

DANTON'S DEATH

*A Drama*



## CHARACTERS

### *Deputies of the National Convention*

GEORGES DANTON  
LEGENBRE  
CAMILLE DESMOULINS  
HÉRAULT-SÉCHELLES  
LACROIX  
PHILIPPEAU  
FABRE D'ÉGLANTINE  
MERCIER  
THOMAS PAINE

### *Members of the Committee of Public Safety*

ROBESPIERRE  
SAINT-JUST  
BARÈRE  
COLLOT D'HERBOIS  
BILLAUD-VARENNE

### *Members of the Committee of General Security*

AMAR  
VOULAND

### *Presidents of the Revolutionary Tribunal*

HERMAN  
DUMAS  
CHAUMETTE, *Procurator of the Commune*

DILLON, *a General*  
FOUQUIER-TINVILLE, *Public Prosecutor*  
PARIS, *a friend of Danton's*  
SIMON, *a theatrical prompter*  
SIMON'S WIFE  
LAFLOTTE  
JULIE, *Danton's wife*  
LUCILLE, *Camille Desmoulins' wife*  
ROSALIE, *a whore*  
ADELAIDE, *a whore*  
MARION, *a whore*

*Ladies at gaming tables, ladies and gentlemen together with a young gentleman and Eugénie on a promenade, citizens, citizen-soldiers, deputies from Lyons, other deputies, Jacobins, presidents of the Jacobin Club and the National Convention, jailers, executioners, and carters, men and women of the people, whores, ballad-singer, beggar, etc.*

## DANTON'S DEATH

### ACT ONE

#### SCENE I—A drawing room

HÉRAULT-SÉCHELLES *and some ladies at a gaming table.*  
DANTON *and* JULIE, *somewhat farther off, DANTON on a stool at JULIE's feet.*

DANTON. Look at that sweet little bitch over there! She knows how to play her cards all right; deals her husband the hearts and every other man her—. You women could make *any* man fall in love with a lie.

*Julie.* Danton, do you believe in me?

*Danton.* How should I know! We know little enough about one another. We're thick-skinned creatures who reach out our hands toward one another, but it means nothing—leather rubbing against leather—we're very lonely.

*Julie.* But you know me, Danton.

*Danton.* Yes, that's what they call it. You have dark eyes and curly hair and a delicate complexion and you always call me: dear Georges! But [*Touches her forehead and eyelids.*] what about here, and here? What goes on behind here? No, there's nothing delicate about our senses. Know one another? We'd have to crack open our skulls and drag each other's thoughts out by the tails.

*Lady* [*to HÉRAULT-SÉCHELLES*]. Just what is it you have in mind there with your fingers?

*Héroult-Séchéelles.* Why, nothing!

*Lady.* Then don't crook your thumbs in that way, I can't stand the sight of it!

*Héroult-Séchéelles.* Understand, my love, such things can't be put down simply by willing.

*Danton.* No, Julie, I love you as I love the grave.

*Julie* [*turning away*]. Oh!

*Danton.* No, listen to me! They say that there's peace

in the grave, and that grave and peace are one. If that is true, then whenever I lie with you I already lie beneath the earth. O you precious grave, your lips are passing bells, your voice their knell, your breasts my burial mound and your heart my coffin.

*Lady.* You lose!

*Hérault-Séchelles.* Well, amorous adventures cost money the same as all the others.

*Lady.* You declare your love like a deaf-mute—on your fingers.

*Hérault-Séchelles.* And why not? One might say that they are less likely to be misunderstood. I arranged an affair with a queen, my fingers were princes transformed into spiders, and you, madame, were the Good Fairy. But it didn't work out too well: the queen was always in childbed whelping sixty knaves a minute. I'll never let a daughter of mine play a game like that: all these ladies and gentlemen playing at goats and monkeys and the knave coming so soon after.

CAMILLE DESMOULINS *and* PHILIPPEAU *enter.*

*Hérault-Séchelles.* Philippeau, how sad you look! Did you tear a hole in your red cap? Has Saint Jacob made a nasty face at you? Did it rain while they were guillotining this morning? Oh—and you got a bad seat and couldn't see a thing!

*Camille.* Parodying Socrates perhaps? Do you know what that most excellent of philosophers said one day to Alcibiades when he saw him sad and depressed? "Did you lose your shield on the battlefield?" he said. "Were you beaten in a race or at sword-fighting? Did someone sing or play the lyre better than you?" There was a classical republican for you! We ought to exchange some of our guillotine Romanticism for that!

*Philippeau.* Another twenty victims fell today. We were wrong: the only reason the Hébertists were sent to the scaffold was that they weren't systematic enough, and perhaps, too, because the Decemvirs thought themselves lost if any man should last a whole week and be more feared than they.

*Hérault-Séchelles.* They'd like to send us back to the

Stone Age. Saint-Just would be pleased if we crawled around on all fours again; that way Robespierre could invent for us, according to the instructions of our good Monsieur Rousseau, the watchmaker's son from Geneva, all sorts of caps and school benches and an Almighty God.

*Philippeau.* They would never hesitate to add a few more zeros to Marat's death figures. How much longer must we be base and bloody as newborn children, with coffins for cradles, and play with heads? We must make some advance: the Committee of Clemency for Prisoners must be put into effect and the expelled deputies reinstated!

*Hérault-Séchelles.* The Revolution must be reorganized. The Revolution must end and the Republic begin. In our Constitution we must place right above duty, contentment above virtue, and self-preservation above punishment. Every man must assert himself and be able to live according to his own nature. He can be reasonable or unreasonable, educated or ignorant, good or bad—that has nothing to do with the state. We're all fools, and not one of us has the right to impose his own foolishness on anyone else. Every man must be able to find pleasure in his own way, but only in so far as he does not do so at another's expense or disturb another's pleasure.

*Camille.* The Constitution must be a transparent veil that clings close to the body of the people. Through it we must see the pulsing of each vein, the flexing of every muscle, the quiver of every sinew. Her body can be beautiful or ugly, because it has the right to be exactly what it is; and we have no right to dress her as we see fit. We shall rap the knuckles of them who see fit to cast nun's veils across the naked shoulders of our sinful but beloved France. We want our gods to be naked and our goddesses to be free with themselves. Olympian delights and lips that sing melodiously of wicked love that sets the body free! We would never think of preventing our good Roman Robespierre and his virtuous Republicans from cooking their carrots in a corner, but let them know that there will be no more gladiatorial games. Our most excellent Epicurus and Venus with her delightful buttocks must stand as porters of our Republic in place of Marat

and St. Chalier.—Danton, you must lead the attack at the next Convention!

*Danton.* I must, you must, *he* must. If we live that long, as the old women say. In an hour we shall have sixty minutes less to live. Right, my boy?

*Desmoulins.* What has that to do with it? It stands to reason.

*Danton.* Yes, everything stands to reason. Who do you propose should set all these grand ideas in motion?

*Philippeau.* Ourselves and all other honorable people.

*Danton.* That's a rather large *and* I should say; it puts us at some distance from one another; in fact it's far enough that Honesty will lose her breath before we meet. And what if we do! All that one can do with honorable people is lend them money, be godfather to their children, and marry one's daughters to them!

*Camille.* If you knew that when you began, why did you ever start to fight?

*Danton.* Because these followers of Robespierre with their puritanical ways were repugnant to me. Swaggering about like little Catos, I wanted to give them a good boot in the ass. That's the way I am. [*He rises.*]

*Julie.* You're going?

*Danton* [to JULIE]. I can't stay here. These people and their politics get on my nerves. [*While leaving.*] If I may prophesy hurriedly in passing: our statue of Liberty has not yet been cast, the great furnace is glowing hot, there is still time for us to burn our fingers. [*Goes off.*]

*Camille.* Leave him alone! Do you really suppose he could keep out of it if it ever came to that?

*Hérault-Séchelles.* It would only be a pastime with him, like playing chess.

SCENE II—A street

SIMON and his WIFE.

SIMON [*beating his WIFE*]. You filthy pimp, you haggard poisonous pill, you worm-eaten apple of sin!

*Wife.* Oh, help me! Help me!

*People* [*come running*]. Get them apart, get them apart!

*Simon.* No, leave me be, good Romans! I'll batter her bones to bits! Oh, you holy whore!

*Wife.* Holy whore! We'll see about that!

*Simon.*

I'll tear the clothing off your wormy body

And bake your naked carrion in the sun.

O bed of a whore, there's lechery in every wrinkle of your body.

*They are separated.*

*First Citizen.* What's the matter?

*Simon.* Where is the virgin? Tell me! No, I can't call her that. The maiden! No, nor that. That woman, that female! Not that, no, not even that! There's but one single name left—oh, how it chokes me! I have no breath to speak it.

*Second Citizen.* It's a good thing, too, or it would stink of brandy.

*Simon.*

O ancient Virginius, veil your hairless head,

The Raven Shame doth sit upon thy pate

And pecks at thine own eyes. A knife, my Romans!

*He sinks to the ground.*

*Wife.* He's usually a good man, but he can't take much drink; whisky's a third leg to him.

*Second Citizen.* Then he walks with three legs.

*Wife.* No, he falls.

*Second Citizen.* Of course; first he walks with all three, then falls over the third till the third falls by itself.

*Simon.* Vampire's tongue! To drink my heart's warm blood!

*Wife.* Just leave him be, this is about the time he grows sentimental; he'll be all right soon.

*First Citizen.* What's the matter with him?

*Wife.* Well, you see, I was sitting on a rock in the sun to warm myself, you see—you see, we've got no wood at home for the fire—

*Second Citizen.* Try your husband's nose.

*Wife.* And my daughter went down there around the corner—she's a good girl and supports her parents.

*Simon.* Ha, she confesses!

*Wife.* You Judas Iscariot! You wouldn't have a pair of pants to pull *up* if those young gentlemen didn't pull theirs *down* with her! You dirty brandy barrel, you want to go thirsty when our little spring dries up? We work with every limb we've got, why not with that one, too? Her mother worked it overtime when she brought her into the world, and it cost her enough pain, too. So why shouldn't *she* work it for her mother! Eh? Even if it does cost her a little pain! Eh? You idiot!

*Simon.* Ah, Lucretia! A knife, my Romans, give me a knife! O Appius Claudius!

*First Citizen.* Yes, a knife, but not for the pitiable whore! What has she done? Nothing! It's her empty belly makes her whore and beg. A knife for the men who buy the flesh of our wives and daughters! Woe to them who lust after the daughters of citizens! You have rumblings in your bellies, they have stomach cramps; you have holes in your jackets, they have warm coats; you have calluses on your hands, they have silk gloves. Ergo: you work and they sit on their asses; ergo: you earn the bread and they steal it; ergo: when you want back a few coins of your property they've stolen you have to go whoring and begging; ergo: they are thieves and must be killed!

*Third Citizen.* The only blood in their veins is what they've sucked from us. Once they told us: "Kill the aristocrats, they're the preying wolves!" We killed the aristocrats and hung them from street lamps. They told us: "The Girondins are starving you out!" We guillotined the Girondins. But they're the ones who stripped the bodies naked, and here we stand bare and freezing as ever. We'll peel the skin from their thighs and make pants for ourselves. We'll burn the fat from their asses to make us richer soups. Away! Kill a man without a hole in his jacket!

*First Citizen.* Kill a man who reads and writes!

*Second Citizen.* Kill a man who walks like an aristocrat!

*All [screaming].* Kill! Kill!

A YOUNG MAN is dragged past.

*Several Voices.* He's got a handkerchief! An aristocrat! To the street lamp with him! To the street lamp!

*Second Citizen.* What's this? He doesn't blow his nose through his fingers? To the street lamp with him!

*Young Man.* Gentlemen! Gentlemen!

*Second Citizen.* There are no gentlemen here! To the street lamp with him!

*Several Voices [sing].*

Those who lie below the ground,  
They will soon by worms be found;  
Better by the neck to wave  
Than rot below in a dismal grave!

*Young Man.* Mercy!

*Third Citizen.* It's only a game with a hemp noose around your neck! It only takes a minute; we're more merciful than you aristocrats. We spend our lives at the end of a rope, hang there for sixty years, kicking—but we'll cut ourselves free. To the street lamp with him!

*Young Man.* Hanging me on a light won't make things any brighter for you.

*Citizens.* Bravo! Well said!

*Several Voices.* Let him go!

THE YOUNG MAN runs off. ROBESPIERRE enters accompanied by WOMEN and SANS-CULOTTES.

*Robespierre.* What is it, citizens?

*Third Citizen.* What is it you'll give us, you mean? Those few drops of blood shed in August and September still haven't turned the people's cheeks red. The guillotine is too slow. We need a hailstorm.

*First Citizen.* Our wives and children cry out for bread, we want to feed them on the flesh of the aristocrats. Kill every man without a hole in his jacket!

*All.* Kill! Kill!

*Robespierre.* In the name of the law!

*First Citizen.* What is the law?

*Robespierre.* The will of the people.

*First Citizen.* We are the people and we don't want the law; ergo: our will is the law; ergo: in the name of the law there is no more law; ergo: kill!

*Several Voices.* Listen to Aristides there! Listen to the incorruptible Robespierre!

*A Woman.* Listen to the Messiah who is sent to choose

and judge; he will strike the wicked with the sharp of his sword. His eyes are the eyes of truth, his hands the hands of justice!

*Robespierre.* Poor, virtuous people! You do your duty. You sacrifice your enemies. People—how great a people you are! You reveal yourselves amidst lightning and thunderclaps. But, my people, your blows must not wound your own bodies; in your rage you must not murder yourselves. You can be overcome only by your own strength, and your enemies know that. Your legislators watch you, they will guide your hands; their eyes cannot be deceived, your hands cannot fail. Come with me to the Jacobin Club! They, your brothers, will extend their arms to greet you, and we shall hold bloody judgment over our enemies.

*Many Voices.* To the Jacobin Club! Long live Robespierre!

*All go off.*

*Simon.* Alone—all, all alone! [*He tries to rise.*]

*Wife.* There. [*She supports him.*]

*Simon.* Ah, my gentle Baucis! Why must you pour coals of fire upon my head?

*Wife.* Stand up now!

*Simon.* Why do you turn away? Can you forgive me, my Portia? Did I strike you? It was not my hand nor arm but my madness did it.

His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.

Then Hamlet did it not; Hamlet denies it.

