

***FANNY***

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

**MARCEL PAGNOL**

TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED

by MICHAEL JOHNSTON

with the permission of the Pagnol Estate

Translation © Michael Johnston 2010

Revised August 2013

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CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

CÉSAR    patron of the Bar de la Marine

BRUN     custom's inspector

PANISSE  sail-maker and ship's chandler

ESCARTEFIGUE  captain of the harbour ferry

STOKER     ferry-boat stoker and occasional waiter

HONORINE  fishmonger and mother of Fanny

FANNY  runs the sea-food stall at the Bar de la Marine

POSTMAN

CLAUDINE  sister of Honorine

CHAUFFEUR

MARIUS    son of César

DOCTOR VENELLE

The action takes place in the Vieux-Port of Marseilles sometime in the 1920s, beginning about two months after the end of the previous play in the trilogy, *Marius*.

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ACT ONE

*The interior of César's bar in the Vieux-Port of Marseilles in the 1920s. The four 'entrances' to the stage are from the bar 'terrace', from the 'kitchen' and César's room, from Marius's 'bedroom' through a door on which there is a hook with a straw hat hanging from it, and from the sea-food stall run by Fanny. The stage props required are a small bar with bottles and glasses, a chaise-longue with a low table in front of it, a square café table with four chairs, a small crate with a sacking cushion almost offstage in the sea-food stall entrance.*

*It is only eight in the morning in the month of August, two months after the end of Marius, the first play in the trilogy but the sun is beating down on the port and those in the bar are already feeling the heat.*

*Brun, Panisse and Escartefigue are drinking white wine which they are pouring out through an ice-filled funnel. At the bar counter, Escartefigue's Stoker, in his disguise as a waiter, is washing glasses. César, with a sombre countenance, stands, paces up and down, and goes in and out of the bar. In his hand he carries a metal fly-swat with which, from time to time, he aims blows at the counter and the table. An occasional mosquito is heard but not seen, and never hit.*

PANISSE: Now, if I were Napoleon – if I were Napoleon ...

CÉSAR: He's dead!

PANISSE: I know. I'm simply saying "If I were Napoleon ..."

CÉSAR: I've told you once already: he's dead!

BRUN: We all know he's dead. What you mean is: "If I had been Napoleon while he was still alive ..."

PANISSE: Just so: if I had been Napoleon while he was still alive ... Right then! I would have ... *(He tries to recall what it was he was going to say).*

CÉSAR: Well?

PANISSE: I'd have, that is, I would have ... *(Giving up.)* There you are! You've made me forget what I was going to say.

BRUN: That's a shame!

CÉSAR *(going out by the terrace door)*: Gaga! Completely gaga!

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ESCARTEFIGUE (*lowering his voice*): You've had your character reference! A month now and you never know what he's going to be like. You can't come in here without taking your life in ...

PANISSE (*stage whisper*): Here he comes!

BRUN (*loudly*): You're not working today, Captain?

ESCARTEFIGUE: We're on the jury, Monsieur Panisse and me. We're just waiting on the President coming to collect us.

CÉSAR: You, on the jury!

BRUN: The Jury! My goodness me!

ESCARTEFIGUE: Amazing, but true.

BRUN: Aren't you supposed to run twenty-four ferry crossings every day?

ESCARTEFIGUE: That's what they pay me to do. But my boat needs to go into dry-dock to have its bottom scraped and the underwater painting done and that takes four days.

BRUN: The same length of time as the Grand Competition!

ESCARTEFIGUE (*winking*): Now there's a coincidence! Exactly like the Grand Competition. And that's why my stoker's doing a bit of moonlighting! (*He points to his Stoker.*)

BRUN (*to the Stoker*): Right then, Tintin! Let's have another croissant.

STOKER: Right away, Monsieur Brun!

*César approaches the table.*

CÉSAR: Félix, have you got the right time?

ESCARTEFIGUE: Well, I think your bar clock is accurate. It's exactly eight o'clock.

CÉSAR: If I thought the bar clock was accurate, I wouldn't be asking you. Would it trouble you to pull out your watch?

ESCARTEFIGUE: For you, I'll pull my watch out. Now then; it's exactly eight o'clock, just like your clock.

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CÉSAR: Thank you.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Mind you, that's hardly surprising. I set my watch this morning by your clock.

CÉSAR (*raising his hands in despair*): What a god-damn blockhead! Where *do* they find people like you?

ESCARTEFIGUE: Blockhead is it? I don't see why you have to insult me just because I put myself to some trouble to be helpful.

BRUN: Hang on, César. (*He pulls out his watch*): It's exactly four minutes past eight according to the clock down at the docks.

CÉSAR: Thank *you*, Monsieur Brun. Now that's what I call information. Eight-oh-four. I should have known better than to ask something complicated of Monsieur Escartefigue, armchair admiral and captain of the café couch.

*César goes out the terrace door again.*

PANISSE: Now *you*'ve been given your character reference.

ESCARTEFIGUE: What use to him is the time with the accuracy of an astronomical clock? Does he want to work out the position of his bar on a chart?

PANISSE: He's waiting on the postman.

BRUN: Like he does every morning.

STOKER: Every evening too, and all day!

ESCARTEFIGUE: He thinks his boy's sending a letter off every day and he's dead keen to have them.

PANISSE: But it begins to look more and more like his son hasn't written.

STOKER: And each time the postman goes past it's like a real tragedy. He turns pale as death. When there's no one in the bar, he just gazes at that hat.

*He points to the straw hat hanging on a hook on Marius's bedroom door.*

PANISSE: Marius's straw hat!

STOKER: It's been hanging there since the day he left. He even speaks to it and some of the things he says to it would bring tears to your eyes.

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PANISSE: And what about poor little Fanny?

STOKER: I reckon it's really going to kill *her*. The pair of them are going to die.

ESCARTEFIGUE: It's a rum do if that son of his hasn't written yet.

BRUN: But it's perfectly understandable. He's on a sailing ship, remember, and their first port of call is Port Said. So, logically, we can work out that his first letter ...

STOKER: Look out!

*César does a tour of the bar, swatting at mosquitoes and flies. He is watched in complete silence, and then goes out again.*

ESCARTEFIGUE: He's getting worse. (*Pseudo-scientific*) I tell you, I once knew a fellow like him; and his brains just softened. They all melted inside. In the end, when he shook his head you heard it going "slip-slop, slip-slop". A wonder it didn't all spill out!

BRUN: An extraordinary case!

PANISSE: *Very* curious.

ESCARTEFIGUE: You don't *believe* me?

PANISSE: *Of course* I believe you! I once heard of a case that was even more bizarre. Instead of softening like your chap, this one's brains completely dried up.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Well I'm damned!

PANISSE: Little by little, they shrank to the size of dried pea. And when he walked in the street, his tiny brain jumped about inside his big head, sounding for all the world like a baby's rattle ...

ESCARTEFIGUE: Ye Gods and little fishes!

PANISSE: Most of all when he walked over cobblestones!

*Escartefigue is transfixed with the horror of all this but Brun erupts into laughter. Realising he's had his leg pulled Escartefigue turns to Panisse who, by now, is also laughing.*

ESCARTEFIGUE: What a load of rubbish!

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PANISSE: It's as true as yours!

ESCARTEFIGUE: That's all right then.

*He sits down again. César has taken up station at the terrace door with his back to the bar.*

CÉSAR: Bonjour, Honorine.

HONORINE (*entering past him with a scowl*): Bonjour.

PANISSE: Dear me; your little girl still feeling tired?

HONORINE: Just don't talk to me about it, please! She's got a face the colour of putty. I'm opening up but she's coming over later. (*To the Stoker who has, meanwhile, been fetching the panniers from the cellar via the kitchen entrance.*) Thanks, young man. (*She busies herself on and off stage with the seafood stall.*)

ESCARTEFIGUE: Fanny's not well?

CÉSAR: She got a chill in her stomach.

BRUN: I trust it's nothing serious?

CÉSAR: No, not at all: a touch of 'flu at worst. That's the problem.

HONORINE: And on top of that, thanks to a certain little rat of a sailor, she's got a broken heart – that's the real problem, and it's going to be the death of her. And there's the father of the assassin! Assassin! (*She has a little sob.*)

*César gives a sad shrug and sidles out again. Panisse, Escartefigue and Brun offer Honorine solace.*

PANISSE: She's not going to die, Honorine. Time cure's everything. You'll see.

ESCARTEFIGUE: And you can't blame it on César. He's even worse than her, I reckon, going completely round the bend.

HONORINE: The further round the better: it serves him right, too!

BRUN: Come on! People don't die of love nowadays. Now and then, folk get killed if one of them buys a revolver – but out of sight is out of mind. Youngsters forget.

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*Fanny appears from the stall entrance.*

HONORINE: Already?

FANNY: I was getting bored, just sitting at home. (*Seeing César entering from the terrace*) Bonjour, César.

CÉSAR: Bonjour, my dear. Feeling better?

FANNY: Fine, thanks. Bonjour, gentlemen all. (*They mumble a reply.*)

HONORINE: Why didn't you stay in bed?

FANNY: Because I'm perfectly well. There's nothing wrong with me.

PANISSE: Now that's good news.

HONORINE: Nothing wrong, she says!

BRUN: Your mother had you on your death bed!

FANNY: A mother always exaggerates. Have the oysters arrived?

HONORINE: Two panniers of Bordeaux oysters and a box of mussels from Toulon. Right then! Can I get off to the fish shop?

PANISSE: We'll all keep an eye on her.

HONORINE: Did you drink the café-au-lait I put on your bedside table?

FANNY: Yes, mother!

HONORINE: Very good! So, I can go then, can I?

ESCARTEFIGUE: Yes, Honorine, you can go! You're not abandoning her on the high seas!

HONORINE: Good: right then! I'm off. I'm going.

*As she exits by the stall, César comes in from the terrace and goes over to Fanny, embracing her gently.*

CÉSAR: Are you really feeling better?

FANNY: Yes of course. And what about you then?

CÉSAR: Tip top! The very best in the world. I slept like a king; like a king, I tell you.

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BRUN: King Julius Caesar!

CÉSAR: I heard that! But it's only what I'd expect from a country bumpkin from Lyons.

*He stomps out to the terrace and Fanny exits to the stall.*

BRUN (*grinning*): I'm wondering if I should take any of that personally or share it with the whole world. "Country bumpkin" is hard to take, even for a Lyonnais!

ESCARTEFIGUE: You can't come in here at all these days without being insulted.

PANISSE: I think the Stoker hit it on the nail. The boy can't have written.

BRUN: The saddest part is he can't bring himself to admit it; not to anyone.

PANISSE: Exactly! He's forcing all that chagrin down into his stomach and one day it's going to explode.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Sounds a bit like a tapeworm to me. Only one thing to do with that: get rid of it!

PANISSE: You may be right, Felix. But he refuses to speak about it. We have to take steps.

ESCARTEFIGUE: What steps? You can't very well bring his boy back.

PANISSE: True enough. We have to worm our way, skilfully, into his confidence. Once we get him talking, it will ease the pain.

BRUN: Sound reasoning!

ESCARTEFIGUE: What you're saying is we need to open the safety valve a bit and let off some steam so as to reduce the boiler pressure.

PANISSE: That's the technical explanation.

BRUN: It won't be easy but we can always have a try.

ESCARTEFIGUE: He can't eat us!

PANISSE: No, but he can brain us with his ice axe!

BRUN: I doubt that.

ESCARTEFIGUE: So – we've no idea, have we?

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PANISSE: And you don't know him Monsieur Brun. He can be quite violent at times ... (*He gently massages his throat as a memory of an earlier row with César comes back to him.*)

ESCARTEFIGUE: He can be a raging monster.

PANISSE: But we can't afford to wait. I don't give him more than a week.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Let's face it! He'll bawl; he'll make a spectacle of himself; he'll wreck the whole bar; but so what. To hesitate a second longer is a betrayal of our friendship. We have to do it. We're *going* to do it. Go to it, Monsieur Panisse.

PANISSE: Why me?

BRUN: Why not?

PANISSE: All right! I'll do it. But back me up.

ESCARTEFIGUE: You can count on me! I'm an experienced submariner. I'll be following you, at a safe depth, and while he's responding to your broadside, I'll torpedo him: Boom! Amidships; below the waterline.

PANISSE: Let's do it then. Are you with us, Monsieur Brun?

BRUN: I shall be ready to intervene – in a strategic sense.

PANISSE: Then here we go.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Advance in line astern!

*Panisse coughs and clears his throat before going up to César, now standing looking out towards the terrace.*

PANISSE: Expecting somebody, César?

CÉSAR: And why should you think I'm expecting anyone?

PANISSE: I've no idea, but since half past seven you've been up and down and looking at the clock all the time. . . .

CÉSAR: Looking at the clock? ... Me!!!

PANISSE: It did rather seem; I mean it had that sort of ...

CÉSAR (*calmly*): Monsieur Panisse, why are you spying on me? Who has put you up to this?

PANISSE: César! I am *not* spying on you!

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CÉSAR: Then why are you standing here, eyeballs on stalks like a lobster, asking me if I'm waiting on someone?

PANISSE (*on his dignity*): Whether you're waiting on someone or whether you're not, I have the honour of informing you that, frankly, I don't give a shit!

CÉSAR: I ask nothing else of you.

PANISSE: Then you've got your wish!

CÉSAR: I might just ask, in my own bar, that when you address yourself to me, you avoid such gross expressions as "I don't give a shit". But, then your basic good taste is such you probably can't appreciate subtle nuances, so let's drop the subject.

*César exits to the terrace. Panisse turns to Escartefigue.*

PANISSE: Somehow, he didn't seem to register the impact of your torpedo.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Too soon! You were sunk by his first salvo but, watch me now! I'll go at him head on.

PANISSE: Astonish me!

BRUN: We're all agog!

ESCARTEFIGUE: Just you watch and listen. Give me covering fire and Bang! I'll torpedo him ... César! (*César re-enters.*) Tell you what, César: it's my impression you're waiting on the postman.

CÉSAR (*glacial*): Waiting on the postman? Now why would I be waiting on the postman?

ESCARTEFIGUE (*very pleasantly*): I really don't know for sure, but maybe to see if he's bringing you a letter from your son?

CÉSAR: Stop right there! I absolutely forbid you to dabble in the affairs of my family.

ESCARTEFIGUE: We don't want to intrude ...

CÉSAR: Of course you don't; which is why I, for example, don't come out and ask you publicly if it's true that your wife is cheating on you with the Chief Inspector of Weights and Measures; now do I? Have I ever asked you that?

ESCARTEFIGUE: You've never asked me, no. But now, you've just told me! God dammit!

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*He collapses onto a chair.*

PANISSE: Poor Felix! Your torpedo has blown up in the firing tube. Bang! And anyway, it isn't true.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Have you heard anyone saying this, Monsieur Brun?

BRUN: Never a word!

CÉSAR: Whether it's true or not is a personal matter between Monsieur Escartefigue, captain of the harbour ferry boat, Madame Fortunette Escartefigue, his wife; and a Chief Inspector of Weights and Measures: the one with a big red beard. I have no wish to know anything about it.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Bloody hell!

CÉSAR: So, kindly copy my discretion in these matters and don't ask me questions about Marius. (*To Panisse.*) And you! Take that smile off your face.

PANISSE: I never asked you anything about Marius!

BRUN: And neither did I!

CÉSAR: You didn't ask me, but you have that way of saying "I didn't ask you anything" that sounds exactly like "I want to know *everything*". You're trying to force confidences out of me.

BRUN: Oh César, not at all!

CÉSAR: It's a conspiracy! You all want to know what's going on, don't you? Well, you're not going to know a thing!

PANISSE: Let me assure you that, for my part, there is absolutely *nothing* I wish to know.

CÉSAR: Fancy that!

PANISSE: I really do not want to get myself involved in your family's affairs.

CÉSAR: So that's it then! After a friendship of more than thirty years, you just don't give a shit what happens to me. Is that it?

