

FIVE MINUTES MORE (ENCORE CINQ MINUTES)

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CHARACTERS:

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Gertrude

Henri, husband of Gertrude

Renaud (nicknamed Booboo), son of Gertrude and Henri

Geneviève, daughter of Gertrude and Henri

ACT ONE

SET — *An empty white room where Gertrude is circling. A crack is digging its furrow into the smooth surface of one of the walls, is growing longer, is branching out. Small, almost imperceptible fissures at first, they will soon invade the entire wall...An eighteenth century clock on a small white marble fireplace. On the floor, propped against the wall, a large, unframed canvas, only the back of which can be seen. It is partially hidden by a three-step ladder. No curtains, no carpet, no furniture. All that must still be found...*

GERTRUDE — *(Anguished lament, as though she is noticing the crack for the first time ...depressed moan).*

NOTE ON GERTRUDE — *It has already been three weeks since the painters left. For three weeks, Gertrude has been living from morning to evening in this room, wracking her brains, forgetting to eat, wearing a tatty housecoat. She no longer even bothers to*

get dressed.

GERTRUDE — What to do?...What? ...

NOTE — *Ideas, of course...they have come to her by the hundreds. Other people's ideas!...But, that's just it, she wants no more of other people's ideas. The design of this room will have to...will have to come from the bottom of her own guts, from the innermost...from the deepest of the deep places inside herself! Somehow, will have to be born from the very fabric she is made of.*

GERTRUDE — I wish...I wish...But that's ridiculous, I guess!...I wish it could please Booboo, Geneviève...Even if Geneviève...And their friends, their strange friends!... (*Increasingly excited*) And mine as well...and even Henri, why not? (*Laughs, frenzied hope*) I wish, I wish... (*Remains still for a moment, marvelling, ecstatic*)

GERTRUDE — I wish everyone liked it...Why wouldn't it be possible, just this once? ...Just for once?...Just for once!

The door opens and Renaud appears.

284 RENAUD — Oh! You're alone in here?

GERTRUDE — (*Beat*) Booboo, you could have knocked.

RENAUD — Well, excuse me! I could hear you talking, and I couldn't help...

GERTRUDE — Who would I be talking to?...Your father is downstairs and you...

RENAUD — Geneviève, believe it or not.

GERTRUDE — Don't be silly!...Why do you always get out of the shower dripping wet like this?

RENAUD — All of a sudden I thought she was home.

GERTRUDE — You couldn't just dry your hair like everyone else? Give me your towel...

RENAUD — In a way, that would've upset me because...

GERTRUDE — I keep telling you, but you don't listen.

RENAUD — Because I need her room...

GERTRUDE — You never listen! (*Beat*) You what?...

RENAUD — Since you don't know what to do with it...

GERTRUDE — What are you talking about? I know very well. I want it for myself, for my personal use.

RENAUD — (*Beat*) But you already have a bedroom...And a walk-in closet, the study, th ...

GERTRUDE — That's different. (*Beat*) What I want here is a sort of...How can I put it?...A place...A get-away...

RENAUD — A sanctuary?

GERTRUDE — (*Beat*) Why not? Well, why not? Why shouldn't I have a room of my own where I could, I don't know...get away, find some peace...

RENAUD — Because you already have the whole house, while Corrine has no room of her own anywhere in the world.

GERTRUDE — Corrine?...Your friend Corrine? (*Snickers*)

RENAUD — (*Beat*) Yes, Corrine, my friend Corrine. And don't get started on that

again.

GERTRUDE — (*Singing*) Corrine, Corrine...

RENAUD — Mom!

GERTRUDE — (*Beat*) Yes, I'm being stupid. Especially since...You say she's charming?

RENAUD — Mom, that has nothing to do with it.

GERTRUDE — (*Beat*) So why are you talking to me about her? You're annoying me! Come here...Your hair is still so wet!

RENAUD — Corinne is an amazing girl. You know she is. I showed you the articles she wrote.

GERTRUDE — (*Beat*) Ah, yes! I remember now...She's the girl who's into big issues! ...Civil rights, socialism, the Vietnam war...What else was there?

RENAUD — It would mean a lot to me to help her. (*Moving to get away*) Will you please let go of me!

GERTRUDE — But Booboo, you'll catch your death of cold that way.

RENAUD — I want Corrine to have this bedroom.

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GERTRUDE — Your sister's room?...For your girlfriend!...So that's what you were getting at?

RENAUD — First of all, Corrine is not my "girlfriend"...

GERTRUDE — Maybe, but not to worry. If you invite her here...

RENAUD — Shut up, Mom!

Gertrude is stunned, turns toward him. They look at each other for a moment. She is shocked; he is amazed by his own violence.

RENAUD — (*Beat*) I'm sorry!...But anyway you should know better! I don't like...I hate...After all, my personal life...

GERTRUDE — (*Has turned away. Moans*) Oh! that crack...Just look at it!

RENAUD — Anyway, you're wrong. The only thing I care about right now is finding a place where Corrine can...

GERTRUDE — Please, do me a favour. Hang that painting over there, will you? I can't stand seeing that horrid crack any more!...

RENAUD — Mom...

GERTRUDE — It would be sweet of you...It would be so sweet of you ...

RENAUD — Fine! But after that?...

GERTRUDE — We'll see...

He moves away with a sigh and returns with the painting.

GERTRUDE — Be careful. Don't damage it.

RENAUD — (*Climbing on the ladder*) Is there a nail?

GERTRUDE — I don't know if I like it any more. But it's a very beautiful painting.

Renaud hangs the canvas and loses his balance. Gertrude wraps her arms around his legs.

GERTRUDE — Oof!...You almost fell!...

RENAUD — (*Trying to free himself*) O.K., O.K...Let me go.

GERTRUDE — But you don't seem very steady up there! (*Laughing*) And it gives me

a chance to hold...

RENAUD — Mother!...

She leans against him affectionately. Like a woman or a mother? or both?

GERTRUDE — These thighs are made of steel!

RENAUD — Let go of me!

Gertrude moves away immediately, stunned.

GERTRUDE — (*Stammering*) What?...

Renaud climbs back down as quickly as he can.

RENAUD — You almost made me fall. Yes you did. Didn't you realize?...

Gertrude, who does not believe him, shakes her head, caught short, silent. Renaud backs away and points to the painting.

RENAUD — So, are you happy with it at least? (*Looks at the painting, the latest fashion in op art, and is startled*). Were you the one who picked that?

GERTRUDE — Yes...

286 RENAUD — Uh, wow!

GERTRUDE — Was I wrong? Don't you think it's beautiful?

RENAUD — I do, I do...But you, your style...

GERTRUDE — What do you mean "my style"?

RENAUD — Corrine would, but you...

GERTRUDE — And why wouldn't I like the same thing as Corrine? Hmm, why?

RENAUD — Because usually...(Gestures, pointing at the clock, then shrugs his shoulders). Never mind.

GERTRUDE — No, really, my main concern is whether such a modern painting would go with...(Affecting a nonchalant air) with a very primitive looking early piece ...Like the dough box you brought me the other day, for instance?...

RENAUD — (*Impatient*) Oh, Mom! Why don't you just forget it? I know you don't like traditional Québec furniture...

GERTRUDE — But that's not true! It's your father who doesn't like it. I'm starting to like it...I'm getting there...Just wait and see the early pieces I've ordered from Brissard. He's supposed to deliver them this very day.

RENAUD — Fine, fine. Let's forget it and go back to...

GERTRUDE — Among other things a delightful little blue armoire from the Île d'Orléans ... Do you think with this painting? ... It wouldn't be too much of a contrast? (*Singing to the tune of "Il y a deux testaments"*) "The old and the new...ew...ew ...ew...ew..."

RENAUD — Shit! Could you forget your petty bourgeois and personal preoccupations for just a second when I'm talking to you?

GERTRUDE — Why would I forget them?...Why? (*Beat*) Does it...Does it matter that much?

RENAUD — (*Moving toward her and trying to take her by the neck*). I'll make you understand...that's exactly what's wrong with you. I swear, the whole thing's insane!

GERTRUDE — (*Backing away*) Why insane?

RENAUD — Spending your life changing the furniture, running from one antique dealer, one art gallery to the next...Sooner or later you'll have to give it up.

GERTRUDE — Why? Why should I give it up?

RENAUD — Because it's a waste of time! Because it doesn't do anything for anybody!

GERTRUDE — So what? Playing ball doesn't do anything for anybody either!

RENAUD — What?...Who's talking about playing ball?

GERTRUDE — Saint-Louis de Gonzague. He's talking about it!

RENAUD — Mom, I don't give a damn about Saint-Louis de Gonzague.

GERTRUDE — You're wrong! You need to know his story...Picture this, one day Saint-Louis de Gonzague and other young boys...

RENAUD — Mom!

GERTRUDE — Listen! It's worth it (*Beat*)...are playing in the courtyard of the noviciate when the Superior comes to them with a question: What would you do if you were told "You only have five minutes more to live"...?

RENAUD — Oh, great! They all answered they would throw themselves down at the foot of the altar, praying, genuflecting and all that religious garbage! So what? 287

GERTRUDE — Yes, they all said that! All, except for Saint-Louis de Gonzague who...

RENAUD — Mom, please, will you stop acting like a crazy old lady for one minute?

GERTRUDE — I'm not acting like a crazy old lady. Maybe I am a crazy old lady, but I'm not doing it deliberately!

RENAUD — Forgive me! I beg you, forgive me – I thought you were telling me this story to keep me from speaking about Corrine! (*Beat*) Mom, I have to tell you about her! After all, the fate of a human being has to be at least as important as redecorating a bedroom, right?

GERTRUDE — But what about me?...Me?

RENAUD — You! you have everything you need, and you're perfectly happy.

GERTRUDE — Happy...

RENAUD — Meanwhile, Corrine!...Corinne's as unhappy as a pebble in a shoe.

GERTRUDE — An unhappy pebble. What a strange idea!...Who could have thought of that?

RENAUD — Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! This must be the way murders get started!

He moves away. Gertrude, who jumps when she hears him swear, collects herself and runs after him.

GERTRUDE — Wait!...Wait, Booboo! (*Beat*) You're so tense! So impatient! And your language! What is wrong with Corrine? Your friend Corrine? (*Beat*) You can't expect me to start crying over the hardships of a girl I don't even know.

RENAUD — (*Exploding*) See? The problem is you have no heart!

GERTRUDE — (*Beat*) No, I have no heart. You're right, I have no heart. And I don't want to have one. I want to be just like everybody else. Don't bother me with your stories about the poor!

With huge effort Renaud manages to control himself and even to speak with great tenderness, as if he were addressing a child. Firmly, he takes her by the shoulders, looking

her straight in the eye.

RENAUD — No, I won't give up on you! Whether you like it or not I'm going to wake you up. I'm going to bring you back down to earth. Listen to me...

She gets away from him, but he catches up to her and restrains her forcefully.

Listen to me, I tell you. I want you to listen to me! Corrine is a girl who's worth a hundred times more than you and me...

GERTRUDE — (*Struggling to get away from him*) I know, I know ...

RENAUD — A girl who's managed to get through university when she had to pay for everything herself. Shit, what more do you want? I never would have had that much guts! And you even less!

GERTRUDE — You already told me that! Let me go!...

RENAUD — I'm not done. This year Corrine has to write a thesis...Can you understand what that means to her after all those years of hard work? Can you understand?

GERTRUDE — (*Struggling to get loose*) Yes! Yes! Yes!

288 RENAUD — Try to put yourself in her shoes. Try to...

GERTRUDE — I can see it all now! The whole family crammed into an apartment no bigger than a closet...

RENAUD — What are you talking about?

GERTRUDE — Squabbling children...The mother tearing her hair out, the father drinking to forget...

RENAUD — (*Taking hold of her again. Exasperated*). Mom!...

GERTRUDE — (*Panic-stricken. Getting away from him, almost shouting*) That's poverty...I understand. Say no more.

RENAUD — You're not even close. Where'd you get all that from? Corrine's family doesn't even live in Montreal.

GERTRUDE — Ah!...

RENAUD — Her problem is she has to earn a living, and it's exhausting to write a thesis under those conditions. That's why I want to invite her here...

GERTRUDE — Don't shout like that.

RENAUD — I'm not shouting half as much as I could. I'm showing so much self-control you should be grateful! (*Beat*) Let me tell you, I'd like to see you in Corrine's place!

GERTRUDE — On top of everything else, you'd like to see me in her place?

RENAUD — (*Highly irritated, gives a prolonged shout of anger, mouth wide open*). Aarrgghh!...Are you deliberately trying to make me lose it?

GERTRUDE — Open your mouth again.