Where is our daughter, where is our little girl?

*Wife.* There, around the corner.

*Simon.* Let us get her then. Come, my virtuous wife.

*They both go off.*

#### SCENE III—*The Jacobin Club*

DEPUTY FROM LYONS. Our brothers from Lyons have sent us here to pour our bitter indignance in your ears. We do not know whether the cart which drove Ronsin to the guillotine was the hearse of Liberty, but we do know

that since that day the murderers of Chalier have walked the streets as safely as if no grave awaited them. Have you forgotten that Lyons is a stain upon the soil of France which must be covered over with the limbs of traitors? Have you forgotten that this whore of kings can only wash her scabs in the waters of the Rhône? Have you forgotten that this flood of Revolution must cause Pitt's navies in the Mediterranean to run aground on the bodies of aristocrats? You are murdering the Revolution with your compassion. The breath of an aristocrat is the death-rattle of Freedom. A coward dies for the Republic, a Jacobin kills for it. I tell you this: that unless we find in you the driving power of the tenth of August, of September, and the thirty-first of May, there remains for us, as for the patriot Galliard, only the suicidal dagger of Cato.

*Applause and confused cries.*

*A Jacobin.* We will drink the cup of Socrates with you!

*Legendre* [*springs to the tribune*]. We have no need to look to Lyons for traitors. These people who wear silken clothes, who ride about in carriages, who sit in loges in the theatre and speak according to the Dictionary of the Academy, have for several days now felt their heads secure upon their shoulders. They are witty and say that Marat and Chalier must be helped to a second martyrdom, that they must be guillotined in effigy.

*There is a violent commotion in the assembly.*

*Several Voices.* Those men are dead—their tongues have guillotined them.

*Legendre.* May the blood of these saints be upon them! I now ask the present members of the Committee of Public Safety: Since when have your ears grown so deaf—

*Collot d'Herbois* [*interrupts him*]. And I ask you, Legendre: Whose voice gives breath to such thoughts that they may come alive and speak such treason? It is time we tore off our masks! Listen! The cause accuses its effect, the voice its own echo, and the premise its conclusion. The Committee of Public Safety understands more logic than that, Legendre. Calm yourself! The busts

of these saints will remain where they are, they shall transform traitors into stone like Medusa heads.

*Robespierre.* I demand the tribune.

*The Jacobins.* Listen! Listen to the incorruptible Robespierre!

*Robespierre.* We have waited only for the cry of indignation to resound from all sides before we spoke. Our eyes were open, we saw the enemy arm himself and rise up, but we did not sound the alarm; we allowed the people to watch over itself; it has not slept, it has taken up arms and made clamor. We allowed the enemy to come forth from his ambush, we allowed him to draw near; he stands there now, open and unconcealed in the bright light of day; every stroke will strike home, he is dead the moment you see him.—I have told you all this before: the internal enemies of the Republic have fallen into two factions, as if into two armies. Under banners of different colors and by different ways they march toward the same end. One of these factions no longer exists. In their affected madness they sought to cast aside as worn-out weaklings the most proven Patriots of the Republic in order to rob us of our strongest allies. They declared war on the Godhead and on property to create a diversion in favor of the kings. They parodied the sublime drama of the Revolution to discredit it with calculated excesses. Hébert's triumph would have brought chaos on the Republic, and despotism would have been satisfied. The sword of the law has struck down that traitor. But what do those foreign enemies of the Republic care as long as they still have criminals of another sort to achieve the same end? We have done nothing so long as there is another faction still to be annihilated. This faction is the opposite of the other. They would drive us to be weak; their battle cry is: "Mercy." They would tear from the people their arms and the strength they need to wield those arms, and deliver them up to the kings naked and uncraved. The arm of the Republic is Terror, the strength of the Republic is Virtue—Virtue because without it Terror is pernicious; Terror because without it Virtue is powerless. Terror is the consequence of Virtue, it is nothing other than swift, stern, and unswerving justice. They say that Terror is the weapon

of despotism and that therefore our government is a despotism. Yes! But only in so far as the swords in the hands of heroes who fight for Freedom are like unto the sabers with which the satellites of tyrants are armed. If the despot rules his brutelike subjects by means of Terror, then, as a despot, he is justified. If by means of the same Terror you destroy the enemies of Freedom, then you, as founders of the Republic, are no less justified. The government of this Revolution is the despotism of Freedom against tyranny. Certain persons call out for mercy toward the Royalists! Mercy for villains? No! Mercy for the innocent, mercy for the weak, mercy for the unfortunate, mercy for mankind! Only peaceable citizens deserve protection from society. Only Republicans are citizens in a Republic, Royalists and foreigners are enemies. To punish the oppressors of mankind is mercy; to forgive them, barbarism. Every sign of false sensitivity appears to me to be sighs that wing their way to England or to Austria. But not content to disarm the people's hands, they also seek to poison the purest sources of our strength through vice. This is the subtlest, the most dangerous, and the most abominable attack of all upon Freedom. Vice is the aristocracy's mark of Cain. In a Republic this becomes not merely a moral but a political crime as well; the man of vice is a political enemy of Freedom, he is all the more dangerous the greater the services he appears to perform. The most dangerous citizen is the one who finds it easier to wear out a dozen red caps than do a single good deed. You will understand me more easily if you recall those persons who once lived in attics but now drive about in carriages and fornicate with former marquises and baronesses. We may well ask whether the people have been plundered, or whether the golden hands of kings have been pressed when we see the legislators of the people parade about with all the vices and all the luxuries of former courtiers, when we see all these marquises and counts of the Revolution marrying rich wives, giving sumptuous banquets, gambling, keeping servants, and wearing priceless clothes. We may well be amazed when we hear of their empty exhibits of wit, their esthetic pretensions, and their good manners. A short time ago one of them parodied Tacitus in a most shameless way;

I could answer out of Sallust and travesty Catiline, though I think there are no more strokes necessary: the portrait is complete. We will have no compromise, no armistice with men whose only thought was to plunder the people, and who hoped to carry out this plan of plunder with impunity, men for whom the Republic was a speculation and the Revolution a trade! Terrified by the torrent of examples we have made, they seek softly now to mitigate the hand of our justice. We are to believe that each says to himself: "We are not virtuous enough to be so terrible. O lawgiving philosophers, have mercy on our weaknesses! I dare not say to you that I am vicious; rather I say to you: 'Be not so inhuman!'"—Calm yourselves, my virtue-loving people, O Patriots, be calm! Say to your brethren in Lyons: "The sword of the law will not rust in the hands of him to whom it was entrusted!" We shall set our Republic a great example.

*General applause.*

*Many Voices.* Long live the Republic! Long live Robespierre!

*President.* The session is closed.

SCENE IV—A street

LACROIX. LEGENDRE

LACROIX. What have you done, Legendre! Do you realize whose heads you've thrown down with those busts of yours?

*Legendre.* A few dandies and some elegant women, that's all.

*Lacroix.* You're a suicide, a shadow that kills its original with itself.

*Legendre.* I don't understand.

*Lacroix.* I thought Collot spoke plainly enough.

*Legendre.* What does that matter? He was drunk again.

*Lacroix.* Fools, children, and—well?—drunk men tell the truth. Whom do you think Robespierre meant when he spoke of Catiline?

*Legendre.* Well?

*Lacroix.* It's simple enough. The atheists and extremists have been sent to the guillotine; but the people have not been helped, they run about in the streets barefoot and swear they'll make shoes out of the aristocrats' skins. The thermometer of the guillotine must not fall; a few degrees lower and the Committee of Public Safety can make its bed on the Place de la Révolution.

*Legendre.* What have my busts to do with all this?

*Lacroix.* You still don't see? You've made the counter-revolution officially known, you've forced the Committee to action, you've led their hands. The people are a Minotaur that must be fed with corpses weekly or they will eat the Committee alive.

*Legendre.* Where is Danton?

*Lacroix.* How should I know? He's looking for the Venus de' Medici piecemeal among all the whores of the Palais Royal; he's making a mosaic, as he puts it. God only knows what limb he's working at now. Pity that nature cuts up beauty in such small pieces, like Medea her brothers, and deposits them haphazardly in people's bodies.—Let's go to the Palais Royal!

SCENE V—A room

DANTON. MARION

MARION. No, leave me alone. I'll sit here at your feet. I'll tell you a story.

*Danton.* You might put your lips to better use.

*Marion.* No, leave me here like this.—My mother was a clever woman; she always told me that purity was the loveliest of virtues. When people would come to our house and begin talking about certain things, she always sent me out of the room; and when I asked her what they meant, she said I should be ashamed asking such questions; then when she gave me books to read I almost always had to leave out certain pages. But I could read as much of the Bible as I wanted because everything there was holy. Still there were parts of it that I never understood. I didn't want to ask anybody, so I brooded over them myself. Then the spring came; there was something



happening all around me in which I had no share. I was in an atmosphere all my own, and it almost stifled me. I looked at my body; at times it seemed that there were two of me, and then they would melt again into one. About this time a young man came to the house. He was very beautiful and often talked to me about silly things. I didn't know exactly what they meant, but I had to laugh. My mother made him come often, and that pleased us both. Finally we didn't see why we shouldn't as soon lie next to one another between two sheets as sit beside one another on two chairs. I enjoyed that much more than his conversation and couldn't understand why they wanted me to be content with the smaller pleasures rather than the larger one. We did it secretly. And so it went on. But I became like a sea that swallows down everything and sinks deeper and deeper into itself. The only fact that existed for me was my opposite, all men melted into one body. It was my nature, what choice did I have? Finally he noticed. He came one morning and kissed me as though he wanted to suffocate me; his arms wound around my neck, I was terribly afraid. Then he let go of me and laughed and said that he had almost done a foolish thing; that I should keep my dress and wear it, that it would wear out soon enough by itself, and that he didn't want to spoil my fun for me too soon, because it was all I had. Then he went away; again I didn't know what he meant. That evening I sat at the window; I'm very sensitive, and the only hold I have on my surroundings is through what I feel; I sank into the waves of the sunset. A crowd of people came down the street then, children running ahead of them and women looking out of their windows. I looked down: they were carrying him past in a basket, the moon was reflected on his pale forehead, his hair was wet—he had drowned himself. All I could do was cry.—It was the only time that my life ever stopped. Other people have Sundays and weekdays, they work six days and pray on the seventh; once every year on their birthdays they become sentimental and every year they think about the New Year. I don't understand that at all: I know nothing of such breaks in time, of change. I am always only one thing, an unbroken longing and grasping, a flame, a

stream. My mother died of grief. People were always pointing at me because of it. That's stupid. There's only one thing that matters, whether it's our bodies, or holy pictures, or flowers, or children's toys. It's all the same feeling: the person who enjoys the most, prays the most.

*Danton.* Why can't I contain every part of your beauty inside me, hold it in my arms?

*Marion.* Danton, your lips have eyes.

*Danton.* I wish I were a part of air that I could bathe you all about in my flood, break myself on every cape of your exquisite body.

LACROIX, ADELAIDE, and ROSALIE enter.

*Lacroix* [*remains in the doorway*]. You will excuse me for laughing, but I can't help myself.

*Danton* [*angrily*]. Well?

*Lacroix.* I was just thinking of the street.

*Danton.* So?

*Lacroix.* Well, there were two dogs in the street just now, a great Dane and an Italian lapdog; they were having a go at it.

*Danton.* What do you mean by that?

*Lacroix.* It merely occurred to me and I couldn't help laughing. It was quite edifying! Girls were looking out of their windows—one should be careful and never even let them sit in the sun: flies are liable to do it in their hands; it might give them cause for thought.—Legendre and I have gone through almost every cell here. The little Nuns of the Revelation through the Flesh clung to our coat-tails and asked our blessing. Legendre is giving one of them her penance now, though he may have to fast for a month afterwards himself. I've brought two of our priestesses of the body along with me.

*Marion.* Good day, Mlle. Adelaide! Good day, Mlle. Rosalie!

*Rosalie.* It's been a long time since we had the pleasure.

*Marion.* Yes, I'm sorry too.

*Adelaide.* My God, we never have a minute free.

*Danton* [*to ROSALIE*]. Well, your hips seem to get better by the day, my dear.

*Rosalie.* One improves with practice.

*Lacroix.* What's the difference between the ancient and the modern Adonis?

*Danton.* And Adclaide has become very virtuously interesting; a charming change. Her face resembles a fig leaf that she holds up to cover her entire body. A fig tree like that throws a most wonderful shade on so busy a thoroughfare.

*Adelaide.* I'd be nothing but a country road if not for monsieur who—

*Danton.* I understand; just don't be a bitch, my sweet!

*Lacroix.* No, listen! A modern Adonis isn't torn by a boar, he's torn by sows; his wound isn't received in the thigh any more but in the groin; and instead of roses, buds of mercury sprout from his blood.

*Danton.* And Mlle. Rosalie is a restored torso, of which only the hips and feet are genuine antique. She's a magnetic needle: what the pole of the head repels, the pole of the feet attracts; her middle is an equator, where everyone who crosses the line must baptize his parts in mercuric chloride.

*Lacroix.* Two sisters of mercy—each serving in her own hospital, that is to say in their own bodies.

*Rosalie.* Shame on you, making our ears turn red!

*Adelaide.* You ought to have more manners!

ADELAIDE and ROSALIE go off.

*Danton.* Good night, you pretty children!

*Lacroix.* Good night, you mines of mercury!

*Danton.* I feel sorry for them, they came for their supper.

*Lacroix.* Listen, Danton, I've just come from the Jacobin Club.

*Danton.* Is that all?

*Lacroix.* The delegates from Lyons read a proclamation; they said the only thing left them to do is wrap themselves in their togas like Caesar; each of them making a face as though to say to his neighbor: "The knife won't hurt, Pactus!" Legendre cried out that they wanted to

break the busts of Chalier and Marat. I think he wants to paint his face red again; he got through the Terror unharmed, and children tug at his coattails in the streets.

*Danton.* And Robespierre?

*Lacroix.* He drummed his fingers on the tribune and said that Virtue must rule through Terror. The phrase made my neck feel raw.

*Danton.* It planes boards for the guillotine.

*Lacroix.* And Collot cried out like a man possessed that they must tear off their masks.

*Danton.* I'm afraid their faces would come with them.

PARIS enters.