PANISSE: Ah, no, César! That's not what I meant.

CÉSAR: Yes you did! Your very words, spoken just a few moments ago, were, "I don't give a shit".

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PANISSE: But I only said that to please you! Really, if you don't want to tell us anything, then don't ... On the other hand, if you'd really like to tell us something, feel free to do so.

CÉSAR: There you go again! "Feel free to do so." I just knew you'd finish up trying to question me. I saw it coming a mile off. All right then! If you force me to speak, then I'll speak.

PANISSE: Come off it, César. We're not forcing you.

CÉSAR: Yes you are!

BRUN: No, I mean, basically ...

CÉSAR: Not you too! Just you hold your tongue. At least let me get a word in.

ESCARTEFIGUE: The floor is yours, César. Speak!

CÉSAR: All right then. I see very well that, in your eyes, I've become an object of pity. I know what you're saying behind my back. You're saying, "He must be crying into his pillow every night, alone in that empty house ... He doesn't look after the bar: he just sits here waiting for news of his son; his son who never writes. It must be breaking the poor old boy's heart." Fine! Let me spell things out, once and for all.

BRUN: That's the idea. Tell us the facts. Put the record straight.

CÉSAR (*to Escartefigue*): You asked me if I was waiting for the postman! Well the answer is No: I am *not* waiting for him. When a boy has the brass neck to abandon his old father, and not to write to him once, in fifty-nine days and (*consults watch*) fifteen hours, it's scarcely likely he'll write on Day Sixty, is it?

PANISSE: But remember he couldn't post a letter until his first landfall.

CÉSAR: It may interest you to know that the *Malaisie* reached Port Said on August seventh; exactly twelve days ago.

ESCARTEFIGUE: But you have to allow a letter a couple of weeks to get here.

CÉSAR: The Post Office say a letter from Port Said takes nine days.

BRUN: Well, not every time, surely.

CÉSAR: Aha! You think so?

BRUN: I'm absolutely sure of it!

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CÉSAR: Then why do we want to waste our time discussing such things? It's of no importance to me whatsoever.

PANISSE: It's of no *interest* to you?

ESCARTEFIGUE: You're having us on!

PANISSE: You're asking us to believe that you didn't love your son!

CÉSAR: I'm not saying that at all: quite the contrary! It's true I loved that boy with all my heart. But after what he's done to me that's dead in the water.

BRUN: But, looked at in the round, what is it he's done to you?

PANISSE: Taken all together.

ESCARTEFIGUE: In the end.

CÉSAR: Looked at in the round! Taken all together!! In the end!!!

BRUN: That's the point. Taken all together, what is it he's *done*?

CÉSAR: Taken all together what he's done is *left* me.

BRUN: But, at twenty years of age, didn't the boy have the right to leave?

CÉSAR: But he didn't have the right to leave without *telling* me!

ESCARTEFIGUE: Fair point!

PANISSE: But if he had told you, what would you have done about it?

CÉSAR: I'd have explained to him clearly, in words even an imbecile could understand, he simply didn't have the right to leave.

PANISSE: And you'd have explained it to him with the toe of your boot.

CÉSAR: In less than a quarter of an hour I'd have knocked any taste for the sea right out of him.

BRUN: Then maybe he did the right thing not telling you.

CÉSAR: The right thing? That's it, is it? You're in favour of revolution. You salute ingratitude! Here's another Bolshevik who wants to destroy family life. And to think I had to hear such claptrap in my own bar! Incredible!

BRUN: But in the end, if a young man wants to go off to sea, what of it?

CÉSAR: Young man! What young *man*!

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BRUN: Marius is a grown man.

CÉSAR: Marius!!

BRUN: He's nearly twenty-one. At that age, you were already married!

CÉSAR: Me, yes of course.

BRUN: You were a man.

CÉSAR: I was, yes.

BRUN: So what was true for you isn't true for him?

CÉSAR: No!!

BRUN: Why not?

CÉSAR: Because I always saw things differently ... and because I'm not my son!

BRUN: So that's the position! Then allow me to remark that you are a *total* egotist.

PANISSE: I'll second that.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Carried unanimously.

BRUN: And if that young man wanted to go to sea, you had no right to prevent him.

CÉSAR: But if he wanted to play at sailors, let him *play* at sailors, for God's sake! Let him play wherever he wants – just not at *sea*!

ESCARTEFIGUE: Where's he going to do it then?

CÉSAR: What I mean is not *out* at sea. Let him be a sailor like you, for heavens sake, in the Old Port. Oh, for God's sake, does he have to be a sailor to earn a living? Does Panisse go to sea? No, he's not so daft. He makes sails so that the wind can carry off other people's children!

*The Postman appears at the terrace door. He hands César a thick letter and a newspaper. Fanny enters from her up-ended box stall.*

POSTMAN: Here we are, Monsieur César. These are for you.

*César takes the items from the Postman and stands there, rigid.*

FANNY (*to the Postman*): You don't have anything for me? Fanny Cabanis?

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POSTMAN: I know you well, mademoiselle. No, alas: nothing for you.

FANNY: Maybe you left a letter for me at home; 39, quai du Port?

POSTMAN: I certainly did leave something but I think it was a catalogue from Nouvelles Galeries.

FANNY: Nothing else?

POSTMAN: Nothing else today.

*The Postman exits. César very deliberately puts the letter on the bar counter and takes the newspaper over to the chaise longue and sits down. Fanny is slowly but irresistibly drawn to the letter which she looks at and gasps.*

FANNY: A letter from Port Said!

CÉSAR: Indeed!

FANNY: It's from Marius. Look it says so on the back.

CÉSAR: Fancy!

FANNY: You have to read it, quickly!

CÉSAR: Please! Just leave it alone.

FANNY: César – read it!

CÉSAR: Just for the moment, I'd rather read my paper. It's a special issue of the *Journal des Limonadiers*.

PANISSE: Have a heart, César.

CÉSAR: I'd rather have a lemonade!

PANISSE: If you want to read your letter, we'll let you have peace to do so.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Everyone knows you're just having us on.

PANISSE: This is not the moment for personal pride.

CÉSAR: What!?

ESCARTEFIGUE: Just like Panisse said, and he said it first: this is not the moment for personal pride.

CÉSAR: Gentlemen, neither the observations of a former cuckold, nor those of an active cuckold, will have any bearing on what I decide to do.

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PANISSE (*to Escartefigue*): To whom might he be referring?

ESCARTEFIGUE: I ask myself that very question.

CÉSAR (*reading his paper*): Just listen to this. They're putting up the price of Picon. Sixteen sous a bottle. Well, well. And they're doing the same nonsense for anisette. Well, too bad. We'll just have to accept it. Don't you agree? And listen to this! There's going to be a Bar Owners' Congress next February in Toulon. I wouldn't miss that for worlds!

PANISSE: Oh, come on, César!

CÉSAR: What d'you mean "come on"? I'm going to the Congress in Toulon and you're not suggesting stopping me, are you?

PANISSE: Certainly not! But look, when all's said and done, you've got news sitting there from your son and you really ought ...

FANNY (*sinking to her knees*): César, please! Open it.

PANISSE: For her sake!

CÉSAR (*to Fanny*): It interests you that much, does it? To get news from the sailor who sloped off and left you? Not me, I tell you!

BRUN (*picking up the letter*): That's enough. If you're not going to open it, I will!

CÉSAR (*leaping to his feet*): For God's sake! You're driving me round the bend with this letter. I'm taking the damned thing out of here!

*He takes the letter from Brun and exits rapidly through the kitchen door. Fanny and the others follow him but we hear the key turning in the lock. Fanny sinks to her knees again, leaning against the door.*

BRUN: You know what we should be doing now?

ESCARTEFIGUE: No.

BRUN: We should all be quietly slipping out so that he isn't embarrassed to find us here when he comes back.

PANISSE: Good idea. (*But he sits down and lights a cigarette.*)

BRUN: We're agreed then?

ESCARTEFIGUE: Completely! (*He sits and begins to fill his pipe.*)

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BRUN: We're all agreed but your both sitting down. Well, in Lyons, we understand modesty and discretion. I bid you both good day. (*He exits by the terrace door.*)

ESCARTEFIGUE: Modesty? Discretion? What's he on about?

PANISSE: You know, Félix, it wouldn't be a bad idea to go round and see if Cadagne is awake yet.

ESCARTEFIGUE: You reckon I should?

PANISSE: It's not all that far. Forty metres, I'd guess.

ESCARTEFIGUE: Forty metres if I turn right outside the door; but it's at least two hundred metres going by the Place de Lenche.

PANISSE: And why would you take a detour like that?

ESCARTEFIGUE: I'd have thought that was obvious. That way I stay in the shade.

*He lumbers out by the terrace door.*

PANISSE: Fanny! (*He goes over and helps her up. She smiles but very weakly.*) Don't tremble like that. There are bound to be lots of things for you in that letter.

FANNY: No, Monsieur Panisse ... I don't think so somehow.

PANISSE: They say it's all in the mind, this love business; but sometimes it hurts the body ... You're very pale, Fanny. You ought to go and see the doctor.

FANNY: Huh! You know my mother. If I told her I was going to see our doctor, she'd think I was heading straight for the undertaker.

PANISSE: Well, what's stopping you going on your own? Go and see old Doctor Venelle. If you let me, I'll give you the money.

FANNY: Thanks for the offer, but that's all right.

*Escartefigue reappears.*

ESCARTEFIGUE: He's awake. He's even ready for the off.

PANISSE: Please tell me he's not drunk!

ESCARTEFIGUE: Not entirely.

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PANISSE: Fine then; let's go. (*To Fanny.*) Just be patient for a few more minutes. In a quarter of an hour, he'll be out here reading it to you and, before the evening's out, he'll have told the whole of Marseilles.

ESCARTEFIGUE (*from the doorway.*): Are you coming or aren't you?

*The men leave. A moment passes and then the door of the kitchen bursts open. César reappears, transformed. He is holding the letter in his hand.*

CÉSAR: Fanny! He's fine! He's well! Come here, quickly. You sit here and read me the letter, that's the idea. Here you are. (*He hands Fanny the letter then goes to the terrace door and calls to the Stoker.*) Serve whatever they want on the terrace but don't let *anyone* come in here!

*César returns, dashes over to take the straw hat off the bedroom door hook and, placing it on the table between them, he sits opposite Fanny.*

CÉSAR: Right then!

*She starts to read the letter to him.*

FANNY: "My very dear Dad, do please forgive me for the pain I had to cause you. I know how sad you must be since I went away. I think about you every night."

CÉSAR (*patting the hat*): Wonderful! *You* think about me every evening but *me*, you great oaf, I think about you the whole day through. Sorry, please go on.

FANNY: "I don't think I can possibly explain in a letter the way I had this great longing. But ask Fanny. She knew all about the madness inside me."

CÉSAR (*to the hat*): Madness! That's the very word for it. I'm glad to hear you realise it now!

FANNY: "Now, let me tell you something about my life so far. When we sailed I was given a job in the galley as assistant cook."

CÉSAR: Assistant cook! With his cooking skills they would all have been skeletons within a month! A ship-load of skeletons!

FANNY: "But after only a few days they replaced me with another crewman who twisted his leg falling in the scuppers and so, now, I've taken his place as a deck hand."

CÉSAR: Don't get too pleased. It gets worse straight away.

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FANNY: “I wasn’t able to write to you sooner because, when we reached Port Said, we had the most terrible bad luck. A sailor on board had just died of some unknown illness and the port authorities suspected it might be a case of the plague and put us into quarantine.”

CÉSAR: The plague! D’you hear that! Bubonic plague! Plague on *his* boat! And to think that when one of his school pals got the mumps, I kept young Master Marius locked in the house for a month; for his own good. And now he goes sailing on a plague-infested ship. Can you credit the stupidity?

FANNY: But he can’t have caught it or he wouldn’t be writing to you!

CÉSAR: So he hasn’t caught it. But he near as dammit did catch it! And that doesn’t alter the fact it’s a terrible disease. Your neck swells right up; your mouth hangs open; your tongue gets as big as a bullock’s! And the body gets covered in boils. The stomach rots away inside and the belly button swells up, all purple like a sea urchin! What a terrible death! Oh Marius, you’re still causing us all such grief! (*Deep breath.*) Anyway, go on, Fanny.

FANNY: “However, the port doctors took the poor man’s corpse to pieces to see what he had and told us it wasn’t the plague after all.”

CÉSAR: Thank goodness for that!

FANNY: “Now the ship has been freed from quarantine and we’re setting sail for Aden. The voyage so far has been marvellous. If I was to tell you all the things I saw, I’d never finish writing this letter. Sad to say, we never stopped once. I wasn’t very happy about that, especially because we sailed past beautiful islands with Greek temples and Roman fortresses.”

CÉSAR: He’s been talking with those experts on the ship.

FANNY: “Anyway, Dad, all is going very well and I love my new life. I’m now working in the team that services the oceanographic equipment.”

CÉSAR: Whatever that means?

FANNY: “We’ll be using this to measure the depths of the Indian Ocean.”

CÉSAR: Can you credit it – someone who didn’t know how to measure out an orange-curaçao is going to measure how deep the ocean is? Incredible!

FANNY: “All the scientists are very good to me and I’ve become a good friend of the one in charge of their equipment. I’ve told him all about myself and he said that my passion for the sea didn’t surprise him because, since I was from Marseilles, I was surely the son of a Phoenician.”

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CÉSAR (*uneasy*): Félicien? Show me? Where, where? What does that mean?

*Fanny turns the letter towards him and he squints at it.*

FANNY: That's what it says. The son of a Phoenician.

CÉSAR: The son of Félicien? (*To the hat.*) Am I not your father then? Never mind. We can't sort that out later. Read on, because there's something for you next.

FANNY: "Anyhow, everything's going along just fine and I hope this letter finds you well, and also Fanny."

CÉSAR: "And also Fanny." There you are, you see! He's always thinking about you.

FANNY: "Give me news of how she is and about her marriage to that great chap Panisse. She'll surely be very happy with him. Wish her well from me."

CÉSAR: You see, you see! "Wish her well from me." He's still thinking about you.

FANNY: "Write to me care of the *Malaisie* in Aden. We'll be there on the fifteenth of September. I send you all my love. Your son, Marius."

CÉSAR (*with emotion*): "Your son, Marius."

FANNY: And underneath he's written, "Don't be upset any more. I'm as happy as a lark!"

CÉSAR: Yes! He's happy ... He's abandoned us both and yet he's in raptures. (*Fanny begins to sob. César comes over to her.*) What can you expect, my dear. That's what he's like ... And there's never much time to oneself on a boat, and when there's time it may be difficult to write because of the weather. He might have put just a bit more, something a little more affectionate – above all for you. But just imagine, there he was, about to write some long sentence, just for you, something really affectionate, when he suddenly got a call to go and measure the depth of the ocean. That's how I explain it all to myself ... And besides, this is just his first letter. There'll be lots more! Now, what d'you say? Shall we write back to him? And because my big fist is too large to hold a pen properly, you're going to write for me. Get the blotter and some paper and I'll lock the door. We'll help ourselves to some peace and quiet while we get on with the job.

*The pair of them scurry about getting pen and ink, paper and blotter which they bring to the table, then César goes over to the terrace entrance and,*

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*offstage, we hear the shutter being closed. He sits down opposite Fanny and begins to dictate.*

CÉSAR: Ready? Right! “My dear son – At long last I have received your first letter. It isn’t very long and I hope the next will run to at least ten pages; maybe even twenty. What you tell me about your voyage is very interesting and your experts seem a clever enough bunch, especially the one who said you were the son of Félicien because, you see, he wasn’t far out. In fact, Félicien was your mother’s father, and so you do have some of his blood in your veins.” Amazing isn’t it Fanny; these experts. They took one look at him and they could tell the name of his grandfather.

*Someone rattles the shutter.*

CÉSAR: That’ll be Hippolitre. (*Calling out.*) If you want a drink, Hippolitre, come back in an hour. I’m busy with urgent correspondence!

