

The Return

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CHARACTERS

7 characters, 6 actors

PIERRE - M, 50S

COLLETTE - F, 40S

BASQUE - M, Any age

TIENNE - F, late 20s

MARTIN - M, late 20s

BERTRANDE - F, late 20s

CORALINA - F, 60

CASTING NOTE: The role of Collette doubles the role of Coralina.

SETTING

A large estate.

ACT 1

A large estate. We are in a lavish living room, which is a central hub for all other rooms in this mansion, and as such has numerous entrances and exits, each leading some place different.

The room is decorated with all the accoutrements of the really rich. Vases and stuff. Nice dishes. Fancy furniture. Paintings with custom frames. Latin phrases on plaques that maybe offer insight as to how all this success can be achieved. The centerpiece of all this fancy stuff is a huge portrait of the matriarch and owner of this estate, Coralina. Next to that portrait is another portrait of Coralina's son, Martin, a teenager in the picture. In between the two is a plaque with the Latin phrase: *Tenet Nosce*.

Presently, Coralina's brother, PIERRE (50s) paces anxiously around the room. COLLETTE (40s), his confidante, watches.

PIERRE

Basque!
Basque, I say!

(To Collette)

Where the devil is he?

BASQUE, a servant, rushes in. He is out of breath and lately in a constant state of nervousness, owing to job insecurity.

BASQUE

Sir? You called?

PIERRE

I called you twice.

BASQUE

Please don't fire me.

COLLETTE

Pierre shouldn't have to call you more than once before you arrive.

BASQUE

(Contrite)

You are absolutely right.

COLLETTE

If you were a good servant, you'd come before he even called the first time.

BASQUE

I am so sorry. It was completely my fault.

COLLETTE

Yes. It was.

BASQUE

I will say, it is a very big house. So to get from one end to the other-

COLLETTE

Are you making excuses?

BASQUE

(Contrite)

I... am and I shouldn't be. I apologize for that, as well.

PIERRE

Enough of your apologies!

I am anxious to know the prognosis of my sister. Did the doctor leave?

BASQUE

Yes. He did. Just a few moments ago.

PIERRE

Did I not say to come tell me as soon as he left?

BASQUE

He did just leave.

PIERRE

I thought he left a few moments ago!

BASQUE
(Contrite)

I should have told you sooner.

COLLETTE
I don't understand why you can't follow simple orders.

BASQUE
The thing is, I was on my way to report the doctor just left, but someone was at the door.

COLLETTE
Are you making another excuse?

BASQUE
I am. And I apologize. What I should have done is come here first to say the doctor has left-

COLLETTE
And leave his guest waiting at the door?

BASQUE
No. That would be horrible.

COLLETTE
Honestly. What is the matter with you today?

PIERRE
(To Collette)
Put a pin in that.
(To Basque)
Answer *me* first. What did the doctor say?

COLLETTE
(To Basque)
Yes. Tell him already? This is like the 5th time he's asked you.

BASQUE
(Carefully)
It's... actually only the... first time he's asked me.

COLLETTE
He shouldn't have to ask you even once! You need to anticipate. That's the mark of a good employee, and that's what you'll become, if it's the last thing I do.

BASQUE
(More carefully)

But I don't... work for you.

PIERRE
No, you work for me. And I don't understand why it's taking so long to answer a simple question.

COLLETTE
(To Basque)
It's like the 12th time he's asked you.

BASQUE
I apologize.

COLLETTE
As I recall, when he brought you on, you assured him you were an excellent servant.

BASQUE
My desire to be of excellent service is at the core of who I am.

COLLETTE
Despite the fact that he is the only one who would hire you.

BASQUE
That's only because my former master died (under mysterious circumstances).
Consequently no one wanted anything to do with me for fear that I might be bad luck.

COLLETTE
Or responsible.

BASQUE
(A touchy subject)
I had nothing to do with my former master's death.

COLLETTE
Yet here we are 6 months later, and your *new* master, Pierre's sister, seems to be suffering from a similar fate.

BASQUE
There is nothing similar about it.

COLLETTE
No? Is she not also deathly ill from mysterious circumstances?

BASQUE

Well yes, *that* is similar. But unlike his sister, my former master was murdered. At least that is what most believe. By her husband, no less. Though that could never be proven.

PIERRE

I don't care about your former master or her husband! I only care what the doctor said about Coralina. Won't you tell me now please!

COLLETTE

This is like the 20th time he's asked you.

PIERRE

Does he know what's at the root of her illness?

BASQUE

...Before I answer that, can I just say I don't think he is a very good doctor. I hope you don't pay him much.

PIERRE

I pay him as much I pay you.

BASQUE

You don't pay me much.

PIERRE

I'm not asking your opinion of the doctor! Just *his* opinion of my sister!

COLLETTE

It's like the 75th time he's asked you!

Beat.

BASQUE

(Bleakly)

Right. Well... The doctor doesn't know what's causing Mistress Coralina's declining health. It is as much a mystery to him as it is to anyone. She is unfortunately still in her coma and the doctor suspects unless a cure can be found, if things keep going the way they've been going, she could be dead within 24 hours.

Pierre nods, taking in the information.

PIERRE

(Confirming)

And he doesn't know what's causing it? You're certain?

BASQUE

I'm certain that's what he told me.

(Then)

I am so sorry. I know how difficult that can be. If there's anything I can do-

COLLETTE

Your job would be nice. Did you not say someone was at the door?

BASQUE

A woman. Yes.

COLLETTE

And why haven't you seen her in?

A confused Basque considers saying, "I've been here with you" but instead opts for the safer:

BASQUE

Under the circumstances, I didn't know if Mr. Pierre would want to see anyone.

PIERRE

Who is the woman? Someone of importance?

BASQUE

I am a servant, sir. Everyone is important to me.

Beat. Then, Pierre makes a motion with his hand to signal that Basque should send the woman in.

BASQUE

Yes, sir.

Basque exits.

A solemn pause.

COLLETTE

(Consoling)

How are you feeling, Pierre?

PIERRE

...I am feeling many things.

COLLETTE

I would imagine so. All the feelings typical of losing a loved one.

PIERRE

Yes.

COLLETTE

Sad.

PIERRE

A little.

COLLETTE

Scared.

PIERRE

I suppose.

COLLETTE

Angry.

PIERRE

Maybe.

COLLETTE

Horny.

PIERRE

Sure.

(Then, confused)

What?

COLLETTE

Sexy.

PIERRE

Hardly.

COLLETTE

Naked.

PIERRE

Collette-

COLLETTE

Rapturous.

Already?

PIERRE

And afterglow?

COLLETTE

Pierre shakes his head.

PIERRE

...Collette-

She sidles up to him.

COLLETTE

You know, I'm here if you need me. As I have been for years. Ever loyal.

PIERRE

You have been a wonderful friend.

COLLETTE

I could be more.
A lover?
A wife?

PIERRE

I can't think of that now.

COLLETTE

Of course. Your sister is sick.

PIERRE

Yes.

COLLETTE

Suffering for 6 months.

PIERRE

It's true.

COLLETTE

All you want, I'm sure, is for her to be at peace.

PIERRE

That's all I want.

COLLETTE

(Trying to sound casual)

And once she is at peace... what happens to her estate?

PIERRE

(Also, trying to sound casual)

...You know I hadn't really thought of that.

I guess it... well Hell, I guess it all goes to me.

COLLETTE

All of it?

PIERRE

A small consolation for the loss of a loved one.

COLLETTE

(Ironically, looking around the mansion)

So very small.

PIERRE

Hopefully I'll persevere.

COLLETTE

I know you will.

(Then)

Your certain you get everything?

PIERRE

There is no one left. Her husband passed some time ago and her son, Martin-

COLLETTE

Died in the war, you said. Left here eleven years ago to enlist and a month later he was killed.

PIERRE

That is what I said, yes.

COLLETTE

And what of Martin's wife? Bertrande? She still lives here, no?

PIERRE

She lives here out of the goodness of my sister's heart. Why, I have no idea, they weren't married long.

COLLETTE

And it was an arranged marriage, as I recall?

PIERRE

Yes. Arranged by Martin's father.

COLLETTE

Did they even love each other?

PIERRE

It is irrelevant. Coralina's Will is quite straight forward. Everything is left to Martin. If Martin is dead... It all goes to me.

COLLETTE

(Repeating)

A small consolation for the loss of a loved one.

PIERRE

So very small.

COLLETTE

Yet you are loved by others. I hope you know that.

She gets close to him.

COLLETTE

There is no need for you to be alone.