*Lacroix.* What is it, Fabricus?

*Paris.* I went straight from the Jacobin Club to Robespierre and demanded an explanation. He tried to look like Brutus sacrificing his sons. He spoke in general terms about duty, and said that where Freedom is concerned he has no personal considerations and would sacrifice everything, himself, his sons, his brothers, his friends.

*Danton.* That's obvious enough; one has only to reverse the order, putting him at the bottom holding the ladder for his friends. We owe Legendre our thanks for having got it out of him.

*Lacroix.* The Hébertists aren't dead yet and the people are still starving; that's a dreadful lever. The scale of blood must not be allowed to grow lighter unless we want to see the Committee of Public Safety hanged from it; it has need of ballast, it needs a heavy head.

*Danton.* I know, I know—the Revolution is like Saturn, it devours its own children. [After a moment of thought] And yet, I don't think they would dare.

*Lacroix.* Danton, you're a dead saint. But the Revolution doesn't recognize relics. It's tossed the bones of kings into the streets, broken statues in churches—do you think they'll let you stand here a monument?

*Danton.* My name! The people!

*Lacroix.* Your name! You're a moderate, so am I, and Camille and Philippeau and Hérault. Moderation to these

people is the same as weakness; they kill all stragglers. The tailors from the Section of Red Caps would feel all Roman history in their needles if the Man of September were a moderate in regard to them.

*Danton.* Very true, and besides that—the people are like a child: they have to break everything open to see what's inside it.

*Lacroix.* And then, too, Danton, we're vicious people, according to Robespierre, that is, we enjoy ourselves; but the people are virtuous, that is, they *don't* enjoy themselves, because work dulls their organs of pleasure; they don't get drunk because they haven't the money, and they don't go whoring because they stink of cheese and herring and the girls don't like that.

*Danton.* They hate people who enjoy themselves just as eunuchs hate men.

*Lacroix.* They call us thieves, and [*Bending toward DANTON'S ear.*], just between us, there may be something to that. Robespierre and the people will be virtuous. Saint-Just will write a novel—that is, deliver one of his interminable reports—and Barère will deliver his usual speech which will send someone to the guillotine and so drape the Convention in a mantle of blood—I can see it all.

*Danton.* You're dreaming. They've never had courage *without* me, so how can they have any *against* me? The Revolution isn't over yet, they might still need me; they'll hang me in the Arsenal for future reference.

*Lacroix.* We must do something.

*Danton.* We'll see.

*Lacroix.* We'll see when we're lost.

*Marion* [*to DANTON*]. Your lips have grown cold: your words have stifled your kisses.

*Danton* [*to MARION*]. My God, the time we've lost! But it was worth every minute! [*To LACROIX.*] I'll see Robespierre; I'll make him angry, he can't keep his mouth shut then. Tomorrow, then! Good night, my friends! Good night! I thank you!

*Lacroix.* Hurry, my friends, hurry! Good night, Danton! A woman's thighs will be your guillotine, and her mound of Venus your Tarpeian rock. [*He goes off with PARIS.*]

## SCENE VI—A room

ROBESPIERRE. DANTON. PARIS

*ROBESPIERRE.* I tell you that anyone who tries to hinder me when my sword is drawn is my enemy—no matter what his intentions. Any man who keeps me from defending myself is my murderer just as surely as if he attacked me.

*Danton.* Where self-defense ends murder begins. I see no reason why we should go on killing.

*Robespierre.* The social Revolution is not yet complete; you dig your own grave, leaving a Revolution half-finished. The aristocrats are still alive, the healthy strength of the people must replace this degenerate, pleasure-loving class. Vice must be punished and Virtue must rule through Terror.

*Danton.* I don't understand your word "punishment." You and your Virtue, Robespierre! You've never taken money, you've never incurred any debts, you've never slept with a woman, you've always worn a decent coat and never got yourself drunk. Robespierre, you are disgustingly virtuous. I'd be ashamed to walk around between heaven and earth for thirty years with that moral expression on my face, and only for the miserable pleasure of finding others worse than myself. Isn't there something inside you that whispers sometimes, quietly, secretly, that you lie, Robespierre, you lie?

*Robespierre.* My conscience is clean.

*Danton.* Conscience is a mirror that monkeys torment themselves in front of. We all get ourselves up as best we can, and then go out and find fun in our own way. It's worth the trouble, believe me! We all have the right to protect ourselves when someone comes along to spoil our fun. What makes you think you have the right to turn the guillotine into a washtub for other people's dirty linens and scrub spots from their clothes with their cut-off heads? And just because you've always worn a well-brushed coat? Yes, you can always defend yourself when they spit on it or tear holes in it; but what right have you

when they leave you in peace? If they're not ashamed to go around as they do, does that give you the right to send them to their graves? Are you God's Special Deputy? And if you can't bear up under the sight like your Good Lord God, then cover your eyes with your handkerchief.

*Robespierre.* Are you denying Virtue?

*Danton.* Yes, and vice, too. All men are epicureans, either crude or refined, as the case may be: Christ was the most refined of them all. That is the only difference that I can discern between men. Every man acts according to his own nature, that is, he does what does him good. It's cruel, isn't it, my incorruptible friend, to take you down like this.

*Robespierre.* Danton, there are certain times when vice becomes high treason.

*Danton.* But for God's sake, you mustn't condemn it, that would be ungrateful; you owe it far too much, by contrast, I mean. Furthermore, according to your own notions, even *our* deeds must be of use to the Republic, since one mustn't strike both guilty and innocent alike.

*Robespierre.* Whoever said an innocent man had been condemned?

*Danton.* Did you hear that, Fabricus? No innocent man condemned! [*He leaves; to PARIS while going.*] We haven't a minute to lose; we must declare ourselves!

DANTON and PARIS go off.

*Robespierre* [*alone*]. Go on! He thinks he can halt the horses of the Revolution outside a brothel, like a coachman with his jaded nags; but they'll have enough strength to drag him to the guillotine.—To take me down, he said! According to my own notions!—But wait! Wait! Is it really that?—They'll say that his gigantic figure cast too great a shadow across me, and for that reason I had to order him from the sun.—And what if they were right? Is it so necessary? Yes, yes! The Republic! He must be got out of the light.—It's laughable how each thought of mine suspects the other.—He must be got out of the light. A man who stands still in a crowd pressing forward is as much an obstacle as if he opposed it: that man will be trampled under foot. We will not permit the Ship of

Revolution to founder on the shallow notions and mud-banks of these people; the hand must be hacked away that would hold it back—and if he grasps at it with his teeth . . . Down with the class that has stolen the clothes of the dead aristocracy and inherited their sores!—No Virtue! Take me down! My own notions!—It keeps coming back to me. Why can't I rid myself of these thoughts? He points his bloody finger at me here, here! I can wrap it in as many bandages as I like, but the blood will always come through. [*After a pause.*] I don't know which part of me is lying to the other. [*He goes to the window.*] Night snores over the earth and tosses itself about in dreamful dreams. Thoughts, desires, scarcely imagined, confused and formless, that crept timidly from the light of day, take shape now and steal into the silent house of dreams. They push open the doors, they look out of the windows, they become half flesh and blood, their limbs stretch in sleep, their lips murmur.—And is our waking anything but a dream, a clear dream? Are we not all sleepwalkers? What are our actions but the actions of a dream, only more clear, more definite, more complete? Who will blame us for that? The mind in a single hour accomplishes more deeds of thought than the sluggish organism of our body can imitate in a year. Sin is in our thoughts. Whether the thought will grow into deed, or the body imitate it—is a matter of chance.

SAINT-JUST enters.

*Robespierre.* Who's there, in the dark? Ho! A light!

*Saint-Just.* Do you know me by my voice?

*Robespierre.* Oh, it's you, Saint-Just!

A SERVANT GIRL brings in a light.

*Saint-Just.* Were you alone?

*Robespierre.* Danton just now left.

*Saint-Just.* I met him on the way in the Palais Royal. He was trying out his Revolution face and talking in epigrams; fraternizing with the sans-culottes, whores running along behind his legs, and the people standing about whispering in one another's ears what he'd said.—We're going to lose the advantage of the initial attack. How

much longer do you want to delay? We'll act without you. We've made our decision.

*Robespierre.* What do you plan to do?

*Saint-Just.* We will summon the Legislative Committee, the Committee of General Security, and the Committee of Public Safety to a special session.

*Robespierre.* All this fuss!

*Saint-Just.* We must bury the distinguished corpse with dignity, like priests, not like murderers; nor may we mutilate it in any way, it must be buried entire.

*Robespierre.* You will speak more clearly!

*Saint-Just.* We must inter him in full armor, and slaughter his horses and slaves on the burial mound: Lacroix—

*Robespierre.* An absolute scoundrel, former barrister's clerk, and now Lieutenant-General of France. Continue!

*Saint-Just.* Hérault-Séchelles.

*Robespierre.* A handsome head!

*Saint-Just.* The handsomely painted capital at the head of the Constitution; we have no further need of such ornaments; he will be obliterated. Philippeau.—Camille.

*Robespierre.* Camille, too?

*Saint-Just* [*hands him a paper*]. That was my reaction at first, too. Read this!

*Robespierre.* *Le vieux Cordelier.* Is that all? He's a child; he laughed at you.

*Saint-Just.* Read this, here! [*He shows him the place.*]

*Robespierre* [*reading*]. "This bloody Messiah Robespierre on his calvary between the two thieves Couthon and Collot—where he sacrifices but will not himself be sacrificed. The prayerful sisters of the guillotine stand at his feet like Mary and the Magdalene. Saint-Just, like John the Beloved, embraces his neck and makes known to the Convention the apocalyptic revelations of his master; he bears his head as though it contained the Sacred Host."

*Saint-Just.* I'll make him carry it like Saint-Denis.

*Robespierre* [*continues reading*]. "Are we to believe that the immaculate frockcoat of the Messiah is the winding sheet of France, and that his fingers twitching on the tribune are the knives of the guillotine?—And you, Barère, who once said that coins would be minted on the

Place de la Révolution! But let's not dig up that old sack again. He's a widow with already half a dozen husbands, all of whom he has helped bury. But what can we do? It's a gift of his: like Hippocrates he can see the livid aspects of death in a man's face six months in advance. And who would want to sit with corpses and smell their putrefying odors?"—And so, you, too, Camille?—Away with them! Quick! Only the dead cannot return.—Have you prepared the indictment?

*Saint-Just.* That's easy enough. You gave full indication of it at the Jacobin Club.

*Robespierre.* I wanted to frighten them.

*Saint-Just.* I need only carry out your threats; the forgers will stuff them on hors d'œuvres and the foreigners on dessert.—The meal will kill them, I can assure you.

*Robespierre.* Quickly then, tomorrow! No long death agonies! I've grown sensitive these last few days.—Only be quick about it!

*SAINT-JUST goes out.*

*Robespierre* [*alone*]. Yes, the bloody Messiah who sacrifices himself but will not himself be sacrificed.—*He* redeemed them with *His* blood, and I will redeem them with their own. He created them sinners, and I take the sin on myself. He suffered the ecstasy of pain, and I the torment of the executioner. Who denied himself, He or I?—And yet there's something foolish in the thought.—Why do we always look to *Him* as an example? Truly the Son of Man is crucified in us all; we all wrestle in bloody agony in our own Gardens of Gethsemane; but not one of us redeems the other with his wounds.—O Camille!—They are all leaving me—the world is empty and void—I am alone.

## ACT TWO

## SCENE I—A ROOM

DANTON, LACROIX, PHILIPPEAU, PARIS,  
CAMILLE DESMOULINS

CAMILLE. Huiy, Danton, we have no time to lose!

Danton [*dressing himself*]. And yet, time loses us!—How tedious it is always to have to put one's shirt on first and then pull up one's trousers; to spend the night in bed and then in the morning have to crawl out again and always place one foot in front of the other—and no one even imagines it could be otherwise. It's very sad; millions have already done so and millions more are destined to do so; and besides that we consist of two halves, each doing the same thing, so everything happens twice—it's very sad.

Camille. You're talking like a child.

Danton. The dying often become childish.

Lacroix. This delay of yours is plunging you into ruin, and you're dragging your friends with you. Tell the cowards the time has come to rally round you, call them from the plains as well as from the mountains! Shout against the tyranny of the Committee, talk of daggers, invoke Brutus, that way you'll rouse the Tribunes and even rally round you those who were threatened as accomplices of Hébert! You must give in to your anger. At least don't let us die disarmed and humiliated like that disgraceful Hébert!

Danton. You have a bad memory, you called me a dead saint. You were more justified than you realize. I've been to see the Section leaders; they were respectful, but more like undertakers. I'm a relic, and relics are tossed into the streets—you were right.

Lacroix. Why have you let it come to this?

Danton. To this? Yes, of course; it finally began to bore me. Always to go about in the same coat and make the same kind of face! It's pitiable. To be a miserable instrument on which each string gives out only a single note!—I couldn't stand it any longer. I wanted to make myself

comfortable. And I've succeeded; the Revolution is retiring me, but not in the way I had expected.—Besides, on what can we support ourselves? Our whores might still find a place with the prayerful sisters of the guillotine; otherwise I can think of nothing else. You can figure it all out on your fingers: the Jacobins have declared Virtue the order of the day; the Cordeliers call me Hébert's executioner; the Commune does penance; the Committee—that might have been a way!—but there was the thirty-first of May; they wouldn't soften willingly. Robespierre is the dogma of the Revolution that can't be stricken. But that wouldn't work either. We didn't make the Revolution, the Revolution made us.—And even if it could work—I'd rather suffer the guillotine myself than make others suffer it. I'm disgusted with it all; why must men fight one another? We should sit down and be at peace together. I think there was a mistake in the creation of us; there's something missing in us that I haven't a name for—but we'll never find it by burrowing in one another's entrails, so why break open our bodies? We're a miserable lot of alchemists!

Camille. More pathetically put, you would have said: "How long must Mankind in its eternal starvation devour its own flesh?" Or: "How long must we who are shipwrecked suck the blood from one another's veins in our unquenchable thirst?" Or: "How long must we algebraists of the flesh in our search for the unknown and eternally withheld x write our accounts with mangled limbs?"

Danton. You are a powerful echo.

Camille. It's true, a pistol shot does make as much noise as a clap of thunder. All the better for you then that I stay with you.

