much too late for all that, in my opinion.

CÉSARIOT: Which is as good as saying you reckon your mother's life is already over. She has nothing more to look forward to – as she sits among those piles of canvas, crates of spare parts and a great big heap of anchors – except becoming a little old lady.

CÉSARIOT: Quite the contrary. One day, in the future, she can begin her life again, honourably, with a respectable marriage as befits a widow. In any case, that was papa's dying wish. I heard it from his own lips.

CÉSAR: Respectable! You mean bourgeois; that's your ideal, isn't it? Deep down, you're scared stiff that your elegant and sophisticated mother might get interested again in the heir to a scruffy bistro. Yes, bistro; that's the word you used one night, here in my high-class establishment ... Right then, let's speak a bit about you. I hope you've had good news recently from Mademoiselle Bermond; so young, so ravishing and so rich, and who plays tennis so well ...

CÉSARIOT: ... Who told you about her?

CÉSAR: Your good friend and fellow-fibber Dromard. It seems you are very well placed to marry her some day or other.

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CÉSARIOT: More like “or other” than “some day”. I still have three more years of study ... But it’s not impossible.

CÉSAR: According to your friend, it’s highly probable.

CÉSARIOT: It’s true that her parents have said I’m welcome to visit when they’re in Paris.

CÉSAR: And even, perhaps, at Rambouillet? (*He swings his imaginary shotgun round.*) Bang! Bang!

CÉSARIOT: Dromard’s got a big mouth!

CÉSAR: The point is – is that what *you* want?

CÉSARIOT: It’s what we *both* want.

CÉSAR: Well then, I have the pleasure of informing you that your prospective father-in-law, who supplies ten thousand bars around the country, is even more of a barkeeper than I am.

CÉSARIOT: It’s not at *all* the same thing!

CÉSAR: You’re right. There’s a damned great difference. The father of the young lady is someone much better than me. But what gives his work real style is he gets it done by other people: while he goes off for a day’s shooting with the President of the Republic. Rambouillet! (*He puts his imaginary shotgun to his shoulder again and kills a couple more pheasants.*) Bang! Bang! Now as for me, for my work, I’ve always done it myself, like my father did and like your father did, and like *you* would have done if Marius hadn’t gone mad; stark, staring, dreaming, seven-seas mad. So there you are! Now listen to me: if you marry this daughter of the king of the bistros, I’ll be very proud of you but it seems to me that settles other matters too. A moment ago, you told me that Panisse hoped that she would marry again. I know that too. He felt real remorse for having taken my son’s wife and child. The very day of his heart attack, in the ambulance itself, when he could scarcely speak, he asked me, “Is your son married?” I told him, “No”. And he said, “That’s good!”

CÉSARIOT: He said *that*: truly?

CÉSAR: I swear on Honoré’s grave.

A moment passes. Césariot is pensive. Then, abruptly, he speaks.

CÉSARIOT: How old is your Marius?

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CÉSAR: Your *father* is exactly two years older than Fanny. They were both born on the second of March.

An untranslatable silence of Pagnolesque eloquence and duration.

CÉSARIOT: You're right then. It was him he was thinking about.

CÉSAR (*wreathed in smiles*): A moment of revelation.

CÉSARIOT: You're very kind and patient with me. I'm sorry for my priggishness, godfather.

CÉSAR: Your godfather forgives you, as does your grandfather.

CÉSARIOT (*looking at his wristwatch*): I'll have to go.

CÉSAR: What time's your train?

CÉSARIOT: Bang on midnight.

CÉSAR: For Heaven's sake! You haven't time to walk from here to the station!

CÉSARIOT (*grinning*): The chauffeur's outside with the engine running. You mustn't breathe a word of this to mama.

CÉSAR: I'm not so daft! She's perfectly capable of making the same mistake twice and we can't have that, can we? Off you go then and leave everything to me.

They exchange a fond embrace. The lights dim, the music swells and the gauze curtain comes across during the scene change.

Scene 6.

LIVINGROOM chez Panisse, a month or so later. Fanny is working at the table. César enters through the French windows.

CÉSAR: Hallo, Fanny, my dear.

FANNY: Bonjour César.

CÉSAR: Is this convenient?

FANNY: Of course!

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César takes a step towards the French windows and calls out “Come in then!” In comes a very smartly dressed Marius, grinning broadly. Fanny is surprised and struggles to conceal her delight.

MARIUS: Bonjour Fanny ...

CÉSAR: This is a business visit. Is your manager in the office?

FANNY: You know very well he’s had a car accident.

CÉSAR: I thought he had come back to work again.

FANNY: Not until Monday.

MARIUS: Well, I suppose I could come back on Monday.