She runs a finger down his chest.

He backs away.

PIERRE

Would you go see what's taking that idiot Basque so long with my guest.

COLLETTE

Anything for you, my dear.

Collette exits.

Pierre turns to the large portrait of Coralina.

PIERRE

24-hours, sister. It doesn't look good. I'm sorry to say the doctor today had no idea what's behind your illness.

A sinister smile.

PIERRE

It looks like the poison I've been giving you is as advertised, truly untraceable.
One more dose I think, and your vast fortune will belong to me.

If there were time he'd do a sinister laugh, but
Collette re-enters.

COLLETTE

I see them coming now. I tell you I don't know why you hired this fellow, he has no sense
of urgency.

PIERRE

I have my reasons.

Basque re-enters with TIENNE.

BASQUE

Mr. Pierre... your guest.

(To TIENNE)

Is it... Tienne?

TIENNE

Yes.

BASQUE

(To Pierre)

Tienne.

Basque exits. Pierre and Collette look Tienne up
and down. She is dressed like a servant.

PIERRE

Tienne? I don't know you.

Tienne smiles.

PIERRE

You do not look like a woman... of importance, though.

TIENNE

I am important to some. Less so to others. Time will tell how *you* perceive me.

COLLETTE

(Condescendingly)

I can tell you right now. I'm unimpressed. What are you, a servant?

TIENNE

I am. I am here to announce the return of my master.

PIERRE

The *return* of your master? Who, pray tell is your master?

TIENNE

My master... is your nephew, Martin. The son of Coralina.

Pause. Collette looks to Pierre, alarmed.

COLLETTE

Martin, you say? The son of Coralina?

PIERRE

Is this a joke? Because it's not funny if it is.

TIENNE

It is not a joke.

COLLETTE

It must be.

TIENNE

If it were a joke I would have said, "a guy walks into a bar. He orders a drink. Suddenly he hears a high-pitched voice say, "That shirt looks great on you!""

COLLETTE

I don't... I don't understand that joke.

TIENNE

(More excited)

"The man turns around but no one is there. Then, a moment later, the voice returns, this time saying, "You seem like a really nice guy!""

COLLETTE

(To Pierre)

This is not a very good joke, is it?

TIENNE

(Even more excited)

“Again, the man looks around, sees nothing, goes back to his drink. But soon the voice returns, ‘I bet your parents are really proud of you!’”

PIERRE

Enough with this nonsense!

TIENNE

(Crescendoing)

“The man slams his drink down, calls over the bartender and says, ‘Hey barkeep! What’s that voice I keep hearing?’

‘Oh’ the bartender replies. ‘Those are the peanuts...’

COLLETTE

...I still don’t get it.

TIENNE

They’re complimentary.

Beat.

PIERRE

Martin is dead!

TIENNE

You’re wrong.

COLLETTE

We heard he died in the war.

TIENNE

Is that what you *heard*?

COLLETTE

It’s the truth.

TIENNE

You have been misled. Martin is very much alive.

PIERRE

Then where is he?

TIENNE

He'll be here shortly. He sent me ahead to announce him. He likes to be announced. Martin has heard of the dire state of his mother, hence his return. If it's all right with you, per his request, I'd like to check on Ms. Coralina. See if I can be of service. Tell her of her child's imminent arrival.

COLLETTE

She won't hear you. She is comatose.

PIERRE

And either way, you are not going in there.

TIENNE

Comatose?

(Concerned)

How much longer does she have?

PIERRE

It is of no consequence to you until I am satisfied that Martin is who you say he is. This could be a ruse. A scam. I'm not an idiot, after all. You come here telling us Martin is alive, where by all accounts we know him to be dead. Let us see this man. Bring him here. Prove to us it is indeed Martin. Then you can visit my sister.

Tienne is unfazed.

TIENNE

I will do so straight way.

She exits.

COLLETTE

Pierre, I'm afraid.

PIERRE

Don't be afraid. Martin is dead.

COLLETTE

She seemed to think otherwise.

PIERRE

Whoever she is bringing back, he is an imposter. I'm sure of it.

COLLETTE

If that's so, we'll... We'll have the man arrested.

PIERRE

We'll have his servant arrested, too.

COLLETTE

But how to know for sure this man is an imposter? Who even knows what Martin looks like now?

Pierre points to the portrait of Martin.

COLLETTE

It's been years since that was painted. I am sure he's changed since then.

PIERRE

Then we'll ask him questions only the real Martin would know the answers to.

COLLETTE

Yes. Yes. Good idea. We'll ask him questions.

Pause, as Collette tries to think up some questions.

COLLETTE

I'm just realizing I didn't know Martin very well. I'm not sure what I would ask him.

PIERRE

I'm drawing a blank, as well.

COLLETTE

We should brainstorm whatever we can remember about his past-

PIERRE

I don't want to do a brainstorm.

COLLETTE

It might help us come up with questions.

PIERRE

I don't think it will.

COLLETTE

Anything you can remember. There's no wrong answers.

Pierre begrudgingly thinks.

PIERRE

I remember he was an odd child.

COLLETTE

That's right! He was!

PIERRE

How's that going to help us come up with a question?

COLLETTE

(As if to Martin)

"Were you or were you not an odd child?"

(Then)

If he says he wasn't we'll know it's not the real Martin.

PIERRE

I don't think that question will work.

COLLETTE

First rule of brainstorming, no criticizing.

PIERRE

I just don't know that he thought of himself as odd. From his perspective he probably thought *we* were all odd.

COLLETTE

Question number 2: "Did you think *we* were all odd?"

PIERRE

Collette-

COLLETTE

Question number 3: "Who the hell are you that you would judge me as odd?"

PIERRE

These questions aren't very good.

COLLETTE

Well, that's the thing about brainstorms. It's not about quality. It's about quantity. You throw out as many ideas as you can and eventually you land on something that's actually useful.

PIERRE

I know what I'll do. I'll send for Bertrande. Who better to determine whether this Martin is the real Martin than his own wife.

COLLETTE

See? I knew brainstorming would help.

PIERRE

(Calling off)

Basque!

Basque, I say!

Basque enters, out of breath.

BASQUE

Sir, you called.

PIERRE

I called you twice! Again!

COLLETTE

Is it so hard to follow a simple instruction?

BASQUE

I would have been here sooner, but someone was at the door.

COLLETTE

Another excuse.

PIERRE

I need you to go find Bertrande.

COLLETTE

Who was at the door this time?

BASQUE

The same woman as before.

COLLETTE

Back already?

BASQUE

Yes. Only now she's with someone.

Martin?
COLLETTE

He didn't say.
BASQUE

Did it look like Martin?
COLLETTE

PIERRE
(To Collette, re: Basque)
How is he to know what Martin looks like? He doesn't know Martin. He was only hired 6 months ago.

Right.
COLLETTE

She thinks.

COLLETTE
(To Basque)
Did he look like a Martin?

Oh my God.
PIERRE

BASQUE
He could have been a Martin. Though I can't say for sure. He might also be a Fred.
(Then)
What does a Martin look like?

PIERRE
Martins can look like anything for God's sake!

BASQUE
Then it definitely could be a Martin.

COLLETTE
Could it be our Martin, though? It's been 11 years since we've seen him last. We hardly remember him at all. What we *can* tell you is that 11 years ago Pierre and I both agreed *our* Martin was rather odd.

BASQUE
Odd how? Did he have two heads?

PIERRE

How many people do you know have two heads?

BASQUE

Very few. That's what makes it odd.

PIERRE

His *behavior* was odd.

BASQUE

I didn't get a good look at his behavior.

PIERRE

He always seemed so distressed all the time, though growing up in this palace I can't imagine why.

BASQUE

Why, do you imagine?

PIERRE

I just said I can't imagine why!

COLLETTE

(Agreeing)

He *was* always distressed. It's true. It used to drive his father crazy. He'd beat him mercilessly because of it.

BASQUE

That might explain why.

PIERRE

What might explain why?

BASQUE

Why he was so distressed. Because he was beaten mercilessly.

PIERRE

You don't know what you're talking about! The distress preceded the beatings!

BASQUE

Oh. It preceded the beatings. Well, in that case-

COLLETTE

So, does the man outside look like what we've described?

BASQUE

Like he might have been beaten by his father for being distressed for reasons unknown?

COLLETTE

Yes. Exactly.

BASQUE

(Nodding)

You know what? Now that I think about it... his back was to me the entire time-

PIERRE

Oh for crying out loud!

BASQUE

I'll look at him now when I let him in.