RENAUD — What?

GERTRUDE — Open your mouth.

RENAUD — What is it? What's got into you?

GERTRUDE — I'm your mother. Open your mouth.

RENAUD — But...

GERTRUDE — Do you hear me? Open your mouth!

He does as he's told, most ungraciously.

GERTRUDE — Exactly what I thought. (*Pointing into his mouth*) That tooth has gone blue, Booboo.

RENAUD — My tooth has gone blue? Teeth don't go blue. It can't happen.

GERTRUDE — Teeth turn blue when they're dead. That's what they do. Your tooth must be treated. Stay right there!

She goes to the closet and opens the door. It's a large closet stuffed full of furniture and odds and ends.

Impressed, Renaud rubs his cheek.

Gertrude closes the door and comes back brandishing a small pedestal mirror.

GERTRUDE — Look!

RENAUD — Leave me alone!

GERTRUDE — I'm warning you. That can get infected. And quickly.

RENAUD — Ah! really...

A sort of flow of tenderness develops between them in the following scene. They stand very close to each other. **289**

GERTRUDE — You should go see the dentist.

RENAUD — But it doesn't hurt.

GERTRUDE — He'll know.

RENAUD — I can see it.

GERTRUDE — What did I tell you?

RENAUD — You really think I should?...

GERTRUDE — We had a cousin in my family who died from that.

RENAUD — From a tooth that died and turned blue?

GERTRUDE — Yes! My cousin Philippe. You didn't know him ...

RENAUD — The one who chased you around for a kiss?

GERTRUDE — Well! How do you know that?

RENAUD — You told me a hundred times. At least! (*Beat*) I wonder what you were like then!

GERTRUDE — Pretty...I was pretty...But naive, you have no idea! One day, you have to hear this...(*Laughs*) One day...

Renaud has gone back to looking at his tooth and is no longer listening to her.

RENAUD — Did your cousin really die from that?

Gertrude, cut off in mid-flight, does not reply.

RENAUD — From a tooth that turned blue?

GERTRUDE — Anyway, that's what they said.

RENAUD — It doesn't seem very scientific to me. By the way, what did he say he'd do, little Louis from Gonzaga, if he only had five minutes more to live?

GERTRUDE — Well! His answer was that he'd keep on playing ball. (*Beat*) That's what.

RENAUD — How stupid!

GERTRUDE — (*Disappointed*) Ah!...Still, the Superior congratulated him warmly!

RENAUD — An idiot!

GERTRUDE — Strange! I've never forgotten that story...

RENAUD — The reason you haven't forgotten it is precisely because you and Saint-Louis de Gonzague belong to the same class with nothing better to do in life but play ball.

End of the unexpressed tenderness.

GERTRUDE — Maybe...Yes, maybe...But it's not my fault. I didn't create the world... I had no part in it.

RENAUD — Listen to you. Just listen to you! If that isn't bourgeois egotism I'd really like to know what it is.

GERTRUDE — Oh, no! I've had enough of that word. How you love to throw it at me. It's not bourgeois egotism. It's pure, unadulterated egotism. And it's no more bourgeois than proletarian. It's human. That's all there is to say about it.

RENAUD — If it's human, you and me can correct it.

290 GERTRUDE — No, no, not you and me can correct it.

RENAUD — Yes, Mom, yes!

GERTRUDE — No, Booboo, no!

RENAUD — Mom!

GERTRUDE — You and *I* can correct it. You and *I*! You-and-*I*-can...!

RENAUD — *Enraged exclamation.*

GERTRUDE — That's what you get from spending most of your time with your social inferiors. Don't play with that mirror. It's a genuine antique and very fragile. Give it to me. And as for egotism, let me tell you that in spite of your fine socialist ideas, you have your own fair share of it, you and Geneviève! Yes, your own fair share!

RENAUD — That reminds me all of a sudden...About the room...If you're refusing because of Geneviève, maybe we could ask her what she thinks?

GERTRUDE — So you know where she is?

RENAUD — No, but it wouldn't be hard to find her...Geneviève really liked Corrine. I'm sure she'd be glad to help her out. She'll tell you that herself when she comes back.

GERTRUDE — Geneviève will not be coming back.

RENAUD — What do you know!

GERTRUDE — Never!

RENAUD — Geneviève has no idea what she wants! It's a good bet that...

GERTRUDE — Never!...That's what she said when she left. Never!...

RENAUD — Well, I certainly came back, after being away for two years.

GERTRUDE — That's not the same thing at all! (*Interrupting her son who is about to speak*) You left to go to school. Everyone knew where you were. (*Beat*) I even nearly went to visit you one year, remember that? I've forgotten why I didn't...(*Sharply. Interrupting him once again*) No! There's no connection. Geneviève has turned her back on us. Geneviève has rejected us. For love!...

Renaud has started to laugh.

GERTRUDE — What's wrong with you?

RENAUD — You make it sound like a romance novel.

GERTRUDE — A romance novel...But!...But it gave me a heart attack ...I nearly died. Have you forgotten that?

RENAUD — I'm sorry! It's the way you talk about it. It's just not real. Think a bit... Yeah, try...Couldn't you, now that it's over? (*Beat*) Don't you think Geneviève could have had other reasons for leaving?

GERTRUDE — Why look for another reason? No matter how silly it might seem to you, love is everything to women. You don't know women if you don't understand that.

RENAUD — (*Beat*) Fine! Have it your way!...Let's forget it and go back to Corrine, O.K.?

GERTRUDE — (*Denigrating snicker*) To tell you the truth, at this point what I mostly blame Geneviève for is choosing such an ordinary boy over us! He's one of a thousand no-talent singers...

RENAUD — Well good god damn! Do we have to be geniuses before women can love us?

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Gertrude jumps, shakes her head vigorously.

GERTRUDE — You know I'll never get used to that!

RENAUD — But it's the only way I know to bring you back to reality. After all, who do you take Geneviève for?

GERTRUDE — You must at least admit she could have found better. (*Beat*) A few years ago when you and I were going to concerts together...Do you remember?...Back then you would have known right away that boy had no talent. (*Beat*) But you've changed. You've changed!...You have different interests now, different friends (*Beat*) Some day, Booboo?...Some day?...

Renaud who had turned away suddenly turns back to face her.

RENAUD — No, Mom! I won't waste my life playing ball with you and Saint-Louis de Gonzague.

She moves away from him, goes to lean against the ladder.

RENAUD — Can't you understand that? (*Goes to her and tries to wrap his arms around her. Worried*) Mom?...For heaven's sake, what's wrong?

GERTRUDE — I'm hungry!

RENAUD — Ah!...

GERTRUDE — Would you go...Would you go get me a coffee? Do that for me at least.

RENAUD — I'd rather you came down with me. We'll have lunch together.

GERTRUDE — No! The cleaning lady must be here already. Go, please, go.

Henri appears at the door.

HENRI — (*Surprised, to both of them*) Oh! You're here...(To Gertrude) I was looking everywhere for you. This just came.

Hands her a parcel.

GERTRUDE — What is it?

HENRI — It's from an antique dealer...

GERTRUDE — I didn't order anything.

SOUND — *She unwraps the parcel. Renaud moves away.*

HENRI — What have you been doing in this empty room? (*To Renaud*) I hope you're not going out in those old pants.

RENAUD — That would make a big difference in the great scheme of things?

HENRI — Absolutely! Something is changed in the great scheme of things when well-bred boys dress the same way as losers hanging out on the streets.

Renaud shrugs his shoulders and moves away.

GERTRUDE — Oh!

HENRI — What is it?

GERTRUDE — It's from Geneviève...

HENRI — From Geneviève!...

He takes the card she was reading. Renaud comes back toward them.

RENAUD — Does she give her address?

292 HENRI — "Thought of you in front of an antique dealer"...

RENAUD — That's all she says?

HENRI — But that's quite enough. Get ready, children. This is a sign. Geneviève's coming home.

GERTRUDE — What are you talking about?

HENRI — I always knew she would, by the way. I knew it!

GERTRUDE — (*Growing agitated*) Poor Henri! (*Violently*) You just don't get it do you? (*Beat*) Neither one of you. You just don't get it. Geneviève will never come back.

That's what she said when she left. She was walking away from her past. She'd found the real thing! True love! The love of her life! (*To Renaud*) Yes, it's the same old love story. (*To Henri*) True love. Do you really believe she'd let it slip away after giving herself to it heart and soul? In exchange for what? The joys of family life, maybe?... Argh! (*Bursts out laughing*).

HENRI — You'll see. Within a week, maybe less, Geneviève will be back in the house. And since we told everyone she was travelling, no one will ever have to know what happened. In a nutshell, everything will be back to normal.

GERTRUDE — Poor fool!

HENRI — My dear Renaud, I can already see the day when you'll be dressing just like your father.

RENAUD — Don't make me laugh.

HENRI — Yes, just like your father! (*To Gertrude*) So what did Geneviève send you? *Rustling of paper. Cynical laugh from Gertrude, who holds a bilboquet in her outstretched arm.*

RENAUD — What is it?

HENRI — A bilboquet! (*Reading the card attached to the toy*) Bilboquet from the 16th century...

RENAUD — (*Examining the bilboquet. Curious*) What was it for?

GERTRUDE — To play ball, Booboo. To play ball.

HENRI — You don't even know that? The favourite game of the dandies at the French court during the reign of Henri III! First time you've heard of it? And to think that the likes of you want to save French culture in North America!

RENAUD — Christ, Dad, if all you see in French culture is a game for queers, I can understand why you sold out to the English!

HENRI — I sold out...? What?...I have never...

RENAUD — Well then, damn it, just back off, because...

HENRI — No, Renaud! You're welcome to any revolutionary ideas you want, but you will express those ideas properly. A man doesn't lose his place in society because of his ideas, my boy. But he will because of his language.

RENAUD — I'd *love* to lose my place in this society! I would rather...

GERTRUDE — Oh, no! please!

RENAUD — What, "please"?

GERTRUDE — Not that!

RENAUD — What, "not that"?

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GERTRUDE — Not that generation gap business again.

RENAUD — He needs to know though...

GERTRUDE — He knows it. And you do too. The two of you have already said everything there is to say about it!

HENRI — (*With a ceremonial bow*) My apologies, Madam. Renaud, I'm sorry, we're annoying your mother. Shall we make peace? What do you say?...No? Not today?

RENAUD — (*Moving away. Beside himself*) Never unless you change.

HENRI — But I already...

GERTRUDE — That's enough, Henri! (*Moving beside Renaud*) Wait, Booboo. Stay here. Your father's leaving.

HENRI — I'll leave when I want to!

Renaud, astonished, turns to look at his father. Gertrude takes him by the arm.

GERTRUDE — Come here...

RENAUD — Why should I stay? What more would I have to say to you than to him? You're both the same. No heart, no guts! Dry as sticks! Completely dried up!

He leaves, slamming the door behind him. Gertrude, choking, tries to catch her breath. Henri utters an enormous sigh of bitterness.

HENRI — You must admit...nothing stops him. I never would have dared speak that way to my father...(Beat) Of course, back then you had to yield, bend...It was the reign of paternal authority! The reign of the all-powerful *pater familias*. (*He sighs again. Enraged*) And now it's the reign of youth. We were cheated somewhere along the line, don't you think? My turn never came! (Beat) What is it, Gertrude? Are you sick? Your heart?...

GERTRUDE — Leave me, leave me...

HENRI — My God, you're really upset (*Worried*)...(Beat) You're not going to have another heart attack on me, are you?

GERTRUDE — Be quiet...

HENRI — You know, he doesn't believe a word of what he says.

GERTRUDE — I don't care what he says. Get that painting down, will you?

HENRI — That...?

GERTRUDE — I can't stand it.

HENRI — You can't...?

GERTRUDE — No, I can't stand it!

HENRI — But just yesterday you...

GERTRUDE — Take it down!

HENRI — You even spoke of decorating the whole room around that painting.

GERTRUDE — I can't stand to look at it any more!

HENRI — (*Enraged. Climbing the ladder. Mock lofty royal tone.*) Great! Perfect!...We shall remove it...And with all the more pleasure because we find this kind of soulless painting horrible.

GERTRUDE — Oh, really?

294 HENRI — Oh, really!

He comes back down and goes to lean the canvas face against the wall.

GERTRUDE — Oh!...

HENRI — What is it?

GERTRUDE — (*Troubled, pointing to the crack*) I had forgotten about it!

HENRI — What, is it still there? You were supposed to call the plasterer.

GERTRUDE — He came three times...It always starts again ...

HENRI — Have him come back. This is unacceptable.

GERTRUDE — He says it's the frame of the house. The outside wall must be damaged.