*Someone bangs the shutter in acknowledgement.*

CÉSAR: The world is full of illiterates! Now, where were we? (*He looks over Fanny’s shoulder and then begins to pace up and down.*) “When you start measuring the sea, take great care not to lean too far overboard. Indeed, when you get to the deepest places, let somebody else do that bit, for all our sakes.” You know, Fanny, when little Master Marius was only four, I took him out fishing in the little dinghy that Panisse had at that time and he got so excited trying to see what we had caught he leant right over the side and suddenly – pouf! – Man overboard! And at that age his head weighed more than his backside. Things are a bit better organised nowadays. Read me back that last bit.

FANNY: “Let somebody else do that bit, for all our sakes.”

CÉSAR: Underline “somebody else”. A good thick line, please. Right then. “Here, all is going well and I’m in good health, apart from being very angry from the moment you left and I can’t say that’s got any the less. Poor little Fanny isn’t very well, however. She’s eating nothing at all and begun to look very pale.” (*At this point, Fanny lays down her pen, puts her head on her arms and begins to sob silently.*) “Everybody has noticed it. She’s just fading away. Added to that, Honorine keeps looking daggers at me. And I wonder sometimes if she isn’t going to come in one day with her father’s old revolver and put holes in me. It scares me to death all this.” (*He finally notices Fanny.*) What’s the matter? Why aren’t you writing?

FANNY: Really and truly, César, I don’t think it’s a good idea to say that. It’ll just upset him.

CÉSAR (*embittered*): And hasn’t he done just that to us, upset us both?

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FANNY: But it won't do any good to tell him.

CÉSAR (*with a deep sigh of resignation*): Deep down, that's true. It won't do any good ... But what can we say instead?

FANNY: I'll write it for you.

CÉSAR: No, no. Don't write it. Tell me first.

FANNY: We'll just put: "Little Fanny is getting along just as usual. As for the marriage to Panisse, I don't think anything is settled yet, but perhaps that will happen. One never knows."

CÉSAR: Perfect!

FANNY: "From time to time, sitting out on the terrace, we talk about you and, in the evening when it's getting cool and calm, and Escartefigue is having a chat with Panisse and Monsieur Brun, it can really seem like you haven't gone so far away, that you've just gone up to the station to fetch oyster panniers, and that you're just about to appear at the door, with your little kerchief round your neck and wearing your straw hat."

*She begins to sob. César helps her to her feet. They sob on each others shoulders.*

End of Act 1.

ACT TWO

*Honorine's kitchen, the following day. There are two entrances/exits. There is a door to an unseen 'corridor' leading to the front door of the apartment building. It has a buzzer which announces someone at the front door and a wire pull to release the front door catch. There is also a sash window that can be slid up from the outside. At a table in the centre is Claudine, Honorine's sister. Over her dress, she wears an apron. All the while vigorously preparing an aioli in a mortar, she keeps up a running conversation with her sister who is slaving over a hot stove and having a good grumble.*

HONORINE: *And she couldn't come and open up the stall this morning? She got that flighty wife of Escartefigue to stand in for her – again.*

CLAUDINE: Listen to you. When the girl wants to work you're getting on to her to lie down and rest, or go out and get some fresh air; but then when she says she'd maybe like to go out, you object! It's not fair on the poor girl. Are you afraid she'll meet up with some nice young man?

HONORINE: I'm sorry to say that's the least of my worries. If only she *could* find some decent boy and marry him, just as soon as ever possible! She can marry a monkey if she wants to – just as long as she gets married.

CLAUDINE: She's not that way inclined. After all, she's not yet nineteen, and if she has to hang on for a couple of years until her fiancé comes home that's no reason for you to tear your hair out.

HONORINE (*dryly*): *That* particular young man is NOT her fiancé. And anyway, she can't *wait* two years.

CLAUDINE: And why not, pray?

HONORINE: Because she's *ruined*! The whole world knows she was that little barman's mistress. They're talking about nothing else.

CLAUDINE: What do *they* know?

HONORINE: Only that every Wednesday night Marius came in here with her and that he didn't leave again until seven in the morning.

CLAUDINE: And what does that prove? How can anyone know what they were doing?

HONORINE: If you're going to be that stupid then hold your tongue.

CLAUDINE: I just don't leap to conclusions. Maybe they were murmuring sweet nothings, or making big plans; or even having a row.

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HONORINE: Or maybe they were playing cards! You silly woman!

CLAUDINE: Now you've done it: you haven't called me that for a long time. And now you've started, you'll just go on and on. At school, when I made a mistake, the teacher would say: "Nobody laugh! Be polite! It isn't her fault she's not all there." I've had enough if it, I tell you! Don't you think I'd really like to be as bright as you?

HONORINE: Don't get upset, Claudine. I'm sorry.

CLAUDINE: Leave me alone. Maybe I *am* stupid but I do everything with a good heart.

*The front door buzzes and Honorine pulls the door release. A sonorous voice is heard in the corridor.*

POSTMAN (*offstage*): Madame Cabanis.

HONORINE: It's the postman.

*Honorine opens the door and the postman appears.*

POSTMAN: A registered letter for you.

HONORINE (*She takes the packet*): It's from my mussels supplier. Where do I sign?

POSTMAN: There! (*While Honorine signs, the postman turns politely to Claudine.*) Well now, Madame Claudine, you're sampling the Marseilles air today?

CLAUDINE: That's right.

POSTMAN: Your sister is the kindest of women.

CLAUDINE: Oh yes! She's very kind.

POSTMAN: And would you like to know how it is I can tell she is so kind?

CLAUDINE: Tell me!

POSTMAN: It's like this. When I call here with a registered letter, it's very rare that she doesn't offer me a glass of a very decent white wine.

HONORINE: Today being no exception.

POSTMAN: Alas, not today!

HONORINE: What's wrong with today?

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CLAUDINE: Aren't you well?

POSTMAN: Very well indeed. It's just that, after what I've been saying, you might just imagine that I was *asking* for a glass, and that wouldn't be polite.

HONORINE: Stop your nonsense. This is a very good little white Burgundy. (*She pours a glass of it.*)

POSTMAN: Since you offer, I don't mind if I do! It's just that, if one had to ask for it; well, that's not my style, you understand. Your very good health! (*He sinks it swiftly but with appreciation.*)

CLAUDINE (*stage whisper*): Ask him now!

HONORINE: What?

CLAUDINE: What you were wondering just a little while ago.

HONORINE: Aha! (*She turns to the postman who is nonchalantly turning the empty glass in his fingers.*) Now then, I could use some information from you.

POSTMAN (*feeling entitled to pour himself a second glass*): And what might that be?

HONORINE: Has my daughter been getting any letters from César's boy?

POSTMAN: Ah! Now that's a question to which I have no right to answer.

CLAUDINE: What's stopping you?

POSTMAN: That would be breaching professional confidentiality. What might people do with that sort of information?

HONORINE: Now listen here. This is to do with *my* daughter. It's important for me to know. Just tell me: yes or no?

POSTMAN: Honorine, despite my long friendship with you and the high regard in which I hold your white Burgundy, I can't tell. I'd like to but I simply can't. Think of it this way: across my *official* mouth I have one of these red seals like you have on your registered letters.

HONORINE: What a pain you are, really!

CLAUDINE: It surely isn't difficult to say yes or no.

POSTMAN: My poor lady! Think about it for a moment. In my bag, every morning, there are all the secrets of all the families on the street. If I was going to spill the beans, even to my wife, even in the dark, even the quietest whisper that – (*with a quick glance to left and right that has the two ladies*

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*come closer*) Monsieur Lèbre gets little pink letters just like this (*he swiftly flashes it*) addressed to him *at his office*: they come from Antibes, from the Casino where Mademoiselle Felicia is performing! If I was going to tell you that this letter (*another one in a buff envelope is brandished*) to Madame Cadolive comes from the prison in Aix where her older son is finishing a three year sentence for burglary ... well, what would you think of me? No, No! I don't even read the postcards. (*Accompanied by an elaborate squinting pantomime, he explains.*) I only read the address with my right eye.

CLAUDINE (*pouring a third glass of wine*): It isn't going to cause any sort of upset!

HONORINE: You'll be giving me precious news affecting the future happiness of my little girl. Come on; take a deep breath and tell me!

POSTMAN: While I wear this uniform, I am a slave to duty, Honorine; a slave. But maybe, if we use our intelligence we can sort this matter out. First, take a look out of the window. Make sure no one's there. (*As Claudine does so, he slips off his uniform jacket and puts it over the back of a chair.*) Now, pay attention. Look at me closely and *ask* your question.

HONORINE: Is Fanny getting letter from Marius?

POSTMAN: Watch very carefully. (*He shakes his head very slightly.*)

HONORINE: You're sure she isn't getting any letters from him.

POSTMAN: Pay very close attention. (*He nods his head ever so slightly.*)

CLAUDINE: You're sure?

POSTMAN: Watch closely. (*He nods. He starts to put his jacket back on.*)

HONORINE: But if she ever did, you'd tell me.

POSTMAN (*buttoning up the jacket*): No, no. I wouldn't. I don't have the right to do that.

HONORINE: Well I don't think that's very kind of you.

POSTMAN: I'm not paid to be kind: I'm paid to do my duty. If Marius writes to her and I see that from the stamps on the letter, I shan't tell you ... The only thing is, she has the same name as you so – it could always happen, by accident of course, I might hand it to you. But that wouldn't be my fault, now would it?

CLAUDINE (*pouring him another glass, which he downs in one go*): That's all we need to know!

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POSTMAN: Now, I need to get on with my round. Au revoir, Honorine, and please forgive me.

HONORINE: Forgive you for what?

POSTMAN: For not having been able to give you any information whatsoever. I simply don't have the right, you see: a question of professional code of conduct.

*He weaves his way, a fraction unsteadily, to the door and exits.*

CLAUDINE: Well so much the better. He isn't writing to her. She'll soon forget him.

HONORINE: Or just as likely she'll die of a broken heart.

CLAUDINE (*dreamily*): But that would be a love story just like the cinema: terrible, but at the same time beautiful.

HONORINE: Beautiful? Try looking at it from my point of view! I'm in absolute despair. I can't sleep; I can't eat; and I daren't look my friends in the face.

CLAUDINE: Don't exaggerate, Honorine. I wouldn't be so worried. Little by little, she's going to forget him and then, in the end, she'll finish up marrying Panisse.

HONORINE: Oh, how I want that to be true!

CLAUDINE: There you are then.

HONORINE: That's all very well, but even if she tried to pick up the threads there, it won't work because it's Panisse now who doesn't want *her*.

CLAUDINE: Why on earth not?

HONORINE: He's not stupid. Can you believe a man of fifty would want to marry a young girl dying of love for another man? Grow up!

CLAUDINE: He's told you that?

HONORINE: Of course he hasn't; but any time I run into him he never says a word about it. He'll talk about the weather – Fancy, Honorine, it's raining! Sunny today! – but about Fanny, not a word. (*The front door buzzer sounds and Honorine gets up to pull the door release.*) Who on earth can this be? (*She pulls the door release cord. Then she opens the door and looks into the corridor, bobbing back in, clearly taken aback.*) It's a man with an opera hat!

CLAUDINE: Dear God! Is it the bailiff?

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HONORINE: Why should it be the bailiff? I don't owe anyone a single sou.

*The door opens and Panisse comes in wearing evening dress, an opera hat and white gloves.*

HONORINE: For the love of God, it's *you*, Panisse!

PANISSE: It is indeed me! Good day to you ladies.

CLAUDINE (*coquettishly*): Bonjour, Monsieur Panisse, and how are *you*?

PANISSE: I'm very well indeed, dear Madame Claudine. And how are *you*?

CLAUDINE: As you see, not at all bad.

PANISSE: To me you look extremely lovely today.

HONORINE: It's you who's the lovely one. When I saw you in the corridor, I got quite a fright.

PANISSE: That's because I'm just on my way home from the wedding of Ulysses Pijeautard, the glove maker in the rue Paradis. That's why I'm all dolled up.

CLAUDINE: And white gloves too! They suit you.

PANISSE: The outfit is very flattering. In fact, it's not me that's elegant; it's the clothes.

CLAUDINE (*flattering*): But you need to know how to wear them, and you have that air about you. Isn't that true, Honorine?

*The sisters enjoy a stage wink at each other.*

HONORINE: He carries himself very well. But why haven't stayed for the wedding dinner?

PANISSE: Today was just the civil ceremony. The banquet will be tomorrow after church and it won't be a banquet. It will be a 'Lunch'. (*He makes a real meal of the word.*) It's an English word.

HONORINE: A nice wedding then, was it?

PANISSE: Quite charming! Even moving: for me especially. Pijeautard is a widower like me, more or less the same age. He's married a ravishingly beautiful girl: his cashier, in fact.

CLAUDINE: What an excellent choice!

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PANISSE: There were two or three there who were perhaps laughing at him just a bit. It seems to me people like that have got it wrong. What do you think?

CLAUDINE: Jealously! That's all it is.

HONORINE: And what's your opinion, Honorine?

HONORINE: If the girl's happy then all's for the best, I'd say.

CLAUDINE: When a man of fifty wants to get married and he has the good fortune to find someone young, why should he go looking for an old woman who'd give him only twenty sous a day to spend on tobacco?

PANISSE: So you approve of Pijeautard, then?

CLAUDINE: I congratulate him!

PANISSE: Perfectly reasoned, Claudine: such good sense. And you, Honorine: could you blame this splendid fellow?

HONORINE: How could I blame him if he makes her happy and if he's given her proper guarantees of happiness – and good fortune!

PANISSE: But of course; and he's done just that and he's ready to do more if that pleases her mother. That's the least of it. Well, we do seem agreed on that, don't we? We're all in favour and we congratulate the lucky Pijeautard, yes?

CLAUDINE: If he was here right now, I'd kiss him on both cheeks.

PANISSE: Very well then. Since I see that good sense reigns supreme, I think the moment is opportune today for me to renew a project, the outcome of which is of capital importance as far my own future is concerned,. I was expecting to find you alone: but Madame Claudine is part of the family so that does not embarrass me; on the contrary.

*Claudine can scarcely suppress her excitement.*

HONORINE: Wait a moment. At least give me time to take off my apron. *(She takes off her apron while Panisse leans on his cane, hat in hand. Honorine sits down and Panisse puts his hat on the table, peels off his gloves, and puts them into his upturned hat.)* Right then, on you go.

PANISSE: I wish to marry your daughter. You know this because I've asked you once already. Being dressed up today for a wedding, I'm taking this opportunity to renew my request and to ask if you will agree to it.

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CLAUDINE: Of course we agree!!!

HONORINE: Don't go poking your nose in, you silly woman! (*She coughs and clears her throat while Claudine hangs her head.*) My dear friend, it would scarcely be convenient for me to give you an answer so suddenly. I shall need at least ... at least a day to think about it. And, even before beginning to think about it, I need to lay down some conditions. Nothing to do with money: we talked about that last time.

PANISSE: So we did. What's it all about then, your conditions?

HONORINE: You know what went on *after* our last conversations.

PANISSE: In the last six months, so much has happened. The mayor has resigned. Pitoffi won the regional pétanque championship. And there has even been an earthquake in Mexico. Piquoiseau has broken his leg, and I had my warehouse repainted. But all of that is in the past. It doesn't exist for me any more. What I'm interested in, Honorine, is the future.

HONORINE: That's good because it's the future I need to talk about ... I mean Marius.

PANISSE: He's gone! Let's not talk about him any more.

HONORINE: Even so, there's something you must know ...

PANISSE: Yes, yes. I know all that.

CLAUDINE: Don't go on, Honorine. He says he knows.

HONORINE: It's just possible you don't know everything.

PANISSE: I do, Honorine! That's to say I know all that I *need* to know.

HONORINE: Everything, Panisse? Everything?

PANISSE: Honorine! Marius is not my favourite subject of conversation. Talk to me about the rain, about the cost of living, even about taxation, but not about Marius.