PIERRE

Collette will let him in. You go find Bertrande. Tell her we need her here immediately.

BASQUE

I will do it so fast it will be like I never left.

PIERRE

You haven't left!

BASQUE

I'm leaving now!

Basque exits.

PIERRE

(To Collette)

Collette, would you be a dear and get the door?

COLLETTE

It would be my honor. There is no one more important to me than you. I will determine if it's the real Martin or not.

Before Collette can exit, MARTIN enters with Tienne. He is carrying a small piece of luggage.

MARTIN

(Angry)

Have I been gone so long that I now have to be kept waiting at the door like a complete stranger? In my own home, no less?

Pierre and Collette look with surprise.

COLLETTE

(Under her breath)

Oh my God. It's Martin.

It's clear by Pierre's expression, he agrees. This is Martin. At least it looks like him or what could be an older version of the teenager in the portrait.

TIENNE

Master, may I... announce you?

MARTIN

No need. I announced myself.

TIENNE

They may not recognize you.

MARTIN

Look at their faces. They know exactly who I am.

Pierre tries to regain status.

PIERRE

We know who you claim to be.

MARTIN

Oh? You still have doubts Pierre?

PIERRE

We had heard you were dead.

MARTIN

Come now, uncle. We both know who spread that rumor.

COLLETTE

I have doubts, as well.

MARTIN

Such a skeptic. You see me standing right here, Collette.

COLLETTE

(Affronted)

I can't believe you'd call me a skeptic!

MARTIN

(Pointedly)

Maybe it's something else that motivates this distrust then? Motivates you both.

(Then)

Either way... Where is my mother? I wish to see her. Now!

PIERRE

You will see no one until we are satisfied you are who you say you are. How do we know you are not some imposter trying to collect an inheritance that does not belong to you? How do we know it's really you?

MARTIN

(A hint of a threat)

Because I know things, uncle. I know *everything*. Why don't you test me?

The two square off. The tension is broken by the entrance of BERTRANDE.

BERTRANDE

Hello. Pierre. I heard you wanted to see me.

PIERRE

Ah good. Bertrande.

TIENNE

(To Martin)

Oh. Finally someone I can announce you to.

(To Bertrande)

Hello Madam. May I present to you Martin. Son of Coralina.

Bertrande stands in shock at what she sees.

MARTIN

(Gently)

Tienne, this is my wife. Introductions are not needed.

TIENNE

Well maybe not for you. But she and I have not met.

(To Bertrande)

(MORE)

TIENNE (CONT'D)

Bertrande, I have heard so much about you. I am Tienne. Servant to Martin. As you are his wife, it is my pleasure to serve you, as well.

A pause as Bertrande takes everything in.
Finally:

BERTRANDE

It's a pleasure to meet you, Tienne.

(Then, to Martin)

And... Martin... is it really you?

PIERRE

That's what we're trying to find out. You're his wife, you should know. Has your husband returned or not? Answer the question! Don't hold back, speak quickly now, child!

BERTRANDE

(Nodding slowly)

I believe my husband has returned.

PIERRE

There's no rush!

Take your time. Look at him carefully before you answer. Examine every aspect of him. Perhaps you should speak to him a little. Ask him questions only a husband would know of a wife.

COLLETTE

Yes. Birthmarks and allergies and favorite sexual positions.

BERTRANDE

I would not ask such questions in public.

PIERRE

Oh for the love of Pete. Fine. We'll give you some privacy. How's that? Everybody out but these two.

(To Collette)

Collette you come with me.

MARTIN

Where is my servant supposed to go?

PIERRE

She can wait outside.

MARTIN

She's not a dog, Pierre. I won't have her waiting outside. Can I send her to make me something to drink, since you have not offered? Are you this rude to all your guests?

Pierre turns to him. A lightbulb.

PIERRE

What a wonderful idea. Yes. Send her to make you a drink. I presume you can tell her where the bar is.

MARTIN

(Unfazed)

Down the hall, 4th room on your left.

PIERRE

(Foiled)

God Dammit!

(Then)

I mean, yes. That is where we keep our bar.

(To Tienne)

Very well, Ms. You will get drinks for all of us then. Save me time tracking down the idiot servant who works for me. Lord knows where he is.

TIENNE

Possibly waiting outside?

PIERRE

(Unamused)

A Gin and Tonic. Make it dry.

COLLETTE

I'll have the same.

PIERRE

Come Collette.

(To Martin)

We'll be over there out of earshot.

Pierre points to the other side of the large room.

PIERRE

But we'll be keeping an eye on you.

Pierre and Collette head to stage left. Tienne crosses to Martin who stands with Bertrande stage right.

I may spit in that man's drink.

TIENNE

I'll allow it.

MARTIN

So... What can I get for you, sir?

TIENNE

You know what I like, Tienne.

MARTIN

A vodka gimlet. Extra slice of lime?

TIENNE

Hold the spit.

MARTIN

Of course.

TIENNE

And here, take this.

MARTIN

He hands her his luggage. She takes it from him dutifully.

Ms. Bertrande, is there something I can make for you?

TIENNE

I'm fine. Thank you.

BERTRANDE

As you wish.

TIENNE

Tienne heads for the exit.

BERTRANDE
(To Tienne)
You said you heard so much about me?

Tienne stops and turns to Bertrande.

TIENNE

From Martin, yes.

BERTRANDE

What did he say?

TIENNE

That you were... sharp as a tack, gracious, broad-minded, compassionate... forgiving.

(Then)

You're sure there's nothing I can get you?

BERTRANDE

You know what, I am a bit parched. I'll have what he's having.

She motions to Martin.

TIENNE

Two vodka gimlets.

MARTIN

Extra lime.

Tienne nods, then exits.

A slight pause.

MARTIN

(To Bertrande)

I neglected to mention your beauty when I spoke of you.

BERTRANDE

You think I'm beautiful?

Bertrande takes off a shawl she's wearing over her shoulders and drapes it over a couch.

MARTIN

Who wouldn't? You live in this giant mansion, I find it hard to believe there's not one mirror. Can you not see for yourself how lovely you are?

BERTRANDE

I've never heard you say it.

MARTIN

To my great shame.

Beat.

BERTRANDE

Why are you here?

MARTIN

Two reasons.

BERTRANDE

Is one of them money? You stand to inherit a lot.

MARTIN

I am in no rush to get it.
I am here for my mother.

BERTRANDE

She's upstairs. You can go see her if you wish. What's holding you back?

MARTIN

Pierre. He needs proof that I am who I say I am. Besides... I want *her* to see *me*. To see how I've turned out. I am not the same person I was when I left.

BERTRANDE

That much is clear.

(Then, sadly)

I don't think you will get what you want though. Your mother is... quite ill I'm afraid.
Unconscious.

MARTIN

So I've been told.

BERTRANDE

Pierre doesn't think she'll recover.

MARTIN

I don't care what Pierre thinks. He's not to be trusted. I just as soon get a second opinion.

BERTRANDE

Oh? Who's?

MARTIN

Tienne's for starters. She's in with her now.

A light rises to half upstage where we see Coralina's room. There is a bed and a motionless patient within.

Tienne enters the space.

BERTRANDE

Is she? So getting drinks was just a ruse?

Martin nods.

BERTRANDE

That's too bad. I'm suddenly very thirsty.

Tienne examines the room. Coralina is hooked up to various medical equipment including a feeding tube.

MARTIN

(Smiles)

You'll get your drink yet. Best not to underestimate Tienne. You'll find she's quite capable.

Bertrande nods.

BERTRANDE

Most women are.

Lights dim on Martin and Bertrande and raise to full upstage.

TIENNE

Hello... Ms. Coralina.

Tienne looks at the woman sympathetically.

TIENNE

Don't get up. I understand you're not well.

Tienne takes a closer look at the feeding tube and the bag attached to it.

TIENNE

What are they feeding you? Nothing good I bet. Why don't we switch it up.

Tienne disconnects the bag that is connected to Coralina's feed tube.

TIENNE

Variety is the spice of life, after all.

She pulls out of from Martin's luggage a new feeding bag and attaches it to the feed tube.

TIENNE

Let's see if you like this any better.

She squeezes the bag a little so it starts draining into the tube and Coralina.

TIENNE

When I turned 10-years-old I was diagnosed with glandular fever. The doctor said it would take months for me to recover, which was devastating because my mother was planning on taking me to see the cherry blossoms that weekend. There was a park a few hours north of us where every spring the elusive blooms made their highly anticipated appearance. My mother and I loved seeing them more than anything.