HENRI — The outside wall! Well then, you should have let me know. We must get it repaired right away. And in the meantime...

GERTRUDE — Leave the picture.

HENRI — Didn't you buy it for this purpose?

GERTRUDE — Yes, but don't hang it back up.

HENRI — Gertrude! If anyone saw that...

GERTRUDE — Anyone?

HENRI — I tell you, it's...it's upsetting...

He tries to take the painting back.

GERTRUDE — No, Henri!

HENRI — I don't understand you.

GERTRUDE — Please, get me a chair...

HENRI — You're not feeling ill, I hope?

GERTRUDE — A chair! That's all I'm asking you for.

HENRI — (*Moving away*) Fine! Fine!

GERTRUDE — In the closet!...

HENRI — (*Changing direction. Annoyed*) Ah!...Strange idea keeping a chair in a closet...(Opens the door and stops). Wow! Have you ever managed to pile a lot of stuff in here!

GERTRUDE — The little Louis XV armchair...

HENRI — Louis XV...Louis XV...It's not quite handy. Wouldn't this one do just as well? (*Steps out of the closet with an Eames armchair*)

GERTRUDE — No! No modern furniture!

Henri puts the armchair down, brutally.

HENRI — So what's it doing here?

GERTRUDE — I wanted to try it...I have the right, don't I?

HENRI — Yes, Gertrude, you have every right. (*Beat*) Only when you asked me for an armchair, I believed it was for you to sit down on and not for decorating purposes.

GERTRUDE — I do want to sit down, but not in just anything.

Henri steps out of the closet carrying a little Louis XV armchair.

GERTRUDE — That one, yes...And please get me the two candle holders on the shelf...

Henri sets the armchair down with irritation.

HENRI — You mean you intend to sit on the candle holders as well?

GERTRUDE — Go!

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Henri sighs and moves away. Gertrude drags the little armchair close to the fireplace and moves it around until she finds the exact spot it should occupy. She pays great attention to it. Henri returns with the objects requested, as well as a music box. Gertrude raises her head without stopping.

GERTRUDE — On the mantelpiece of the fireplace...with the mirror between them. And the bilboquet...Not like that!

She goes and places the objects herself. A little piece of mechanical music can be heard, pathetic and old-fashioned.

GERTRUDE — Ah!...Why did you bring that out?

HENRI — (*Amused. Leaning his ear forward*) Listen...All of your grand-mother is in that music.

GERTRUDE — Idiot! Go take it back...Or rather, no, give...

She takes the box from him and tries it on the fireplace. Hesitates, takes a look and moves the bilboquet. The little tune continues in the silence.

HENRI — (*Beat*) Perfect! Perfect! Don't move a thing!

GERTRUDE — (*Standing back to have a look*) What do you think?

HENRI — Ravishing...I must admit you have a gift.

GERTRUDE — (*Looking at her work. Relieved*) Yes...Yes, I think I like it...It's a good start...it's...it's...

HENRI — Refined...The line of this little armchair is amazing!

Satisfied sigh from Gertrude who sits down.

GERTRUDE — Perhaps it's quite traditional as arrangements go, but...anyway!

HENRI — It makes me wonder why you work so hard to find a new style when you're so good at this one.

GERTRUDE — I wanted...I would have liked... (*Sigh of weariness*).

Beat. Ticking of the clock and tune of the music box. They both seem more relaxed, reassured. Henri goes to close the closet door and points to the Eames armchair.

HENRI — You know, this armchair isn't bad... (*Sits down, amazed*) Believe it or not, it's supremely comfortable.

GERTRUDE — Of course, when it comes to comfort, the Americans...

HENRI — Ah! I should have thought of that...Would you let me have it as a gift? It would be perfect in a financial consultant's office, don't you think?

GERTRUDE — If you like...

HENRI — (*Settling in even more comfortably*) Those Americans, there's no denying it, they know what they're doing. (*Beat*) What a shame your son refused to take my advice. He should have gone to Harvard!

End of the little tune.

GERTRUDE — Our mistake...Our only real mistake was letting him leave. He cut himself off from us while he was away.

HENRI — (*Who has ideas of his own about Renaud's motivations*) Ah, well!

GERTRUDE — I didn't want him to leave.

296 HENRI — Let me remind you it was his idea not mine.

GERTRUDE — Weren't you the one who put it in his head? I always thought it was you.

HENRI — Really?

GERTRUDE — You were so jealous of my influence over him then.

HENRI — Ah! your influence back then was something else. I have to admit it. He followed you everywhere. He wouldn't do anything without consulting you first. He organized his entire life so it would fit with yours.

GERTRUDE — So what? What's wrong with that?

HENRI — Wrong! He was getting lost, poor kid. He wasn't studying any more. He found sports boring. He had only one idea, to follow his brilliant mother to the right places. To the homes of the rich and famous. To concerts. To the theatre...

GERTRUDE — Henri, it was you who pushed him to leave.

HENRI — Let's just say I helped open his eyes. Nothing more.

GERTRUDE — How?

HENRI — Oh, it happened very simply. So much so, it even surprised me.

GERTRUDE — Tell me!

HENRI — One day when I heard him laughing and making fun of...who was it?... One of your gay friends?...

GERTRUDE — So what?...

HENRI — Brissard, yeah! Pierre Brissard!...Exactly, he was your interior designer!

GERTRUDE — Go on...

HENRI — Well! All I said to Renaud was...“I don't understand why you're making such fun of Brissard. The way you behave yourself anyone would think you're trying to be just like him.”

GERTRUDE — Just like Brissard! *That's* what you said to him!

HENRI — That's what I said to him! (*Snicker*) You should have seen the look on his face. He turned green, then blue, then purple...

GERTRUDE — A rainbow! And then what?

HENRI — And then white, white as a sheet...

GERTRUDE — I want to know what he did after that.

HENRI — Oh! I have no idea. All I can tell you is that the next summer he said he wanted to go away. D'you want the whole truth? He was running away from you.

GERTRUDE — Me! He was running away from me! When you've just said yourself he couldn't do without me in those days.

HENRI — Precisely! He was running away from you because...How can I put this!... Because you were stealing...Ah! yes...You were stealing his identity. Anyway, things have changed a lot since then, because today you're under *his* influence.

GERTRUDE — You're nothing but a poor jealous man making up stories to get even.

HENRI — Get even for what?

GERTRUDE — For his love for me. You were dying from spite because of it.

HENRI — Please notice that you yourself are now speaking of that love in the past tense.

GERTRUDE — Yes. I'm speaking of it in the past tense, because it's true Booboo has put some distance between him and me. That's normal, isn't it? There was no need for you to put an ocean between us. It would have happened sooner or later. All mothers know their sons have to pull away from them in order to become men. I accepted that. I actually accepted it very well.

HENRI — And that's why you keep on calling him Booboo?

GERTRUDE — Yes. And I'll call him Booboo to the end of his days or mine. Because I'm his mother. I'm not the one who's changed. He is. There was no need for me to pull away from him. Do you understand the difference, you imbecile, do you get it? And when you say he left to get away from me...You're...you're flapping your gums, as your mother used to say.

HENRI — My mother never...

GERTRUDE — Of course not! What am I saying! Your mother was so afraid of making a mistake in French she never opened her mouth. Brissard thought...Yes, Brissard...He thought she was a silent pet. I said to him: "Not a pet, a Fisette." Miss Fisette from Nicolet.

HENRI — Must I remind you that my mother's father was a lawyer and Member of Parliament and consequently, that my mother...

GERTRUDE — Was an extremely distinguished woman. (*Getting up and changing tone*) Please get rid of this armchair for me.

HENRI — The...The Louis XV?

GERTRUDE — Yes! Now that I look at it, I find it ridiculous.

HENRI — But you said just now...

GERTRUDE — All of a sudden, it hits me right smack in the eye. That chair is nothing more than pure decadence.

She moves toward the closet.

HENRI — Gertrude, there are limits to my patience. Especially since it's nine-thirty

and...

GERTRUDE — One last favour, it won't kill you. Come here...

HENRI — (*Taking hold of the armchair with ill-concealed rage*) Gertrude, I wonder if you have any idea how extremely painful it can feel at times to be a man of good breeding.

GERTRUDE — Oh, yes! Contrary to what Booboo thinks, all the victims of the bourgeoisie aren't found in the lower classes...Wait...Wait a second. First I'd like you to take that dough box out for me.

HENRI — (*Putting down the armchair to move beside her*) A dough box? You have a dough box in there?

GERTRUDE — That piece over there...

HENRI — Now wait a minute. What're you planning to do with it?

GERTRUDE — I'm going back to my first idea. Just early Québec pieces.

HENRI — Oh, no! I hate that, and you well know it.

298 GERTRUDE — (*With mock civility*) My dear Henri, when this room is finished, you shall never set foot in it again, so...

HENRI — (*Going into the closet*) Very well, my dear! But you won't either, since Geneviève's coming back. And when that happens...

GERTRUDE — Geneviève isn't coming back.

HENRI — (*With an effort, picking up the dough box*) Oooh, wait a minute...Your dough box weighs a tonne.

GERTRUDE — Pfff! Muscles of a golf player.

HENRI — I'd like to see you do it.

GERTRUDE — Fine, I'll help you.

She sets to work. They are both struggling now. Gertrude, immediately exhausted, breathes loudly.

HENRI — You see!

GERTRUDE — You're moving all the weight over to my side.

HENRI — What!

GERTRUDE — (*With effort*) I just don't understand...Booboo carried it all by himself. *Henri lets the piece fall heavily.*

HENRI — Oh, please! I know Renaud is your beloved son. That doesn't make him Joe Monferrand, though.

GERTRUDE — I swear! He even brought it up from downstairs without any help!

HENRI — Well, then, get him to help you. I give up. I have no desire to break my back with such a piece of garbage.

He kicks the dough box.

GERTRUDE — Watch out! It could be your grandmother's dough box.

HENRI — My grandmother...

GERTRUDE — Let's say your great-grandmother...

HENRI — (*Shaking his head*) My great-grandmother...

GERTRUDE — Was a good farm wife and nothing more. She milked the cows herself.

She rocked the cradle. She danced the jig. And she square danced. And *Allemande Left!*

HENRI — That could be. Yours too then.

GERTRUDE — Yes, of course. Like it or not, in this country everyone is in off the farm! “So what?” as Booboo says.

HENRI — That’s just it. I didn’t get off it just to go back there.

GERTRUDE — Wait! Rest a minute. You’re tired. Rest a minute...

HENRI — It’s quarter to ten. I have to get going.

GERTRUDE — I’m asking you. It’s a gift from Booboo, and I’d like to surprise him.

HENRI — (*Between his teeth*) I’ve got a surprise for you too! (*Aloud*) And while we’re on the subject of Booboo...

GERTRUDE — What do you mean?

HENRI — You didn’t believe me just now, did you, when I said Renaud chose to go to Paris to finish his studies so he could get away from you?

GERTRUDE — No, of course not!

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HENRI — What if I could prove it to you?

GERTRUDE — Pfff! If you had that kind of proof, you would’ve shown it to me long ago.

HENRI — I do have it. I’m sorry to say, I do have it. Irrefutable proof! A letter written in his own hand, if you please. You should be grateful for the goodness of my heart. I’ve had it in my possession for seven years. It dates from the time Renaud was living in Paris...I could’ve shown it to you a hundred times.

GERTRUDE — Precisely, that’s exactly what you would’ve done.

HENRI — I wanted to spare you.

GERTRUDE — Well, keep on doing so.

HENRI — You don’t want to see it?...

GERTRUDE — No...

HENRI — So, you believe me?

GERTRUDE — No.

HENRI — In that case, like it or not...(*He moves away*) It’s in my room. I’ll go get it. (*He moves further away*) Wait one minute. I’ll be back.

GERTRUDE — Just go away. You were in such a rush to leave just now...

HENRI — (*Consulting his watch*) I still have a little quarter of an hour to spare for you. That’s more than enough to commit a crime. (*Leaving*) Stay there.

Gertrude starts getting worried and shows signs of agitation. Looks for a way to settle her nerves.

GERTRUDE — He doesn’t have a letter. No such letter exists. He’s going to come back and tell me he can’t find it. He has no letter!

Henri reappears holding a letter. Gertrude moves immediately over to him.

HENRI — You see? Hands off. I’m going to read it.

GERTRUDE — And if I don’t want you to?

HENRI — You *do* want me to! Listen...Oh, no! I won’t let you get away from me.

(Catches her and forces her back to the little Louis XV armchair) Sit there, and stay there. In your beautiful little Louis XV armchair. Don't you love your beautiful little armchair? Or at least, did you not love it only a minute ago? *(Beat)* So, stay there! *Overwhelmed, Gertrude does not respond.*

HENRI — Are you comfortable?...