HONORINE: Do you think it gives *me* any pleasure to talk about him? But honesty compels me to refer to the fact that I found my daughter in bed with him.

PANISSE (*To Claudine*): Oh, Mother of God! Did she have to *say* this?

CLAUDINE: Pay no attention! She's imagining it!

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HONORINE: Did I imagine that it actually took place beneath the portrait of her grandmother?

CLAUDINE: Oh my God!

PANISSE: Will you never learn to hold your tongue?

HONORINE: I'll hold my tongue when I *want* to. But I had to tell you so that, later on, you couldn't make a scene saying we'd kept something from you. And now I've started, I'm going even further. Because this is a serious matter we're discussing, I'm going to be utterly frank with you. But what I'm going to tell you I've never told a living soul and you mustn't repeat it – ever!

PANISSE: So be it. Never!

HONORINE: You swear?

PANISSE: I swear.

HONORINE: On what?

PANISSE: On the tomb of my first wife.

HONORINE: Right then! I've been asking myself if what happened doesn't show she's the same way inclined as my sister Zoë.

PANISSE: It's not possible!

CLAUDINE: Not at all!

HONORINE: I tell you: Zoë was just like her at fifteen, sensible, well-behaved, didn't like boys at all. If one of them tried to kiss her in a corner, she'd get so mad. Then, she met that Spaniard and it was bye-bye to modesty. It hit her like the Mistral. She turned into the person you know about – just like a closed umbrella, she couldn't stand up without help.

PANISSE: One has to take a few risks when the prize one wants is so great.

HONORINE: You could be taking too big a risk ...

CLAUDINE: But that's his business after all! Don't try to put the man off!

HONORINE: All right then; but you must promise me *one* thing. If she ever deceives you, you won't kill her.

PANISSE: I'm a good man: you've just said it, but on that particular point I can't give you any binding commitment. If she cheats on me, I tell you frankly I don't know what I would do.

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HONORINE: Then why on earth didn't you kill your first wife?

PANISSE: Because she never once deceived me – and, of course, because she was my bookkeeper.

HONORINE: Then it's no, no, no!

CLAUDINE: No? No? No?

PANISSE: Hold on a minute! Naturally, I never once tried to find out if she was deceiving me: that would have been undignified. And if anyone brought me any sort of evidence, I had such confidence in her I'd simply not believe it.

CLAUDINE: Bravo, Panisse!

PANISSE: I think I've answered your question.

HONORINE: I think you have. All right, listen: I'll give you my answer tomorrow night round at your place.

PANISSE: Agreed! And may I cling on to a modest hope?

CLAUDINE: A great, great big hope!

PANISSE: Then while I'm ahead, I'll quit for the moment. The official interview with my prospective mother-in-law is concluded. I'll retire to my Aladdin's cave of sails and ropes, dreams and hopes and wait there politely but impatiently. I bid you good day, Honorine. Au revoir, Claudine.

*He exits to the 'corridor' with dignity and a broad grin.*

CLAUDINE: There you are, you see! I was sure it was going to happen. But what about Fanny; will she want to have him?

HONORINE: I tell you I just don't know. But if she doesn't want Panisse, she can choose someone else and if she doesn't want someone else, she can have Panisse. That's my position and I'm sticking to it. Stick your head out of the window and tell me if you see Fanny coming.

CLAUDINE (*looking out of the window*) Yes, here she comes. Now don't go talking to her about Panisse the moment she's in the door. Wait till we're sitting at table. That's more like family!

*The two women bustle round the table. Fanny enters, like a sleep-walker.*

HONORINE: Here you are at last, then. Where have you been? Are we going to need a stall-minder fulltime now?

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*Fanny does not reply. She walks across the room and sits in the armchair, looking straight ahead.*

CLAUDINE (*going over to kiss her*): Bonjour, Fanny!

FANNY (*with an effort*): Bonjour, Aunt Claudine.

*A long silence ensues.*

HONORINE: That walk doesn't seem to have done you any good. Can't you even speak to us?

CLAUDINE: But of course she can talk! We're just not giving her a chance to get a word in. (*To Fanny.*) You've been for a nice walk then?

FANNY: Yes.

CLAUDINE: And what did you see?

FANNY: Nothing.

HONORINE: That's enough now! When your Aunt Claudine comes here for a visit, we'll not have a fit of the sulks, thank you very much!

CLAUDINE: Oh Honorine! She's not sulking.

HONORINE: Just look at her then! That sour puss is going to turn the milk any minute.

CLAUDINE: Do stop grumbling. (*Stage whisper.*) Can't you see it's L-O-V-E? (*Normal voice.*) We can chat at the table, the three of us, all family, eh? I do declare I'm hungry. Come on, Fanny. Give me a hand to set the table. (*She gets a tablecloth from a drawer and puts it on the table.*) Aren't you hungry too?

*Fanny looks at her without seeing her then, abruptly, stands up and puts herself in front of her mother.*

FANNY: Mummy, I'm going to have a baby.

HONORINE (*poleaxed*): What did you say?

CLAUDINE: Fanny! What kind of silly idea is that?

FANNY: I'm going to have a baby. The doctor's just told me.

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HONORINE (*collapsing onto a chair*): Oh my God! Oh my God! (*Leaping up again.*) It's not possible! It can't be true!

CLAUDINE (*smiling Heavenwards*): A baby!

HONORINE (*striding to the door and yanking it open*): Then get out at once, you dishonest woman! Get out, you dirty slut! If your poor father were alive today, this would have killed him! The door's open!

CLAUDINE: But where's she to go?

HONORINE: On the street, like all the other street walkers! You're not my daughter any more. I never want to see you again!

FANNY: But Mummy!  
*Honorine shuts the door.*

HONORINE: Get to your room and collect your things, then off you go!

CLAUDINE: Honorine, don't say such things! Hold your wicked tongue. Stop it at once.

HONORINE: This is even worse than Zoë! It's a disgrace to the family. Get going at the double or I'll chase you out with a broom handle, you slut!

CLAUDINE: Honorine!

*While Claudine restrains her sister, Fanny begins to stagger and seems about to fall down. Honorine rushes to catch her.*

HONORINE: Quick! (*She holds Fanny in her arms.*) Fetch the vinegar!

*Claudine goes for the vinegar.*

CLAUDINE: Aren't you ashamed? In her condition! Do you want to kill her?

HONORINE: Fanny! My little Fanny! My daughter!

CLAUDINE: Fanny!

HONORINE: My little girl! My darling! Fanny! Quick, open your eyes. Don't die on me! Fanny, I forgive you.

*Fanny opens her eyes.*

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FANNY: It's nothing, Mum. There you are. It's gone. I'm fine again.

CLAUDINE (*putting the corner of a vinegar soaked hanky under her nose*):  
Take a deep breath ... Her colour's coming back.

HONORINE (*getting going again*): Hah! And so she ought to be: blushing with shame! She ought to be suffocating with shame.

CLAUDINE: Hold your tongue! As soon as she faints, you're weeping; but as soon as she's better, you start off again!

HONORINE: I suppose you find it quite in order for an unmarried girl to announce she has a bun in the oven? What's next, I ask?

CLAUDINE: Well, the first thing is stop yelling, or the whole neighbourhood will know.

*She goes and shuts the window.*

HONORINE (*to Fanny*): Are you not ashamed?

CLAUDINE: Of course she's ashamed; you can see that perfectly well! When this sort of thing happens no one denies it's a great misfortune. But, when all's said and done, from what you've already told me it was only to be expected. When a young girl has a lover she gets a baby more easily. That simply proves her innocence, I'd say. Let me talk to her. Listen to me, Fanny, don't upset yourself. Just answer my question calmly without getting worked up. You're sure of this, this ... this unfortunate event? (*Fanny nods sadly.*) Fine; and who's the father? Is it Marius?

HONORINE (*furious*): Who would you like it to be? She hasn't been sleeping with the whole of Marseilles, I'll have you know.

CLAUDINE: All right then. It's Marius's baby.

HONORINE: Ah, if I could only get my hands on that fellow! She was in the wrong, I don't deny it. But she's just a child. He must have thrown himself on her like a wild beast! I'm going to take this to court, see if I don't. He deserves hard labour, breaking stones every day. Mother of God, I hope sea devils eat his ship from under his feet so that piranhas can strip him to a skeleton. That awful man has ruined my innocent little daughter. (*She takes Fanny in her arms and embraces her fondly.*)

CLAUDINE: It's certainly enough to prove he has no manners. Giving a girl a baby is very inconsiderate. But the harm's done, and now we have to find the remedy. It's as simple as that.

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HONORINE: Simple! (*To Fanny*) Now then, my little one; how long have you known about this? I need to know.

FANNY: I've been feeling sick since he went away. Every morning, I've felt terrible.

HONORINE: Oh, dear God!

FANNY: And then I was eating so much.

HONORINE: But, at mealtimes you eat like a sparrow.

FANNY: I've been eating just when the mood came over me: bread, chocolate, fruit, shell fish. It hits me all of a sudden. I feel like I'm getting skinny but I'm actually putting on weight.

CLAUDINE: There's no doubt of it then. She's expecting.

FANNY: And I have this great fear. I cry my heart out because Marius never writes, and I want to throw myself into the sea.

HONORINE: My poor girl, you must never dream of doing that. How you must have suffered, keeping all this to yourself!

FANNY: So, anyway, this morning I made my mind up and went and saw Doctor Venelle.

HONORINE: Well he's a very good doctor, a real prof, I'd say. So what did he tell you?

FANNY: It's due in March.

HONORINE: Well, it's not a bad month, as months go. So after that what did you do? I suppose you went and told César.

FANNY: No, no. I really don't know where I've been. I just walked and walked. In the end I had to come back here to tell you.

HONORINE: That's all right then. We're in the clear! Dry your eyes now. Blubbing won't help. When you lose your honour, it's a sad moment but what's lost is lost, and there's an end of it.

CLAUDINE: Besides, so long as no one knows about it, it isn't really lost, is it? If folk told all their faults in the market place, you couldn't look a soul in the eye.

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HONORINE: So what about it, then? What do you think *you're* going to do?

FANNY (*throwing herself into her mother's arms*): I'll do whatever you want, just so long as you take care of me.

HONORINE: Well that's easy then, and we're saved, thank God! Marry Panisse!

FANNY: You think he still *wants* me?

CLAUDINE: He came asking for you only ten minutes ago, dressed in a frock coat and wearing white gloves!

HONORINE: And this time the answer's yes, yes, yes! Marriage in a fortnight: I'll go round with the answer in just a moment.

CLAUDINE: So what do you think of that, then?!

FANNY (*hesitant*): But it seems to *me* I could earn my own living: I'm a hard worker and I can get along on my own. My idea – if Mum would let me – would be not to get married and to bring up my child by my own efforts, but all the time waiting for his father to come home – if he ever comes.

CLAUDINE: A lovely dream – but a difficult life!

HONORINE: Difficult? Impossible more like! Having a child without a husband? Don't waste everybody's time with such nonsense.

FANNY: But Mum, the chief of police's daughter had a son and no husband? She's brought him up very well and didn't seem too unhappy.

HONORINE: That's not the same thing at all! His father died suddenly the night before the wedding, but yours went off for a swim as fast and as far as possible so as not to marry you. And anyway, you can't compare their family with ours; the Cabanis.

CLAUDINE: Very true! You're a Cabanis! In every family there can be one who turns out to be a child-mother or a bit of a slut; and people forgive that because it's only natural, but in this family it's too late now. Your Aunt Zoë has done that already.

HONORINE: If you don't accept Panisse, we'll all be ruined and as for me I'll die of shame.

CLAUDINE: If you had someone else you'd prefer, and who maybe loves you too, just say the name. Young Victor, maybe?

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FANNY: I'd rather die!

HONORINE: Anyway, they're not a healthy family. That's something that's often overlooked, the health of the father; because like father, like son, you know. But what about Balthazar's son? He's been making eyes at you since your catechism, and he's rich. Now there's a handsome boy!

FANNY: No, Mum. I don't want some youngster. If you're forcing me to marry then I'd just as soon it was Panisse.

HONORINE: Now you're talking sense.

FANNY: But will he want me?

HONORINE: We've just finished telling you he's asked for you again!

FANNY (*gesturing at her belly*): But he doesn't *know*!

HONORINE: He knows all about the hanky-panky between you and Marius. I took the precaution of reminding him.

FANNY: He doesn't know I'm going to have a baby.

HONORINE: Fortunately not. It'll be a seven month baby: that's all there is to it.

FANNY (*thunderstruck*): You want me to marry him without telling him the truth?

CLAUDINE: Are you so daft as to *think* of telling him?

FANNY: I've *got* to tell him! He has a right to know!

HONORINE: Well I declare: she's either mad or she's doing this deliberately! You've a real gift for inventing fairy tales just to get us worked up, Miss!

CLAUDINE: Fanny, this man is our only hope? If you go and tell him, he won't want anything to do with you.

HONORINE: If you say a single word, it'll be all over, finished, dead and gone.

CLAUDINE: And besides; why should you tell him? You can't be absolutely certain it's true, now can you?

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HONORINE: Exactly! She can't possibly be so sure!

FANNY: But Doctor Venelle has told me.

HONORINE: He's nearly sixty. How on earth can an old fool like that be so certain?

CLAUDINE: It could just be 'nerves'.

HONORINE: That's it of course: it's your nerves; or just a passing something or other; a touch of 'flu maybe. There's a lot of it about. You don't want to make a crisis out of a little cough.

FANNY: If that's the case then, there's no need to get married!

HONORINE: No, you don't have to be in the family way to get married. There are *some* virgin brides after all! I'm telling you, take Panisse because he's asking for you, and don't say a *thing*!

FANNY: No, Mum! That would be dishonest. It would be a terrible lie.

HONORINE: But you don't need to *tell* a lie! He's not going to ask you any embarrassing questions. Oh Fanny, if you knew how vain men are, especially about this! He'll find it altogether natural for you to have a beautiful baby only six or seven months after the wedding.

CLAUDINE: That's true: and he wouldn't be the first! And think about this Fanny: Panisse is such a good man.

FANNY: Yes, he is!

CLAUDINE: Then you'd have to be very unkind to deprive him of a great joy: the joy of becoming a father. That something he surely deserves.

FANNY: And what about me? What would I think of him while all this was going on? What would I think of myself? I'm sorry. I don't want to be so dishonest.

HONORINE: A woman is never dishonest with a man. If we're in this pickle, it's because of a man. So, let a man pay for it!

FANNY: But it's not the same man!

HONORINE: They're *all* the same! He's no different from the rest. And besides, think about *him*: if he wants to marry you, it's because you're young and pretty. So don't let's think he's some sort of saint.

FANNY: No! I've made a bad mistake, I know it. I've ruined my whole life. But that's my business, no one else's. It's me that's got to deal with the mess. Are you saying because Panisse is kind and loves me, I should dump a bastard on him? Do you want me to steal his name for someone else's child? If I did such a thing, I could never look anyone in the eye, ever again. I would think myself the lowest of the low; a real street walker.

HONORINE: How dare you? Giving *us* lessons in morality after all you've done; sneaking your gigolo into your very own bedroom and under the eyes of your grandmother's portrait? I'm surprised it didn't fall off the wall. You're an ungrateful wretch, a wicked hussy, you're a ...

CLAUDINE: For pity's sake, hold your tongue, Honorine. Don't let's start the whole comedy again. Let's sit down and eat something. Fanny, sit here!

FANNY: I'm not hungry.

HONORINE: After what you've just been telling us?

FANNY: I'll have to get over there and take over from Fortunette on the stall. She's been running the stall since this morning. I have to go.

*She exits quickly.*

HONORINE: Fanny!

*There is no reply and the outer door slams.*

HONORINE: What's possessed her to go off again this time?

CLAUDINE (*serving the soup*): She told you.

HONORINE: I tell you, when you've no children, you're jealous of those that have; and when you do have them they drive you completely demented. The Blessed Virgin, poor woman, only had the one, but just look at the worries he caused her!