Sadly, that year we would be denied because of my fever. Or so the doctor thought. What he didn't count on, what no one anticipated was just how badly I wanted to go. I wanted it so much that I somehow managed to will myself better.

She sits close to Coralina.

TIENNE

Did you know you could do that? You can. By the time the weekend had arrived and we were supposed to leave, my fever was gone and the astonished doctor gave me a clean bill of health.

Studies show that what goes on in our heads has a direct influence and impact on our bodies. They say our thoughts can manifest miracles. So long as we *know* it to be true, regardless what anyone else surmises, it *can* be true. So you need to know this:

Your baby has come home! You understand me? Surely if there were reason to wake, it would be that. Your child has returned. You must get better now.

She looks up to the heavens.

TIENNE

Please help her find her way back.

The lights go dark in this part of the stage and once again raise in the main living area.

Bertrande sits next to Martin, who is seated on a couch.

BERTRANDE

Why didn't you come home sooner?

MARTIN

...I thought she hated me.

BERTRANDE

Your mother? What could possibly give you that impression?

MARTIN

My uncle. He told me she blamed me for my father's death. Couldn't bare to look at me. Did not want me around. God knows what he was telling her, he can be quite convincing and manipulative. In any case, Pierre persuaded me to leave eleven years ago.

BERTRANDE

He said you left on your own accord. To join the war.

MARTIN

Who do you believe? Obviously one of us is lying.

BERTRANDE

You both could be lying.

MARTIN

I'm trying very hard not to.

(Then)

He also said I was dead. You see that's not true.

BERTRANDE

Why would he say such things?

MARTIN

Why do you think?

BERTRANDE

For the money?

MARTIN

He does inherit everything if I am dead.

BERTRANDE

You'd have to stay dead. What if you returned? As you have.

MARTIN

(Nodding)

That is a problem for him, isn't it? In fact, I wrote him a year ago asking if I can come home. If my mother had forgiven me. If she was willing to see me again. He wrote back and said no. Don't come. It would not be good for her.

BERTRANDE

That wouldn't guarantee you not coming. Obviously.

MARTIN

A month later he sent a man to kill me.

Pierre, who has been writing a letter on the other side of the stage, finally puts his pen down.
Both scenes continue simultaneously.

PIERRE

Collette, I need you to deliver a message for me.

BERTRANDE

He sent a man to kill you? Who?

COLLETTE

Who am I delivering the message to?

MARTIN

Someone he hired.

PIERRE

A man who worked for me.

BERTRANDE

Does anyone else know this?

PIERRE

Under no circumstance are you to read this message.

MARTIN
No.

COLLETTE
Of course not. I would never.

PIERRE
Instructions are here on where you can find
the man. His name is Pansette. It is
imperative you find him quickly.

Pierre hands Collette the letter.

BERTRANDE
If he sent someone to kill you, how is it you're still alive?

COLLETTE
Nothing will prevent me from finding this
man.

MARTIN
...I killed *him* instead.

COLLETTE
I won't let you down.

Collette exits.

Bertrande crosses away from Martin.

MARTIN
As I said, I'm not the same person I was eleven years ago. I don't know what my mother
will think of me now. Or what you must think of me.

Beat.

BERTRANDE
You said you came back for *two* reasons. What was the second?

Tienne re-enters now holding a tray of drinks.

TIENNE

Your drinks.

(Then)

I'm sorry. Have I come back too early?

MARTIN

It's fine.

Martin crosses closer to Bertrande.

MARTIN

(To Bertrande)

The second reason I came back is for you. It was not right to leave you. Not without an explanation. I'll understand if you don't forgive me, but I came back to apologize.

She faces away from him. It's too much. She crosses to Tienne, still holding the tray of drinks. Still facing away from Martin, she says:

BERTRANDE

Things were not easy for you, Martin. I know that. I understand why you left.

Tienne holds up the tray to Bertrande.

TIENNE

Your drink, madam.

BERTRANDE

There's no lime.

TIENNE

Yes. They were all out. I apologize.

BERTRANDE

It's not your fault.

Bertrande grabs both Vodka Gimlets, turns and hands one to Martin.

BERTRANDE

I forgive you.

Martin smiles at her gratefully.

Pierre returns to their room and crosses to them.

PIERRE

I see drinks are being served. I assume that means you're done talking.

TIENNE

Your Gin and Tonic.

Tienne hands him a drink. Pierre grabs it.

PIERRE

What say you, Bertrande?

TIENNE

(Re: the final drink)

And for Collette?

PIERRE

Collette had to leave.

(To Bertrande)

Bertrande?

TIENNE

Excellent. I love a Gin and Tonic.

Tienne takes it.

PIERRE

(To Bertrande)

Speak now! Has Martin returned or not?

BERTRANDE

(Defiantly)

Martin has returned. This is my husband. I would swear my life on it.

Pierre can barely hide his frustration.

TIENNE

(Happily)

I think this calls for a toast. To Martin! Home at last!

Tienne, Martin and Bertrande raise their glasses.
Pierre forces a smile and does the same.

PIERRE

Yes. To Martin. We are so happy to have you here.

MARTIN

Thank you. If it's all right with you, I'd like to see my mother now.

PIERRE

Of course.

And I will talk with my servant and plan a feast for tomorrow to celebrate your return.

MARTIN

(Pointedly)

I'll celebrate when my mother's health returns, as well.

Pierre nods. Martin places his glass down, half drunk. He exits.

Pierre downs his drink, then holds the glass out to Tienne.

PIERRE

Here. Take this back to the bar!

TIENNE

(With condescension)

Don't you have your own servant? I work for Martin. Heir to Coralina and Successor of this estate.

Pierre glares at Tienne, then turns on his heel and heads for the exit.

PIERRE

Basque! Basque, I say!

He leaves.

Tienne watches him go, amused.

BERTRANDE

(To Tienne)

Shall I take Martin's bag? I can unpack it in our room.

TIENNE

That won't be necessary. I don't think Martin expects to stay in your room.

BERTRANDE

He's my husband.

TIENNE

It's been eleven years. You should... get to know one another... again... before you decide whether you want him in your room.

Bertrande nods. Then heads to exit. Before she goes, she turns to Tienne one more time.

BERTRANDE

I love Coralina! Like she is my very own mother.

TIENNE

Martin said as much.

BERTRANDE

I worry she won't get better.

TIENNE

I do, as well.

BERTRANDE

If she doesn't... I think it's important Martin knows she never forgave herself for failing to protect him. When he was young, I mean. Protect him from his father.

TIENNE

I think Martin would appreciate to know that very much.

Bertrande nods politely.

BERTRANDE

Good evening.

TIENNE

Good evening.

Bertrande exits. A moment later, Basque rushes in out of breath.

BASQUE

Did I hear Pierre call for me?

TIENNE

He did call for you. I can't say for sure whether you heard it.

BASQUE

You know I pride myself on being a good servant. I fear I keep failing him.

Basque slumps distraught.

TIENNE

(Sympathetically)

You are a good servant. I could tell right away. Don't let him make you think otherwise.

Basque nods gratefully.

BASQUE

Thank you.

(Then)

Do you know which way he went?

From offstage we hear:

PIERRE (O.S.)

Basque! Basque, I say!

TIENNE

I think he went that way.

BASQUE

I'm over here, sir!

Pierre enters.

PIERRE

Basque! Do you know how many times I called for you?

BASQUE

More than once, I fear?

PIERRE

You're damn right more than once!

BASQUE

I am so sorry!

PIERRE

I looked for you in the den. I looked for you in the parlor. I looked for you in the bar.

BASQUE

What can I do for you, sir?

Pierre hold out his empty glass.

PIERRE

I need you to take this glass to the bar.

BASQUE

But you were just at the / bar.

PIERRE

Is it my job to clear the glasses now? Do you want me cooking dinner, as well? Please do as I ask and take this to the bar.

BASQUE

Right away, sir.

Basque takes the glass from him.

TIENNE

You know what, Basque. I'm actually headed to the bar myself. I can take that for you.

BASQUE

No, I couldn't let you-

She takes the glass from him.

TIENNE

Not a problem. Always happy to do a favor for a fellow servant.

Tienne exits, glaring at Pierre on her way out.

BASQUE

She seems quite nice.

PIERRE

You think so? You keep doing the job you're doing I might have her replace you.

BASQUE

Yes sir! I can't apologize enough for not being here when you called. I was on the other side of the house preparing Ms. Coralina's medicine for the evening.

He holds out a syringe. Pierre immediately grabs it.