Silence from Gertrude.

HENRI — Are you listening to me?...*(Beat)* Gertrude, can you hear me?

GERTRUDE — *(Shouting)* Of course, I can hear you. I'm not deaf!

HENRI — *(Jumps)* All right! I don't trust you, you know...It would be just like you to play a nasty trick on me and drop dead any minute.

Gertrude responds with nothing more than a scornful exclamation.

HENRI — Here it is!...It's a simple little letter, but it speaks volumes. *(He tries to read. Sigh of annoyance)* Five years ago I could have read it without glasses. *(He digs into his pockets and takes his glasses out)* Getting old is so annoying, don't you think? ...

300 *(Exclamation)* Oh!...

GERTRUDE — What is it?

HENRI — These glasses make me look at least twenty years older.

GERTRUDE — Idiot!

HENRI — I'd be doing you a favour if I went and had them changed.

GERTRUDE — Are you going to read the letter or not?

HENRI — I'm getting there..."Dear Dad...You did me a great favour the day you opened my eyes about Brissard"...You see!..."about Brissard and his crowd, where I was getting lost"...“getting lost.” Are you listening to this?

Gertrude moves her armchair so as to turn her back on him.

HENRI — I'm not making any of this up. Do you want to see?

GERTRUDE — No!

HENRI — Good...Let's go on..."If you want me to continue finding my way, try to stop Mom from coming to visit me in Paris"...

GERTRUDE — *(Getting up suddenly)* It's there? He wrote that? Booboo wrote that?

HENRI — In his own hand. Yes, Madam! Do you remember? You wanted...

GERTRUDE — Let me have it!

She rips the letter from him.

HENRI — I forbid you to destroy it! It's a record.

Gertrude digs in the pockets of her housecoat. Irritated exclamation. She looks around her.

HENRI — What're you looking for?

GERTRUDE — You know very well what I'm looking for.

Henri takes off his glasses and hands them to her. Mocking.

HENRI — Would you like mine?

Gertrude takes them with irritation.

HENRI — Growing old together has its advantages. Some day, you'll lend me your false teeth.

GERTRUDE — I don't have...!

HENRI — I said "some day"...Next year maybe.

GERTRUDE — Will you shut up? (*Searching*) Where is that piece of dirt you say he writes?

HENRI — Wrote! *Wrote*, past tense...

GERTRUDE — I have it...(Reading) "try to stop Mom from coming to visit me in Paris"...

HENRI — You see!

GERTRUDE — "Because she still has a hold on me"...

HENRI — That was there as well? I had forgotten...The rest doesn't concern you. Give me back the letter.

GERTRUDE — Let me read...Ah, good..."As for you, let me warn you you'd ruin everything if you tried to replace Mom's influence with yours"...Of course, you didn't brag about *that* part!

HENRI — (*Angry*) Read on...Read on!...

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GERTRUDE — "Neither of you will be deciding for me where my life will go"...

HENRI — You see, he puts us in the same bag.

GERTRUDE — "It will be up to me alone from now on to say what I'm going to do" ...(*Beat*)

HENRI — Are you going to stop there? Have you had enough?

Gertrude takes off Henri's glasses and hands them back to him.

GERTRUDE — What did you want him to do?

HENRI — Same as always. Send him to school in the United States...My letter, please. *She hands him the letter.*

GERTRUDE — Why did you keep it for so long? It's no more flattering for you than for me.

HENRI — I needed a weapon in case you regained your influence over him...

GERTRUDE — And Geneviève? Her leaving?...That was you too?...

HENRI — Oh! I beg your pardon! Geneviève is a girl. Raising her was no concern of mine. You have only yourself to blame if you missed the mark. Renaud is something else. You were turning him into a fairy at the speed of light. It was my duty to make a man of the boy.

GERTRUDE — (*Snickers*) A man like you?...

HENRI — And why not a man like me? Traditional as well as progressive!

GERTRUDE — If the fact of cheating on your wife is what makes you believe you're progressive, let me tell you my grandfather did as much a century ago.

HENRI — I'm talking about having an open mind, having a generous outlook... Being ready to welcome Geneviève back with open arms even though she ran away. Wouldn't you call that generous?

GERTRUDE — That's no commitment. Geneviève won't be back.

HENRI — And I'm telling you...

GERTRUDE — You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know your own

children.

HENRI — Ah! while you, on the other hand, thanks to your mother's heart see into every nook and cranny of their dear little souls?

GERTRUDE — I'm starting to know them. I'm learning how to know them. At my own expense, I grant you that, but at least I see clearly now. And I can tell you this: Geneviève will never come back. Neither will Booboo.

HENRI — Renaud?...He wants to go away too? He told you that?

GERTRUDE — No, but his turn will come. You would be well advised not to provoke him.

HENRI — Charming children!

The clock sounds three times.

GERTRUDE — That's the way they are. Their friends. All young people...Nothing makes them back off. Compared to them, we're slugs.

HENRI — (*Consulting his watch*) Ten o'clock. My crime was unsuccessful, since **302** you're still alive.

GERTRUDE — Yes, slugs! Whereas they have a sort of purity that refuses to compromise.

HENRI — Purity...

GERTRUDE — Yes, purity. Of course, you have no idea what that means. They do. They're hard, but they're pure.

HENRI — What is this? Some sort of commercial? Buy Boom! The soap of Independence! "Every bar hard, but pure."

GERTRUDE — Poor dolt! Doesn't even know what he's talking about. What he's laughing at. (*Beat*) When it comes right down to it, maybe it takes a heart attack to open your eyes.

HENRI — Ah, yes, your famous heart attack!...If I were you, I wouldn't talk too much about it.

GERTRUDE — Which means?...

HENRI — I have my own little ideas about that, let me tell you.

GERTRUDE — What are you saying?

HENRI — Simply that it wasn't caused by the grief of seeing your daughter leave.

GERTRUDE — Oh, no, Doctor? It wasn't the shock of her leaving that...?

HENRI — No, Madam, no. In this day and age, only dogs still die of a broken heart. On the other hand, it often happens with human beings that spite or rage will cause the aorta to burst. Isn't that so? That great vein of the heart...

GERTRUDE — The aorta is not a vein. It's an artery. And quit being so mysterious. I want to know what you're talking about.

HENRI — Oh, come on, Gertrude, think about it...What more could a loving mother wish for her daughter than happiness?

GERTRUDE — So...?

HENRI — Stop and think a little...Setting aside moral judgments, what could you imagine would bring greater happiness in the life of a twenty-year-old girl than run-

ning away with the man she loves? Think about it...

GERTRUDE — All right!

HENRI — In your case, for example, wouldn't that have been supreme happiness?

GERTRUDE — Leave me out of it!

HENRI — Ah, good! You agree then it was the rage of seeing your daughter do openly what you didn't have the guts for when you were her age that...?

GERTRUDE — Leave me out of it, I tell you!

HENRI — Of course, in your case a married man was involved...

GERTRUDE — Leave it, Henri! That's none of your business!

HENRI — It was so long ago, Gertrude...And we've never really spoken about it you and I. What really happened? What stopped you from doing the same as Geneviève? Fear of scandal?

GERTRUDE — I told you to shut up. That part of my life does not belong to you.

HENRI — It does indeed belong to me, at least a little, since I'm the imbecile you chose to marry right away to put an end to the gossip. Must I remind you that rumours of scandal were already spreading? **303**

GERTRUDE — Since you said nothing about it then, keep on keeping quiet.

HENRI — I said nothing then because I was hoping like an idiot...But let's forget what I was hoping for because it didn't happen. The only true pleasure—yes, true pleasure this story has given me has been watching that weakling you loved go downhill year after year. The higher I got in life, the more he fell back. I've made a success of my life, while he...

GERTRUDE — I agree. But I don't want you to talk to me about it.

HENRI — I'll talk to you about it whenever I want. I'll talk to you about it every time you treat me like a slug. Every time you tell me I don't know my children. Every time you call me an old fossil incapable of understanding them, and right in front of them too. I won't stand for you cutting me down in their eyes any more. I'm warning you. It's getting harder and harder to stand. Just now again in front of Renaud, I had the hardest time stopping myself from...Yes, from giving you a slap in the face.

GERTRUDE — From giving me a slap in the face? (*She can't stop laughing*).

HENRI — Yes, you heard me right!

GERTRUDE — (*Laughing*) You?...Raised as you were by the most straight-laced, the most affected, the most...

HENRI — Will you please leave my mother out of this.

GERTRUDE — And will you please remember that you belong to a part of society where children are the only ones you're still allowed to hit.

HENRI — Gertrude, there are limits even to the patience of a man of good breeding.

GERTRUDE — No, there are not. And that really is what...makes me sick. A person who's had your kind of upbringing will put up with anything. There are no limits.

HENRI — But you yourself...

GERTRUDE — Of course, I was cast in the same mould. So I know what I'm talking about. (*She goes close to him and dares him*) Just try to slap me. You'll see!

HENRI — Gertrude!

GERTRUDE — Go ahead! A good slap will make you feel better.

Henri, who can no longer contain himself, raises his hand, but does not bring it down.

GERTRUDE — Well go ahead. Do it. *(Beat)* Just do it!

A pause after Henri awkwardly lets his arm fall.

HENRI — I can't.

He turns away in order not to see her any longer. Gertrude stays in place. She was right.

GERTRUDE — So there! You can't do it!

HENRI — What's wrong with you? Wanting to get beaten! Are you sick or what?

GERTRUDE — Pretend you don't understand.

HENRI — Gertrude!

GERTRUDE — Go away. You should leave...Go, otherwise you'll be late for the Stock Market, and High Finance would never recover.

304 HENRI — *(Beat)* Yes, Gertrude, I'm leaving. I'm leaving because as far as I'm concerned, you're dead. You're as dead to me as you are to your son and your daughter. *He moves away with a quick step. Just as he goes to open the door, Gertrude takes a step toward him.*

GERTRUDE — Henri!

He is about to leave. Gertrude straightens up and walks to the door.

GERTRUDE — Best wishes to Jeannette!

Beat. Henri has stopped, stunned. Gertrude feels she achieved her goal.

HENRI — *(Beat)* All right. What do you want, revenge?

GERTRUDE — Would you marry her, Henri? You can at least tell me that. If you became a widower?...

HENRI — That question doesn't need to be addressed. You'll never give me that pleasure.

GERTRUDE — Liar! There's a good reason why you worry so much about my health. If I died, Jeannette would demand that you marry her, and, knowing you, you are much too much of a snob to marry such an ordinary, such a common, woman.

HENRI — Do I need to remind you she's twenty years younger than you, my love? And since you don't even go to the trouble any more of fixing up what you still have left...

GERTRUDE — Do I need to remind you that if she's twenty years younger than I, it means you yourself are twenty-five years older than she?

HENRI — And you think that make her any less desirable?

GERTRUDE — In any case, it doesn't make her any less common.

Henri protests.

GERTRUDE — Yes, common! As common as...*(Beat)* As what? There used to be an expression for that.

HENRI — If you find it, you can let me know.

She holds him back by the arm.

GERTRUDE — Try, try to remember...

HENRI — It's not my place to remember for you...

He moves away. She follows him.

GERTRUDE — I'm sure you know it.

HENRI — Find it yourself. You have time. You're always alone. Yeah, try to find it while you're getting dressed. Or while you're taking a bath, if you still take baths. Are you still bathing?

GERTRUDE — Who should I get dressed for? I never see anyone any more.

HENRI — Well, then! That's precisely the problem. I *told* you that, after Geneviève left...we should have kept on entertaining, going out, you know, playing the game.

Gertrude shakes her head as a sign of protest and moves away from him quickly. He follows her.

HENRI — For starters, you would have had to get out of this silly housecoat that I threw away. Why do you wear my old stuff? It's incredibly annoying.

GERTRUDE — Because I'm part of your old stuff.

HENRI — All the same...If you care about dignity...Simple human dignity...Doesn't that matter to you any more, dignity?

Exasperated, Gertrude suddenly turns around.

GERTRUDE — Dignity, shmignity...! Dignity, my ass!

Henri receives the word smack in the face and jumps. Gertrude hastily places her hand on her mouth as though she wanted to swallow what she has just said.

HENRI — And you're the one calling Jeannette common?

GERTRUDE — Then go to your Jeannette and let me be. Let me be!

Henri looks at her and suddenly begins to laugh. Exasperated, Gertrude turns to him in order to understand.

HENRI — Jealous?

Gertrude looks at him as if she were spitting on him.

GERTRUDE — Pfff!

HENRI — No doubt you would be quite capable of it, even if I've never meant anything to you.