Philippeau. And France stay with her executioners?

Danton. Do you think it really matters? They're well off enough even so. Yes, they're unhappy; but what more can one ask to make himself compassionate, noble, virtuous or witty, or in general simply not bored with it all?—What does it matter whether they die on the guillotine or of fever or of old age! But there's still something to be said for leaving the stage with a good spring in your step and a fine gesture and hearing the applause of the spectators be-

hind you. It's an agreeable way to go and it also suits us: we stand on the stage all our lives, even though in the end we are finally stabbed in earnest.—It's not so terrible to have our life's span cut down a bit; especially since the coat was too long, and our limbs never quite filled it out. Life becomes an epigram; that makes it bearable. Who has either breath or imagination for an epic in fifty or sixty cantos? It's time we started drinking our little bottle of elixir out of liqueur glasses instead of tubs; that way at least we'd get a mouthful, rather than have the few drops lost in the bottom of the clumsy vessel.—Finally—my God, I can't hold it in any longer!—finally it isn't worth the trouble, life isn't worth the effort it costs us to keep it going.

*Paris.* Escape, then, Danton!

*Danton.* If I could take my country with me on the soles of my shoes, yes.—But finally—and this is the main point—they wouldn't dare lay hand on me. Good-bye! Good-bye!

DANTON and CAMILLE go off.

*Philippeau.* There he goes.

*Lacroix.* And doesn't believe a word of what he said. He's lazy! He'd rather be sent to the guillotine than . . . make a speech.

*Paris.* What can we do?

*Lacroix.* Go home and like Lucretia study to make an honorable end.

SCENE II—A promenade

A CITIZEN. Did you know that my virtuous Jacqueline—I mean, Corn—— what I meant was, Cor——.

*Simon.* Cornelia, Citizen, Cornelia.

*Citizen.* My virtuous Cornelia has blessed me with a son.

*Simon.* Blessed the Republic with a son.

*Citizen.* The Republic? No, no, that's too general; one might almost say——

*Simon.* That's the point, the particular must contribute to the general. . . .

*Citizen.* Yes, yes, that's what my wife says too.

*Ballad-Singer* [sings].

Tell me then, tell me then,

What is it now that pleases men?

*Citizen.* Now it's the name for the boy, we can't agree.

*Simon.* Why not call him Pike Marat?

*Ballad-Singer* [sings].

Bent with sorrow, bent with care,

To sweat all day in foul despair,

Till the evening comes again.

*Citizen.* I'd really like three—there's something about the number three—now let me see, I'd like a name that's useful and one that's honest; I know: Plough, and Robespierre. But now the third . . .

*Simon.* Pike.

*Citizen.* Many thanks, neighbor! Pike, Plough, Robespierre—fine names; sounds good.

*Simon.* I tell you, the breasts of your Cornelia will, like the udders of the Roman she-wolf—no, that won't do: Romulus was a tyrant, so that won't do.

*They walk on.*

A Beggar [sings].

A handful of earth and a little piece of moss . . .

Kind gentlemen, lovely ladies!

*First Gentleman.* Why don't you work, you lazy lout? You look well enough fed!

*Second Gentleman.* Here! [Gives him some money.] Why, his hands are soft as velvet! The shameless thief!

*Beggar.* Sir, where did you get your coat from?

*Second Gentleman.* Work, my good fellow, work! You could have one, too; I'll give you some work if you like. Come to me at——

*Beggar.* And, sir, why did you work?

*Second Gentleman.* You fool, to have the coat, of course!

*Beggar.* You tortured yourself for a luxury; because a coat like that is a luxury when a rag would do just as well.

*Second Gentleman.* Of course, otherwise you'd never get on.

*Beggar.* I'd never be such a fool! The work I'd have to

do wouldn't make it worth it. The sun there on the corner's nice and warm, and it's free. [Sings.]

A handful of earth and a little piece of moss . . .

*Rosalie* [to ADELAÏDE]. Hurry up, here come some soldiers! We've had nothing warm in our bellies since yesterday.

*Beggar* [sings].

Is all that is left of my profit and my loss!

Kind gentlemen, lovely ladies!

*Soldier*. Halt! Where're you girls off to? [To ROSALIE.] How old are you?

*Rosalie*. Old as my little finger.

*Soldier*. Sharp, aren't you!

*Rosalie*. And aren't you blunt!

*Soldier*. What do you say I use you for a whetstone then? [Sings.]

Christina, O Christina mine,

Does the pain hurt you sore, hurt you sore?

Does the pain hurt you sore?

*Rosalie* [sings].

For shame not, my sweet soldier dear,

I wish that I could have more, have more!

I wish that I could have more!

DANTON and CAMILLE enter.

*Danton*. How happy they look!—I smell something here in the air; like the sun hatching out lechery.—It makes a man want to get down there, doesn't it? Rip off his pants and go at it like dogs in the street!

*They go on.*

*Young Gentleman*. Ah, madame, the sound of a bell, the light of evening on the trees, the twinkle of the first star . . .

*Madame*. The fragrance of a flower! These natural pleasures, this pure enjoyment of nature! [To her daughter EUGÉNIE.] You see, Eugénie, only Virtue has eyes for such things.

*Eugénie* [kisses her mother's hand]. Oh, Mama, I see only you.

*Madame*. That's a good child.

*Young Gentleman* [whispers in EUGÉNIE's ear]. Do you see the pretty lady over there with the old gentleman?

*Eugénie*. I know her.

*Young Gentleman*. They say the hairdresser did her hair à l'enfant.

*Eugénie* [laughs]. Naughty gossip!

*Young Gentleman*. And the old gentleman walks along beside her; he sees the bud swelling and takes it out in the sun for a walk, thinking he was the thundershower that made it grow.

*Eugénie*. How indelicate of you! I feel I should blush.

*Young Gentleman*. That could make me grow pale.

*They go off.*

*Danton* [to CAMILLE]. Don't expect anything serious out of me! I don't understand why people don't just plant themselves in the street and laugh in one another's faces. I should think they would have to be laughing from their windows and from their graves, and that heaven itself would burst, and the earth roll over in laughter.

*They go off.*

*First Gentleman*. I assure you it is a most extraordinary discovery! It gives the technical arts an entirely new aspect. Mankind hurries with giant strides toward his higher destiny.

*Second Gentleman*. Have you seen the new play? There's a Babylonian tower, a great confusion of arches and steps and passages—and they blow it all up into the air just as easily and cleverly as you could imagine. You grow dizzy at every step. What an extraordinary brain that invented it! [He stands there, suddenly perplexed.]

*First Gentleman*. Why, what's the matter with you?

*Second Gentleman*. Oh, nothing, nothing at all! Would you reach me your hand, sir! The puddles in the street, you know. There! Thank you, sir! I almost didn't get across them! It could have been dangerous!

*First Gentleman*. Surely you weren't afraid?

*Second Gentleman*. Well, you see, sir, the earth has nothing but a thin crust—a thin, thin crust. I always fancy I might fall through a hole like that if I were to



step into it.—One must be careful where one steps. One might break through! But you *must* go to see the play; I highly recommend it!

## SCENE III—A room

DANTON. CAMILLE. LUCILLE

CAMILLE. I tell you that unless they have wooden copies of everything, scattered about in theatres, concert halls, and art exhibits, people have neither eyes nor ears for it. Let someone carve out a marionette so that they can see the strings that pull it up and down and with each awkward movement from its joints hear it roar out an iambic line; what a character, they'll cry out, what consistency! Take a minor sentiment, a maxim, a notion, and dress it up in coat and trousers, make pairs of hands and feet for it, color its face and permit the thing to moan and agonize about for three whole acts until at last it has either married or shot itself dead—and they will cry out that it was ideal! Fiddle them out an opera which reproduces the rising and sinking of the human soul as a clay pipe with water reproduces the sounds of the nightingale—oh, what art, they will cry out!—Take these same people from the theatre and put them on the street and they'll grow pained with pitiful reality!—They forget their Lord God because of His bad imitators. And they see and hear nothing of the creation round about them and in them that glows, and surges, and glitters, and is born anew with every moment. All they do is go to the theatre, read poetry and novels, and grimace like the characters they find in them, and then say to God's real creations: How commonplace!—The Greeks knew what they were about when they told of Pygmalion's statue, come to life, but unable to bear children.

Danton. And artists handle nature like the painter David. In September when they threw the murdered bodies out of La Force onto the streets, he went around cold-bloodedly drawing them and said: "I'm snatching the last spasms of life from these scoundrels."

DANTON *is called out.*

Camille. What do you say, Lucille?

Lucille. Nothing; I'd rather watch you talk.

Camille. Do you listen to what I say?

Lucille. Well, of course!

Camille. Am I right? Do you know what I was talking about?

Lucille. No, not really.

DANTON *returns.*

Camille. What is it?

Danton. The Committee of Public Safety has just now ordered my arrest. I've been warned and offered a place of refuge.—It seems they want my head; for all I care they can have it. I'm disgusted with this bungled work. I wish they *would* take it. What difference does it make? I'll know how to die bravely; it's easier than living.

Camille. Danton, there's still time!

Danton. No—but I would never have thought that—

Camille. Your damned laziness!

Danton. I'm not lazy; I'm tired; even the soles of my feet burn.

Camille. Where will you go?

Danton. I wish I knew!

Camille. I'm asking you seriously: where?

Danton. For a walk, my friend, for a walk. [*He goes out.*]

Lucille. Oh, Camille!

Camille. Don't worry, my love!

Lucille. When I think that this head—yours—! Oh, Camille! Tell me I'm not talking sense—please—that I don't know what I'm talking about!

Camille. Don't worry—Danton and I are two different people.

Lucille. The earth is broad and there are many things upon it—why should they want just this? Who would take him from me? It would be wicked. What would they want him for?

Camille. How many times must I tell you, you needn't worry. I spoke with Robespierre yesterday—he was friendly to me. Things are a bit strained at the moment, that's

true; our points of view are different, nothing more!

*Lucille.* You must go to him.

*Camille.* We sat together on the same school bench. He was always gloomy and alone. I was the only one who ever sought him out and made him laugh at times. He has always shown me a great deal of affection. All right, I'll go.

*Lucille.* So quickly, my love? Go on! No, come here! There [*She kisses him.*], and there. Go now! Go!

*CAMILLE goes off.*

*Lucille.* These are terrible times. But that's how it is. What is there we can do? We simply must get hold of ourselves. [*Sings.*]

Parting, oh, parting, oh, parting,

Who'd ever have thought we must part?

Why should that of all things have occurred to me just now? I don't like the way it came of its own accord.—As he went out, it seemed to me that he could never come back again, that he had to go farther and farther from me.—How empty the room is, just all of a sudden! The windows open as if a dead man had been laid out in here. I can't bear this place any longer. [*She goes off.*]

SCENE IV—*An open field*

DANTON. I'll go no farther. Why should I disturb this silence with the rustling of my footsteps and the sound of my breath. [*He sits down; after a pause.*] I was told once of a sickness that wipes out our memory. Death must be something like that. And then at times I hope that perhaps death is even more powerful and wipes away everything. If only it were true!—I'd run like a Christian then to rescue my enemy—my memory, that is.—This place should be safe; for my memory if not for me; but the grave should give me safety, at least it will make me forget. The grave kills memory. But back there, in Paris, memory kills me. I or it? Which shall it be? It's an easy choice. [*He rises and looks back whence he came.*—I'm flirting with death. It's rather amusing to make eyes at

him from a distance.—Actually I should laugh at the whole business. There's a sense of permanence in me that says: tomorrow and the day after, and so on and on, will be no different from today. It's a meaningless alarm to frighten me. They'd never dare! [*He goes off.*]

SCENE V—*A room—night*

DANTON [*at the window*]. Will it never stop? Will the light never soften and the noise die away? Will it never be dark again and still so that we needn't look at and listen to each other's ugly sins?—September!

*Julie* [*calls from within*]. Danton! Danton!

*Danton.* Yes?

*Julie* [*enters*]. Why are you calling out?

*Danton.* Was I?

*Julie.* You talked about ugly sins, and then you groaned: September!

*Danton.* Did I? I? No, it wasn't I who spoke; I was scarcely thinking such things, they were scarcely more than quiet, secret thoughts.

*Julie.* You're trembling, Danton!

*Danton.* Why shouldn't I tremble, with the walls chattering as they are; if my body is so gone to pieces that my thoughts go astray and start speaking through lips of stone? It's a strange thing.

*Julie.* Georges, Georges.

*Danton.* Yes, Julie, it's strange indeed. I'd rather never think again, if my thoughts are going to speak out for me. There are thoughts, Julie, that are meant for no one's ears. It's not good when they cry out like newborn children; it's not good.

*Julie.* God keep you in your right mind!—Georges, Georges, do you recognize me?

*Danton.* Why shouldn't I? You're a human being and you're a woman and my wife, and the earth has five continents: Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia, and two times two makes four. You see, I'm in my right mind. You say there was a cry: September. You did say that, didn't you?

*Julie.* Yes, Danton, I heard it through all the rooms.

*Danton.* As I went to the window—. [*He looks out.*]  
How quiet the city is, it's lights are out. . . .

*Julie.* A child's crying near by.

*Danton.* As I went to the window—there cried and shrieked through all the streets: September!

*Julie.* You were dreaming, Danton. Calm yourself!

*Danton.* Dreaming? Yes, I dreamed; but that was something else. I'll tell you in a moment—my memory's so bad right now—in a moment! Yes, I have it now: the globe of the world writhed under me as it leapt from its course; I had grabbed hold of it like a wild horse, I clutched at its mane with giant arms and dug into its ribs, my head turned aside, my hair streaming across the abyss, and I dragged along. Then I cried out in terror, and I woke up. I walked to the window—and then I heard it, Julie.—What does it want from me? Why *that* word? What have I to do with it? Why does it stretch its bloody hands at me? I never struck at it.—Oh, help me, Julie, my mind is numb and dull! What happened in September, Julie?

*Julie.* The kings were within forty hours of Paris . . .

*Danton.* The fortresses fallen, the aristocrats in the city . . .

*Julie.* The Republic was lost.

*Danton.* Yes, lost. We couldn't leave the enemy at our back, we would have been fools: two enemies on a single plank; we or they, the stronger always pushes the weaker down—it was only fair, wasn't it?

*Julie.* Yes, yes.