PIERRE

I'll take that, thank you!

BASQUE

You don't want me to give it to her?

PIERRE

I'll give it to her this time. Eh, when the time is right.

BASQUE

This is the time I normally give it to her.

PIERRE

Her son is in with her now. I... I don't want to disturb him.

BASQUE

Her son?

PIERRE

Martin.

BASQUE

Oh. So it was a Martin. At the door.

PIERRE

Yes, it was a Martin.

BASQUE

But was it *the* Martin?

PIERRE

Enough with your stupid questions!

BASQUE

Apologies-

PIERRE

We're having a feast tomorrow to celebrate Martin's return.

BASQUE

The Martin-?

PIERRE

A feast, you hear me?

BASQUE

Yes, sir!

PIERRE

Make the preparations.

BASQUE

It will be the best feast you've ever had! I'll start right away! You can count / on me-

PIERRE

Go!

Basque exits.

Pierre turns to the portrait of Coralina. He holds up the syringe.

PIERRE

Looks like you have a stay of execution, sister. I need to make sure your son is dead first. We have to do these things in the proper order, after all. But not to worry. He will be taken care of soon enough. Even if I have to do it myself. Then you can have your final bit of "medicine."

Pierre exits.

A moment later Basque returns.

BASQUE

Sir? Sir? Oh dammit all to Hell! I forgot to ask what he wanted me to prepare for tomorrow. I can't screw this up. He's so mad at me already.

He thinks, pacing nervously.

BASQUE

Maybe a liver pâté. A french bread of course. A nice selection of cheeses. This is assuming of course this Martin can eat dairy. Not everyone can. How am I supposed to prepare a feast if I don't know the dietary restrictions of the guest of honor?

He picks up a glass left behind.

BASQUE

What does he even drink? Wine, ale, mead. This looks like Vodka. Is it Vodka? I need guidance here! There can be no more mistakes!

Martin enters from the other side of the stage.
He sees Basque from behind holding his drink.
He goes to retrieve it.

MARTIN

Excuse me.

Basque turns around surprised by the presence
of someone else in the room.

BASQUE

Oh my God!

Startled, he accidentally throws the remains of
the drink in Martin's face.

BASQUE

(Mortified)

...I'm so sorry. Did I spill on you?

Martin's surprised face is dripping Vodka.

MARTIN

It's... It's not a problem.

Basque quickly grabs something for Martin to
dry his face.

BASQUE

It's such a problem! I can tell by your face your angry with me. And deservedly so. I'm
such an idiot!

MARTIN

It's fine, Basque. I'm not angry. Honestly. I just can't believe it's you.

BASQUE

Unfortunately it's me! Stupid, clumsy Basque! Now you're going to tell Pierre and I will
once again be unemployed for God knows how long and...

(Then)

Wait, do we know each other?

Beat.

...No.

MARTIN

Martin takes the cloth that Basque is holding and proceeds to dry his face.

BASQUE

Oh. You said I can't believe it's you, it sounded like you knew me.

MARTIN

I don't.

BASQUE

But you knew my name.

MARTIN

I heard your name. Many times. People saying Basque this. Basque that.

BASQUE

But how did you know *I* was Basque?

MARTIN

I know everyone else. I don't know you. I assumed you must be Basque.

BASQUE
(Nodding)

I'm Basque.

MARTIN

The one and only.

BASQUE

Yes.

(Then, nervously)

What were people saying about me?

MARTIN

It's not important.

BASQUE

Good things I hope.

MARTIN

Basque this. Basque that.

Martin hands Basque back the cloth he used to dry his face.

BASQUE

(Unconvinced)

That could be good things. I mean, I can't imagine why anyone would have anything bad to say about me.

Bertrande enters.

BERTRANDE

Sorry to interrupt. I think I left my shawl here.

Basque looks in his hand. It is Bertrande's shawl, now drenched with the Vodka from Martins face.

BASQUE

I am so sorry. Why don't I have this cleaned for you.

BERTRANDE

Thank you, Basque.

She looks at Martin.

BERTRANDE

Good evening.

MARTIN

Good evening.

She exits.

BASQUE

God, I'm the worst.

MARTIN

How long have you been working here? If you don't mind me asking.

BASQUE

6 months.

MARTIN

6 months? That's it?

BASQUE

Yes. It seems much longer.

MARTIN

And how was it that you ended up here to begin with?

BASQUE

They needed a servant.

MARTIN

So you... applied?

BASQUE

I didn't need to. Pierre found *me*.

MARTIN

He found *you*? Your reputation preceded you then?

BASQUE

God, I hope not.

MARTIN

What? What does that mean?

BASQUE

(Quickly covering)

Nothing. Never mind. I don't know why I said that. I'm actually a very good servant.

MARTIN

I don't doubt it.

Then, unable to help himself:

BASQUE

There was an incident. With my previous master. I had nothing to do with it.

MARTIN

I never said you did.

BASQUE

Thankfully Pierre was willing to overlook... the incident... and asked me to work for Ms. Coralina.

MARTIN

So you work for Ms. Coralina?

BASQUE

Barely. She got sick shortly after I started.

MARTIN

I bet she did.

BASQUE

(Growing nervous again)

Then she got very sick. Now I fear she's going to die.

(He starts to cry)

That will be two masters I've lost. I'll never work again!

MARTIN

Basque.

BASQUE

My name! My reputation!

MARTIN

Basque.

BASQUE

Everything I am will be ruined!

MARTIN

Basque!

BASQUE

I'm sorry!

I'm so sorry. I shouldn't complain. I know I shouldn't. I have my health. That's something. That poor old woman up there is dying.

MARTIN

It's fine to complain. And I understand what you're going through. Believe me I do.

BASQUE

Thank you.

Working here has been a lot harder than I thought it would be. Pierre is a difficult boss. Certainly compared to my last masters who treated me so well. The wife was an artist, and her husband was a doctor. They were really kind. Up until the husband killed the wife, that wasn't so nice. But until then, it was so delightful.

Anyway, as you can imagine, having a murdered master limits your job prospects so now I have to work for this tyrant and everything I do disappoints him! I am always falling short one way or the other. Putting my foot in my mouth! You name it!

MARTIN

I probably should tell you I'm the tyrant's nephew.

BASQUE

Oh for Heaven's sake!

Basque bangs his head against a wall.

MARTIN

It's fine.

BASQUE

He's made me such a worse servant. I used to be at the top of my game. Look at me now. Talking out of turn so disrespectfully. About my master. To a guest, no less.

MARTIN

I'd be offended if you talked about him any other way.

Beat.

BASQUE

No, not a guest. You're Pierre's nephew.

MARTIN

I am.

BASQUE

(Realizing)

You're Coralina's son.

MARTIN

I am.

BASQUE

That poor woman. I'm so sorry.

MARTIN

Thank you.

Then, the final realization.

BASQUE

Wait, you're Martin!

Martin nods.

MARTIN

I am.

BASQUE

The Martin! Oh my God! What a boon for me! I'm so glad to run into you.

MARTIN

You are?

MARTIN

Well not run into you the way I did, but yes, if you can help me.

MARTIN

I can try.

BASQUE

Pierre has requested a special feast tomorrow but I neglected to ask him what he wanted me to serve. Is there something you would like, sir?

MARTIN

Yes. I'd like not to attend. Certainly not if Pierre is going to be there.

BASQUE

I think you have to attend. You're the guest of honor. He wants to celebrate your return.

MARTIN

That's not what he wants.

BASQUE

That's what he said.

MARTIN

You don't know him like I do.

BASQUE

I know he wants a feast! And I know he wants me to make it! What I don't know is what to make.

MARTIN

I assure you it doesn't matter.

BASQUE

Oh it matters. It will matter to him! I'm sure it will matter! Do I make some Blanquette de Veau? Or maybe some Coquilles St-Jacques? What if you don't like Coquilles St-Jacques?

MARTIN

I won't be eating anything he serves me.

BASQUE

I can make a chicken cordon bleu or Escargots-

MARTIN

Basque!

BASQUE

I have to make something! You have to tell me what to make!

MARTIN

Bouillabaisse if you have to make something. God knows it's your specialty. I don't care!

BASQUE

Yes! Yes, I'll make Bouillabaisse. Everyone's always loved my Bouillabaisse!

MARTIN

Just know it will be wasted on me as I won't be eating it.

BASQUE

You'll eat it! You won't be able to not eat it! It's my specialty! Thank you Mr. Martin for your very kind help! Good evening!

Basque exits. Martin takes a breath.