GERTRUDE — Pfff!

HENRI — Yes, you would be that illogical.

GERTRUDE — Pfff! And again: Pfff!

Henri looks at her for a moment without saying anything. The moment is long enough to make Gertrude turn toward him.

GERTRUDE — Are you leaving?

HENRI — You'd never admit it, would you?

GERTRUDE — Oh, just listen to that! What do you want? An official statement?

Henri is silent.

GERTRUDE — You make me laugh. Oh, you make me laugh.

HENRI — (*Beat*) Well then, laugh, Gertrude. And to the sound of music. Wait. Like your grandmother at the end of her days.

He takes the music box and turns the handle. The tune begins again.

HENRI — To the sound of the pretty little music she listened to while your grandfather and his Jeannette were out having a good time. Laugh then, since there's nothing else left for you to do.

He leaves slamming the door.

GERTRUDE — His Jeannette!...Really!...How can he believe that?...Jealous!...(Beat) At least that would be something, to be jealous...

She is heard breathing with difficulty while she looks around her, lost, not knowing what to do. Beat.

GERTRUDE — Now what?...*(Beat)* Now, what?...What?...What?...

Beat. Gertrude's breathing and the music box. Low and prolonged moan from Gertrude who lets herself fall into the Eames armchair. Relaxed posture, almost obscene because of the way she lets herself go. The door opens. Gertrude does not hear it and continues to moan. Renaud appears holding a cup of coffee.

RENAUD — *(Long pause)* Mom?...

306 GERTRUDE — Booboo!...You were there?...

RENAUD — I brought you...

GERTRUDE — *(Horrified, struggling to regain her composure)* You should have said you were there. How many times have I told you that? You could have knocked...You should always...

She is having difficulty breathing.

RENAUD — I'm sorry...I wanted to apologize...

GERTRUDE — You should always knock...

RENAUD — I was hard on you and I wanted...

GERTRUDE — Always before entering...You must knock!...You must...

RENAUD — Mom...Are you sick?

GERTRUDE — Sick?...

RENAUD — Your eyes were closed...And your face was so...Ever since your heart attack, I've always been a bit worried...

GERTRUDE — Really?...You hide it very well!

RENAUD — The problem is...One way or another you...You always put me on the defensive...

GERTRUDE — Why? Why Booboo?

RENAUD — Because of your ideas. You know that.

GERTRUDE — Oh, really?...What ideas? Do I have ideas? Have I ever had a single idea of my own in my whole life? First I had my family's...Then your father's...And now I have yours! *(Beat)* You see?

RENAUD — Certainly not mine!

GERTRUDE — Goodness, what more do you need? Look how I'm living! I don't go out any more. I've turned my back on all my friends. I have no more servants, and I barely dare move around in my own house when the cleaning lady is here.

RENAUD — I don't see the connection.

GERTRUDE — What! You don't see the connection. Well it would be so obvious that

I do nothing with my two hands while she works herself to the bone!

RENAUD — Mom, that's ridiculous! No one expects you to...

GERTRUDE — But you're always saying...You used to say I was good for nothing except to be served...That I should be ashamed...That...

RENAUD — You exaggerate everything. You always go too far. It's like with Corrine

...

GERTRUDE — Oh no! You're not going to start that again?

RENAUD — Yes, because I have another proposal for you. Listen...Since you don't want to give her Geneviève's room...

GERTRUDE — That's right. I don't want to.

RENAUD — I understand that.

GERTRUDE — You don't understand.

RENAUD — Listen to me. I thought of the maids' rooms...They're empty, so...

GERTRUDE — You don't understand. It's easy to see you don't understand.

RENAUD — We could give one to Corrine. Mom, are you listening to me?...

GERTRUDE — Yes...I'm listening...(Beat) But it's impossible.

RENAUD — Why?

GERTRUDE — A guest in a maid's room...Think about it for a minute. It would be humiliating for her.

RENAUD — Mom! I explained to you...

GERTRUDE — Don't start again.

RENAUD — Compared to what she has...Or rather what she doesn't have, it would be paradise.

GERTRUDE — That's the point. Because she has nothing, we'd have to...We'd have to give her the nicest room in the house. Or nothing at all.

RENAUD — Oh! You're such a hypocrite! But I'm going to beat you at your own game...I'm going to let her have my room. What do you think of that?

GERTRUDE — Your room?

RENAUD — What can you make up now to get out of that?

GERTRUDE — Listen! I have an idea too. Really, a better one than yours.

RENAUD — Tell me?...

GERTRUDE — I'll give you money so you can rent a room somewhere...Close to the university, that would be handy. Can't you see? And I'll pay for everything. Everything. I'll pay for everything!

RENAUD — Shut up! Will you just shut up!

Shaken, Gertrude stops.

RENAUD — It's a bad idea. Corrine would never agree to it.

GERTRUDE — Why?...Why wouldn't she agree?

RENAUD — Because that would be charity, and she's not asking for charity. Who do you think she is?

GERTRUDE — Well, I think she's...I think she's poor. (*Sharply, when Booboo protests*) Why wouldn't she accept charity, if she's poor?

RENAUD — That's exactly what she'd find humiliating. How can you not feel that! The poor want no more of your charity!

GERTRUDE — Why? Why do they want no more of it? In my day, we were taught very young to do charity work. I remember. I went out with Mother and we visited, we visited...

RENAUD — With your little baskets?...And that didn't bother you?

GERTRUDE — Yes, it bothered me. It bothered me even more than them.

RENAUD — That's a lie. You understand nothing if you believe that.

GERTRUDE — But when you get right down to it, what do your damned poor people want? What do they expect from us? That we give them our homes? Our beds? That's what they want?

RENAUD — They want what they have a right to and nothing more. Among other things, the opportunity to get an education.

308 GERTRUDE — For all the good education does. Do they believe they'll be happier when they're well educated? Do they imagine that education is the solution to everything?

RENAUD — You have to understand that's not how they see the problem.

GERTRUDE — (*Almost shouting*) They'll have to find out, at some point, you'll all have to find out, that it has nothing to do with anything! I may not know what has to do with it, but at least I know what doesn't. (*Incoherent*) I don't know what the question is either. But I feel...Yes! I feel there is a question, and if...if it was asked correctly ... if...

RENAUD — Mom! What question are you talking about?

GERTRUDE — I don't know exactly. I'm looking for it...The rest of you are looking for answers. I'm looking for a question...Just one. Yes...just one question that would contain all the others! (*Beat*) But which one?...What question?...

RENAUD — Argh! It's enough to drive you crazy! None of what you're saying makes any sense. I swear that listening to you makes me want to puke.

GERTRUDE — You're the one who's making me want to puke.

RENAUD — Mom!...

GERTRUDE — Yes, you're the one... (*She stops herself, choking*) Ah!...

RENAUD — What's happening to you?

GERTRUDE — Twice today...

RENAUD — Mom, are you OK?

GERTRUDE — What, am I OK? What do *you* think? That you and your friends have a monopoly on garbage? Hey, think again! I could have garbage pouring out of my mouth day and night if I didn't control myself.

RENAUD — You?...

GERTRUDE — The only difference between you and me is that I would never dream of calling it strong language...Strong language!...Makes me laugh! It's much harder to keep your mouth shut about what you're thinking. Or to say it and say it well, that's even harder. As for your little vulgarities...Pfff! Would you like me to talk like you

from now on?

RENAUD — I don't know...Coming out of your mouth...It bothers me.

GERTRUDE — Of course, nothing but honey is supposed to come out of a mother's mouth.

RENAUD — Never mind, after all, if it makes you feel better, talk however you want.

GERTRUDE — Oh, this room!...(Beat) These pieces of furniture that don't go together.

RENAUD — Oh, if you would only...!

GERTRUDE — I don't know any more...I don't know what to do any more...

RENAUD — Mom, if you would only...Listen to me! If you would only...

GERTRUDE — Oh, no!

RENAUD — What?

GERTRUDE — I don't want to hear any more about Corrine.

RENAUD — Be reasonable. You have to understand.

GERTRUDE — Oh, no...Besides, even if I said yes...Your father...? Have you thought of your father? He would never accept that... **309**

RENAUD — Forget him. I can handle Dad.

GERTRUDE — Have you even said a word to him about it? *Your father* has a right to a say in this. This is his home. And you know what he thinks of your friends...He will never accept one of them living under his roof. No, not even a girl.

RENAUD — You're wrong. Dad has always been good at smelling the wind...He's a master of compromise. (Beat) He'll accept because Corrine represents the up and coming class in his eyes, and we must accommodate those who are coming after us. He's even capable of trying to seduce her.

GERTRUDE — That's right. So there'll be two of you after her.

RENAUD — I didn't mean that kind of seduction.

GERTRUDE — It doesn't matter anyway. It doesn't matter, because you're mistaken if you imagine your father will invite a girl who has contempt for him into his home. A girl who will judge him. He'll feel guilty every time she looks at him...

RENAUD — Guilty?...

GERTRUDE — Your friend Corrine said it in her article. She spelled it right out that the poor will always look on the rich as objects of scandal. I read it. In her view, I will be...Your father will always be in the wrong. Think about it!

RENAUD — Pfff! before he notices, Corrine will have finished her thesis.

GERTRUDE — But don't you see it would make life impossible. Feeling ashamed day in and day out...No, that girl will not come here.

RENAUD — Can't you see you're the one making up these obstacles! And for no good reason. Pure selfishness. Since that's the way it is, I'm giving you an ultimatum. Listen to me: either Corrine comes here for as long as it takes her to write her thesis, or else I'm leaving.

GERTRUDE — Booboo!

RENAUD — Like Geneviève!

GERTRUDE — Oh, no! That's blackmail!

RENAUD — Yes, that's blackmail. With people like you, it always has to be that way.

GERTRUDE — Give me...Give me some time to think about it.

RENAUD — Not too long. I need your answer today. I promised Corrine...

GERTRUDE — You've already spoken to her about it? Even before you knew whether I would say yes?

RENAUD — I'm going to get her. We'll be back.

GERTRUDE — I don't want to see her! Or anybody! Her even less than the others! No one!

RENAUD — You'll give your answer to her.

GERTRUDE — No, Booboo, no! Don't do it! Don't ask this of me!

But he has already left.

GERTRUDE — No, no! no! no! no!

She stops and breathes with difficulty. Profound distress. Choking.

310 I wish...I wish I could...scream...I wish I could scream at the top of my lungs!

ACT TWO

NOTE — *Gertrude is still in the room where things have been piling up. A Chippendale desk has been added to the American armchair, the little Louis XV armchair and Booboo's dough box. She has been struggling, dragging the desk by herself, and is now looking at it with consternation.*

GERTRUDE — That doesn't work at all...

And now a table and a rocking chair have arrived from the Brissard store, carried by two burly men, surly and scornful. Gertrude backs away from them, ashamed, adjusting her old housecoat.

GERTRUDE — And the armoire? I ordered an armoire...An antique from the Île d'Orléans?...A blue armoire, do you know about it?

With disdain, they move away without a word. Did they even hear her?

GERTRUDE — They could at least answer!

She examines the new pieces of furniture. Are they the ones she chose?...

GERTRUDE — Yes...Ah, yes...They're the right ones. (*Beat*) But do I still like them?...*The chance alignment of the rocking chair, the Eames armchair and the little Louis XV feels like a deliberate provocation.*

GERTRUDE — I don't know...I don't know any more...

In the stairway the men are exhausting themselves moving the armoire. Gertrude can hear them noisily struggling, and puffing and swearing...Odious sensation of guilt. At least make room for them, since she is unable to help them. Buzzing around, she moves the table, then the desk. The delivery men can be heard swearing loudly.

GERTRUDE — Just like Booboo...and Booboo's friends...

Delivery man — A new obscenity.

GERTRUDE — It's my fault. They're tearing out their insides because of me.

Hide! So at least they don't see her. Seized with panic, she runs to the closet and closes the door behind her.

They enter, breathing so loudly it seems they are carrying the world on their shoulders, accompanying each of their moves with eloquent onomatopoeias. They place the armoire in the middle of the room. With a flick of his knife, one of them cuts the strings, while the other removes the cardboard protecting the piece, adding even more elements of disorder to the already existing mess. They leave and Gertrude comes out of the closet with a sigh of relief. The sigh is followed by a lament.

GERTRUDE — Oh!...This room!...this room!...

Where to start? The sight of the new pieces of furniture gives her renewed energy. She admires the armoire and ends up deciding to place it against the wall. And now it is she whose breath grows so short it seems her soul could soon escape. The veins of her forehead are swollen to the bursting point, she unknowingly imitates the harsh sounds of the Brissard employees. Upon his arrival, Henri stops at the door...