CLAUDINE: But then, he was a boy!

HONORINE: At least *she* didn't talk about drowning herself!

CLAUDINE: No; and besides, if she'd tried to, her boy would have stopped her, wouldn't he? (*She starts on her soup.*) Sit down, Honorine. (*Honorine sits down and picks up her spoon.*) Is it true what they say: little bastards are much less pretty than the rest? What do you think?

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HONORINE: Certainly not: quite the opposite! They're often stronger, more intelligent and, when you come to think of it, they're called love children.

CLAUDINE (*tucking into her soup*): So what are we complaining about then?

End of Act 2.

ACT THREE

*The combined living room and front shop of Panisse, master sail-maker of Marseilles later the same day. There is an exit to the dining room and bedrooms, a French window with shutters outside. There is a low counter with a drawer between the sail-loft and the door. An unrolled bolt of canvas and a telephone are on the counter. Not far from the dining room entrance a diver's helmet sits on the corner of an open crate filled with straw. Panisse is seated on the counter eating, his plate in his hand. Around him on the counter are dirty plates, a small loaf, a bottle of wine and a glass, plus a salt cellar and a small tray. A little time passes as Panisse munches away.*

*The telephone rings and Panisse goes over to answer it.*

PANISSE: Hello, yes. Yes, yes. I'll get it sent over straight away.

*He hangs up and then turns back to the counter and starts to roll up the bolt of canvas. Fanny appears in the open French window.*

FANNY: Monsieur Panisse?

PANISSE: Bonjour, my dear young lady!

FANNY: Bonjour, Monsieur Panisse.

*She remains standing in the entrance.*

PANISSE: But don't stand there, my dear. Do come in!

FANNY: Is it ... can I; I mean *may* I have a word with you?

PANISSE: Of course you can: as many as you'd like!

FANNY: I do have something very serious to say to you but I'm afraid that if we stay here we're bound to be interrupted.

PANISSE: Then give me a moment. (*He locks the door. Then he shuts the shutters outside and closes the French window and lowers the blind.*) There we are then; total tranquillity. Now then; you've something very serious to say. Perhaps I can guess. Your mother will have told you I came round.

FANNY: Yes; she's told me.

PANISSE: And you are the bringer of her reply?

FANNY (*almost inaudible*): Yes ...

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PANISSE: You seem very out of sorts but you mustn't be upset on my account. If it's no, then it's no; and if no's the answer and that's all there is to it. Too bad for me; but there's nothing more to be said.

FANNY: You're mistaken, Monsieur Panisse. I haven't come to say no.

PANISSE (*taken by surprise*): Have you come to say yes!?

FANNY: I've come to say that, if it were still possible, I would say yes but I'm afraid it's no longer possible.

PANISSE: But why not?

FANNY: Because of a serious fact you don't know about, and when you do know ... this fact ... it's you who won't want *me* any more.

PANISSE: Not want you any more! That would surprise me. Give me an idea about this fact, so we can see. Come and sit down. (*She sits but he stands and paces about.*)

FANNY: I needed to pluck up a lot of courage to come and tell you. But I owe it to you: even if, afterwards, you're going to look down on me.

PANISSE: Look down on *you*, Fanny? Never! And, in any case, I already know what 'that fact' is. And I think quite a few people know it too. At least a couple of times, people have seen Marius coming away from your house at the crack of dawn. So what? And, for that matter, what's new? If some busybody *were* to come and say to me, "Panisse, you've married a young girl but you weren't the first to know her", I'd say to them, "Was I a virgin?" What kind of a difference does it make? ... As far I'm concerned, it doesn't matter at all and I'll tell you why. When a man of my age marries a young girl like you, it isn't a very equal arrangement, is it? In her case, she brings him her beauty and her youth; she brings a freshness and newness into his life. But look at him! What's his side of the bargain? A ready-made house and home, a social position, affection, and a grey moustache – well, *going* grey, shall we say? I'd say the scales were tipped too far in his favour. But if that young girl has had, in so many words, a lover, well then, that tends to balance things up and I could marry you without feeling any loss of self-esteem. Anyway, that's what I think ... Can't really say more than that.

FANNY: You're a truly good and generous man, Monsieur Panisse, but there's something else, something terrible, something that couldn't be concealed ... (*There is a long pause: neither looks at the other.*)

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PANISSE: I can see it embarrasses you to tell me. So, let me say it for you. I do understand what it is you are trying to say. Put simply, you think about him all the time and, out of kindness, you want me to realise that, from time to time, you'll want to talk about him and you want me to be aware of this. I tell you, my dear, you can talk about him as much as you want to. After all, none of this is your fault, but nor is it mine. So, I'm saying to you that, two years from now, you'll be a different woman and, if he does come back, we'll invite him here to our house, and you'll be astonished to discover that, as far as you're concerned, he's become a stranger.

FANNY: It's true. I do think about him, but ... there really is something more serious ... something that can't be put right ...

PANISSE: Which is ...?

FANNY: Please don't force me to say. Please try to understand ...

PANISSE: As you wish; I'm trying hard; I am trying; I'm thinking ...

FANNY (*standing up*): Don't try any more. I can see you've understood. You look to me like someone who doesn't *want* to understand because it would horrify you, like everyone else. I know that ... I only came here this evening because of my mother ... (*She makes him sit down.*)

PANISSE: But what is it that I seem to you to be trying not to understand?

FANNY: Enough! You're right, Panisse. You mustn't take me on. I'm a lost woman, completely lost ... I don't even have the right any more to take my own life.

*She seems about to collapse and Panisse leaps up, catches and holds her. She weeps and he speaks in a voice charged with emotion.*

PANISSE: It's a little pigeon, Fanny, isn't it? Tell me; is there a little pigeon in the nest? (*Fanny nods in confirmation, breathing a 'Yes'.*) You're sure of it? Has Doctor Venelle told you? (*Fanny nods again.*) And this is why you've been so unwell lately? (*Fanny again confirms this.*)

FANNY: Don't despise me too much, Panisse. You came asking for me again this morning. I know I only had to say yes and it would all have happened but I *had* to warn you. I would be very happy even now to become your wife but I've got a baby inside me, gnawing at my belly, wanting to be born; that can't be stopped now.

PANISSE: And would you still agree to marry me?

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FANNY: I'd accept becoming your servant. I would obey you like a pet dog. I would have so much respect for you that I might well finish up loving you.

PANISSE: But would you give me this child? Would he be mine? Would he have my name?

FANNY: That's the only thing I ask of you.

PANISSE (*ecstatic*): Now the Heavens be praised!

FANNY: You still want me?

PANISSE (*sitting Fanny down again*): Listen to me Fanny. Have you looked at the sign over my door? It says "Honoré Panisse" and, underneath, "Master Sailmaker". Have you never noticed how the letters of my name are pushed over to the left and that, on the right, there's empty space? Well then, look at this! (*He goes to the counter and unlocks the drawer from which he draws out gilded letters which he piles on the counter.*) Look, this is the sign for "and" (*holding up an ampersand*), and then look at these others. (*Panisse holds them up as he speaks.*) There's an "en", an "ess" and an "oh" and if I arrange them in their proper order what does that say? It says "& SON". And son! I've had these in this drawer now for *thirty* years and never been able to bring them out. (*As Panisse gestures at the letters emotionally, Fanny gets up and embraces him. They stand together for a moment or two.*) But just one thing, Fanny. Let's be sure on this point. Have you told your little secret to anyone?

FANNY: The doctor knows.

PANISSE: Of course. But he's not going to say anything because he's a doctor. And then who else?

FANNY: There's my mother and my aunt Claudine.

PANISSE: Well, these two aren't going to breathe a word because of family honour. But is there anyone else who knows?

FANNY: Nobody at all.

PANISSE: Splendid! Now, tell me when *my child* is due to be born.

FANNY: The end of February, or March more likely.

PANISSE: Perfect! A seven-month baby! So, when can we have the wedding?

FANNY (*smiling and being infected by his enthusiasm*): Whenever you want.

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PANISSE: As soon as possible then, because of the baby. Shall we say in a fortnight?

FANNY: It's as simple as that, I suppose, but, Monsieur Panisse, have you truly weighed up the consequences? Are you really going to save my little bastard?

PANISSE: Fanny, I'm going to tell *you* everything; and then you'll understand I'm making no sacrifice. When I married my poor Felicity, a long time ago, she was about your age: I wasn't much older. We'd just bought this workshop with a bank loan. The arrangements all had to be signed in advance. At the beginning, the place wasn't worth a great deal. We had only one woman working for us, but then two, then five, and after four years or so it soared up to thirty. We had good money coming in. So finally, one evening, after about seven years, I said to my wife, "Felicity, we've got enough money and we've got the right premises. Business is looking good. What if we had a baby?" Well, poor woman, she covered her face and she went all red and she said to me, "Honoré, I've been wanting to talk to you about this for a long time but I didn't dare." Well, the long and the short of it was that she'd been sure for a couple of years she couldn't have children. I can't tell you all the doctors we went to see, all the healing waters she drank and all the candles we lit, the pilgrimages, the Swedish drill: and I kept asking her, "D'you think there's a chance now? Just a chance?" But that was the story of our married life. For the first few years we'd been scared of having a baby and upsetting our finances and for the rest of our lives we were often too scared to talk to each other about our disappointment. (*He sighs and sits down. Fanny puts her arms round his shoulders.*) I just longed to be a Daddy. I often felt really ill with the pain of it. I behaved badly to Felicity; often had rows with her over stupid things. Then I began to put all the blame onto her, especially when she began to put on a bit of weight. I said terrible things like, "With a belly the size you're getting, couldn't you manage to find room for a baby in there?" And she would hit back saying that if I'd spent less time and money drinking over at César's I might not have lost the ability to put a baby in there. After a while, we got used to things: we got used to having no children and knowing we'd never have any. But for a good ten years the business didn't get us excited any more. We only sold the basics. You could say, in that way, I missed the boat, because other people saw the future and began to sell engines rather than sails. And that's why our lovely port stinks of petrol – all because Felicity was barren or I was sterile; because we had no one to nourish, no one to grow the business for. (*Looking up at her with a smile, he puts his arm round her and a hand on her belly.*) Well, all that's changed now; thanks be to God! Now I'll have a wife and a child: all mine. (*He has a sob and a large blow into a white handkerchief. Fanny pats his shoulder.*)

FANNY: You are such a good man. Thank you. But I've sprung all this on you. Don't you need a day or two to think about it?

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PANISSE (*uneasy*): You're not backing out already, are you? I know: you're expecting a letter from Marius!

FANNY: I'm expecting nothing, except from you. But I wouldn't want you to take such a big decision just out of pity.

PANISSE: Pity!? (*More wistfully*) Pity! Fanny, I swear to you no man has ever taken a more selfish action. I am doing something for my own *exquisite* pleasure, and that's the absolute truth. Youngsters can make this sort of happiness for themselves; but when one gets to fifty there's little chance left, so if, suddenly, that chance comes ready-made, one's best to grasp it firmly; but quietly without telling the whole world in advance. So, I've only one condition, Fanny ... that you tell no one, not even your mother, that I've heard all this. That way, I can look the whole world in the eye when I tell them this child is mine, all mine! You'll never breathe a word; you promise?

FANNY: Never a word, dear Panisse!

*There is a rattle of knocking at the French window shutter and César is heard, offstage.*

CÉSAR (*offstage*): Hey there, Panisse. Is this how you received distinguished visitors?

PANISSE: All right, all right! I'm coming.

FANNY (*upset*): César! I really don't want to meet him.

PANISSE: Don't you worry! Slip into my dining room. It will soon be yours anyway so make yourself familiar with it all ... (*César rattles the shutter violently.*) I'm coming, I'm coming! (*To Fanny*) But remember now! I know nothing at all: you haven't told me a thing. I'll let that coarse brute in before he breaks the shuttters!

*Fanny exits to the dining room while Panisse goes to raise the blind, open the French window and the shutters.*

PANISSE: Take care, you savage! Don't break the shutters!

CÉSAR (*coming in*): Why have you locked yourself in? I expect you're counting your money, you old miser!

PANISSE: If I'd counted it in front of you, you'd have made off with half of it.

CÉSAR: Or maybe you were giving your seamstress's backside a quick squeeze, you old goat.

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PANISSE: That would be more in keeping with someone of my age if it were indeed a part of my character!

CÉSAR: Have you got five minutes to spare?

PANISSE: The whole afternoon if necessary.

CÉSAR (*after a little humming and hawing*): We need to have a serious little chat ... Listen; a little while ago didn't you ask Honorine for Fanny's hand?

PANISSE: Yes?

CÉSAR: The girl said no, on account of Marius. She thought my son was going to marry her. If I'm getting this wrong, just say so.

PANISSE: Fine; agreed. Go on.

CÉSAR: But instead, my boy ran away to sea and, what's more, he'll be gone for some time.

PANISSE: True, but so what?

CÉSAR: Right then: a little bird tells me – and I can see for myself because I don't walk about with my eyes closed – and anyway I know what kind of an old rogue you really are ... I hear it said you're still trailing your coat in front of Fanny and, any moment now, you're going to ask for her again. Is there any truth in this?

PANISSE: Now why might you be asking me this?

CÉSAR: Because it interests me very much! Is it true, or isn't it?

PANISSE: César, you may be my neighbour and my friend, but this is none of your business. Not one little bit!

CÉSAR: None of my business?

PANISSE: Not in the least! However, since what I am doing is perfectly honest and above board and I've not been trying to hide anything, I would rather tell you straight away: yes, I have asked again for Fanny's hand and *this time* it has not been refused and, this very evening, we are going to decide the wedding date.

CÉSAR: It's not at that stage already!

PANISSE: Further! A couple of weeks from now! On Friday fortnight if you want the precise date.

CÉSAR: This wedding *cannot* take place!!

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PANISSE: Cannot?

CÉSAR: No.

PANISSE: Has your son come back?

CÉSAR: My son will not be back for another twenty-six months, when he's finished doing his 'oceanographicalising'. But this marriage cannot take place because I do not wish it.

PANISSE: What rights do you have in the matter?

CÉSAR: The *right* that Fanny is already his wife. I grant they didn't stand up in front of the Mayor first but that's just a formality, and they can do all that when he comes back.

PANISSE: And if *she* doesn't want to wait?

CÉSAR: Of course she'll want to. She's in love with him.

PANISSE: She wants to so much, César, that she's just given me her consent.

CÉSAR: You mean she's said "Yes" – to you!

PANISSE: Precisely! To me!

CÉSAR: She, herself, actually to you?

PANISSE: To me; to my face; personally!

CÉSAR: I don't understand this. (*Becoming angry*) Or rather, I understand it perfectly well. You've *bought* her! You've been to see that old bag Honorine and promised to pay a rent for Fanny. And she's sold her to you, like in a slave market. That's the truth, isn't it? You old lecher!

PANISSE: Do you seriously imagine anyone could *buy* a girl like that if she didn't want it: a young lady like Fanny, with her good character? Get a grip on reality!

CÉSAR: What I've got a picture of is Honorine telling her she's been ruined, and she's got to get married double-quick or there'll be Hell to pay; so she's thrown herself into your arms.

PANISSE: If I didn't know you've never read a book in your life, I'd say you got that plot out of novel.

CÉSAR: Listen to me, Honoré. You know damn fine this wedding would be a scandal. Now tell me once and for all. Are you going to marry her?

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PANISSE: Absolutely!

CÉSAR: But *why*?

PANISSE: Because such is my earnest desire.

CÉSAR: Mother of God! (*He makes an effort to control himself.*) Listen, Panisse. Don't let's argue about this. Let's be calm, and chat about it like two old friends. I don't want to finish up strangling you all over again. Let's stay calm; let's be sensible.

PANISSE: I'd like nothing better.

CÉSAR: For an old man to marry a little girl: it's not decent.

PANISSE: I've given that some thought.

CÉSAR: It's altogether too unpleasant to think about. It's offensive.

PANISSE: It doesn't offend me!