A moment later Basque returns.

BASQUE

Wait.

How did you know it was my specialty?

MARTIN

What do you mean?

BASQUE

You said, "Bouillabaisse if you have to make something. God knows it's your specialty." How did you know it was my specialty?

Martin shakes his head.

MARTIN

A lucky guess, I'm sure.

BASQUE

Are you certain we don't know each other?

MARTIN

Do I look like someone you know?

Basque takes a good look at him.

BASQUE

No.

Martin smiles. Validated.

BASQUE

But you sound like someone I know.

MARTIN

I do?

BASQUE

I never forget a face.

MARTIN

You just said-

BASQUE

Or the voice coming from the face.

MARTIN

I'm sure you're mistaken.

BASQUE

I don't think so. We've definitely met before.

Martin shrugs.

MARTIN

If we have, then it is a pleasure meeting you again. Though I don't think we have.

BASQUE

It will come to me. I'm sure of it.
Good evening. Again.

Martin nods. Then points to the glass Basque spilled on him earlier.

MARTIN

Don't forget the glass.

Basque turns to retrieve the glass he put down. Once he does, Martin quickly retrieves from his inside pocket a syringe. He grabs Basque from behind and injects him.

Basque suddenly goes limp and Martin drags the now motionless body offstage.

Black out.

ACT 2

It is the next morning. A doorbell rings.

Pierre emerges.

PIERRE

Basque! Basque, I say!

Nothing.

Bertrande enters with a cup of coffee.

PIERRE

Have you seen Basque?

BERTRANDE

Not yet this morning.

PIERRE

Where the devil is he?

The doorbell rings again.

BERTRANDE

Someone is at the door.

PIERRE

I'm aware. Why do you think I'm looking for Basque.

BERTRANDE

Maybe it's Basque at the door.

PIERRE

Why would Basque be at the door?

BERTRANDE

When you answer it you can ask him.

PIERRE

Answer my own door? How's that supposed to look? I suppose you'd have me do my own laundry, too. Take out my own garbage. Make my own bed. Tie my own shoes!

BERTRANDE

You have Basque tie your shoes?

PIERRE

And why shouldn't I? He is my servant, is he not?

BERTRANDE

He is Coralina's servant. And she would never treat her servant this way.

PIERRE

Of course not. She is laid up in bed. She's not even wearing shoes!

Bertrande crosses to an upstage window to see who is at the door.

PIERRE

Can you see from there who's at the door?

BERTRANDE

I can not. They are currently concealed by the bushes.

The doorbell rings again.

PIERRE

(Frustrated)

Basque!

Martin and Tienne both enter. They don't see Bertrande.

MARTIN

Why won't someone answer the door?

PIERRE

What do you think I'm trying to do!

MARTIN

I don't know but can you do it more quietly?

PIERRE

I am looking for my servant. Have you seen him?

MARTIN

The only servant I've seen since I've been here is my own.

This lie doesn't go unnoticed by Bertrande, who still remains unseen.

PIERRE

His name is Basque. He's a wiry fellow about yea high.

MARTIN

I've met no one named Basque, servant or otherwise. Though I can only imagine how horrible his job must be, working for you.

PIERRE

He's never complained.

MARTIN

Oh yes, I'm sure he loves it. That's why he's not here.

Pierre crosses to Tienne.

PIERRE

(To Tienne)

You! What's your name again?

TIENNE

Tienne.

PIERRE

Tienne, answer the door!

TIENNE

(Indignant)

Who do think you're talking to?

PIERRE

(Intimidated)

A servant.

TIENNE

Not *your* servant.

PIERRE

Come now. You act like I'm asking you to prepare a seven course meal. All you need do is grab the door knob and twist.

TIENNE

Would you ask someone else's accountant to do you taxes, or someone else's masseuse to massage your back?

PIERRE
(With a hint of innuendo)

Not my back, no.

TIENNE
Disgusting. Please know I will never be touching your knob.

She walks away from him.

PIERRE
Such disrespect!

MARTIN
You have your answer, Pierre. You will have to get the door yourself.

PIERRE
Get my own door? Perhaps I should also brush my own teeth, too.
What would you have me do next?

MARTIN
You'll soon find out. Won't you.

The two square off.

TIENNE
(To Martin)
I am going to check on your mother.

MARTIN
Thank you, Tienne.

Tienne exits.

The doorbell rings again.

PIERRE
Dammit all to hell! Will someone please!

BERTRANDE
It's Collette. *She* is at the door. I can see her now.

PIERRE
Fine. In that case, I'll do it myself. But God forbid this becomes a habit!

Pierre exits.

Martin crosses upstage to Bertrande.

MARTIN

Good morning. I didn't see you back there.

BERTRANDE

I wonder if you had if you still would have told Pierre you hadn't met Basque before.

MARTIN

...I don't understand.

BERTRANDE

I walked in on you both talking last night. Remember?

MARTIN

(Trying to cover)

Oh that's Basque. Yes. I guess I have met him before. Though I haven't seen him this morning, so I still wouldn't be of any help to Pierre. He'll need to help himself from now on. Speaking of which, I am going to make myself breakfast. You've eaten, I take it?

BERTRANDE

I have.

MARTIN

Can we talk later then? I am useless on an empty stomach.

BERTRANDE

Of course.

Martin exits towards the kitchen.

Bertrande watches him go, suspicious of this interaction.

A moment later, Pierre returns with Collette.

COLLETTE

They're making you answer your own door now?

PIERRE

It's horrible. What will they have me do next? Flush my own toilet? They have no sense of propriety.

COLLETTE

You poor man. What can I do?

PIERRE

(Discretely)

I am anxious to hear if you were able to deliver my message.

(Then)

But first let me get some aspirin. All this door answering has given me a splitting headache. I'll only be a moment.

Pierre exits.

Bertrande heads to exit the other way. Collette sees her.

COLLETTE

Ah, Bertrande. How excited you must be to have your husband back. He is your husband, is he not? I left yesterday before I heard your answer. How did you respond?

BERTRANDE

I responded that he was.

COLLETTE

How lucky for you. To have a man in your bed again.

BERTRANDE

He didn't sleep in my bed.

COLLETTE

No? He's only been back a day, there's trouble already?

BERTRANDE

No trouble. I'm just not ready to have him back in my bed.

COLLETTE

You better get ready. Otherwise someone else might have him in *their* bed.

BERTRANDE

I wonder who.

COLLETTE

Who wouldn't? He's handsome, strong and on the verge of inheriting a fortune.

BERTRANDE

I don't need a fortune.

COLLETTE

You don't need a man in your bed. You don't need a fortune. It seems a husband is wasted on you.

Beat.

BERTRANDE

Collette, I have to wonder if there is more to you than this avaricious, calculating yet manifest disposition you portray. I want to believe you're more complicated than you let on, and that you can't simply be summed up by two words: greedy bitch.

(Then)

Good day.

Bertrande exits. Collette scowls as she watches her go. A moment later she sees Martin poke his head in the room looking around as if to see if the coast is clear.

COLLETTE

Looking for someone, Martin?

MARTIN

Ah Collette. Good morning. Yes. Did Bertrande go?

COLLETTE

She did. Though I'm not sure where.

Relieved, Martin fully enters carrying two plates of food.

MARTIN

No worries. I'm sure I'll see her eventually.

COLLETTE

How thoughtful. You got her a plate of food.

MARTIN

Uh... Yes. I did. This second plate is for her.

COLLETTE

Well, she's not here. I guess she's not hungry for whatever it is you have to offer.

MARTIN
She may have already eaten.

Collette looks Martin up and down.

COLLETTE
You look good, Martin.

MARTIN
What? Oh. Thank you.

COLLETTE
I missed having you here.

MARTIN
Did you?

COLLETTE
Oh yes. It's nice to have another man in the house.

MARTIN
Pierre's not enough?

COLLETTE
Not nearly enough.

MARTIN
No, I suppose he isn't anymore.

COLLETTE
But now that you're back, and looking better than ever, it's like you brought purpose to the estate once again.

MARTIN
I think there's a number of objectives happening here with or without me.
(Then)
If you'll excuse me, this food is getting cold.

Martin tries to exit. Collette steps in front of him.

COLLETTE
But your wife has already eaten you said. Who will you eat with?

MARTIN
I'm sure I can find another taker.

COLLETTE

I might be tempted.

MARTIN

Actually I'll see if Tienne is interested.

COLLETTE

You get your servant food?

MARTIN

She does so much for me, I don't see why I can't do something for her.