*Danton.* We killed them—but it wasn't murder; it was war, civil war.

*Julie.* You saved the country.

*Danton.* Yes, I saved it; it was self-defense, we had no choice. That Man on the Cross made it easy for Himself: "It must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." That *must!* That *must* was *mine!* Who will curse the hand on which that curse of *must* has fallen? Who spoke that *must?* Who? What is this in us that lies, whores, steals, and murders?—What are we but puppets, manipulated on wires by unknown powers? We are nothing, nothing in ourselves; we

are the swords that spirits fight with—except no one sees the hands—just as in fairy tales.—I feel calmer now.

*Julie.* Really calm, my love?

*Danton.* Yes, Julie. Come—to bed!

SCENE VI—*Street in front of DANTON'S house*

SIMON. CITIZEN-SOLDIERS.

SIMON. How goes the night?

*First Citizen.* What do you mean "how goes the night"?

*Simon.* How far has the night gone?

*First Citizen.* As far as between sunset and sunrise.

*Simon.* You rogue, what time is it?

*First Citizen.* Look at your timepiece: it's time for perpendiculars to sprout between the bedsheets.

*Simon.* Forward, Citizens, forward! We must answer for it with our heads! Dead or alive! Watch for his strong arms! I'll lead you on, Citizens! Make way for Freedom!—See to my wife! I shall bequeath her a ring of walnuts for her table.

*First Citizen.* A ring of walnuts? She has her fill of nuts all right, and on the table, too!

*Simon.* Forward, Citizens, we shall put the country in our debt!

*Second Citizen.* I'd rather we were in the country's debt! For all the holes we made in people's bodies, the holes in our pants have stayed as big as ever.

*First Citizen.* What are you after, you want your fly sewn up? Ha! Ha! Ha!

*The Others.* Ha! Ha! Ha!

*Simon.* Away! Away!

*They force their way into DANTON'S house.*

SCENE VII—*The National Convention*

A group of DEPUTIES

LEGENDRE Will this slaughter of Deputies never end? What man can be safe if Danton falls?

*A Deputy.* What can we do?

*Another.* He must be heard here in the Convention. It can't fail; what can they charge him with to his own face?

*Another.* That's impossible. There's a decree forbidding it.

*Legendre.* It must either be withdrawn or an exception made. I'll make the motion; I count on your support.

*The President.* The session is opened.

*Legendre* [*ascends the tribune*]. I have learned that four members of the National Convention were arrested during the night just past. I know that Danton was one of them; I do not know the names of the others. But be they who they may be, I demand that they be heard here in the Convention. Citizens, I declare this to you here and now: I hold Danton to be as innocent as myself, and I do not believe that any accusation can be brought against me. I have no thought of attacking any member of the Committees of Public Safety or General Security, but I am in possession of well-established reasons which make me fear that for certain private hatreds and private passions Liberty may be denied some particular men who have served her most greatly. That man, who in 1792 saved France by virtue of his private energy, that man deserves to be heard; he must be allowed to defend himself if he is to be accused of high treason. [*A great commotion breaks out.*]

*Some Voices.* We support Legendre's motion.

*A Deputy.* We are here in the name of the people; we cannot be deprived of our places except by the will of our voters.

*Another.* Your words smell like corpses; you've stolen them from Girondist mouths. You want privileges? The ax of the law hovers over every head.

*Another.* We cannot allow our Committees to send our own legislators to the guillotine without the protection of the law.

*Another.* Crime knows no protection. Only royal criminals find protection—on the throne.

*Another.* Only thieves ask for such protection.

*Another.* Only murderers fail to recognize it.

*Robespierre.* Such disorder, which has been unknown to this Assembly for some time, suggests to me that there is a matter of some import under discussion here. It is to be decided today whether several men are to score a victory over their country.—How is it possible that you are able to deny your principles to the extent of granting today to a few individuals what but recently you refused to such men as Chabot, Delaunai, and Fabre? What distinction is there in favor of these men? And why should I be concerned with the complimentary speeches which people pay themselves and their friends? We have had experiences enough to show us what they are worth. We do not ask whether a man has accomplished this or that patriotic action; we are concerned with his entire political career.—Legendre appears not to know the names of the others arrested; yet the whole Convention knows them. How is it Legendre appears not to know this? Because he knows well enough that only shamelessness can defend Lacroix. He has named only Danton, because he believes that a special privilege attaches itself to this name. No, we will have nothing of privileges, we will have nothing of idols! [*Applause.*]

What distinction has Danton over Lafayette, Dumas, and Brissot; over Fabre, Chabot, and Hébert? What could be said of them that cannot also be said of him? Did you spare them as well? What has earned him this advantage over his fellow citizens? Perhaps because certain deceived individuals, and others who did not allow themselves to be deceived, ranged themselves about him in order to fall into the arms of power and fortune as a result of his success. The more he has betrayed the trust of those patriots who believed in him, just that much more vigorous must he find the strength of all those who love Liberty. They will try to inspire you with fear at the misuse of a power which you yourself have exercised. They cry out about the despotism of the Committees, as though the confidence which the people placed in you, and which you in turn have handed over to these Committees, were not sufficient guarantee of your own patriotism. They pretend as if we were all

trembling. But I tell you, whoever trembles at this moment, he is guilty; because innocence never trembles in face of public vigilance. [*General applause.*]

They have tried to frighten me as well; they have given me to understand that the danger that threatened Danton might not stop until it reached me. They wrote me that Danton's friends held me besieged, in the thought that a recollection of a former association and a blind trust in some simulated virtues might convince me to mitigate my zeal and passion in regard to Liberty. And so I declare this to you: there is nothing will blunt my purpose, even though Danton's danger become my own. We all have need of a bit of courage and some greatness of soul. Only criminals and base spirits are afraid to see their kind fall at their side; for without the safety in numbers of their accomplices, they would stand revealed in the light of truth. And if there are such spirits in this Assembly, then there are also those who are heroic. The number of scoundrels is not great; we have very few heads to let fall, and our country is saved. [*Applause.*]

I demand that Legendre's motion be rejected.

*The DEPUTIES rise in a body as a sign of their general agreement.*

*Saint-Just.* It appears in this Assembly that there are a number of sensitive ears that cannot endure mention of the word "blood." A number of general observations might convince them that we are no more gruesome than Nature or Time. Nature follows its laws quietly and unresistingly; Man is destroyed when he comes into conflict with them. An alteration in the composition of air, a flare-up of the tellurian fires, a fluctuation in the balance of bodies of water, and an epidemic, a volcanic eruption, a flood—each of these can bury thousands. What is the result? An insignificant, and on the whole scarcely noticeable, alteration of physical Nature, which might almost have passed without a trace, were it not for the bodies in its path.—I ask you now: Shall the moral universe take more consideration in its revolutions than the physical universe? Shall an idea not have equal rights with the

law of physics in regard to annihilating that which opposes it? Moreover, shall an event which changes the entire configuration of the moral universe, and by that I mean humanity, not be allowed the shedding of blood? The forces that move the universe make use of our arms in the world of the spirit just as in the physical world they make use of volcanoes and floods. What matter whether they die of an epidemic or of the Revolution?—The strides of humanity are slow, one can count them only in centuries; behind each one rise the graves of generations. In order to arrive at the most basic principles and discoveries, millions have had to sacrifice their lives along the way. Is it not understandable then that in an age where the pace of history is increased, all the more people should find themselves—out of breath?—We will conclude, then, quickly and simply: Since all men were created under the same circumstances, then all men are equal, allowing for the differences which Nature herself has imposed. Each man, therefore, is entitled to the same benefits, but no man to any special privileges, whether he be an individual or a smaller or larger class of individuals.—Every link in the chain of this argument translated into reality has cost human lives. The fourteenth of July, the tenth of August, the thirty-first of May—these are its punctuation marks. It has required four years to make of the idea a fact; under normal circumstances it would have required a century, with generations serving as punctuation marks. Is it so astounding then that the great flood of the revolution tosses up its dead at every bend and turn?—We still have certain conclusions to append to our proposition; are a couple of hundred bodies to hinder us from doing so? Moses led his people through the Red Sea and into the desert, till the old corrupt generation had annihilated itself—and only then did he found his new city. Legislators! Although we have neither the Red Sea nor the desert, we do have the war and the guillotine. The Revolution is like the daughters of Pelias: they cut humanity in pieces to make it young again. Humanity will rise from this caldron of blood, as the earth once rose from the waters

of the Deluge, with arms strong as though created anew.  
[Long, sustained applause. Several DEPUTIES rise in enthusiasm.]

We herewith summon forth all the enemies of tyranny, whether in Europe or on the face of the entire earth, we summon these secret men, who bear the dagger of Brutus under their cloaks, to join with us and share this moment of triumph!

*The SPECTATORS and the DEPUTIES strike up the Marseillaise.*

### ACT THREE

SCENE I—*The Luxembourg. A room with PRISONERS.*

CHAUMETTE, MERCIER, HÉRAULT-SÉCHELLES,  
and other PRISONERS

CHAUMETTE [*tugs at PAINE's sleeve*]. Paine, listen—it could be the way you say; I was almost sure of it a while back. I have a headache—help me a little with some of your arguments; I feel very bad today.

Paine. All right, Anaxagoras, I'll help you with your catechism.—*There is no God*, because: either God created the world or He did not. If He did not, then the world contains its own first principle, and there is no God because God can only be God in so far as He contains the first principle of all things. Now, however, God cannot have created the world: for either the creation is eternal with God, or it has a beginning. If the latter is true, then God must have created it at a certain point in Time; and God must also, having rested for an eternity, have suddenly become active, and must therefore have suffered a change in Himself, which made Him subject to the concept of Time, both of which conflict with the nature of God's being. Therefore God cannot have created the world. And since we know quite certainly that the world, or at least our ego, exists, and that, according to what I have said before, it must also have its first principle either in itself or in something else, which is not God, it there-

fore follows that there can be no God. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

Chaumette. Yes . . . yes—that makes it all so clear again; thank you!

Mercier. Just a minute, Paine! But what if creation is eternal?

Paine. Then it's no longer a creation, for then it is one with God, or an Attribute of Him, as Spinoza says; then God is in all things, in you, my friend, in our Anaxagoras here, and in me. That wouldn't be so bad, but you must agree that it doesn't say much for the Divine Majesty when the Good Lord God has to have a toothache or the clap or be buried alive with each one of us, or at least have the very unpleasant concept of it.

Mercier. But there must be a reason for it somewhere.

Paine. Who says otherwise? But who claims that this basic principle has to be what we call God, that is, what we think of as perfection? Do you take the world to be perfect?

Mercier. No.

Paine. Then how would you explain an imperfect effect proceeding from a perfect cause?—Voltaire dared offend God just as little as he did the kings; that's why he did it. If a man has only his reasoning and doesn't know how to use it, or doesn't dare, then he is nothing but a blunderer.

Mercier. Let me ask you this: can a perfect cause have a perfect effect, that is, can something perfect create something imperfect? Isn't it impossible, because that which is created cannot contain within itself its own first principle, which, as you say, the perfect does contain?

Chaumette. No, no! Keep quiet!

Paine. Calm yourself, philosopher!—You're quite right; but why should God *have to* create at all? If He can create only the imperfect, then it were best He leave well alone. Isn't it rather a weakness in our humanity that we can only conceive of God as working? Simply because we must always be moving and bustling about to convince ourselves of our existence, must we also attribute this miserable need to God? Why must we, if our spirit is sunk in a being harmoniously at rest in itself in eternal

blessedness, assume at once that it stretches out its finger across the table and kneads men out of dough? We always whisper in one another's ears that it's out of a boundless need for love. Must we go through all this merely to make ourselves sons of God? I'd just as soon have a less imposing Father; at least I wouldn't be able to say of Him that He let me be raised below His station in a pigsty or galleys. First do away with the imperfect, and then you can demonstrate God; Spinoza tried it. One can deny evil, but not pain; only reasoning can prove God, feeling rebels against it. Consider this, Anaxagoras: why do I suffer? That is the very bedrock of atheism. The least quiver of pain, in even the smallest of atoms, makes a rent in the curtain of your creation from top to bottom.

*Mercier.* And what of morality?

*Paine.* First you prove God from morality, then morality from God! What do you want with this morality of yours? Properly considered I don't know whether there is such a thing as good or evil, and for that reason I have no need to change my way of life. I act according to what my nature tells me; whatever is suitable to it is good for me and I do it, and whatever is repulsive to it is evil and I do not do it and I defend myself against it when it comes my way. You can stay virtuous, as they say, and defend yourself against so-called vice without despising your enemies, which is a very sad feeling.

*Chaumette.* True, very true!

*Hérault-Séchelles.* But, my good Anaxagoras, one might also say: since God is all things, then He must also be His own opposite, that is, perfect and imperfect, good and evil, happy and unhappy; the result of course would be nil, each side would cancel out the other, we would come to nothing.—Be glad you've come through victorious; you can continue worshiping Madame Momoro as Nature's masterwork; she's at least given you a crown of rosebuds in your groin.

*Chaumette.* I thank you, gentlemen. I thank you most heartily!

*Paine.* He's still not certain. Before it's all over he'll have had Extreme Unction, set his feet toward Mecca, and been circumcised, so as to leave no way unexplored.

[*He goes off.*]

DANTON, LACROIX, CAMILLE, and PHILIPPEAU are led in.

*Hérault-Séchelles* [*rushes to DANTON and embraces him*]. Good morning! Or, good night, I should say. I can't ask you *how* you've slept, but: *how will* you sleep?

*Danton.* Very well; I shall go to bed laughing.

*Mercier* [*to PAINE*]. These great Danes with wings of doves! He's the evil genius of the Revolution; he dared defy his mother, but she was stronger than he.

*Paine.* His death is as great a misfortune as his life.

*Lacroix* [*to DANTON*]. I didn't expect you would be here so soon.

*Danton.* Yes, I knew; I was warned.

*Lacroix.* And you said nothing?

*Danton.* To what? Isn't a stroke the best of all deaths? Or would you rather suffer first in sickness? And—well, you see, I didn't think they would dare. [*To HÉRAULT-SÉCHELLES*.] I'd rather lie *in* the earth than rub corns on my feet *on* it. I prefer it as a pillow rather than as a footstool.

*Hérault-Séchelles.* At least we won't have calluses on our fingers when we stroke the cheeks of our good lady Decay.