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HENRI — This is worse than ever! (*Noticing Gertrude*) And you're still here. (*Beat*) My gosh, do you spend your days in this room?

GERTRUDE — Oh, yes! This is my battlefield. I set my heavy artillery, I move it around, I re-arrange it...

HENRI — But why?

GERTRUDE — If only I knew...

HENRI — What?...

GERTRUDE — There are times when I know. Sometimes I know...It comes to me like a thunderbolt. And then, it disappears...Since you're here, Henri...

HENRI — No, thank you!

GERTRUDE — Just one minute.

HENRI — Not even one second.

GERTRUDE — This armoire is so heavy.

HENRI — You should have had the delivery men help you...I presume it didn't come all on its own? And between you and me, they could have taken their cardboard with them.

GERTRUDE — You know very well how they are...

HENRI — You should have insisted. But you don't know how to give orders any more. (*Beat*) Not so long ago, there were more servants in this house than people to serve...

GERTRUDE — If you won't help me, get out.

HENRI — All of a sudden, from one day to the next, Whoosh! Nobody.

GERTRUDE — I told you to get out.

HENRI — I won't help you and I won't get out.

GERTRUDE — Then make yourself invisible.

She goes back to pushing the furniture.

HENRI — Anyway, you're wasting your time. Geneviève is coming back...

Gertrude continues to push while breathing very loudly to incite Henri to help her.

HENRI — Are you listening to me? Geneviève is coming back...Can you hear what I'm saying to you? (*Raising his voice*) Gertrude!

GERTRUDE — Kindly leave.

HENRI — I'm telling you...

GERTRUDE — Leave!

HENRI — Listen to me!

GERTRUDE — Push first!

HENRI — (*Turning around to sit down*) No!

GERTRUDE — Then shut up!

She goes back to pushing the furniture.

HENRI — I wish you could see yourself. A real madam!...And from a cheap whore house at that.

GERTRUDE — And what do you know about that? Do you often go to such places? (*Beat*) By the way, what are you doing here in the middle of the day? It isn't normal.

312 HENRI — Ah! so you finally noticed.

GERTRUDE — That's right...What're you doing here? Don't tell me you came here for no reason. (*Beat*) Tell me. (*Beat*) What's going on?

HENRI — Sit down first...

GERTRUDE — Booboo?...It's Booboo that...

HENRI — It's not about Booboo.

GERTRUDE — No, but about one of his friends, isn't it? Corrine...? (*Beat*) Henri, we absolutely must not...

HENRI — This is not about Renaud! Could you remind yourself from time to time that Renaud is not the only member of your family?

GERTRUDE — Why so much mystery? Tell me.

HENRI — It's about...

GERTRUDE — Geneviève?...An accident?...

HENRI — What if it was about me? (*Beat*) Some misfortune could happen to me, after all.

GERTRUDE — You?...

HENRI — Imagine that, just for once... (*Stops*)

GERTRUDE — What?...

HENRI — (*Embarrassed, giving up*) Forget it!...

GERTRUDE — What are you talking about?

HENRI — Forget it, forget it, I tell you!...In fact it's about Geneviève...

GERTRUDE — So why were you saying?...

HENRI — It was a game. Only it takes two to play it...Come with me, let's go somewhere else...To the study, the living room, wherever you like, but let's get out of here!

GERTRUDE — No! Why?

HENRI — Because I can't breathe in such confusion.

GERTRUDE — Maybe you think I like it?

HENRI — Well, you never leave.

GERTRUDE — I don't have a choice...A change...What's happened to Geneviève? What's happened to her?

HENRI — She's coming back. That's all! Yes, she's coming back....I wanted to break the news gently, so you wouldn't get too excited, but what's the use of trying to be gentle with you!...

GERTRUDE — I don't believe you...

HENRI — Oh, please! Don't be so stubborn. She told me so herself. In my office. She came to see me. We had lunch together...

GERTRUDE — Lunch...?

HENRI — The two of us just came here from the restaurant.

GERTRUDE — I'm hungry!

HENRI — I'm speaking to you, Gertrude!

GERTRUDE — I know. But I don't believe you. Geneviève said...

HENRI — What she said six months ago matters very little to me. I tell you she's here right now, in this house. Yes, downstairs. Is that good enough for you?

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GERTRUDE — Here?

HENRI — Ah! finally...

GERTRUDE — I don't understand.

HENRI — Come now! You were boasting only this morning that you knew your children like the back of your hand.

GERTRUDE — It can't be...

HENRI — You even called me an old fool because I predicted Geneviève's return. I was all wrong. I understood nothing...

GERTRUDE — So what?...I was wrong. It can happen to anyone. A man who loved her enough to snatch her away from her family...Such a great love!...I believed...

HENRI — What? That you can never get over it?

GERTRUDE — I believed...

HENRI — Well as this shows, you do get over it! And that much faster when you have the nerve to throw yourself into it completely.

GERTRUDE — Completely?...Six months?...

HENRI — Yes!...That's the way it would have been for you if you'd had the nerve to do the same thing as your daughter. Ah! You really should've run away with your great imbecile.

GERTRUDE — That's enough! What's got into you today that you keep on talking about him?

HENRI — Six months and you would've forgotten him.

GERTRUDE — Leave him alone!

HENRI — Six months and you would've been disgusted with him. And maybe then you could have loved another man.

GERTRUDE — (*Who is not listening*) Anyway, I'm sure you're wrong about this! If Geneviève is coming back, it's not because she doesn't love him any more...

HENRI — No?

GERTRUDE — It's him...He's the one who doesn't love her any more. He's walking out on her.

HENRI — Aha!...So *that's* what really happened to you?

GERTRUDE — I'm talking to you about Geneviève. About Geneviève!

HENRI — And I'm talking to you about you! About your story! He was the one who'd had enough? He got fed up first?

GERTRUDE — Leave my story out of it! That was long, long ago in the depths of time. Thousands of years ago...

HENRI — You would have been willing to go with him? It was he who didn't want to?

GERTRUDE — Thousands, thousands of years...It's dead!

HENRI — He didn't love you, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE — It's dead, I tell you. Leave it!

HENRI — He didn't love you? Or at least not enough to run away with you?

GERTRUDE — He was married! He had children!

314 HENRI — That's exactly what I'm saying. He didn't love you. He preferred his wife and children to you. Or rather his wife's money....Yes, more likely his wife's money. He hadn't gone through it all yet...

GERTRUDE — No! It was his children. His duty...

HENRI — His duty?...Oh! don't make me laugh...It's true people talked a lot about duty then ... (*He laughs*) I suppose it was also duty that made him sleep with you? And with others, after you. He carried on after you...You know it, don't you? It's common knowledge...

GERTRUDE — I refuse to talk about him!

HENRI — So, he didn't love you? You know what? That's funny. That explanation never occurred to me. He—did—not—love—you. You didn't even have the choice of running away with him, because there was never any question of it.

GERTRUDE — That's a lie. We often talked about it! I'd even say that's all we talked about.

HENRI — Is that so?...And you would've done it? Tell me?...You would've done it?

GERTRUDE — I don't know...I don't know!

HENRI — Pfff! I'm sure you wouldn't! You never would have had the nerve. With the father you had?...The brother of a bishop, if you please. I'm sure your virtuous father knew about it, didn't he? At least, in the end...?

GERTRUDE — In the end, yes...

HENRI — The dear man found out? (*He laughs*) Oh! Holy wrath! What you must have heard, my poor Gertrude. Tell me...What did he say? That he would have the police arrest you?

GERTRUDE — Not me, him...

HENRI — Good Lord, yes! He would have had the law on his side, too. You were a minor then. (*He looks at her and starts to laugh*) Who would believe seeing you today that you were ever a minor. And that frightened your Don Juan? Can't you see he didn't love you!

GERTRUDE — (*Exploding*) Enough! Are you through with this?

HENRI — Strange, isn't it. This should give me pleasure, and yet, I feel...no...no satisfaction. (*Beat*) I must have no talent for revenge. What happened after that?

GERTRUDE — After what? I don't want to talk about this any more.

HENRI — After the two of you decided not to run away together.

GERTRUDE — Nothing! That was the end.

HENRI — The end of the story?

GERTRUDE — Yes, the end of the story.

HENRI — The end period? You never saw each other again?

GERTRUDE — No!

HENRI — I don't know...I feel you're holding something back.

GERTRUDE — There's nothing more to tell.

HENRI — Nothing at all?

GERTRUDE — Will you leave me alone!

She moves to get away.

HENRI — One last question. Did you see him after we were married?

GERTRUDE — No! What an idea!

HENRI — Wonder if it's true.

GERTRUDE — Never!

HENRI — But you never stopped loving him?

GERTRUDE — Where's Geneviève?

HENRI — While he stopped loving you.

GERTRUDE — I want to see Geneviève. I want...Have I ever been foolish! Geneviève isn't here. You made all that up just to get me to talk.

HENRI — Now wouldn't that be funny?

GERTRUDE — She's not here. Now I'm sure of it. And I believed you! I'm an idiot, a stupid woman, an utter fool.

HENRI — I couldn't agree more.

He moves away toward the door.

GERTRUDE — Where are you going?

HENRI — To get her. You'll have to believe me when you see her right in front of you.

GERTRUDE — (*Calling him back*) Henri...Wait!...Wait!...

HENRI — Wait for what?

GERTRUDE — Let me explain to you...Come here. You don't understand yet...

HENRI — Well, fine, here we go again!

GERTRUDE — I didn't think of it either, but...It came to me all of a sudden, just as clear as daylight!

HENRI — An illumination!

GERTRUDE — Don't laugh! I beg you. Don't laugh!

HENRI — So, now, what are you trying to say?

GERTRUDE — She's pregnant, Henri...Geneviève is pregnant...

HENRI — What?

GERTRUDE — I'm sure of it.

HENRI — What are you imagining now. First of all, how would you know that?

GERTRUDE — This sudden return...It couldn't be anything else. I can feel it...I know it.

HENRI — Wait a minute!...If you have no other proof...

GERTRUDE — You'll have to take my word for it. I'm a woman, Henri! A woman knows these things.

HENRI — But she'd have told me, I would think.

GERTRUDE — You? Her father?

HENRI — Why not, me, her father?

GERTRUDE — Stop and think...Try and imagine how confused she must be.

HENRI — Do you really think...? So that's why she kept on sniffing.

GERTRUDE — She...?

HENRI — Constantly! I thought she had a cold.

316 GERTRUDE — You thought...? There she was heartbroken, swallowing her tears, and you thought she had a cold!

HENRI — It's not my fault if in both cases you end up blowing your nose the same way.

GERTRUDE — Poor dummy!

HENRI — (*Shaken*) O.K. O.K....I have to admit it...But how could I have guessed?...In the age of the pill? Tell me that. The famous pill!

GERTRUDE — (*Distraught*) I can't understand either...

HENRI — (*Worried*) What should we do now? We're going to help her, of course, but how? ... How can we help her?... (*Thinking aloud*) Above all, we mustn't panic... Everything can be worked out. I'm convinced of that. But we must be careful...very, very careful...

GERTRUDE — (*Indignant*) What do you mean, careful...Where are you going with this? How could you know your own daughter so poorly?

HENRI — (*Horried*) You're not saying this child...

GERTRUDE — Geneviève will insist on giving birth to her baby. You can be sure of that! And on keeping it, on raising it...

HENRI — Have you gone mad? How can you expect?...Keeping it where...?

GERTRUDE — I don't know. Here, of course...

HENRI — Here!

GERTRUDE — I suppose that's why she came back.

HENRI — (*Panicking*) But think of the scandal, Gertrude!...The scandal!...

GERTRUDE — Did the fear of scandal stop her when she ran away six months ago?

HENRI — You're right...

GERTRUDE — You know how they are now. They do everything right out in the open.

HENRI — Still!...The world being what it is!

GERTRUDE — I'm doing everything I can think of to convince you the world has

changed. It's evolved. Between Booboo's world and yours there's...There's...

HENRI — A world of difference!

GERTRUDE — (*Aggressively*) Yes!...And a better world than ours if you want my opinion. Better than ours, if it gives a woman the chance to keep the child of a man she loves!...

HENRI — (*Protesting*) But Geneviève no longer loves the boy. She told me so herself. I'm telling you it's over.

GERTRUDE — Less hypocritical. Basically less cruel. More human.

Henri is looking at her and does not respond right away.

GERTRUDE — Yes, more human.

HENRI — (*Hesitating*) Don't you think that under the circumstances an abortion...

GERTRUDE — Shut up! Don't even say the word!

HENRI — (*Who is beginning to understand*) It seems to me that if you were to try to convince Geneviève...

GERTRUDE — Never....Don't count on me!