COLLETTE

What does she do for you? Surely, not everything. Perhaps there's a void I can fill.

Collette sensually picks up a piece of egg on a plate and puts it in her mouth.

MARTIN

Not one I can think of.

COLLETTE

(Seductively)

Maybe there's a void you'd like to fill.

MARTIN

(Surprised at her forwardness)

Wow.

(Then)

Uh... no. Nothing comes to mind.

COLLETTE

I'm referring to my vagina.

MARTIN

Yes, I... I thought you might be.

COLLETTE

You can fill it.

MARTIN

I'd rather not.

COLLETTE

With your penis.

MARTIN

I understand the innuendo, however subtle, I'm just not interested.

COLLETTE

You don't know what you're missing.

MARTIN

And I'm grateful for that. I'm hoping you don't describe it.

COLLETTE

Let's just say it's like you're trying to squeeze a loaf of French bread through a keyhole.

Martin shakes his head at the image.

MARTIN

Can we JUST say that? Can we please NOT say anything else?

COLLETTE

That doesn't interest you?

MARTIN

Your motives don't interest me.

COLLETTE

What ever do you mean?

MARTIN

I've been home less than a day and your suddenly throwing yourself at me? It's curious.

COLLETTE

I've always fancied you.

MARTIN

I don't recall you being this nice to me when I was younger.

COLLETTE

You were a child.

MARTIN

Old enough to marry.

COLLETTE

Now you're a man.

MARTIN

And still married.

COLLETTE

An arranged marriage. And the person behind the arrangement, your father, he's long gone. Surely if you wanted to make a different arrangement, no one would object.

MARTIN

What kind of arrangement?

COLLETTE

One that is mutually beneficial.

MARTIN

Don't you mean mutually beneficiary?

He tries to leave again.

COLLETTE

You need a wife, Martin.

MARTIN

I have one.

COLLETTE

One that will take care of your needs *whenever* you should need them. And all I ask in return is a little security.

MARTIN

You don't strike me as insecure.

COLLETTE

Well, I'm secure here. In this home.

MARTIN

That's unfortunate for you. This is my mother's home.

COLLETTE

Not for long.

He shakes his head.

MARTIN

Though I find your transparency refreshing, Collette, please tell me there's more to you than the overt rapaciousness on display now. Or do you truly just identify as an unprincipled, opportunistic, gold digging parasite?

He exits.

COLLETTE

What did everyone get a thesaurus last Christmas?

Pierre re-enters.

PIERRE

Collette, I'm back.

COLLETTE

I've missed you.

PIERRE

Yes, yes. Listen, I need to know if you were able to deliver my message. Did you find Pansette? Did you give him my letter?

COLLETTE

Pierre...

She shakes her head.

COLLETTE

I'm sorry to say I failed you. Or more precisely, Pansette failed you.

PIERRE

How do you mean?

COLLETTE

I went to where you thought he might be. In the town next over. The bar you said he frequents. I asked the people there if they knew where I could find him. They said they hadn't seen him in over a year. They all seemed to think he's dead.

PIERRE

Dead? That would be horrible news if it's true!

COLLETTE

Why, I wonder?

PIERRE

(Covering)

Because... Because he's dead. A man is dead. That's always horrible. And he was a friend obviously. A very, very good friend!

COLLETTE

The people there told me Pansette was the one that killed his wife.

PIERRE

I mean, we didn't know each other that well.

COLLETTE

He was Basque's former master.

PIERRE

What? That is... crazy! Who knew!

COLLETTE

He murdered his wife and got away with it somehow.

PIERRE

Unbelievable!

COLLETTE

I thought so, too. I was so blown away by this information I'm sorry to say, I had to read what was in your letter.

Pierre looks at Collette with a mixture of disappointment and surprise.

PIERRE

Collette. After I expressly told you not to?

COLLETTE

Yes.

PIERRE

That is a serious betrayal. It's unforgivable. I can't think of anything you could do that would be worse.

COLLETTE

I'm going to blackmail you now.

PIERRE

What?

COLLETTE

I want 50 percent of everything this estate is worth.

PIERRE

That is so much worse!

COLLETTE

I know. I'm sorry.

PIERRE

I was willing to forgive reading the letter, but this is over the line.

COLLETTE

50 percent! Or I go public with your letter.

PIERRE

That's way over the line!

COLLETTE

Those are my terms.

PIERRE

I won't do it. I won't give it to you. Not a dime! Go public with the letter if you must. There's nothing in there that's incriminating anyway.

COLLETTE

(Reciting from memory)

"Dear Pansette, You may recall a year ago I hired you to kill my nephew Martin."

PIERRE

Crap! I forgot I wrote that.

COLLETTE

(Reciting from memory)

"Though I paid you well for this very simple task, I fear now you may have failed to do it."

PIERRE

Yes, yes, he failed to do it! Martin is still alive. So no crime has been committed. There's nothing in that letter you can use against me.

COLLETTE

(Reciting from memory)

"While details of your own wife's death have proved useful in my plot to murder my sister..."

PIERRE

Dammit!

COLLETTE

(Reciting from memory)

“If Martin is still alive, my sister’s death will mean nothing.”

PIERRE

And it does mean nothing because *she’s* not dead either. So again I say there’s nothing in that letter-

COLLETTE

(Reciting from memory)

“As you know, I consistently cheat on my taxes, rob elderly people of their pension and kill puppies for fun.”

PIERRE

Why am I so open in my correspondence?

COLLETTE

(Reciting from memory)

“Did I mention I also hate Jews, blacks, gays and women-”

PIERRE

All right! Enough! You’ve made your point.

COLLETTE

I want money, Pierre. I’m sorry but blackmailing you is the only way I know to get it.

PIERRE

Have you ever considered working for a living?

COLLETTE

Have you?

PIERRE

I wrote the letter, didn’t I? That took work.

COLLETTE

50 percent of everything this estate is worth.

PIERRE

I can’t give you 50 percent of what I don’t have. Martin is alive. Pansette failed. I’ve been plotting the acquisition of my sister’s fortune for years, investing time and money.
(MORE)

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Her estate was supposed to be the return on my investment. But look, it's all for naught. It's outrageous.

COLLETTE

What's outrageous is how long I've had to suck up to you and your family with nothing to show for in return.

PIERRE

Friendship. That's not nothing.

COLLETTE

I don't want your friendship! And I certainly don't want your hand in marriage. I want your inheritance. That is the return on *my* investment.

PIERRE

I have no inheritance if Martin is alive. What am I supposed to do?

COLLETTE

You kill him obviously!

Pierre is surprised and impressed by this outburst.

PIERRE

Wow... Collette... You've gone dark. I like it. All this time, I thought it was your sycophantic, brown nosing that defined you. This is a new you I'm seeing now. I'm impressed. You're quite motivated.

COLLETTE

Don't do as I ask and you'll see just how motivated I am.

She points to the portrait of Martin.

COLLETTE

You kill him.

She points to the portrait of Coralina.

COLLETTE

You kill her.

She points to herself.

COLLETTE

You pay me. Then I'll give you back your letter and keep my mouth shut. That's the deal. Think it over, won't you? I'm going to have your servant prepare me something to eat.

PIERRE

(Under his breath)

Good luck with that.

COLLETTE

I'll be back in a bit to hear your answer.

PIERRE

This would be a lot easier if Pansette just did what I paid him to do.

COLLETTE

If you want something done, you have to do it yourself.

She exits.

PIERRE

I hate doing things myself!

Lights out on the main area. Lights up in Coralina's room.

Tienne is here hooking up another food bag to Coralina's feeding tube.

Bertrande enters.

BERTRANDE

Hello Tienne.

TIENNE

Bertrande. What can I do for you?

BERTRANDE

How is Coralina?

TIENNE

Unclear.

BERTRANDE

What is that you're giving her?

Antidote. TIENNE

For what? BERTRANDE

For the poison she's been given. TIENNE

She's been poisoned? BERTRANDE

Tienne nods.

And how do you know this antidote will work? BERTRANDE

I don't. It could make things worse. TIENNE

Where did you get it from? BERTRANDE

Martin. He made it. But it's never been tested. TIENNE

I see. BERTRANDE

Bertrande looks as if there is something else she needs to say.

Something else on your mind? TIENNE

Yes. BERTRANDE

Another pause.

Something you want to share? TIENNE

I am wondering if I can trust... BERTRANDE

TIENNE

...Trust who?
Your husband?

BERTRANDE

In part, yes.

TIENNE

I'd like to think you can. But after so many years apart, I'll understand if you don't. A lot's changed. You have concerns?