*Camille* [*to DANTON*]. Why trouble yourself? Your tongue could hang out as far as your neck, but you could never lick the sweat of death from your brow.—Oh, Lucille! What a terrible thing this is!

*The PRISONERS throng about the new arrivals.*

*Danton* [*to PAINE*]. What you have done for the good of your country, I have tried to do for mine. I wasn't quite as fortunate; they're sending me to the scaffold. For my sake I hope I don't stumble.

*Mercier* [*to DANTON*]. You're drowning in the blood of the twenty-two Girondins.

*A Prisoner* [*to HÉRAULT-SÉCHELLES*]. So the power of the people and the power of Reason are one, uh?

*Another* [*to CAMILLE*]. Well, General Procurator of Street Lamps, your improvement in the lighting of streets hasn't made France any brighter.

*Another.* Let him alone! Wasn't he the one who

talked about mercy? [*He embraces CAMILLE; a number of others follow his example.*]

*Philippeau.* We are priests who have prayed with the dying; we have become infected and are dying of the same epidemic.

*Several Voices.* The blow that strikes you down strikes us as well.

*Camille.* Gentlemen, I very much regret that our efforts have proved so useless; I go to the scaffold now, because my eyes grew moist at the fate of a few unfortunate men.

## SCENE II—A room

FOUQUIER-TINVILLE. HERMAN

*Fouquier.* Everything ready?

*Herman.* It won't be easy; of course if Danton weren't among them it would be.

*Fouquier.* He's also going to have to lead the dance.

*Herman.* You know he'll frighten the jury; he's the scarecrow of the Revolution.

*Fouquier.* The jury must will it.

*Herman.* There is a way, but it's not quite according to the letter of the law.

*Fouquier.* Speak up!

*Herman.* Instead of drawing the jury by lots, we'll pick out those we can depend on.

*Fouquier.* It'll have to work.—That will make a good running fire. There are nineteen of them. A cleverly mixed bunch. The four forgers, then a few bankers and foreigners. That will make a spicy Tribunal. The people need something of the sort.—All right then, reliable people! Who, for example?

*Herman.* Leroi. He's so stone-deaf he won't hear a word of the defense; Danton can shout himself hoarse.

*Fouquier.* Excellent. Go on.

*Herman.* Vilatte and Lumière. One of them never gets his hand off the bottle and the other one's always sleeping; they won't open their mouths except to say "Guilty."—Girard has a rule of honor that no one escapes the Tribunal once he's appeared before it. And Renaudin—

*Fouquier.* Why Renaudin? He once helped a couple of priests get through our hands.

*Herman.* Don't get excited! He came to me a few days ago and demanded that the condemned be bled a bit before their execution, to make them a little less spirited; he was annoyed by their generally defiant attitude.

*Fouquier.* I see—very good. Then I shall rely on you!

*Herman.* I'll see to it!

SCENE III—*The Conciergerie. A corridor*

LACROIX, DANTON, MERCIER, and other PRISONERS *pace to and fro.*

LACROIX [*to a PRISONER*]. These poor wretches!

*The Prisoner.* Don't you know? Paris is a slaughter-house! Don't the carts rolling to the guillotine tell you as much!

*Mercier.* Don't you know, Lacroix, that Equality swings its sickle over all heads without distinction? The lava of the Revolution flows on! The guillotine makes good Republicans! The galleries applaud and the Romans rub their hands together in delight. But what they don't hear in every one of the words spoken is the death rattle of another victim.—Follow up your words sometime to where they become human forms. Take a good look around you, you see here everything that you've said: a faithful translation of your own words. These miserable creatures, their executioners, and the guillotine are your speeches come to life. You erect your systems like Bajazet his pyramids—from the heads of men.

*Danton.* You're right—everything we build today is of human flesh. That's the curse of our age. And now my own body will become a building block.—It's exactly a year now since I created the Revolutionary Tribunal. I ask both God and man to forgive me that; I wanted to prevent another September Massacre, I hoped to rescue the innocent, but this long-drawn-out murder with its formalities is even more terrible and just as inevitable. I had hoped, gentlemen, to save you all from this place.

*Mercier.* Oh, we'll get out of it, all right.



*Danton.* And now I'm here *with you*; heaven only knows how it will end.

SCENE IV—*The Revolutionary Tribunal*

HERMAN [to DANTON]. Citizen, your name.

*Danton.* The Revolution gives me my name. My place of dwelling will soon be in nothingness and my name in the Pantheon of History.

*Herman.* Danton, the Convention accuses you of conspiring with Mirabeau, with Dumouriez, with Orléans, with the Girondists, with foreigners, and the faction of Louis XVII.

*Danton.* My voice, which I have so often raised in the people's cause, will find little difficulty in refuting this wrongful accusation. If the wretches who have accused me should care to appear, I will cover them with shame. And if the Committee should care to appear, then I will answer, for otherwise I will not. I have need of them both as accusers and as witnesses. If they would be so kind.—Moreover, what concern have I with you and your decisions? I have told you once already that my asylum will soon be nothingness; life has become a burden, you may tear it from me, I long to be rid of it.

*Herman.* Danton, audacity is the mark of the criminal, calmness that of the innocent.

*Danton.* Private audacity is indeed blameworthy, but that national audacity which I have so often manifested, with which I have so often fought for Freedom, is the most meritorious of all virtues. That is my audacity; it is the audacity that serves me here in face of my pitiable accusers, and in the best interests of the Republic. How should I be calm when I find myself so basely slandered? Do you expect a revolutionary like me to defend himself dispassionately? Men of my stamp are inestimable in Revolutions, the Spirit of Freedom hovers upon our brows. [Signs of applause from among the SPECTATORS.] I am accused of having conspired with Mirabeau, with Dumouriez, with Orléans, of having debased myself at the feet of miserable despots. I am required to answer

your inescapable and inflexible justice.—You, Saint-Just, will be answerable to posterity for this blasphemy against me!

*Herman.* I require you to answer calmly; you might take Marat's example; he approached his judges with awe.

*Danton.* You have placed my entire life in your hands; I think it has a right to rise up and meet you face on; I will bury you under the weight of every one of my accomplishments.—I am not proud of this. It is destiny commands our actions, but it chooses only powerful natures for its instruments.—I declared war on the monarchy on the Champ de Mars, on the tenth of August I deposed it, and on the twenty-first of September I killed it, and to all the kings of Europe I threw down as my gauntlet the head of a king. [Repeated signs of applause. He takes up the Bill of Indictment.]

When I look at this shameful document my whole being trembles. Who, then, are those men who had to force Danton to appear on that memorable day, the tenth of August? Who, then, are those privileged beings from whom he borrowed his strength?—I demand that my accusers appear in front of me! And I am in my right mind when I make this demand. I will unmask these repulsive villains and cast them back into the nothingness whence they ought never to have crept.

*Herman* [ringing the bell]. Do you hear this bell?

*Danton.* The voice of a man defending his honor and his life must cry louder than your petty bell.—In September I gorged the young brood of this Revolution on the finely chopped flesh of the aristocracy. My voice forged weapons for the people out of the aristocracy's gold and riches. My voice was the hurricane that buried the satellites of despotism under waves of bayonets. [Loud applause.]

*Herman.* You have strained your voice, Danton, you are too violently moved. You shall conclude your defense the next time, you are in need of rest.—The session is adjourned.

*Danton.* You know Danton now—yet a few hours and he shall slumber in the arms of glory.

SCENE V—*The Luxembourg. A cell*

General DILLON. LAFLOTTE. A JAILER

DILLON. You, stop shining your nose in my face. Ha, ha, ha!

Laflotte. And close your mouth, too; that sickle-moon of a nose has a halo around it from all your stink. Ha, ha, ha!

Jailer. Ha, ha, ha! Do you gentlemen think my nose is bright enough to read by? [*He points to a paper in his hand.*]

Dillon. Give it here!

Jailer. I'm at ebb tide now, sir, with the cost of keeping my moon lighted.

Laflotte. But your pants look more like flood tide.

Jailer. Yes, sir, the practice provokes water, too. [*To DILLON.*] My moon hides from your sun, sir; you must give me something to make it glow again if you want to read, sir.

Dillon. There, you rogue! Now get out!

*He gives the JAILER money. The JAILER goes off.*

Dillon [*reads*]. "Danton has roused the Tribunal, shaken the jury, and caused the people to grow restless. The crowd was extraordinary. The people thronged around the Palace of Justice all the way to the bridge across the Seine. A handful of gold, a push——" Hm! Hm! [*He paces to and fro, pouring himself a drink now and then from a bottle.*] If I could get one foot outside this prison, I'd never give in to this slaughter. Just one foot out!

Laflotte. And onto the cart? It's all one.

Dillon. Do you really think so? I see a few steps' difference, wide enough to be covered up by the bodies of the Committee. The time has come for decent people to lift up their heads.

Laflotte [*to himself*]. To make it casier to cut them off. Come on, old man; a few more glasses and you'll be floating.

Dillon. The scoundrels, the fools, they'll guillotine themselves in the end. [*He walks quickly back and forth.*]

Laflotte [*aside*]. One could learn to love life properly

again, like his own child, if he could give himself life. It isn't often a man can commit incest with chance and become his own father. Father and child at the same time. A cozy little Oedipus!

Dillon. You don't feed the people with corpses! Danton's and Camille's wives ought to throw money to the people, that's better than heads any day.

Laflotte [*aside*]. On second thought, I don't think I'll tear out my eyes like Oedipus; I might need them to weep for the good general.

Dillon. The idea of laying their hands on Danton! Who can be safe after this? But fear will unite them.

Laflotte [*aside*]. He's lost for sure. What does it matter then if I clamber over a corpse to get out of this grave?

Dillon. If I could get just one foot out of this prison! I'd find enough people, old soldiers, Girondists, ex-nobles; we'd break open the prisons—we must come to terms with the prisoners.

Laflotte [*aside*]. Of course it does smell a bit of villainy. But what does that matter? I'd like to try my hand at that for a change, too; I've been too one-sided up till now. It could give one pangs of conscience, but that's a change, too; it's not so unpleasant to smell your own stink.—The prospect of the guillotine has grown a bit tedious by now; imagine having to wait so long for a thing like that! I've rehearsed the scene in my mind twenty times over. I've lost all interest in it; it's become rather common.

Dillon. We must get a letter through to Danton's wife.

Laflotte [*aside*]. And then—no, I'm not afraid of death, it's the pain. There's nobody can tell me it won't hurt. Of course they say it only takes a moment; but pain always measures with a more delicate scale. No! Pain is the only sin, and suffering the only vice; I'll stay virtuous.

Dillon. Listen, Laflotte, where's that fellow gone? I have money here, and I've got to use it. We must strike while we still can; I've worked it all out.

Laflotte. Yes, at once, at once! I know the jailer; I'll talk to him. You can count on me, General; we'll get out of this prison all right—[*To himself, going out.*] only to be thrown into another: myself into the big one they call the world, he into the small one known as the grave.

SCENE VI—*The Committee of Public Safety*

SAINT-JUST, BARÈRE, COLLÔT D'HERBOIS, BILLAUD-VARENNES

BARÈRE. What does Fouquier write?

*Saint-Just.* The second hearing's over. The prisoners demand the appearance of more members of the Convention and of the Committee of Public Safety; they've appealed to the people because of the refusal to allow witnesses. He says the excitement is indescribable.—Danton's been parodying Jupiter and shaking his locks.

*Collot.* The easier for the executioner to grasp him by them.

*Barère.* I don't think we'd better show ourselves, the fishwives and raggickers might find us somewhat less imposing.

*Billaud-Varennnes.* These people have an instinct for being trodden on, even if only with looks; they like insolent faces. They're more irritating than a coat-of-arms; they have the stamp of the aristocracy's contempt for humanity. And one who doesn't like to be looked up and down should help to smash them in.

*Barère.* He's like the Horned Siegfried, the blood of the September Massacre has made him invulnerable.—What does Robespierre say?

*Saint-Just.* He only *acts* as if he had something to say.—The jury must declare itself sufficiently informed and end the hearings.

*Barère.* That's impossible—it would never work.

*Saint-Just.* We must get rid of them at any cost, even if we have to strangle them with our bare hands! "Dare!" Danton mustn't have taught us that word for nothing. The Revolution won't stumble over its own corpses; but if Danton stays alive he'll grab her by the skirt, and from what I see in his face he's liable to rape Liberty herself.

SAINT-JUST is called out. A JAILER enters.

*Jailer.* Some of the prisoners in Sainte Pélagie are dying, sir; they asked for a doctor.

*Billaud-Varennnes.* That won't be necessary; just that much less work for the executioner.

*Jailer.* Some of the women are pregnant.

*Billaud-Varennnes.* Excellent; we won't need coffins for the children.

*Barère.* Every consumptive aristocrat saves the Tribunal a sitting. And every bit of medicine would be counter-revolutionary.

*Collot* [*takes a paper*]. A petition! A woman's name!

*Barère.* Probably one of those forced to choose between the guillotine and a Jacobin's bed. They die like Lucretia, at the loss of their honor—but somewhat later than the Roman matron: in childbed, perhaps, or of cancer, or old age.—It might not be so unpleasant to drive a Tarquin out of the virtuous republic of a virgin.

*Collot.* She's too old. Madame wants to die; she knows how to express herself: prison lies upon her like the lid of a coffin; she's been there four weeks. The answer's easy: [*He reads as he writes.*] "Citizeness, you have not yet wished long enough for death." [*The JAILER goes off.*]

*Barère.* Well said! And yet, Collot, I don't think it's proper for the guillotine to begin laughing; as it is, the people aren't afraid of it any more; we shouldn't get too familiar about it.

SAINT-JUST re-enters.

*Saint-Just.* I've just received a letter of denunciation. A conspiracy's under way in the prison; a young man named Laflotte discovered it. He was in the same cell as Dillon, and Dillon became drunk and talked.

*Barère.* So he simply cuts his throat with his bottle; that's happened often enough.

*Saint-Just.* The wives of Danton and Camille are to throw money to the people, Dillon will escape, the prisoners be freed, and the Convention blown up.

*Barère.* Fairy tales!

*Saint-Just.* These fairy tales will send them to sleep, all right. I have the report here; add to that the impudence of the accused, the people's dissatisfaction, the confusion of the jury—I'll make a report.