HENRI — Maybe I could...

GERTRUDE — Oh, no! Especially not you! That would be horrible!

HENRI — Look! She wouldn't be the first girl who...

GERTRUDE — (*Extreme anguish. Almost incoherent*) Shut up! You have no idea what you're talking about. The only way these things are ever done is in the most disgusting circumstances you can imagine. It's like you were committing a crime. You're surrounded by shame. Where would she go? Who would she go to? It's despicable! It's unthinkable!

HENRI — (*Sotto voce*) The end of the story...The true end of the story!

GERTRUDE — (*Exhausted*) All right. That's the end of the story. It's that pretty! And I don't care if you know, as long as I can protect Geneviève from it.

HENRI — My poor Gertrude...

GERTRUDE — I am not your poor Gertrude!

HENRI — What...? You won't even accept a word of consolation, coming from me?

GERTRUDE — I'm nobody's poor Gertrude!

HENRI — Not even a gesture of...friendship?

GERTRUDE — Nothing!

HENRI — Of humanity then? As I would have for a stranger...

GERTRUDE — Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!

HENRI — (*Long beat*) You've had it, huh?...You've had it!...Oh! they did a fine job of destroying you! They did it well, once and for all!

Geneviève enters.

GENEVIÈVE — Hello...

GERTRUDE — Geneviève!

HENRI — Ah, yes, Geneviève!...

GERTRUDE — (*Overwhelmed, taking her in her arms*) My little girl ...

GENEVIÈVE — Well yes, Mom, yes. (*She sniffles and frees herself, refusing to play the*

scene of the prodigal child)

GERTRUDE — My little girl...my poor little girl.

GENEVIÈVE — Are you sick, Mom?...

GERTRUDE — Why not at all. What's wrong with all of you today telling me I'm sick?

GENEVIÈVE — I wouldn't have recognized you. Your hair...

HENRI — Oh! I should've warned you. We no longer go to the hairdresser...

GENEVIÈVE — And that old housecoat... (*She sniffles*)

HENRI — Why, it's the latest fashion!

GERTRUDE — And so what?...So what? What difference does it make? Does it bother anyone? Does it change anything?

GENEVIÈVE — Of course!...What's going on here?... (*To Gertrude*) You were redecorating my room? So, you were expecting me... (*She sniffles*)

GERTRUDE — That is...Uh...It was...

318 HENRI — For herself!

GENEVIÈVE — For you? My room?

GERTRUDE — Geneviève, you said...

GENEVIÈVE — (*Cutting her off, to her father*). D'you remember Renaud's room when he went to Europe...? Absolutely forbidden to change anything at all in it. It was turned into a shrine. (*She sniffles*)

GERTRUDE — That's not the same thing at all.

GENEVIÈVE — Why?

HENRI — Because Renaud...is Booboo!

GERTRUDE — Oh, you're lying!

GENEVIÈVE — So little...

GERTRUDE — Geneviève, Geneviève, remember!...We were expecting Booboo to come back, whereas you ...The day you left, surely, you haven't forgotten it...You told me over and over so many times that you'd never come back...

GENEVIÈVE — I know... (*She sniffles*) My bilboquet...Did you at least guess when you received it that it was a roundabout way of announcing my return?...

HENRI — Well, on that score I have to admit your mother was remarkable! She immediately understood it was a sign. I was amazed.

GERTRUDE — Will you be quiet?

HENRI — Your brother and I truly witnessed one of the most authentic demonstrations of vibrant and glorious motherly love! Ting!... (*He imitates the sound of a harp chord*)

GERTRUDE — Henri!

GENEVIÈVE — And to think that away from home... (*She sniffles*) family life seemed so attractive!

HENRI — Geneviève, I can understand you're feeling emotional right now, but please, blow your nose.

GENEVIÈVE — I'm not feeling emotional. I have a cold.

HENRI — Excuse me?...You have...? Did I hear you correctly? Say that again?...

GENEVIÈVE — Say what again? You're getting on my nerves!.

HENRI — Did you say?...Did you indeed say you have a cold? A real cold?...

GENEVIÈVE — Yes, a head cold. And I happen not to have a hankie. (*Eager to move away*) I'll go find one in your room, Mom.

She goes out.

HENRI — Did you hear that, Gertrude? You did indeed hear that, I hope? Those were not tears the dear little one was gulping down. All she has is a good old-fashioned cold.

Gertrude, who followed Geneviève as far as the door, does not answer.

HENRI — No more pregnant than you and I! Oh, glorious day! I have met with victory on every front. Don't run away, Gertrude. Stay here. We're going to do some elementary mathematics.

GERTRUDE — Leave me!

HENRI — Don't move, I tell you.

GERTRUDE — I refuse to listen to you any more.

HENRI — A simple little exercise in mental arithmetic so that you never again feel the desire to identify with your daughter. A mother and a daughter, Gertrude, do not make one. They make two. You have to understand that. One plus one equals two. Repeat after me...

GERTRUDE — I understand.

HENRI — So repeat it.

GERTRUDE — Let go of me!

She gets loose suddenly at the moment when Geneviève returns. Henri, rather embarrassed, does not insist. Beat.

GENEVIÈVE — Won't the two of you ever stop fighting!

HENRI — Never! There are some privileged couples like us for whom marriage means mortal combat! (*Almost tender*) Eh, Gertrude. A battle to the death. And maybe continuing on into eternity, as far as anyone knows!

GENEVIÈVE — I hoped that in honour of my return...

HENRI — Ah, yes!...You're right...Please, excuse us...Let's have a truce, Gertrude. Wait, even better, I'm going, I'm leaving the two of you together...Geneviève, I'm happy you're back. Now order will be restored. You're going to take your room back. Gertrude, you're going to get dressed. You're going to hire some servants, and we'll finally get back to normal life. As it used to be.

GENEVIÈVE — As it used to be...

HENRI — I'm really counting on you, Geneviève! (*He moves away*) I'll see you this evening...

GERTRUDE — Where are you going again?

HENRI — Where else?...To the office.

GERTRUDE — That's what you always say.

HENRI — What else is there to say?

GERTRUDE — Some days I think it can't be. You would have gone mad if that was all you did your whole life.

HENRI — Well, as you can see, I haven't.

GERTRUDE — Why?...

GENEVIÈVE — Mom!...

GERTRUDE — Why?...

HENRI — What, why? Why what?

GERTRUDE — The office during the week, Jeannette on Saturday, mass on Sunday. Is that all there is?

HENRI — Ah, yes. That's a man's life.

GERTRUDE — It can't be true. If it were as boring as you say, you would all let yourselves die. There must be something in your life, something that women don't understand, something to keep you alive...What is it?...How long will you keep doing the same thing? Until when?

320 HENRI — Until you die, Gertrude! And then, I'll rest. Until then, Good bye!

He leaves.

GERTRUDE — Good bye...Good bye...

GENEVIÈVE — Oh! What made me come back here?

GERTRUDE — This room!...Just look at this room. I'll never get the job done.

GENEVIÈVE — What's happening to you, Mom?

GERTRUDE — (*Worried*) You think something's happening to me? (*Beat*) No!...It's... this room...This room is haunting me...

GENEVIÈVE — Let's get out of here. You'll forget about it. Come with me and rest. Come! I feel so responsible. It's my fault...

She tries to draw her away.

GERTRUDE — Your fault?

GENEVIÈVE — Your heart attack...Dad told me all about it...

GERTRUDE — Ah! As you can see, it didn't kill me.

GENEVIÈVE — If I'd known...

GERTRUDE — Of course, you wouldn't have gone.

GENEVIÈVE — Well...at least I wouldn't have waited until the last day to say I was leaving. I would have...

GERTRUDE — What does it matter? It's over. What counts right now is... (*Beat*) All this!

GENEVIÈVE — Well there's no rush. I can easily sleep in another room in the meantime.

GERTRUDE — (*Stammering, brought back to reality*) Oh! right! This is your room... (*She looks around her, trembling like a handicapped person suddenly left without crutches*).

GENEVIÈVE — It's not a problem...You can use your own taste to decorate it. I won't always be here...If you like, I can even help you. (*Beat*) If we did it together, it seems to me...

GERTRUDE — Do you think so?...

GENEVIÈVE — Let's try! But first, you must tell me where you were going with this mix of styles. I have to say it creates a funny impression.

GERTRUDE — I was trying...I wanted...Oh! I've been changing my mind all the time! I was looking for...At first, I thought... (*She breaks off like someone who has an idea*) I wanted...

GENEVIÈVE — (*Forcing her to sit down*) Sit down. Calm down...

GERTRUDE — Wait...Wait! (*She gets back up, in a state of great agitation*) First I wanted...but that doesn't matter because suddenly...Oh! Geneviève, suddenly, this is so strange...All of a sudden, now...My Lord, my heart is beating so hard...Now I know what I need!...

GENEVIÈVE — Tell me. But don't get so excited.

GERTRUDE — It took me so long to finally understand. And yet it was there, way down inside me. A big bare room...Completely white...Completely white...

GENEVIÈVE — Well, the walls are already white...

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GERTRUDE — Not only the walls, everything. The drapes, the curtains, the carpet...

GENEVIÈVE — And the furniture would add colour?

GERTRUDE — No! No furniture. I would take out all the furniture. And the accessories too. Not a single object...Nothing! White...Only white... (*Beat*) The purest white...

GENEVIÈVE — (*Shocked*) That feels like a room for the dead!

GERTRUDE — Ah!...

GENEVIÈVE — (*Laughing. Ill at ease*) Or an alcove for a saint.

Gertrude, crushed, does not answer.

GENEVIÈVE — I would at least keep the armoire. It's beautiful...And this old dough box...What's inside? (*Lifts the cover*) I'm amazed you chose such a primitive piece of furniture...Look! a bit of flour.

Gertrude moves beside her.

GENEVIÈVE — In that corner, can you see it?...It's too white to be dust.

GERTRUDE — Flour!...

GENEVIÈVE — Maybe it's been there for a hundred years.

GERTRUDE — A woman made bread with it...I wonder how you make bread... (*Beat*) Rye bread! As common as rye bread. (*Beat*) Make bread... (*Beat*) Knowing how to make bread. That would be something... (*Beat. Sigh, gently and seriously*). This boy, Geneviève...Your father's wrong isn't he? You still love him, don't you?

GENEVIÈVE — Mom!

GERTRUDE — Did he hurt you?

GENEVIÈVE — No!... (*She laughs*) You're such a romantic!

GERTRUDE — (*Embarrassed*) Forgive me! I thought maybe you were too shy to tell us about your feelings...

GENEVIÈVE — I swear to you, he didn't mean anything to me. He wasn't even the first.

GERTRUDE — (*Shocked*) Wasn't even the...

GENEVIÈVE — Does that shock you?

GERTRUDE — (*Shaken*) I thought...Since you left us for him...

GENEVIÈVE — No! That's what I told you, but really, he was just an excuse. I was already thinking of leaving long before I met him.

GERTRUDE — (*Distraught*) But why? Why, Geneviève?

GENEVIÈVE — Oh! You know...To...To learn about life, as Renaud says. Only I was afraid. All alone, I didn't feel strong enough.

GERTRUDE — I thought there was nothing you were afraid of.

GENEVIÈVE — Really! I guess you also think it's easy to break away from your family?

GERTRUDE — No, I know it's not. Oh! I know all about that.

GENEVIÈVE — It took me so long to get there! Renaud was pushing and pushing, but I couldn't make up my mind.

GERTRUDE — Booboo?...

322 GENEVIÈVE — Without him I would never have had the nerve to leave home. And yet, I had to do it!

GERTRUDE — He has...He has no pity!

GENEVIÈVE — He's exactly what he should be.

GERTRUDE — What do you mean: what he should be? What is that supposed to mean?

Renaud enters.

RENAUD — Hi!

GENEVIÈVE — Well, there he is... (*Beat*) Doesn't even look surprised!

RENAUD — Dad just told me you were back. It's good to see you.

GENEVIÈVE — Yes, but you still think six months isn't long enough.

RENAUD — You'll soon figure that out for yourself.

GERTRUDE — Listen to the great spiritual leader.

RENAUD — Mom, I have no desire to fight with you...

GERTRUDE — The little philosopher with all the answers.

RENAUD — Corrine is downstairs, and I would like...

GERTRUDE — Before long he'll be advising you to leave again.

GENEVIÈVE — He won't need to!

GERTRUDE — What?...

GENEVIÈVE — I never should've come back. I'm sorry, Mom, but I couldn't ever live here again.

GERTRUDE — Will you please tell me what's wrong with me? What is it about me? What kind of a pest I am to make you all feel you have to break away from me?