CÉSAR: There you are, you see. You've given yourself away! You're marrying Fanny because she's young and you're getting all excited about pressing her soft young skin to your tanned old hog's hide.

PANISSE: No. It's not for that!

CÉSAR: It's not only for that maybe but *that* is a part of it. You've just said so yourself. You disgust me. I am *disgusted* by you.

*The two men stand glaring at each other; César with loathing but Panisse smiling.*

PANISSE: Very well; that's your privilege. Be disgusted! What do you want me to do about it?

CÉSAR: I want you to stop disgusting me. I want you, in these grave family matters, to conduct yourself like a Provencal gentleman and not like some cheap-skate swindler!

PANISSE: And if it so happens I'd *like* to behave like some cheap-skate swindler?

CÉSAR: If you refuse to take the sound advice of one of your oldest friends, I shall be compelled, on the day of the wedding, to wait for you at the church!

PANISSE: As we come out?

CÉSAR: No fear! As you go *in*.

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PANISSE: And what will you say to me?

CÉSAR: My first words will be “Take that!” followed by a hammer blow to your skull. And then I’ll draw and quarter you and dispose of the bits in the harbour.

PANISSE: Thank you for the prior warning. For my part, if you so much as raise your hand to me, even with the hammer of your pocket watch, I’ll put a hole in you with my revolver. And I’m not talking about some toy pistol: I’m talking about a magnum.

*Panisse opens the drawer in the counter again and brings out an enormous pistol.*

CÉSAR (*taken aback*): Mother of God! A couple of wheels and that would be a cannon.

PANISSE (*getting progressively more and more worked up*): Listen to me, César. I first met you forty years ago and all that time you called me your “good old friend, Panisse”. Good old friend be damned! For forty years non-stop you’ve been dropping me in the proverbial!

CÉSAR: *Moi!!!!*

PANISSE: Since we were in short pants, you’ve been dropping me in it; you’ve been cheating me and torturing me. At ten years old, you stopped me playing the games I wanted to play and made me play the games *you* wanted to play. When I was playing marbles and having a hell of a good time with my friends, you came along and said, “Hey, Honoré, come and play kick-the-can.” And like some daft sheep, off I would go, though I hated kick-the-can. I loathed it so much that, even nowadays when I see kids in the street playing kick-the-can I send them packing, sometimes with the toe of my boot ...

CÉSAR: What is all this rubbish about kick-the-can? Have you gone completely round the bend?

PANISSE: And in the street, you made me carry your school-bag. And when you got two hundred lines from the teacher, you came round to my place and made me write them for you – and while I was doing it you ate my all my toffees. You were so *horrible* to me that one day I wrote in my diary, “One day when I’m bigger I’ll give César a hiding.” Unfortunately, I never did get bigger than you.

CÉSAR: This is paranoia!

PANISSE: And then ... then there was Marie-Frisette. I was head-over-heels in love with her. But you did everything you could to separate us; *everything*. And all because you were jealous!

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CÉSAR: Jealous of Marie-Frisette? She was a ghastly sight: as skinny as a bicycle, and she had a squint.

PANISSE: She was *not* skinny: she was slim, and she didn't squint. She had what they called a 'lazy eye'.

CÉSAR: And apart from that she was beautiful?

PANISSE: You were jealous!

CÉSAR: Jealous? What are you insinuating?

PANISSE: You were jealous because when I was with her you'd lost your little slave. That's why you were always trying to make yourself a nuisance to us. It was tyranny, it was abominable, and what's more it's gone on for years.

CÉSAR: Oh yes: so why have you put up with me all this time if you detested me so much?

PANISSE: Because you have such a big mouth! You're a great big mouth and nothing else. And now you think you can get away with it again. You have the brass neck to think you can prevent my marriage. In the name of God, with a couple of rounds from this revolver I'll send you packing, once and for all!

*Panisse slams the revolver down on the counter and it goes off. The bullet 'strikes' the diving helmet with a loud clang and it falls into the box. Panisse is stupefied by the accident but César remains calm.*

CÉSAR: Now you've killed the diver. Who's next?

PANISSE: Let that be a warning to you because *you'll* be next. (*He totters over to look at the helmet.*)

CÉSAR: Poor old fellow! Better calm down. Go and have a stiff drink. That revolver has scared the stuffing out of you. I should have realised I was wasting my time talking to a daft old man like you. It's not you I need to speak to. And I give you my solemn word the wedding is O-double-F, *OFF!* (*He turns to leave.*)

PANISSE: You want to speak to her? All right then. Hold on. You can speak to her straight away. (*He opens the dining room door and calls.*)  
Fanny!

CÉSAR: She's here?

PANISSE: Fanny, César wants a word with you!

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*Fanny enters and stands nervously at the door.*

CÉSAR: What are you doing *here*?

PANISSE: She's going to tell you but you're not going to put the questions. (*He turns to face her.*) Fanny, César has the intention of preventing our marriage by whatever means he has at his disposal, even taking a hammer to my head. He thinks he has some rights over you and asserts that you belong to him because his son has done you the great honour of abandoning you. Tell him what you think of that.

CÉSAR: Hold on, Fanny; don't answer. He's not put things honestly or in good faith. Marius has left you for the moment, it's true, but you're waiting on his getting back. It's as simple as that. Now, am I not right?

FANNY: César: I can't wait for two years.

CÉSAR: Yes, I know, you're pining away – but you *have* to wait because you love him!

FANNY: Yes, I love him and Panisse knows that. But I can't wait any longer.

CÉSAR: So that's it, is it? They've ganged up on you. It's clear as daylight.

FANNY: No, César, my mother is right. You – well, you would never understand.

CÉSAR: What I understand is that because of what people are saying, your mother wants to pop you into bed with Panisse. Your mother's become very touchy all of a sudden. Has no one ever told you she was your father's mistress before they were married? But did that stop them being happy? Come one now: tell Panisse they frightened you into this. He's old enough to understand. And as for your mother, I'll explain things to her in no uncertain terms.

FANNY: No, César. I have to have a husband!

CÉSAR: D'you hear what you're saying? "I have to have a husband". So you'll take the first baboon that comes along wearing a bowler hat and marry him because he has a bit of money?

FANNY: César, I would wait for him for *ten* years if I was able to wait. But now, I just *can't*. If Panisse will still have me, I'm ready to marry him.

CÉSAR: Are you telling me you've been hatching this all the time? Is this why you sent Marius packing? You even told him the truth then – you told him you preferred Panisse because he had money. He said so in his letters and I didn't believe him. But it's true then!

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FANNY: I was lying. I said it to help him do what he really wanted to do. If he'd loved me as much as I love him, he'd have understood

CÉSAR: You weren't lying. And the proof is that while he was running down to that awful boat, you kept me talking in the bar. You knew I'd have been able to stop him. So, like a little hypocrite, you talked about getting married and even brought a tear to my eye. And me, like some daft imbecile, I was touched, and I believed you. And the biggest proof of all is what you're doing now. I can see that you're ready to leap over this old satyr's piles of money to get at the prize. If you'd had a clear conscience you wouldn't have sneaked off and hidden when I rapped at the door. Well, there you have it: you really are the niece of the infamous Zoë. She certainly knew how to make the old goats dance. For the first time, I can say I'm glad my son has gone away. He made the right choice. Now I'm going to write to him and spill the beans and I guarantee you if he still has any regrets, he won't have them much longer!

*He sets off for the French window but Fanny runs after him.*

FANNY: César, I beg you ...

PANISSE: Let him go: the stupid baboon.

FANNY: No, Panisse, no! Tell him everything. Tell him.

CÉSAR (*turning back*): Tell me what?

PANISSE: If you *really* haven't understood yet ...

CÉSAR: Understood what?

FANNY: Panisse, tell him, just tell him.

CÉSAR: What are you on about?

PANISSE: The fact is that she finds herself in a position that, for her, is very awkward and ...

CÉSAR: I don't get this. What are you saying?

PANISSE: And that she is urgent need of a good man to repair the damage done to her by that sloping-off-to-sea son of yours!

CÉSAR (*slapping his forehead*): A baby! You're carrying Marius's child? (*Yelling*) In God's name! She's going to have a child and you want to take him from me?

PANISSE: What do you mean *take* him?

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CÉSAR: Because he's *mine*! He's my son's son. And you want to steal him? My grandson! Fanny, what are you thinking?

FANNY: I'm thinking of my mother and my family.

CÉSAR: I don't give a damn for your mother or her family. Your family is Marius and your son – and me! As for this gentleman, tell him to hold his tongue because this is none of his business. Come on, let's go home.

FANNY: No, César. Listen to me. You just haven't thought about it. Marius can't come home for two whole years and if I go and have a baby without a husband my mother will die of shame ...

CÉSAR: Not her!

PANISSE: You know Honorine better than that. You remember how she was so ill when her Zoë went to the bad. If her own daughter is ruined, she'll take it even worse ...

CÉSAR: Ruined? I've never heard anything so stupid.

FANNY: Yes, ruined! I'll be nothing but a fallen woman, scorned by everybody.

PANISSE: In three months, when she walks along the street, people won't care what they say. "Oh look," they'll say, "little Fanny's swallowed a water melon!" Or, "That's a great big mosquito bite!" I've heard you say such things yourself.

FANNY: And my mother ... just think what the people will be saying to her.

CÉSAR: But when everyone knows the baby is Marius's?

FANNY: Exactly! The whole world knows Marius is a decent boy, so they'll all start wondering out loud why he left me in this condition and they'll imagine all kinds of wicked things.

CÉSAR: Like what?

PANISSE: They'll say, "If he's left her it must be because he discovered he wasn't the first at the door" or they'll say the child probably isn't his. Or, just like you, they'll say, "It runs in the family: look at her Aunt Zoë. She never found the time to get her knickers back on again." And this is the pain you want to inflict on these two women?

CÉSAR: If she ever wants to get married, I won't say no. But for the moment I'm there to protect and defend them both. And besides, she'll have a husband in a couple of years.

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PANISSE: She might; and then again, she might not. Let's suppose your son comes back. Are you sure he'd marry her?

CÉSAR: Of course I'm sure.

FANNY: Since he left, he's written only twice to you and never to me!

CÉSAR: Well, that's only natural. But he speaks about you all the time in his letters.

FANNY: But like I was a stranger!

PANISSE: And in the letter you got earlier this morning, did he mention her? ... No, he hasn't mentioned her at all.

CÉSAR: And what might *you* know about it?

PANISSE: If he'd mentioned Fanny, you'd have told us long before now. No, he hasn't said a word. Get it into your head, César; we're talking about this young woman's honour and the sort of life she's going to lead. Admit it. Tell us truly what you think now.

CÉSAR (*beginning to hesitate*): The truth is she made a big mistake letting him go. And he doesn't say much about Fanny, although in the letter before last he did ask me to say "Bonjour" on his behalf.

PANISSE: Oh, that really is kind "on his behalf"! (*Fanny gets up and leans, crying, on the counter.*) Look how much pleasure that's given her. That puts everything right, doesn't it Fanny: he "hopes you have a good day!"

CÉSAR (*provoked by this*): And when he knows he's got a son, he'll marry her – or I'll knock his block off.

PANISSE: That doesn't solve anything! And think about it: we're talking as if he's sure to come back in a couple of years. But, even then, you're not sure about it. And what if he *doesn't* come back? What then?

CÉSAR: What d'you mean: doesn't come back? How dare you even think such a thing?

PANISSE: And you – how can you dare *not* think about it? Is it by any chance *you* that arranges the weather: the tempests, typhoons, tornados and cyclones? Eh, eh? Do you let them loose across the ocean when it suits you? And if his ship were to founder? Face the facts; can you swear to me that your son is sure to return and marry this girl?

CÉSAR: Honoré, there must be at least eight chances out ten the marriage will take place – well let's say seven out of ten.

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PANISSE: Let's say six; or even five at best.

FANNY: There are plenty more chances that my child's life will be destroyed.

PANISSE: Right now, nobody suspects a thing and anyone could marry Fanny and give his name to the child without fear of ridicule.

FANNY: But after he's born? What will happen?

PANISSE: If Fanny has no husband, he'll be a little bastard all his life.

CÉSAR (*wilting*): That's true ...

FANNY: And later on, at school, his little friends will be saying, "My Daddy's a mechanic, or a baker. And what does your Daddy do?" And the poor little mite will go all red and say, "I haven't got a Daddy". (*She sobs.*)

CÉSAR: Mother of God! The very idea!

FANNY: I've been thinking about nothing else for long enough. I think about my mother; I think about my child; about the whole family. If I become Madame Panisse, everyone will be satisfied, including Marius.

CÉSAR (*weakly*): Oh no, oh no!

PANISSE: If I marry Fanny, the child will have a father, and a name. He'll be called young Master Panisse.

CÉSAR: If he's got to be called Panisse, then let it be Marius Panisse. Or, better still: Marius César Panisse.

PANISSE: As you wish, because you are going to be his godfather. That way you run no risk of losing him and you can take as much interest in him as you like. And one more thing ... the boy will be rich! I'll tell you something no one knows, because I'm actually just a little embarrassed by it. You know I've been in the habit, when people bragged about how well off someone was, to say I was worth around six hundred thousand francs. Well, the truth is it's at least double that.

CÉSAR: You're a ... you're a millionaire?

PANISSE: At least a million and a half. Not even Fanny knew this but now I'm telling you because it's useful to have it on the table, so to speak.

CÉSAR: And that would all come to the child?

PANISSE: Certainly! He will be my sole heir.

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CÉSAR: I can't deny the child will have a better life, especially if that vagabond insists on sailing the seven seas. (*He hesitates and then comes out with it.*) Because that's what he says is his destiny. He says in his letters he wants to spend his whole life at sea.

PANISSE: There you are then.

CÉSAR: Give a man time to think.

*They all stand in silence for a while, then César takes a deep breath.*

CÉSAR: And if I leave the bar to him, adding it all up, he'll be a rich young man. Fanny, this boy, at twenty, can afford to smoke cigars as thick as a table leg.

PANISSE: Unless it's a girl!

CÉSAR: A girl! What are you trying to do to the child? Bring him bad luck? All right, all right. But listen here, there's still one problem that can't be so easily sorted out.

PANISSE: Which is?

CÉSAR: The child's going to be born just too soon. He's already two months down the road and everyone in this part of the world can count on their fingers!

PANISSE: I've been thinking about that too: the child will be a seven-month baby and that's all there is to it.

CÉSAR: And who's going to believe *that*?

PANISSE: Everyone! Because I've got a little plan; listen. When the time comes, towards the end, one evening, I shall take Madame Panisse for a little run in the car, up into the hills, just to take the air. Then, I'll park in some secluded spot. And that's where I'll take a tyre lever and smash a headlight and dent the wing. And there you have it: an automobile accident; they happen all the time. And that's why you'll read, shortly afterwards, in *Le Petit Provençal*: "Coming down the slope in the area known as La Fontasse, the car being driven by Monsieur Honoré Panisse, master sail-maker in the Vieux-Port of Marseilles, swerved off the road and collided heavily with an electricity pylon. Damage was relatively minor. However, on arriving home, the young wife of Monsieur Panisse went into premature labour and has since given birth to a healthy baby boy. Mother and child are both well, as confirmed by Doctor Félicien Venelle. While we must criticise the imprudent driver, we heartily congratulate the happy parents."

*Everyone is smiling and laughing.*

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CÉSAR: Oh, Panisse! I take my hat off to you; that's just perfect. No wonder you're rich!

*Honorine and Claudine enter through the French window in line ahead, guns blazing.*

HONORINE (*to Fanny*): It seems I have to spend my whole life going looking for you!

PANISSE: She's never in any danger when she's round here, Honorine. Good day to you again, Claudine. How are you?

CLAUDINE: My legs won't carry me another step. I have to sit down!

HONORINE: And I see you're having a little chat with César.

CÉSAR: We are having a "conversation". About something that isn't very pleasing to me.

PANISSE (*radiant*): Honorine, your daughter has said "Yes"!

HONORINE (*to César*): And that's what doesn't please you?