*Barère.* Yes, Saint-Just, you go on spinning out your sentences, with every comma the stroke of a sword, and every period a chopped-off head!

*Saint-Just.* The Convention must decree that the Tribunal continue the trial without interruption and that every prisoner who fails to show due respect toward the court or creates a disturbance will be excluded from the hearings.

*Barère.* You do have an instinct for the revolutionary! It all sounds quite moderate, but it's also bound to succeed. They'll never be able to keep themselves down, and Danton's bound to let go.

*Saint-Just.* I'm counting on your support. There are people in the Convention who are as sick as Danton and afraid of being served the same cure. They've regained courage and will start complaining about unconstitutional procedures—

*Barère [interrupting him].* And I'll tell them that's what happened to the Roman Consul who uncovered Catiline's conspiracy and had the criminals executed on the spot—they complained about unconstitutional procedures then, too. And who were his accusers?

*Collot [with theatrical solemnity].* Go, Saint-Just! The lava of the Revolution flows! Liberty shall suffocate with her embrace those weaklings who would lie within her lap; the majesty of the people shall appear in thunder and lightning like Jupiter to Semele and change them all to ashes. Go, Saint-Just, we will help you thrust your thunderbolt down upon the heads of these cowards!

[SAINT-JUST goes off.]  
*Barère.* Did you hear him use the word "cure"? Next thing you know they'll be calling the guillotine a cure for syphilis. They're not fighting the moderates, they're fighting vice.

*Billaud-Varennes.* This is the first time we've disagreed.

*Barère.* Robespierre wants to turn the Revolution into a morals lecture hall, and the guillotine into a pulpit.

*Billaud-Varennes.* Or into a cushion to kneel on while praying.

*Collot.* And on which he'll finally lie rather than kneel.

*Barère.* That will be easy enough. The world will be

standing on its head when all the so-called rogues are hanged by all the so-called righteous people.

*Collot [to BARÈRE].* When are you coming to Clichy again?

*Barère.* When the doctor's done with me.

*Collot.* Is it true that over the place there hangs a comet, and that its scorching rays dry up the marrow of your spinal column?

*Billaud-Varennes.* And soon the lovely fingers of that Demaly will pull it from its sheath and make it hang down like a pigtail behind your back.

*Barère [shrugs his shoulders].* Hm! What can the virtuous know of such things!

*Billaud-Varennes.* The impotent pedant!

[BILLAUD-VARENNES and COLLOT go off.]

*Barère [alone].* The monsters!—"You have not yet wished long enough for death!" These words should have withered the tongue that spoke them.—And I?—When the Septembrists broke into the prison, one of the prisoners seized a knife, joined with the assassins, thrust it into the breast of a priest, and was saved! Who can blame him for that? Shall I join with the assassins now, or sit on the Committee of Public Safety? Shall I use the guillotine or a pocketknife? The situation is the same, only the circumstances are more involved.—And being allowed to murder one man, why not two, or three, or more? Where does it end? It's like barleycorns! Do two make a pile, or three, or four? How many? Come, my conscience, come, my little chicken, come, chuck-chuck-chuck, here's your feed!—But—I was never a prisoner. Yet I was under suspicion; that can mean only one thing: my death.

[He goes off.]

SCENE VII—*The Conciergerie*

LACROIX, DANTON, PHILIPPEAU, CAMILLE

LACROIX. You were in good voice, Danton. If you had taken such trouble for your life earlier it might be different now. Am I right? Especially now when death

comes so shamelessly close with her stinking breath, more and more urgent?

*Camille.* Why can't death ravish a person and tear his prize from our hot bodies with fighting and struggling! But here with all these formalities, it's like marrying an old woman, with contracts to sign, and witnesses to call, and the Amen to be said, and then finally she crawls in under the bedcovers with you with cold feet!

*Danton.* How I wish it were a fight, with arms and teeth tearing and clutching! But it's as if I'd fallen into a mill shaft, and my arms and legs were slowly and systematically being wrenched off by cold physical force. Imagine being killed mechanically!

*Camille.* And then to lie there, alone, cold, stiff, in the damp fog of decay—perhaps death will torture life out of us fiber by fiber—perhaps we'll even be conscious of the fact that we're falling to pieces!

*Philippeau.* Calm yourself, my friends. We're like the autumn crocus that bears no seed until the winter's over. The only difference between us and flowers being transplanted is that we stink a bit in the process. Is that so bad?

*Danton.* What an edifying prospect! From one dunghill to another! The divine theory of classes! From first we move to second, from second to third, and so on and on. I'm sick of school benches; I've sat calluses on my backside like a monkey from sitting on them.

*Philippeau.* Then what do you want?

*Danton.* Peace.

*Philippeau.* Peace is in God.

*Danton.* Peace is in nothingness. Sink yourself into something more peaceful than nothingness, and if the ultimate peace is God, then God must be nothingness. However, I'm an atheist. Damn whoever said: Something cannot become nothing! The pitiable fact is that *I am something!* Creation has spread itself so far that there is nothing empty any more, multitudes everywhere. This is the suicide of nothingness, creation is its wound, we its drops of blood, and the world its grave in which it rots.—Mad as that sounds, there is some truth in it.

*Camille.* The world is the Wandering Jew, and nothing-

ness is death; but that's impossible. "Alas, alas, I cannot die!" as they sing in the old song.

*Danton.* We're all of us buried alive like kings in three or four layers of coffins: the sky, our houses, our shirts, and our coats. We scratch at the coffin lid for fifty long years. If only we could believe in annihilation! It would at least be a comfort. There's no hope in death; it's only a less complicated form of decay than life—that's the only difference!—But this is the very kind of decay that I've grown used to; the devil only knows how I'll adjust to another.—Oh, Julie! What if I go alone? What if I must leave her behind?—And even if I fell to pieces utterly, completely dissolved: I would always be a handful of tormented dust, no single atom of me could find rest except in her.—I can't die, no, I can't die. We must roar; they must tear every drop of life's blood from my body.

## SCENE VIII—A room

FOUQUIER. AMAR. VOULAND

*Fouquier.* I don't know what to answer them any more; they're demanding a commission be appointed.

*Amar.* We've got the scoundrels now: here's what you've been wanting. [*He hands FOUQUIER a paper.*] The decree from Saint-Just.

*Vouland.* That should satisfy them.

*Fouquier.* Yes, we needed this.

*Amar.* Let's get this settled and out of the way for them and for us.

## SCENE IX—The Revolutionary Tribunal

*DANTON.* The Republic is in danger and knows nothing of it! We appeal to the people; my voice is still strong enough to deliver a funeral oration for the Decemvirs.—I repeat: We demand the appointment of a commission; we have important matters to reveal. I shall withdraw to the citadel of Reason, and I shall break through with the artillery of Truth and cast down my enemies before me.

*Signs of approval.* FOUQUIER, AMAR, and VOULAND enter.

*Fouquier.* Silence in the name of the Republic and in the name of the law! The Convention decrees the following: In consideration of the fact that signs of mutiny have been detected in the prisons; in consideration of the fact that Danton's and Camille's wives are distributing money among the people, and that General Dillon is plotting to escape and place himself at the head of the insurgents in order to free the accused; and, finally, in consideration of the fact that the accused have gone out of their way to create disturbances and insult the Tribunal—the Tribunal is hereby empowered to continue the investigation without interruption, and to exclude from the trial any prisoner who shall fail to show the respect due to the law.

*Danton.* I ask all present whether we have defied the Tribunal, the people, or the National Convention?

*Many Voices.* No! No!

*Camille.* The beasts, they want to murder my Lucille!

*Danton.* The truth will be known one day. I see a great catastrophe overtaking France. It is dictatorship; it has torn off its veil, and carries its head high, and strides across our corpses. [*Pointing to AMAR and VOULAND.*] There you see the cowards, the murderers; you see there the ravens of the Committee of Public Safety!—I accuse Robespierre, Saint-Just, and their hangmen of high treason. They are out to suffocate the Republic in blood. The ruts made by the guillotine's carts are highways on which the enemies of France will surge into the heart of our country.—For how much longer must the footprints of Liberty be graves?—You ask for bread, and they toss you severed heads! You thirst, and they make you lap up blood from the guillotine's steps!

*There is an uproar among the SPECTATORS,  
cries of approval.*

*Many Voices.* Long live Danton! Down with the Decemvirs!

*The PRISONERS are forcibly led away.*

SCENE X—A square in front of the Palace of Justice

A crowd

SEVERAL VOICES. Down with the Decemvirs! Long live Danton!

*First Citizen.* Yes, he's right! Heads instead of bread! Blood instead of wine!

*Several Women.* The guillotine's no mill, and the executioner's no baker! We want bread, bread!

*Second Citizen.* Danton's eating your bread. And his head will give it back to you. You can trust him.

*First Citizen.* Danton was with us on the tenth of August, Danton was with us in September. Where were the people who accused him?

*Second Citizen.* And Lafayette was with you at Versailles and still he was a traitor.

*First Citizen.* Who says that Danton's a traitor?

*Second Citizen.* Robespierre.

*First Citizen.* Then Robespierre's a traitor!

*Second Citizen.* Who says so?

*First Citizen.* Danton.

*Second Citizen.* Danton has nice clothes, Danton has a nice house, Danton has a nice wife; he bathes in Burgundy, eats game off silver dishes, sleeps with your wives and daughters when he's drunk.—Danton was as poor as you. Where did all this come from? The King bought it for him so Danton would save his crown. The Duke of Orléans gave it to him as a gift so Danton would steal the crown. The foreigners let him have it so Danton would betray you all.—What does Robespierre have? The virtuous Robespierre! You all know him.

*All.* Long live Robespierre! Down with Danton! Down with the traitors!

## ACT FOUR

## SCENE I—A room

JULIE. A BOY

JULIE. It's all over now. They trembled in front of him. They'll kill him because they're afraid. Go on! I've seen him for the last time; tell him I could never look at him as he is now. [*She gives him a lock of her hair.*] Here, take this to him and tell him that he won't have to go alone—he'll understand. And then come back to me quickly; I want to see him again—in your eyes.

## SCENE II—A street

DUMAS. A CITIZEN

CITIZEN. How can they sentence so many innocent people to death after a trial like that?

Dumas. It does seem extraordinary; but these revolutionaries have an instinct about such things that others lack, and this instinct never misleads them.

Citizen. The instinct of a tiger.—You have a wife.

Dumas. Soon I will have had one.

Citizen. Then it's true?

Dumas. The Revolutionary Tribunal will pronounce our separation; the guillotine will divide us from bed and board.

Citizen. You're a monster!

Dumas. You fool! I suppose you admire Brutus?

Citizen. With all my heart.

Dumas. Must one be a Roman consul and able to hide his head in a toga in order to sacrifice his love to his country? The only difference between Brutus and myself is that I shall wipe my eyes with the sleeve of my red coat.

Citizen. But that's horrible!

Dumas. Go on, you wouldn't understand such things!  
[*They go off.*]

SCENE III—*The Conciergerie*

LACROIX, HÉRAULT-SÉCHELLES *on one bed*, DANTON *and*  
CAMILLE *on another.*

LACROIX. The way your hair and nails grow in a place like this makes you ashamed of yourself.

Héroult-Séchéelles. I wish you'd be more careful, you sneezed directly in my face!

Lacroix. And you, my friend, stop stepping on my feet, my corns take exception to such treatment!

Héroult-Séchéelles. And you've got lice, too.

Lacroix. Oh! I can hardly wait to be rid of the little vermin!

Héroult-Séchéelles. Well, good night! We'll have to see how we get on with one another, there's little enough room. Just don't scratch me with those nails in your sleep!—There! Stop tearing at the shroud that way, it's cold in here!

Danton. That's right, Camille, tomorrow we'll be worn-out shoes that they'll throw in the lap of that beggar-woman, earth.

Héroult-Séchéelles. The cowhide that, according to Plato, the angels make slippers from and grope about in on the earth. It's all what you might expect.—Oh, Lucille!

Danton. Calm yourself, my boy!

Camille. How can I, Danton? How can you even think I could? How can I? They can't even touch her, can they? The beauty that shines from her precious body can't be put out. Why, not even the earth would dare bury her; it would arch itself over her body, the mist of the grave would sparkle on her eyelashes like dew, crystals would spring up like flowers around her limbs and bright springs murmur her to sleep.

Danton. Go to sleep, my boy, go to sleep!

Camille. You know, Danton—just between us—it's a terrible thing to die. It's all so useless. When it happens, I'll want to steal just one last look from life in all its beauty; yes, I'll keep my eyes open.

Danton. You'll keep them open anyway; our executioner

never holds one's eyes shut. Sleep is more merciful. Sleep, boy, sleep!

*Camille.* Lucille—I can imagine your kiss on my lips; every kiss becomes a dream; I'll close my eyes and dream—and hold them fast. . . .

*Danton.* Will the clock never stop! Every tick pushes the walls closer around me, till they're narrow as a coffin.—I read a story like that once when I was a child, it made my hair stand on end. Yes, when I was a child! It wasn't worth the trouble to fatten me up and keep me warm. Just another job for the gravediggers!—I feel as if I'd already begun to stink. My dear body, I shall hold my nose closed and imagine that you are a lovely woman, sweating and stinking a bit after a dance, and pay you compliments. We've had better times than this with one another. Tomorrow you'll be nothing but a broken fiddle with no more tunes to play. Tomorrow you'll be an empty bottle; I've emptied all the wine but I'm still not drunk and go sober to bed—they're lucky people who can still get drunk. Tomorrow you'll be a worn-out pair of pants; you'll be thrown in the wardrobe, and be eaten by moths, and then you can stink as much as you like.—Yes, it's useless! Of course it's miserable having to die. What does death do but mimic birth? We die as helpless and naked as newborn babes. And of course we get a shroud for swaddling clothes. What good will it do! We can whimper just as well in the grave as in the cradle.—*Camille!* He's sleeping. [*While bending over him.*] There's a dream between his lashes. I mustn't wipe that golden dew of sleep from his eyes. [*He rises and goes to the window.*] I won't be going alone: thank you, Julie! Still, I wish I could have died differently, without effort, like a star falling, or a note of music that breathes itself out, kissing itself with its own lips, like a ray of light burying itself in a sea of clear water.—The stars are scattered through the night like glistening teardrops; what a terrible grief must be behind the eyes that dropped them.