CÉSAR: That depends what you want to ask her. Fanny knows the business backwards. She’s here and the manager isn’t. And besides, she’s the boss. *(To Fanny)* He didn’t dare come and disturb you so he telephoned to ask if I would do it for him. I told him he had to come and do it himself. *(To Marius)* Go on! Tell her then, about this engine business ...

The Stoker appears at the French windows.

STOKER: César! The Picon driver is at the bar and he needs you to sign his delivery note. I’ve counted the bottles: there are forty-eight, but he wants you to sign for them.

CÉSAR: Coming, coming ... *(To Marius)* Get yourself sorted out ... *(To Fanny)* ... it’s really important for him. I’ll be back in ten minutes.

César exits.

FANNY: Please sit down and tell me what all this is about.

They both sit but then he jumps to his feet and paces around the room.

MARIUS: I can’t sit still – it’s like this. My father’s probably told you I sold my share in the garage in Toulon and I’ve bought a small boat-builder’s yard in Cassis.

FANNY: I know about this, yes.

MARIUS: Of course, you understand, I’m not planning to build boats – but marine engines, that’s what I want to be doing, especially Stantons ... I know

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them very well ... So, anyway, they've told me that your business has the franchise for Marseilles but they've no one selling them in Cassis. That's why I was wondering whether, if you could put in a word for me with their head office, they might just let me have Cassis, and even La Ciotat. That would really help to get me known by the right sort of customers. Is that something you could do for me?

FANNY (*smiling*): I certainly could but it's not necessary to ask Stanton. Panisse and Son have the franchise for the whole of the Cote d'Azur. So what you want is yours for the asking.

MARIUS: As long as it's no loss to you.

FANNY: On the contrary; actually we're needing someone with an outlet in Cassis. I'll send you a couple of engines to start with and a supply of spare parts. And I'd be grateful if you could take care of La Ciotat as well.

MARIUS: I don't know how to thank you.

FANNY: No need for thanks. This will suit us both.

MARIUS: Thanks even so, with all my heart. Thanks for that, and for all the rest. What you've done for the boy. Dad told me he's back up in Paris. It's quite incredible: our son at the École Polytechnique?

FANNY: Not any more. He's graduated from there; second in his year.

MARIUS (*in awe*): From the most prestigious school in France!

FANNY: Now he's going to spend three more years in another school because he wants to become a Naval Architect.

MARIUS: Wonderful, marvellous; what a boy! Not least when I think back to that bar counter and the sea-food stall ... (*A silence.*) You know, Fanny, when he came to see me, in Toulon, I said to myself, "I know that face. And even more, I know that smile ... from somewhere". But, you can imagine, I didn't think about you then. But it did something to me. I felt something I couldn't explain. Now, of course, I know why I thought he was so handsome. It's because he has your looks.

FANNY (*struggling to conceal a rising tide of emotion*): I've just thought of something else. As well as the Stantons, I can give you a supply of outboard motors. We've got Jansens and the full range of Martin-Bernards.

She has picked up catalogues from the table where she is sitting. Marius goes over and stands next to her and leans over to look at the illustrations, speaking

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to her in a different, more emotional voice. The actual words he is saying have nothing to do with what he is really thinking and feeling. As the scene progresses, the emotions of both Fanny and Marius become more and more obvious but they keep up their 'technical' conversation as a counterpoint to the real dialogue of their looks and their actions.

MARIUS: No Fanny, not for me. Outboard motors aren't real marine engines. For me, these don't begin until at least fifty horse-power. Outboard motors are for holiday-makers. They run too fast and, for another thing, they're only two-stroke. The compression is really too feeble because it's created there in that tiny crankcase. *(He points to an illustration; she gazes up at him.)* Then there's the problem of the right-angle pinions that drive the propeller. It's not a logical arrangement because the vertical pinion always wants to rise up and the horizontal always wants to move away from it. And what's the result? The teeth get worn or damaged far too quickly.

FANNY: But they can be replaced, and wouldn't that be extra business for you?

MARIUS: Right, but that isn't very interesting work. The engines are too temperamental. There are no valves; the inlet and outlet ports have slides that clog up too easily. And another thing, they're run by amateurs who've no sense of when an engine is suffering. They run them far too fast. So every week they're back for more and more repairs and, of course, that gets them all upset. By the end of the second season, they're beyond repair; completely beyond repair.

She gazes up at him and tears well up. She stands up and turns towards him. She lays her head against his shoulder. He folds her into his arms. They stand silently.

FANNY: Marius.

MARIUS: Fanny.

FANNY: Nothing is 'beyond repair', Marius. *Nothing* is beyond repair . . .

They kiss for the first time in twenty years. A long kiss. César re-enters, does a quick double-take and then backs out silently. He closes the French windows behind him, gazes through them for a moment and then closes the outside shutters as well. Music swells; lights dim. Curtain.

THE END