CÉSAR: Just so! I mean ... because of Marius.

HONORINE: A sailor who's probably dancing the hula-hula on a beach in Tahiti right now; and who'll bring home a dose of the pox just like that nephew of Matilda that finished up in the loony bin.

CLAUDINE: This is Fanny's choice, César.

CÉSAR: I know. I do know that. But you have to understand it gives me a pain right here to lose a lovely girl like Fanny. I've got so used to seeing her out at the cockle stall and hearing her little clogs clip-clopping on the terrace. And now she won't be coming any more.

FANNY (*going over to César and taking his arm*): But I will! Not every day, perhaps; but I'll still come.

CÉSAR (*shaking his head*): Not any more, you can't: the wife of Monsieur Panisse, President of the Business Council, and arbitrator at the Tribunal of Commerce. No, you'll have pointy shoes, fox furs, gloves – and even a hat ... (*To Panisse*) Better give your mother-in-law a kiss!

PANISSE: What are you saying?

CÉSAR: There stands your future mother-in-law and her charming sister!

PANISSE: Then I salute them both. (*He kisses both women ceremonially.*)

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CÉSAR: And that's the whole family united; except me I suppose, although, one day, who knows.

HONORINE (*coquettish*): Does that mean you might one day get round to marrying?

CÉSAR: Everything's possible these days. But, listen, if, by any chance, this happy couple have children, I'm to be godfather. Right, Panisse?

PANISSE: You have my word on it, César, but please be patient. One thing at a time!

HONORINE (*to César, wide-eyed*): You really think they might have children!?

CÉSAR: Why ever not?

CLAUDINE: Yes, why not? Panisse is such a lively fellow they'll probably have half a dozen.

HONORINE (*to Panisse*): Would you be surprised to have children?

PANISSE: Half a dozen would really surprise me! It might even get me a bit worried; but, yes, one; that wouldn't surprise me at all.

CÉSAR: Then I think you can count on it.

End of Act 3.

## ACT FOUR

*The same room, an evening some nineteen months later. Panisse's room has had a 'makeover' revealing a woman's touch but it is still part business, part living room. The counter has gone and there is now a low table with a bottle of wine and several glasses. Between the hall door and the French window are an armchair and a side table with a period wireless set. On a central table there are some piles of paper and a small typewriter.*

*Honorine comes in from the bedrooms.*

HONORINE: *(to herself but mocking Panisse perhaps?)* Not too loud, Honorine, because the little one is sleeping!

*She sits down beside the set and turns it on to dance music. We hear the front door opening and Fanny comes in the hall door followed by her husband, Panisse. She has an elegant hairstyle, perfect make-up and is wearing a fur coat over her dress. Panisse is in a business suit. He goes straight over to the wireless and switches it off, wagging his finger at Honorine.*

PANISSE: Still up?

HONORINE: Your tax returns need signing before you go off tonight. The bookkeeper says that from midnight tomorrow there's a surcharge of ten per cent if you don't get it in.

PANISSE *(sitting down and signing as he speaks)*: Thank you, Honorine! I wasn't planning to get back until around six but it might even stretch over to the day after... How's the little one?

HONORINE: He was a little bit hot but he went off to sleep no bother.

PANISSE: A little bit hot? And you haven't called the doctor?

HONORINE: Heavens, no! He saw the boy only three days ago.

PANISSE: In three days, anyone can become very ill!

*He exits towards the baby's bedroom.*

HONORINE *(to herself)*: What a fuss-pot you are, *Daddy!*

*Fanny pulls off her evening gloves.*

FANNY *(smiling)*: Now then; *Grandma!*

*Fanny takes a seat at the table and begins to read the post, sorting it into different piles. After a moment, Panisse comes in wearing a travelling coat and hat.*

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PANISSE: Mother-in-law, I think you should sleep in the baby's room tonight. He's sleeping but his cheeks are bright red and they're saying whooping cough is going the rounds!

HONORINE: When he's pale you swear he has the colic, and when his cheeks are red you're sure he's going to die. What colour do you want him to be?

PANISSE: Rose.

HONORINE: Good. Then he's rose-pink!

PANISSE: Even so, you'd better take his temperature.

HONORINE: I'll feel his forehead and that'll be enough to know if he has a fever. If you go on sticking that thermometer up his BTM you're going to give him nasty habits.

*She exits to the baby's room. Panisse shrugs and turns to Fanny.*

PANISSE: Please keep an eye on her! And, even for the least little thing, call the doctor. Fine! So I should be back tomorrow evening or by noon the day after ... So, my dearest, until then!

*There is a knock at the hall door and a chauffeur in a peaked cap enters.*

CHAUFFEUR: It's five past ten, Monsieur.

PANISSE: Good, good. I'm coming. Right then my love! Until tomorrow but, in any event, I'll telephone. And remember before you go to bed to check the outside shutters are locked. We can't be too careful.

*He kisses his wife's forehead and exits by the hall door, preceded by the chauffeur. Fanny goes to the central table and sits. She takes the cover off the typewriter and assembles a letter head, a carbon and a page of copy paper, then threads them into the machine and begins to type.*

*A shutter outside the French window opens slowly and a man knocks quietly on the glass. Fanny gets up and crosses to it. The window opens and Fanny takes a step back in mild alarm. A sailor stands in the doorway. It is Marius.*

MARIUS: Don't be scared, Fanny. It's only me.

FANNY: You've come back!

MARIUS: Just passing through; please don't be upset. I just wanted to say "Bonjour" or rather "Bonsoir", if that's all right with you. (*He comes in.*)

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*Fanny steps back again. Marius looks at her and hesitates in confusion.*) I'm sorry. Maybe you think I ought to have addressed you as Madame.

FANNY: Don't be ridiculous!

MARIUS: My, how you've changed!

FANNY: I've aged a bit!

MARIUS: At your age, a little older is a little lovelier. Is your husband here?

FANNY (*with a moment's hesitation*): Yes ... but he's sleeping. We've been to a Gala Dinner and he has to be up early tomorrow ... Can I offer you a drink, perhaps?

MARIUS: Gladly, thank you, but I would have preferred to raise my glass to him, for fear he might get any mistaken ideas, and of course to see *him* too, and talk to him!

*Fanny pours glasses of wine for them both.*

FANNY: You can do that tomorrow.

MARIUS: That won't be possible. I'm off back to Toulon very early tomorrow. I need to be at the station by four at the latest. I'm on a special project.

FANNY: Has your ship returned?

MARIUS: No; she's still in Tahiti. Can you imagine: we sailed through a typhoon. It took hours and hours of waltzing around and quite a few of our scientific instruments took a battering. Well, you can imagine, they can't just be repaired on the beach. They need to go back to the people who made them. But there was a Navy torpedo-boat in Papeete heading straight back to Toulon and they've brought everything. I'm one of the team sent with them, to get them repaired and taken out again. Actually I volunteered for the job ... I was feeling a bit homesick.

FANNY: You missed your father?

MARIUS: My father, of course, Marseilles, Escartefigue ... you ... everybody, really.

FANNY: So is he pleased?

MARIUS: Who?

FANNY: César!

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MARIUS: I ... I haven't actually seen him yet ... I stopped off here on the way because I saw the lights were on. So, anyway, I'll go and have dinner at the bar and then I'll have to get back to Toulon and Tahiti.

FANNY: So, you've finally seen Polynesia.

MARIUS: I really have! It's quite incredible. There are mountains that soar out of the sea ... gigantic trees ... and huge crabs that climb right up the palm trees and make the coconuts fall down ... and it's never cold so everybody goes around half naked. There are lots of beautiful girls ... and handsome men too playing guitars all the time. And they eat nothing but fish and fruit. Mind you, some of the most attractive looking fruits smell like turpentine. But never mind that: in another six months, my ship will be back and my contract is finished.

FANNY: So then what will you do?

MARIUS: I don't know yet ... I'll have to see.

FANNY: You're not so mad about being a sailor, then?

MARIUS: I couldn't say I don't like it any more but, with great desires like that, it's always the same. Once you actually get what it was you wanted, you catch yourself wondering why you wanted it so much in the first place.

FANNY: You're not enjoying the life at sea?

MARIUS: I suppose you're always happy when you're where you want to be. If I said I was *unhappy* that would make me sound rather daft ... No, I'm not unhappy, not at all ... But I realise now that if I had stayed at home I wouldn't have been unhappy either. And what about you; are you happy?

FANNY: I have a wonderful husband.

MARIUS: And a beautiful house!

FANNY: Yes; a really beautiful house!

MARIUS: Your mother's well?

FANNY: Yes. Very well, thanks. She didn't want to stay on at the fish shop and we've got a girl in to run the sea-food stall. Mother lives here with us.

MARIUS: That's even better, isn't it, for keeping the house running smoothly. (*There is a silence between them, and then Marius stands up.*) Right then; I need to get round to my Dad's and I have to get the train back to Toulon without fail.

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*There is a knock at the hall door and the chauffeur comes in carrying a large bouquet of roses. He takes off his cap.*

CHAUFFEUR: Sir sends you these flowers, Madame, and asked me to let you know that he was travelling with Monsieur Tavernier, the pharmacist, and he'd be back tomorrow on the train that arrives at four-thirty.

FANNY: Thank you. *(Takes the flowers.)*

CHAUFFEUR: Will Madame need the car tomorrow?

FANNY: Yes please; about ten o'clock. I have some shopping to do in town.

CHAUFFEUR: Good night then, Madame.

FANNY: Good night, Lucien.

*The chauffeur nods his head to Marius and exits. Fanny moves to put the table between herself and Marius.*

MARIUS: Why didn't you tell me?

FANNY: With my husband not here, it wouldn't have been proper to invite you into the house.

MARIUS: Yet you did ask me in, even so.

FANNY: Because you didn't know he wasn't here.

MARIUS: And you didn't tell me in case I went on and on about the past and made a terrible scene.

FANNY: No! Not that at all! Anyway, you were keen enough to go off as I remember.

MARIUS: You told me you wanted to marry Panisse!

FANNY: And you believed me?

MARIUS: Perhaps because it suited me ... but I did believe it.

FANNY: If it suited you to believe it, it must have been because you weren't too sorry to leave me ... I don't get the impression you're really sorry even now.

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MARIUS: What goes on in our heads is something we don't always understand; not at once anyway. And, to tell you the truth, for the first few months, I was really happy ...

FANNY: I know. Your father read me your first letters. You asked him to say "Bonjour" to me. That was nice of you.

MARIUS: I didn't know what else to say! I didn't even dare *think* about you, I had such a bad conscience ... And when we got to Polynesia it got worse. In the evenings there were singers and guitar players, and lots of pretty girls, but after three nights I just stayed on board and thought about you. I'd picture you beside the sea-food stall. I could imagine you running along the quay and I could hear the click-clack of your little clogs.

FANNY: Marius, it's all too late now. Don't say any more!

MARIUS: I used to think about you all the time, but all the time. And then, one day, just off the Marquesas Islands, as we were crossing the reef, a terrible thing happened: I couldn't remember your face. I'd put my head in my hands and shut my eyes tight but I could only see the blackness. I really had lost you. I nearly went out of my mind and I wrote to my father asking him to send a picture postcard, that one of the bar terrace. I told him it was just to have a souvenir of the bar but it was because of you; because you're there, standing at the corner of your stall. You've no idea how I waited and waited, and longed and longed for it to arrive. Finally, when we got to Tahiti, there was mail waiting. My father had put the postcard into his letter but there was another photograph; your wedding photograph, in front of the Town Hall. I just tore them all up, into tiny pieces, and threw them to the winds. That's when I realised I'd ruined my whole life.

FANNY: You'll find someone else ... There are lots of prettier girls than me!

MARIUS: Not true! You *are* the most beautiful and you always will be the most beautiful. Tell me the truth, Fanny. Are you happy?

FANNY: Like I said: I have a wonderful husband.

MARIUS: Are you in love with him?

FANNY: I love him very much.

MARIUS: I can say *that* about my father. I love *him* very much.

FANNY: It's enough.

MARIUS: Do you want to know what I'm thinking?

FANNY: No, I don't want to know what you're thinking, thank you.

MARIUS: I'm thinking you haven't forgotten me. And I'm thinking that when I get back here in six months time ...

FANNY: It's too late, Marius ... Too late! ...

MARIUS: Fanny, I was a complete idiot and I know now this love I feel is not going to die. But without you, my life is really over. I'm not telling you I'm going off to drown myself ... but when I see you in this house, I feel a pain in my chest and it seems like my heart is going to stop beating any moment ... And you, have you forgotten everything?

FANNY: You know perfectly well I haven't.

MARIUS: Well then?

FANNY: There's nothing to be done. It's *too late!*

MARIUS: People do get divorced. It happens, even here. There's nothing shameful about it nowadays. Caderousse divorced his wife, and they've even stayed good friends ...

FANNY: I know. But they didn't have any children.

MARIUS: And so?

FANNY: I do.

MARIUS: You? You have a child?

FANNY: Yes.

*Marius sinks to the chair at the central table.*

MARIUS: How old?

FANNY: He's just a baby. Didn't your father tell you?

MARIUS: No. And I'm beginning to ask myself why not.

FANNY: I expect he thought you wouldn't be interested.

MARIUS: Or maybe he didn't want me to have any regrets.

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FANNY: Maybe.

*The French window opens again and César comes straight in. He is clearly unhappy.*

CÉSAR: Now here's a surprise. After getting on for two years, instead of coming straight home to see your father, I find you here at half past ten at night in the house of Monsieur Panisse, who hasn't invited you because he isn't here to do so. If Monsieur Brun hadn't accidentally let drop he'd seen you in the station buffet, I wouldn't even know you'd arrived!

MARIUS: Don't start a row straight away!

CÉSAR: I'm not starting a row; I'm giving you an explanation. *(He comes in and goes to Marius.)* Let me look at you! *(He pulls Marius up from the chair, kisses him on both cheeks and then steps back to look at him.)* You've filled out. It suits you. Don't you think he looks better, Fanny?

FANNY: He's a real sailor now.

CÉSAR: So why didn't you let me know?

MARIUS: We left so quickly on a torpedo-boat and it travels twice as fast as the mail steamers.

CÉSAR: What about sending me a telegram?

MARIUS: Because I wasn't even sure if I could come over to see you: and anyway, I wanted to give you a surprise. And what about you: why didn't you write to tell me Fanny had a baby – or send me a telegram?

CÉSAR: Because ... well ... when a young girl gets married, that just what happens. It's only natural! Anyway, have you got a good long leave?

MARIUS: I'm not even on leave. I have to catch the train back to Toulon at four-thirty in the morning.

CÉSAR: Is that so! Well then; we'd better go and have dinner straight away. You've been and you've seen, so now you understand. Say good night to Madame Panisse and come and talk to your own father. *(Although César takes his arm, Marius hesitates. He looks round the room, at Fanny and finally at César. At this moment, there are the sounds of the outer door being opened and we hear the offstage voice of Panisse from the hall.)*

PANISSE *(offstage)*: Can you imagine, I was already on the train and it was just about to depart when ... *(He enters and, seeing Marius and César, stops*

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*and stares with surprise.*) What's going on here? Oh my God, is something wrong with the child?

FANNY (*shaking her head and forcing a smile*): Nothing at all! We have visitors, that's all.

PANISSE: Well hello Marius. You're back, are you?

CÉSAR: He's a bird of passage. He's just arrived but he's catching the train back to Toulon early tomorrow.

FANNY (*to Panisse*): Have you missed your train?

PANISSE: No, not at all! What happened was I met up with Tavernier and he just happened to tell me our cleaning woman's little boy has the most terrible whooping cough, and of course she hasn't told us a thing about it, or has she?

FANNY: No.

PANISSE: That's criminal. I mean she sweeps the baby's room, she cleans his cradle, and she takes his bed linen home to wash. I've even seen her giving him his bottle ...

FANNY: That was only once when Mama had a touch of 'flu and you wouldn't let her in the room.