*Camille.* Oh! [*He has sat up, and gropes for the ceiling.*]

*Danton.* What is it, Camille?

*Camille.* Oh! Oh!

*Danton* [*shakes him*]. Are you trying to scratch the ceiling down?

*Camille.* Oh, it's you, it's you—hold me, please, talk to me!

*Danton.* Your whole body's trembling, there's sweat on your forehead.

*Camille.* Yes, it's you—and I'm here—yes! And this is my hand! Yes, I remember now.—Oh, Danton, it was terrible!

*Danton.* What was?

*Camille.* I was half between waking and sleeping. Then suddenly the ceiling disappeared, and the moon floated down into the room, close to me, it was thick, I held it with my arms. The sky came down on me with its lights, I pounded at it, I groped at the stars, I thrashed about like a man drowning under a layer of ice. Oh, Danton, it was terrible!

*Danton.* What you saw was the glow of the lamp on the ceiling.

*Camille.* It doesn't take much to make a man lose the little understanding he has left. I felt madness grasp me by the hair. [*He rises.*] I don't want to sleep any more, I don't want to go mad. [*He reaches for a book.*]

*Danton.* What are you reading?

*Camille.* *Night Thoughts.*

*Danton.* Why die twice! Give me *La Pucelle*. Why should I slide from life on my knees! I'd rather crawl from the bed of some merciful sister. Life's a whore; she fornicates with the whole world.

SCENE IV—*The Square in front of the Conciergerie*

A JAILER. TWO CARTERS with their carts. WOMEN

JAILER. Who called you here?

*First Carter.* Here? I'm not called Here, that's a funny name.

*Jailer.* Blockhead, who gave you permission to come?

*First Carter.* Commission? I don't get commission—no more than ten sous a head.



*Second Carter.* The villain'd take the bread right out of my mouth.

*First Carter.* What do you mean: bread? [*Pointing toward the PRISONERS' window.*] There's food for worms.

*Second Carter.* My children are no better off than worms either, and they want their share, too. Oh, it's a bad trade we've got, even if we are the best carters.

*First Carter.* How do you mean?

*Second Carter.* Who's the best carter?

*First Carter.* The one that drives farthest and quickest.

*Second Carter.* You silly fool, how can you drive farther than driving people out of the world, and quicker than in fifteen minutes? It's exactly fifteen minutes from here to the guillotine.

*Jailer.* Hurry up, you lazy louts! Closer to the door! You girls get back!

*First Carter.* You stay there! You never go around a girl, you go through her.

*Second Carter.* Sure, I'll believe that: you'll find the road wide enough to take your horse and cart with you; but you'll be in quarantine when you get back out. [*They drive forward.*]

*Second Carter* [*to the WOMEN*]. What are you gawking at?

*A Woman.* Waiting to see our old customers.

*Second Carter.* You mean my cart will be a whorehouse? I'll have you know it's a respectable cart, the King and all the fine gentlemen from Paris rode in it to the scaffold.

*Lucille* [*enters; sits down on a stone beneath the PRISONERS' window*]. Camille! Camille! [*CAMILLE appears at the window.*] You're making me laugh, Camille, with that long stone coat and the iron mask on your face! Can't you bend down to me? Where are your arms?—I'll lure this tassel-gentle to me then: [*Sings.*]

Two stars in Heaven are shining,

Oh, brighter than the moon,

One at my dear love's window,

One at her chamber door.

Come, come, my love! Come quietly up the stairs, the house is sleeping. The moon has helped me wait for you

all this time. But you can't come in the door, your costume's too unbearable. This is not a very funny joke, so please stop! You aren't moving either, why won't you say something? You're making me afraid.—Listen! People are saying you have to die, and making such long faces. Die! Their long faces make me laugh. Die! What kind of word is that? Tell me, Camille! Die! I must think about it. Oh, there, there it is—I must run after it; come, my love, help me catch it, come! Come! [*She runs off.*]

*Camille* [*calls*]. Lucille! Lucille!

SCENE V—*The Conciergerie*

DANTON *at a window which looks into the adjoining room.*

CAMILLE, PHILIPPEAU, LACROIX, HÉRAULT-SÉCHELLES

DANTON. You're very quiet now, Fabre.

*Fabre* [*from within*]. Quiet as death.

*Danton.* Do you know what we'll be making soon?

*Fabre* [*from within*]. Well?

*Danton.* What you've spent your whole life making—*des vers.*

*Camille* [*to himself*]. There was madness behind those eyes. She's not the first to go mad—that's what the world makes of us. What can we do? Wash our hands! It's better that way.

*Danton.* I'm leaving everything in terrible confusion. Not one of them knows how to govern. It might still work, though, if I left my whores to Robespierre and my thighs to Couthon.

*Lacroix.* We'd be making Liberty a whore!

*Danton.* But that wouldn't have been much of a feat! Liberty and whores are the most cosmopolitan things under the sun. Liberty will prostitute herself honorably now in the marriage bed of the lawyer from Arras. But I think she'll play Clytemnestra on him. I give him less than six months before he follows me.

*Camille* [*to himself*]. Heaven help her to find some comfortable delusion. The universal delusion that we call

Reason is unbearably boring. The only way to be happy is imagine yourself Father, Son, and Holy Ghost all in one.

*Lacroix.* The asses will cry out: "Long live the Republic!" when we go by.

*Danton.* What does it matter? The flood of the Revolution can toss up our bodies wherever it likes, but they'll still be able to pick up our fossilized bones and smash in the heads of kings with them.

*Hérault-Séchelles.* Yes, if there happens to be a Samson around to find our jawbones.

*Danton.* They're all brothers of Cain.

*Lacroix.* And Robespierre's another Nero; look how friendly he was to Camille just two days before the arrest. Isn't that right, Camille?

*Camille.* I don't care—what does it matter? [To himself.] What a charming child she made of her madness! Why must I leave just now? We would have laughed with it, and rocked it, and kissed it.

*Danton.* If ever history opens our graves, despotism will suffocate from the stink of our dead bodies.

*Hérault-Séchelles.* We stank enough while we were alive.—But those are phrases for posterity, aren't they, Danton; they're none of our business.

*Camille.* From the face he's making you'd think he was turning it to stone for posterity to dig up as an antique.—Does it pay to put on false smiles, and rouge our cheeks, and speak with a fine accent? We ought to tear the masks off for once and look around as if in a room of mirrors, and everywhere see nothing but the ancient, innumerable, and imperishable head of a fool.—Nothing more, nothing less. The difference isn't so great, we're all rogues and angels, idiots and geniuses, in fact all of them in one: they all four find place enough in our bodies, they're not so large as people like to believe. Sleep, digest, procreate—it's what we all do; all the rest are only variations in different keys on the same theme. And still we have to be embarrassed and make faces, we still have to be embarrassed in front of one another! We've all stuffed ourselves sick at the same table and have a monumental bellyache; why cover our faces with our napkins? Cry and whimper as it happens to you! Just don't make such virtuous and

clever and heroic and cheerful grimaces—after all, we know one another, so let's spare the trouble!

*Hérault-Séchelles.* Yes, we ought to sit down together and roar; what can be stupider than pressing our lips together when something hurts us. It was the Greeks and gods who roared, the Romans and Stoics sat there making heroic faces.

*Danton.* They were both Epicureans in their own way. Those Stoics gave themselves a comfortable feeling of self-respect. It's not at all bad to drape your toga around you and look about to see how long a shadow you're throwing. Why should we argue? What does it matter whether we cover our parts with laurel or roses or vine leaves or show the ugly thing in public for dogs to lick at!

*Philippeau.* No, my friends, we needn't get too high above the earth before all this confusion and glitter disappear and our eyes see only the few broad lines that God intended. There's an ear to which all this screaming and crying that we find so confusing is a stream of harmonics.

*Danton.* Except that we're the miserable musicians, our bodies the instruments. Do these ugly sounds that we bungle out of them exist only to float higher and higher and finally die out as softly as a voluptuous sigh in those heavenly ears?

*Hérault-Séchelles.* Are we suckling pigs that are whipped to death for the tables of princes, so that our flesh is more tasty?

*Danton.* Are we children roasted in the glowing Moloch-arms of the world and tickled with rays of light so that the gods can laugh?

*Camille.* Is the ether with its golden eyes nothing but a bowl of golden carp, set on the table of the blessed gods, so that the blessed gods can laugh eternally, and the fish die eternally, and the gods amuse themselves eternally with the play of colors of the death agony?

*Danton.* The world is chaos. Nothingness is the world-god yet to be born.

THE JAILER enters.

*Jailer.* Gentlemen, you may be on your way, your carriage is at the door.

*Philippeau.* Good night, my friends! Let us quietly pull the great cover over us, under which all hearts beat their last and all eyes fall shut. [*They embrace one another.*]

*Hérault-Séchelles* [*takes CAMILLE's arm*]. Cheer up, Camille, it will be a nice night for it. Look there at the clouds in the still evening sky—like a burnt-out Olympus, with its dead, sinking forms of gods. [*They go off.*]

## SCENE VI—A room

*JULIE.* People were running in the streets, but it's quiet now.—I mustn't make him wait for even a moment. [*She takes out a phial.*] Come, dearest priest, whose Amen sends us to bed. [*She goes to the window.*] How lovely it is to say good-bye like this; I have only to close the door behind me. [*She drinks.*] I wish I could stand here forever.—The sun has gone down; earth's face looked so sharp in its light, but now she's calm and solemn as a dying woman. Twilight plays so beautifully on her brow and cheeks.—She grows paler and paler, like a body sinking down into a sea of air. Will no one seize her by her golden hair and pull her from the stream and bury her?—I'll go quietly. I won't kiss her, for fear a breath or sigh should wake her from her slumber.—Sleep, sleep! [*She dies.*]

## SCENE VII—Place de la Révolution

*The carts are driven on and stop in front of the guillotine. MEN and WOMEN sing and dance the Carmagnole. The PRISONERS begin singing the Marseillaise.*

A WOMAN WITH CHILDREN. Make room here! Give us some room! My children are screaming, they're hungry. I want to let them watch so they'll stop crying. Give us some room here!

A Woman. Hey, Danton, you can pump away at the worms now.

*Another.* You, Hérault, I'm going to have a wig made from your beautiful hair.

*Hérault-Séchelles.* Madame, I don't have enough hair to cover your denuded mound of Venus.

*Camille.* You damned bitches, you'll be crying soon enough for the mountains to fall on top of you!

A Woman. It's you the mountain's fallen on, or more likely you've fallen behind the mountain.

*Danton* [*to CAMILLE*]. Quiet, my boy! You've screamed yourself hoarse.

*Camille* [*gives the CARTER money*]. There, old Charon, your cart makes a good salver!—Gentlemen, permit me to serve myself up first. This is a classical supper we are invited to: we lie down to our places and scatter a bit of blood as a libation. Good-bye, Danton!

*He ascends the scaffold, the PRISONERS follow him one after the other. DANTON is the last to ascend.*

*Lacroix* [*to the PEOPLE*]. You killed us on the day when you lost your Reason; you will kill them on the day when you regain it.

*Some Voices.* Ha! We've heard that one before; try again! How boring!

*Lacroix.* The tyrants will break their necks over our graves!

*Hérault-Séchelles* [*to DANTON*]. He thinks his body's a hotbed of Liberty.

*Philippeau* [*on the scaffold*]. I forgive you; I hope that the hour of your death is no bitterer than mine.

*Hérault-Séchelles.* I knew it! He couldn't resist pulling out his shirt to show them down there he's got on clean linen!

*Fabre.* Farewell, Danton! I die twice over.

*Danton.* Good-bye, my friend! The guillotine is the best of all doctors.

*Hérault-Séchelles* [*tries to embrace DANTON*]. I'm sorry, Danton, I can't seem to manage a joke. The time has come. [*An EXECUTIONER pushes them apart.*]

*Danton* [*to the EXECUTIONER*]. Are you trying to be crueller than death? Do you think you can prevent our heads from kissing down there in the basket?

## SCENE VIII—A street

LUCILLE. There must be something serious in it somewhere. I must think about that. I'm beginning to understand such things.—Dying—dying—!—But everything has the right to live, everything, this little fly here, that bird. Why not he? The stream of life would stop if even a drop were spilt. The earth would suffer a wound from such a blow.—Everything moves on, clocks tick, bells peal, people run, water flows, and so on and on to—no, it mustn't happen, no, I'll sit on the ground and scream, that all things stop, in fear, that nothing goes any more, that nothing moves. [*She sits on the ground, covers her eyes and screams. After a moment she rises.*] It doesn't help, nothing at all has changed: the houses, the streets, the wind blowing, the clouds passing.—I suppose we must bear it.

Several WOMEN come down the street.

First Woman. A handsome man, that Hérault!

Second Woman. On Constitution Day when I saw him standing at the Arc de Triomphe, I said to myself, I said: "Now there's one who'd look good up on the guillotine," really. Kind of a presentiment, you might say.

Third Woman. Yes, I think we need to see people in all kinds of circumstances; I think it's a good thing that dying's become so public. [*They go past.*]

Lucille. O Camille! Where shall I look for you now?

## SCENE IX—Place de la Révolution

Two EXECUTIONERS busy with the guillotine.

FIRST EXECUTIONER [*stands on the guillotine and sings*].

And when I home do go

By the moon's warm glow—

Second Executioner. Hey! You almost done?

First Executioner. In a minute, in a minute! [*Sings.*]

My father stands at the door

Asking: "Where have you been with your whore?"  
Here! Throw me the jacket! [*They go off singing.*]

Both Executioners [*sing*].

And when I home did go

By the moon's warm glow . . .

Lucille [*enters and sits on the steps of the guillotine*].  
May I sit here in your lap, O silent Angel of Death?  
[*Sings.*]

There is a Reaper, his name is Death,

His power from Almighty God he hath.

My dear, sweet cradle that lulled my Camille to sleep,  
you smothered him with your roses. And you, his death  
bells, you sang him to his grave with your sweet voices.  
[*Sings.*]

How many hundred thousands fall  
Beneath his sickle's pitiless call.

A PATROL enters.

A Citizen. Ho! Who's there?

Lucille [*reflective, and then as if making a decision, suddenly*]. Long live the King!

Citizen. In the name of the Republic!

She is surrounded by the PATROL and led away.