RENAUD — Shit! Just listen to yourself. Still at it. Always bringing everything back to yourself. Can't you just forget yourself for a second? This is not about you. This is about Geneviève! And I'm warning you right after that it'll be about Corrine. So please try and forget your own precious self for a minute.

GERTRUDE — But what about you, Booboo?...You're staying, aren't you?

GENEVIÈVE — Oh! his problems are settled.

GERTRUDE — I want to know why he's staying.

GENEVIÈVE — He's staying...

GERTRUDE — Let him tell me.

RENAUD — I don't know how to explain it...It's as if for me...as if it doesn't matter any more...

GERTRUDE — (*In a rage*) We don't upset you any more? Is that what you mean? We don't count any more for you? Yes, that's what you said. You even wrote it down!

RENAUD — Well, yes!...But don't get angry, because...because in spite of everything I love you enough to know you need me.

GERTRUDE — (*Stammering*) Is...is that why?

RENAUD — Partly...How can I tell you? I'm not giving up on the idea of changing you.

GERTRUDE — (*Angry*) Changing me?...

RENAUD — And anyway, I'm getting there. Already I've made you drop some of your prejudices. You didn't even notice it. Already, I've made you think differently, admit it. **323**

GERTRUDE — (*Deeply shaken*) Yes!...it's true! Yes, you did that...You too, you did that...Like the others. And that...I know it now! I know it! (*Mad with rage*) That's what's killing me!

RENAUD — What's killing you?

GERTRUDE — But it's over! It can't go on! It has to stop!

Candle holder thrown with full force to the ground.

GENEVIÈVE — Mom!...

RENAUD — What's got into you? What are you doing?

The mirror falls.

GERTRUDE — I'm clearing the table. That's what I'm doing!

RENAUD — (*Trying to restrain her*) Mom!

The second candle holder falls. Geneviève picks up the objects as they fall.

GERTRUDE — I'm cleaning the place up! Everything has to go, everything! Your bilboquet, Geneviève!

Bilboquet thrown to the ground. Renaud and Geneviève try in vain to restrain Gertrude who is always one step ahead of them. The pile of furniture makes this stage action easier.

GENEVIÈVE — The clock!

Clock thrown to the floor.

GERTRUDE — Too late! Into the garbage with the rest! All that comes from you! All that comes from anybody else!

She throws the music box, which starts to play upon touching the ground.

RENAUD — What are you doing! Calm down! What's wrong with you...

GERTRUDE — Into the garbage! Get rid of it for me! Just look at what I'm doing with your dough box, Booboo!

He tries to hold onto the piece, but rage gives Gertrude so much strength she wins the struggle. She bursts out laughing.

GENEVIÈVE — Renaud! Do something!

GERTRUDE — The American armchair! The little Louis XV!

The two armchairs fall, one after the other. Geneviève manages for a moment to restrain her.

GENEVIÈVE — *(To Renaud)* Help me! Help me!

Renaud moves closer.

GERTRUDE — Don't touch me! Don't you dare touch me!

Renaud, speechless, backs away.

GERTRUDE — *(To Geneviève)* Not you either!

She raises her arm ready to strike.

GERTRUDE — Neither one of you!

GENEVIÈVE — Mom!

324 RENAUD — For Heaven's sake, listen to me! At least, listen to me!

He takes a step toward her.

GERTRUDE — Stay away from me!

RENAUD — *(Standing one of the armchairs up)* All I want you to do is to sit down and to rest...

GERTRUDE — Don't give me orders! Don't make it your business ever again to tell me what to do! Never again will anyone tell me what to do!

RENAUD — Yes, yes, yes!...But please, get hold of yourself!

GERTRUDE — You're not going to tell me what to feel either! That's for me to decide! For me alone! And for starters, get out of my way!

RENAUD — I need to talk to you! *(Pleading)* O.K.? Listen to me!

GERTRUDE — Get out of my way, I'm warning you!

GENEVIÈVE — Please, Mom!...

GERTRUDE — Let me by! *(She moves away)* And don't follow me!

RENAUD — Where are you going?

She stops at the door and turns to them.

GERTRUDE — That's none of your business. I'll be back, don't worry. Stay there, I'll be back...I won't be long. Oh! I won't be long!

She leaves. A time during which only the music box tune is heard.

RENAUD — But what's wrong with her? What's happened to her?

GENEVIÈVE — I've never seen her like that!

RENAUD — I haven't either!

GENEVIÈVE — Is she going?...Do you think...?

RENAUD — I don't think anything at all. Be quiet!

Henri appears. Upset.

HENRI — What's going on? I heard shouting...And furniture falling...

GENEVIÈVE — It's Mom...

HENRI — A heart attack?

RENAUD — No, a crisis. (*Beat*) A sort of crisis...

GENEVIÈVE — (*Crying*) It's my fault!

HENRI — Where is she? (*Calling*) Gertrude?

RENAUD — Wait! In her state, it's better to let her calm down.

HENRI — Her state?

RENAUD — Sssh, listen...

A moment of silence.

GENEVIÈVE — I can't hear a thing!

HENRI — How about explaining to me?...How about telling me?...

GENEVIÈVE — It's my fault!

RENAUD — Let it go, Geneviève, let it go! You have nothing to do with it.

HENRI — Are you going to explain?

RENAUD — Wait! I don't know what to tell you. Give me a bit of time to collect my thoughts. I don't understand what happened.

GENEVIÈVE — It's my fault, I tell you. It was right after I told her... (*She is crying*).

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HENRI — What did you tell her?

GENEVIÈVE — That I was leaving again...

HENRI — Ah! You mean you...? (*Beat*) Come on now, do you even know what you want? You leave, you come back, you leave again? What is this house to you? A train station?

GENEVIÈVE — This place is unliveable, can't you see! Mom's not the same any more. I don't recognize her.

HENRI — Well, I beg your pardon! She's the same, plus your leaving. It's as simple as that.

RENAUD — That's not what this is about. Geneviève is wrong...

HENRI — Let me speak! (*To Geneviève*) So you told her you were leaving again, just like that, with no warning...?

GENEVIÈVE — Yes!

HENRI — When you know you nearly killed her the first time?

GENEVIÈVE — Yes! It's just that stupid!

RENAUD — I know that, but I repeat, Geneviève is wrong. It wasn't about her when Mom got angry!

HENRI — What...? Are you saying it's nothing more than a fit of anger?

RENAUD — Of rage! Not anger, rage!

HENRI — Well, good...You frightened me. I imagined the worst.

GENEVIÈVE — But you should have seen her! She turned into a mad woman!

HENRI — Oh! I've seen that before.

RENAUD — No, never like that. I swear to you. She was scary. She was throwing everything on the floor. She was trying to break everything.

GENEVIÈVE — I think we should go see what she's doing...

HENRI — I'll go.

RENAUD — Wait! She told us not to come after her.

GENEVIÈVE — But she was supposed to come back right away. And you can see she's not back. What if...

She stops.

HENRI — What if what?

GENEVIÈVE — She could...She would be very capable...

RENAUD — Stop!

GENEVIÈVE — She would be capable of killing herself! Maybe that's even why she told us not to go after her.

Henri moves quickly away. Renaud runs after him and restrains him.

RENAUD — Let me go! I'm the only one she'll listen to!

HENRI — Stay there!

GENEVIÈVE — (*To her father*) He's right! It's better for him to go.

HENRI — Stay there! I'm the one who'll speak to her...Stay there I tell you! (*Beat*) Is she my wife or yours?

326 *Astonished, Renaud stops.*

HENRI — If I need you, I'll call you.

Gertrude appears at the door. Street clothes. Suitcase in hand.

Stupor...Beat.

GENEVIÈVE — Mom!...

RENAUD — Why the suitcase?

HENRI — No, no, Gertrude...

GERTRUDE — Yes, Henri.

RENAUD — You can't mean...?

HENRI — (*Regaining his self-control*) After all why not? When you stop and think about it, why not? Your mother hasn't been out of the house in six months! A little trip...

GERTRUDE — I'm not leaving on a trip.

GENEVIÈVE — So then, where are you going? And why? What are you thinking?

GERTRUDE — I don't know. All I know is I have to leave, and right away.

RENAUD — Mom, you can't do this!

HENRI — (*Taking each of them in turn as witness*) He's right isn't he?...Isn't he? This is absurd!...Put down that suitcase! Have you lost your mind or what?

RENAUD — At your age, Mom...There is no more leaving.

GENEVIÈVE — It's true. It's hard to imagine...Try to understand!

HENRI — You see. I'm not the one saying it!

RENAUD — It's too late!

GERTRUDE — Says who? Who decided that? Are there laws about it?

RENAUD — Think about it for a minute, good Lord! Simple good sense...Why leave? Your life is done now!

GERTRUDE — I'm sure I still have five minutes more...Don't I?

HENRI — Gertrude, stop and think...They don't dare say it to your face, but it's...it's perfectly ridiculous! I'm warning you. You will be the laughing stock of the town!

Gertrude starts to laugh.

HENRI — I swear to you, it makes no sense! Where did you get such an idea? You've never talked about this before!

GENEVIÈVE — If you think it's fun to live alone, you're wrong!

HENRI — Especially for a woman your age!...And who's never been able to cope on her own. What will you do with your life? I don't suppose you'll be looking for love. So...?

RENAUD — (*Bluntly*) She'll be breaking away from us, that's what. (*Beat*) (*Angry*) That's what she wants.

GERTRUDE — Well, here's a glimmer of intelligence. Thank you, Renaud.

RENAUD — And what's more, you're calling me Renaud!

GERTRUDE — You have to start somewhere.

HENRI — (*Feeling lost*) You used to say...you used to say a mother doesn't need to get away from her children.

GERTRUDE — One stupid thing more or less. You know, I never counted.

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GENEVIÈVE — And you're laughing!...When I left, I was choking back tears...

HENRI — Wait a minute. She won't be laughing for long. This isn't over. (*Beat*) Put down that suitcase, Gertrude.

Gertrude, caught short, makes a move to put down her suitcase, but immediately catches herself and stands back up, once again ready to leave.

HENRI — Listen to me. One final question. Just one. What will you live on?

Gertrude stops.

HENRI — Huh?...What will you live on?

Gertrude puts down her suitcase.

HENRI — After all you have no money of your own. Money...I am the money!

GERTRUDE — (*Caught short. To Geneviève*) How did you manage?

GENEVIÈVE — I worked...But you don't know how to do anything.

HENRI — There it is!

Gertrude sits down, devastated.

RENAUD — (*Protesting to Henri*) You're not going to make her stay because of...

HENRI — This is none of your business! The matter is settled. Take off your coat, Gertrude. Whether you like it or not, your place is here!...

GENEVIÈVE — Dad!...

HENRI — Be quiet!

RENAUD — All the same!...

HENRI — Be quiet, I tell you. Both of you, shut up!

Gertrude stands up, illuminated.

GERTRUDE — How stupid I am! I do have a profession after all.

HENRI — A profession?

GERTRUDE — What I do here...what's to stop me from doing it somewhere else? Looking after a home, organizing parties, cooking, being a hostess...I can earn a living that way.

RENAUD — You'd do that?

GENEVIÈVE — You?

HENRI — You'd go that far?

She moves away.

GENEVIÈVE — Wait!...You haven't said anything about coming back...

RENAUD — At least you knew that I'd return.

GENEVIÈVE — Say something.

HENRI — Well, answer! (*Beat*) Can't you at least tell them that?

GERTRUDE — I don't know!...And what does it matter? Even if I were never to come back? Aren't you all old enough to be orphans?

HENRI — Gertrude...

GERTRUDE — (*In a rush to get it over*) Oh, come on. Once you get over the shock, everything will be just fine. Geneviève, you will no longer need to go away. For a while, at least. Renaud, you will give my room to Corrine. It's the nicest room in the

328 house. I'd like her to enjoy it.

RENAUD — If this is all because of her...

GERTRUDE — No, Renaud! Whether you like it or not, this time it really is about me.

RENAUD — Let me give you a hug.

GENEVIÈVE — Me too!

Gertrude hugs them both.

HENRI — Gertrude!...Gertrude. If...If I told you...If I insisted...If I asked you...

GERTRUDE — What?...To behave like all the women who wait for their husbands to die before they feel free to breathe?

HENRI — (*Beat*) You can go.

GERTRUDE — Thank you.

She moves away. Geneviève follows her.

GENEVIÈVE — It isn't easy. I warn you! Living alone!...

Gertrude stops, suddenly filled with anguish. All three of them step toward her as though to make a circle around her, take her back. Gertrude regains a hold on herself.

GERTRUDE — (*Stepping back*) Be quiet now...let me go...I have to do this!...

She walks out.

CURTAIN.