PANISSE: Even so, it's verging on the scandalous. We don't need a whooping-cough carrier going anywhere near our son. Anyway, as I came past, I woke the doctor and he's coming round straightaway. What a disaster.

MARIUS: Whooping-cough isn't all that serious, is it?

CÉSAR: Don't dare joke about it! You can catch whooping-cough just by looking at it. It's a kind of jumping germ but a hundred times smaller than a mosquito. Even if the doctor points it out to you, you can't see it, no matter how hard you look. But it's a monster with claws like grappling irons. And as soon as it sees a little child, this dreadful thing jumps right on to him and disappears down his throat, giving him no end of torments. Oh, the poor little child.

*Panisse has been nodding in agreement. The doctor enters through the French window at a fast trot, wearing pyjamas and a dressing gown. He is far from pleased.*

DOCTOR: Well, well. Good evening, young Marius.

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MARIUS: Good evening, Doctor.

DOCTOR (*to Fanny*): Has he been coughing?

FANNY: No. Not at all.

DOCTOR: Temperature?

FANNY: At six o'clock, 37 point 2.

DOCTOR (*to Panisse*): Well, doesn't that beat all? You drag me from a deep sleep and get me round here to tell you there's nothing wrong with him?

PANISSE: Well, naturally, that was what I was hoping to hear.

DOCTOR: My poor Honoré, you are a real pain in the coccyx. That child is in perfect health. He'll be one tomorrow. He weighs three and half pounds more than the average for his age. His premolars are months ahead of schedule without a hint of fever, and he can yell almost as loud as his godfather. What more could you want?

PANISSE: All right; but since you're here, I insist you take a look at him.

*Fanny leads the way, followed by the Doctor and Panisse. The Doctor, however, turns to Panisse.*

DOCTOR: Not you, for pity's sake. You suck the air out of a room. Come along then, Fanny!

*They exit to the bedroom, leaving Marius, César and Panisse who stand in awkward silence for a moment.*

MARIUS (*to César*): You're his godfather?

CÉSAR: As you'd expect; the son of my oldest friend ...

PANISSE: He'll be one year old ...

MARIUS: Yes; tomorrow; that's what the doctor said. It's curious that this child is so far in advance of all the others.

PANISSE: What do you mean by that?

MARIUS: Because I know how to add up, Monsieur Panisse. You were married on August sixteenth ... One might even be tempted to think ...but no, in Fanny's case, I would never have thought that possible.

CÉSAR: Come on son; don't joke about it.

PANISSE: Let him say what he wants, César. You know I have the answer to all that. You're right, Marius: he was a premature baby and I'm going to show you the evidence for this.

*He goes to the writing desk and takes a scrap-book out of a drawer.*

MARIUS: That would surprise me!

PANISSE (*opening the book at the first page*): Very well then: be surprised! (*He offers the scrap-book to Marius.*) This is a complete record of the health of the child. I compiled it. And on the very first page is an article from the *Petit Marseillais*. Just you read it!

*Marius reads silently.*

PANISSE: And that is indisputable proof: from an official source.

MARIUS: What you read in the papers; sometimes it's true but other times it isn't. I mean I could believe you might have had a car accident that brought the birth on by two or three *days*, but months – well! ... I reckon you've been keeping this just to show me.

CÉSAR: Look here, Marius. It's eleven o'clock and I've left a wonderful stew in the oven. Come home and have some dinner and if you want two and two to make five, you can tell me all about it there. Come on, let's go.

MARIUS: All right, all right! But before I go, I want to ask one thing. Monsieur Panisse, will you swear to me, on the life of the child, that he's your son. Swear that on his life and I'll rest easy.

PANISSE: Swearing an oath is something I've never done, and certainly not on the life of my child.

MARIUS: Well, well. And as for you, Dad, you wouldn't know whose child it is, would you? Tell me what you know.

CÉSAR: What I *know* is that we are standing in the house of Monsieur Panisse and his wife and that this child was born during their marriage and, what's more, he has their name.

MARIUS: Well now I know everything! It's for the sake of my child she got married so quickly. And what's more, you know it. That's why you never

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told me. That's why you're the godfather. So what I want to know is: where do I figure in all this?

PANISSE: *If* what you're saying were true, then your position is the one who went off like some common vagabond, abandoning the girl who put her trust in you. So if some honest man comes along and saves her from dishonour and gossip, then what you ought to be doing is saying a sincere thank you to him.

MARIUS: All right then! Thank you Monsieur Panisse. I mean that sincerely, but now we need to find a solution that lets me have my wife and my child.

CÉSAR: Marius! You're speaking right out of turn now!

PANISSE: A solution! Well, here's one. I go fishing one fine morning at dawn. The boat capsizes and I drown. That would be a truly noble sacrifice. But if I disappeared, I would never see my wife again, or my little one. I couldn't spend the rest of my life working for their future. Conclusion: I refuse to go and drown myself.

MARIUS: You're a good man, Panisse; and me, I'm just an imbecile and I admit it. I was completely mad. I was twenty and I threw everything away ... But nobody knew that child would be born ... You wouldn't be wrong if you said that, in a moment of madness, several lives were ruined.

PANISSE: Whose lives, for instance?

MARIUS: Fanny, me, my father and my son.

PANISSE: And what about me? As you say, where do *I* figure in all this?

MARIUS: You? You've had two *years* of happiness, and you've had the pleasure of doing something good and generous. For that, I want to thank you very much. But now, you have to take your courage in your hands and give back what truly belongs to me.

CÉSAR: Steady, Marius! You're going too fast!

PANISSE: Going much too fast – and probably in the wrong direction. Listen to me, Marius. I'm angry but I'm speaking to you very calmly because your coming back now, after two years, is something I've been expecting. Every night, before I fall asleep, I've been asking myself, "What would happen if he came back tomorrow?" And then I think, "He's too happy with his life at sea. If he comes back, he'll sail off again." But now, this evening, I'm in a situation that I don't like and I'll tell you why.

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*The Doctor enters followed by Fanny.*

PANISSE: Is it the whooping-cough?

DOCTOR: There's no sign of it.

FANNY: Just in case, I've changed his sheets and blankets and we've put the cradle in the little bedroom.

DOCTOR: No sign of whooping-cough but there's a touch of fever: 38 degrees.

PANISSE (*shock-horror*): Thirty-eight!!!

FANNY: Thirty-eight and two tenths.

PANISSE: But that's serious, because he's never had fever before.

FANNY: Yes he has; but we've never mentioned it to you because it wasn't a real problem.

PANISSE: You two women should be ashamed! (*To Doctor*) And where did this fever come from then?

DOCTOR: It's partly because he's teething but the other thing is he's bunged up. Have you been giving him his little laxative pills regularly?

PANISSE (*with hesitation*): Well, actually, that's to say ...

DOCTOR: That's to say *what*?

FANNY: That's to say that my husband doesn't like us to give them to him.

DOCTOR: Why ever not?

PANISSE (*ashamed to admit it*): Because he doesn't like them. He makes such faces and then he cries ...

DOCTOR: Go on like that and then it will be you who's crying, I tell you. Remember the throne of good health for babies is the potty! A constipated baby is at much greater risk of infection.

PANISSE: Then we'd better give him one straight away.

*He makes for the door but the doctor steps in front of him.*

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DOCTOR: No. Tomorrow morning will do. Now let him sleep in peace.

PANISSE: Well, all right ... but only if you give me an *absolute* guarantee that ...

DOCTOR: I can't give you any sort of absolute guarantee he doesn't have whooping-cough any more than I can guarantee that César isn't hatching an outbreak of typhoid fever.

CÉSAR: There's no risk then. I've had that already.

DOCTOR: And in any case, if he did have whooping-cough, we'd nurse him through it. But once he has passed a generous motion there will no further danger. And now, I for one am going to bed! Good night to you all.

*He exits by the French windows, sped on his way by a chorus of "Good Nights".*

PANISSE: I'm not really cross with him. I know he tends to exaggerate. . . . But maybe, even so ...

FANNY: Please don't fret, Honoré. You'll see, tomorrow morning, everything will be fine.

PANISSE: God willing! Ah but, Fanny, there's something else that's quite important. I don't know what Marius said to you before I came back. But, to me, he has said he intends to reclaim his wife and his son. (*Fanny seems about to speak.*) No, please wait; let me speak! During these past nineteen months of total happiness, I've often reproached myself, especially to begin with when I saw you so pensive; even unhappy. And I said to myself, "Honoré, you flatter yourself you've done a really good deed but, when it comes down to it, it could be said you've taken advantage of the momentary folly of a young man and the distress of a young girl being threatened with expulsion by her own family. You've done the noble and generous thing and the result is you have the prettiest wife and the handsomest son in the whole of Marseilles."

CÉSAR: And *that's* true!

PANISSE: But if a good deed is *guaranteed* to win you first prize in the lottery, it might not be as generous as it seems. And another thing, I was fifty-four the day before yesterday and already, from time to time, I have to use a stick when I feel an attack of sciatica ... I mean, do I have the right to inflict my old age, which is surely on its way, on a young woman of twenty? That's all I want to say. (*To Marius*) Now, as for your claims, I do not give a fig.

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But Fanny has to make up her own mind. Fanny, if you want a separation, I will take all the blame on myself.

FANNY: Are you serious, Honoré?

PANISSE: I love you more than enough to do that.

FANNY: Honoré, listen ...

PANISSE: No, don't answer at once. I've said what I want to say. (*A cough is heard off-stage.*) He's coughing! (*Panisse runs to the bedroom entrance and calls out.*) Is he coughing?

HONORINE (*offstage*): That was me sneezing.

PANISSE (*sternly*): Bless you! But please take care not to sneeze over the cradle! (*He turns back to Fanny.*) Go in there and get her to stop blowing her trumpet all over the baby. Old people's microbes have a thin time of it on our thick hides and they're only too delighted to jump onto a fresh young skin! (*Fanny exits, shutting the door behind her.*) Right, you two, you've heard my proposals.

CÉSAR: They couldn't be fairer.

MARIUS: You're saying we shall have the child?

PANISSE: Absolutely not! That's out of the question! ... The fact is, it's not the child you want; it's not even the wife! What you're wanting – and I can understand it – is your first love, the little girl you kissed on the quay, played hide-and-seek with behind the sacks of coffee beans. Well, you're still young. If you really want children, you have *plenty* of time. But as for *my* child, don't even think of asking! He's the only, my only, my first and my last child.

MARIUS: Now that's a cunning game. You say the mother can go but she can't take her child. You're hanging onto the child because you know full well that without him his mother will never leave you!

PANISSE: Not at all! It's for the child's sake I want to keep him. And, what you're asking is legally impossible. He has my name and the law will not permit you to change that. And another thing: have you seen the sign above the door? "Panisse and *Son*": in big gold letters. Take a moment to think about the future. This child has his life ready-made. He'll inherit a business worth millions; yes, millions. And you want to take all that away from him! You simply haven't given it any thought at all, have you? He doesn't just belong to us; he's the future head of a family and a business empire. If you're so sure that you are his father then you have to put *his* interests before your

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own. After all, blood is stronger, and more intelligent than sea-water. And one final thing! Fanny never said anything to you herself, did she? So there must be at least *some* doubt.

MARIUS: Doubt! Doubt about what?

*Panisse smiles and taps the side of his nose.*

PANISSE: Let me share a thought with you. Yes, it's true. Fanny thought she was going to have your child. But it's also true we had a real car accident – no pretence. (*Fanny enters silently and listens to this.*) The plan was to do it deliberately: I admit that. I slowed down as much as I could to be sure to hit the pylon just enough to do the damage. But, like an imbecile, I concentrated so much on what I was doing and looking round to make sure no one saw us that I didn't hold onto her tightly enough. So when the car hit the pylon, Fanny fell forward and struck her head on the windscreen. (*To Fanny*) Am I making this up?

FANNY: No. That's the truth.

PANISSE: And due entirely to that completely unexpected shock, the child was born the following day. The consequence is that it is perfectly possible that Fanny made a mistake and that the child is mine.

CÉSAR: My poor Honoré: you're off your trolley.

PANISSE: Not at all! I've spoken about it to the doctor. He says it's not very probable but it's not impossible ... And another thing: I don't speak of this lightly. There is a sort of a proof and I've lots of examples I could mention. When he was weaned and wouldn't take his bottle, it was me, not Fanny, who lost five kilos just worrying about it all. Every night, I would be jerked out of sleep because I couldn't hear him breathing and I would leap out of bed just to see if he was still alive. I was so worried that I went and bought a book on child-rearing. Ah, my friends, when I read about all these illnesses and diseases, I realised that a baby is like a little candle trying to stay alight in a howling gale. I lost all control of myself. Now, I ask you, is it natural that I became just a bit mad with worry over a child who was actually your son's little bastard? No sir; that was the call of Nature, it was father to son.

CÉSAR: You're not "just a bit mad", Panisse; you're completely crazy.

PANISSE: And in the evening, just as he's dropping off to sleep, if I touch him ever so gently on the chin with the tip of my finger, he gives me a little smile; and, you know, it's a smile I knew so well – my own mother's smile! Oh yes, I see you laughing but I know what I've seen and I've seen it so often.

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CÉSAR (*beginning, like Marius, to be moved*): You know what you saw, all right, but we know what actually happened.

PANISSE: Yes, we all know, but we each have our own interpretation; and that's why there is that element of doubt. I know it is a little doubt, but for me that doubt gets less and less every day; every day: above all that wonderful day when he said his first word. And you'll never guess what word he said. (*Panisse is shaken by emotion.*) He looked at me, he laughed and he said "Dada, Dada". (*He wipes away a tear.*) And me, his Dada, for the next three days I couldn't bring myself to give him his little laxative pills ... It may even be my fault now if he catches whooping-cough. My silly sentimentality has put his life in danger.

*From offstage, Honorine calls out triumphantly.*

HONORINE (*offstage*): He's on the potty!

*Fanny races out.*

PANISSE (*raising his gaze and his hands to Heaven*): Thank you, God! Thank you, thank you!

*Panisse runs off too. The door closes behind him. César and Marius are left looking at each other perplexed and moved. Then César smiles at his son.*

CÉSAR: Listen, son: this discussion, well, we can't go on with it just now.

MARIUS: But you *know* that child is my son ...

CÉSAR: Of course I know it. You're as alike as two drops of water. But, even so, Panisse is a little bit the boy's father too. When he was born, he weighed three kilos. That was down to his mother. But now, he weighs seven kilos and that's four kilos of love. I've contributed my little amount. His mother's given him a lot, that's obvious. But the one who has given him the most love is Panisse. And what would you say you'd given him?

MARIUS: His *life*!

CÉSAR: Dogs can do that but it doesn't make them daddies. And after all, you didn't *want* this child. Life: don't say you gave him it. He took it. Panisse is right, you know. It's not the baby you want. It's the mother. Maybe it wouldn't be strictly necessary to get a divorce. When you get back again, give up the sea, and if you still love her ...

MARIUS: I'll love her all my life.

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CÉSAR: And I'd guess she loves you ... We'll see. We'll see what we'll see and what Panisse doesn't want to see. Who knows? Anyway, let's go. Spend a little time with your Dad before you disappear again, eh?

MARIUS: Are we going to leave just like that; without saying anything?

CÉSAR: What else is there to say? They'll be out there for a quarter of an hour at least. They're wrapped up in the ceremony of the potty. And then they'll have a little conference about it and almost certainly telephone the doctor. Now, as for me, I've a whole raft of things to tell you and I can do that while we tuck into the casserole Félicie made this morning. Warmed up it'll taste delicious. She put a great big handful of black olives in it. Come on, son.

*He puts his arms round his son's shoulders and they tiptoe to the French window, exit and quietly shut it and the shutters beyond the window. A few moments elapse. Then the bedroom door burst open and Panisse rushes in holding the potty aloft in triumph.*

PANISSE: Look! Look! Isn't it wonderful?

*Amazed to see no one there, he halts in mid-stage, shrugs and gazes fondly into the potty, takes a deep sniff before walking slowly off stage.*

END.