BERTRANDE

I just don't know what my husband could possibly want from me after all this time.

TIENNE

Nothing.

BERTRANDE

No?

TIENNE

Nothing else.

Bertrande nods.

BERTRANDE

That man out there, he's... so full of secrets. It scares me what he might be hiding.

TIENNE

We all have secrets.

BERTRANDE

Yes. I know. I now have a few of my own. I don't like it. I'm not good at hiding them. I feel as if people can see right through me.

TIENNE

You'd make a terrible actor then.

BERTRANDE

(Agreeing)

I'm afraid you're right.

TIENNE

You needn't be afraid of Martin, or whatever it is he might be hiding. He's a good man.

BERTRANDE

Oh? How can you be so sure? Because I have good reason to think he's not.

TIENNE

He saved my life!

Beat.

BERTRANDE

Is that hyperbole? You know like how people say, "I was waiting in a very long line at the market, and I was running late to take my dog on a walk. I was so afraid my dog was going to go to the bathroom right in the middle of my living room. And I was having a dinner party that night and I was scared people would come over and they would see it. But thankfully this nice lady ahead of me in the line saw that I only had a few items to purchase, so she let me cut in front of her. And because of that I was able to get back to my dog in time to walk him so he could go to the bathroom outside. And so this lady *literally* saved my life."

Beat.

TIENNE

I didn't know people said that.

BERTRANDE

How did he save your life?

TIENNE

He found me during a time that was incredibly difficult and precarious for me. A very dark and dangerous time. And though he had no reason to, he helped me through it, when most others would not. In fact, when most others did the exact opposite. In his own way, he somehow knew exactly what I was going through and it was because of that he was able to help me get to the other side.

BERTRANDE

I see.

(Then)

Actually I don't. That was really vague.

TIENNE

I know. I apologize. I don't really like talking about my past. Suffice it to say that Martin has earned my trust. I don't know if that lessens any of your fears.

BERTRANDE

A little.

TIENNE

Can I ask *you* a question?

Bertrande nods.

TIENNE

In the past eleven years, why did you never divorce? Move on. Find someone else. Was it out of some sense of loyalty?

BERTRANDE

Maybe. A little. The fact is though, I couldn't. A woman here is not allowed to divorce her husband without his permission. Not unless he's dead.

TIENNE

He was dead for all intents and purposes, was he not?

BERTRANDE

Not without a body. The law is very clear on this. No body, no divorce. So I've been kind of stuck here.

TIENNE

I'm sorry. I had no idea.

BERTRANDE

(She nods)

Welcome to my world.

Beat.

TIENNE

We are trying to make it right, Bertrande. Me and Martin. I know that might be hard to believe. You're just going to have to trust us.

BERTRANDE

He lied.

TIENNE

Who did?

BERTRANDE

Martin. When Pierre asked him if he knew where Basque was. Martin said no. He said he never met Basque. But I saw them talking just last night.

TIENNE

It simply may have slipped his mind.

BERTRANDE

So I snuck back to his room just now.

TIENNE

You did what?

BERTRANDE

Basque was there. Unconscious. Gagged and bound. Did that slip his mind, too?

TIENNE

You saw Basque.

BERTRANDE

Yes.

TIENNE

Did you tell anyone this?

BERTRANDE

No. But I didn't know Martin's intentions and I couldn't just leave Basque there.

TIENNE

What did you do?

A light up on a liminal space on the stage made to represent Martin's room. Martin enters still carrying the two plates of breakfast. He looks around. Does not see Basque.

MARTIN

Basque? Basque!

It's clear Basque is gone.

MARTIN

Oh crap!

Back in Coralina's area:

BERTRANDE

I dragged him to my room so Martin wouldn't find him. Basque was still asleep when I left.

TIENNE

Let's hope he stays that way. Did you untie him?

BERTRANDE

I'm afraid so.

TIENNE

I need to go.

BERTRANDE

Did I do something wrong?

TIENNE

(Re: Coralina, urgently)

Take care of her. Do not let anyone come in here to give her anything. You understand?

BERTRANDE

Yes.

TIENNE

No one!

BERTRANDE

I'm sorry. Did I mess things up?

A light starts to raise in the main space and
Basque enters.

BASQUE

Pierre! Master Pierre! Come quick!

Tienne and Bertrande both hear this.

TIENNE

Dammit! I need to find Martin!

Tienne exits.

Lights out on Coralina's room.

In the main room:

BASQUE

Master Pierre!

Pierre rushes into the main area. He is holding a glass filled with what looks like a smoothie.

PIERRE

Where the devil have you been?

BASQUE

I was knocked out by some drug.

PIERRE

What are you taking about?

BASQUE

He knew I'd figure out who he was. That's why he did it! He knew I'd figure it out, and I have!

PIERRE

You're not making sense!

BASQUE

Martin!

PIERRE

What about him?

BASQUE

He's not Martin!

Pierre puts the glass down.

PIERRE

What do you mean?

BASQUE

He's Pansette!

Pierre's eyes widen.

PIERRE

Martin is Pansette?

BASQUE

Yes.

PIERRE

Your former master?

Yes!
BASQUE

The man who killed his wife!
PIERRE

The very same!
BASQUE

Pierre heads for a cabinet against the back wall.

Where is he now? Do you know?
PIERRE

I don't. But he's dangerous. I know that.
BASQUE

So am I.
PIERRE

Pierre opens the cabinet and pulls out a pistol.

Go find me some rope, Basque.
PIERRE

What are you going to do?
BASQUE

I am going to find your former master!
PIERRE

As soon as Pierre and Basque exit their separate ways, the following improvised sequence occurs:

Martin enters looking for Basque. He is still holding the food. He goes out another door. Then Tienne comes in looking for Martin. She goes out another door missing Pierre who comes in looking for Pansette. He exits, then Basque enters looking for rope.

This continues so long as it remains funny and engaging.

Just before it gets old, Martin and Tienne enter the room one final time, now with their arms raised. Pierre comes in after them, pointing the pistol he has at them.

He motions towards a corner of the room.

PIERRE

Get over there! Both of you!

TIENNE

What are you going to do with us?

PIERRE

I'll be asking the questions around here!

(Then, slow and menacing)

So... What shall I do with you?

TIENNE

(Confused, under her breath)

...I just asked that-

Pierre retrieves the glass he had with what looks like a smoothie in it.

PIERRE

(To Martin)

Do you know what this is... Pansette? It is Pansette, isn't it?

He looks closely at Martin's face.

PIERRE

What a fool I've been. You used the money I paid you to kill Martin and had some procedure to help you take his place. All so you can come here and collect. Diabolical.

MARTIN

Let Tienne go. She knows nothing of this.

PIERRE

I don't think I will. Her fate is still uncertain. Yours, on the other hand...

(He holds up the glass)

I ask again, do you know what this is?

MARTIN

I can guess.

PIERRE

The poison you told me about a year ago. In your drunken stupor. Bemoaning the death of your wife, and everyone thinking it was you who did it. Poor man.

Pierre looks at the glass he's holding with great admiration.

PIERRE

(To Tienne)

Your master told me all about this poison. Derived from a berry that his wife discovered on her trip cross country, she started ingesting it every day thinking it was good for her health, not realizing that she was slowly killing herself... and inadvertently framing him. By the time the doctor here discovered how his wife really died, a year had gone by, and everyone was certain he was the one who killed her.

(To Martin)

They always think it's the husband, don't they? This is why I don't marry.

TIENNE

Oh is that why? Not because you're a hideous man? Ugly on the inside and out. It's permeated from your twisted soul, seeped through your pores and misshaped your face making it grotesque and heinous to look at.

PIERRE

Your words don't hurt me.

TIENNE

You're so ugly when you throw a boomerang it doesn't come back. You're so ugly you make onions cry. You're so ugly your mom put meat around your head just so the dog would play with you.

PIERRE

...It doesn't hurt.

It does.

PIERRE

And you ought to be nicer to me, young lady. I've become somewhat of an expert on this little berry. Depending on the dosage, I can kill someone within days, weeks, even 6 months... where they fall into a coma first.

He looks to the portrait of Coralina.

PIERRE

Sorry, sis. But I've lived in your shadow long enough.

TIENNE

You won't get away with it.

PIERRE

The poison is untraceable dear. People will think she died of natural causes. And in case not, Basque is my back up plan. He'll take the fall.

MARTIN

Sure. That's why you hired him. His *former* master died and now his *new* master died. Everyone will think *he* must be responsible.

PIERRE

Precisely.

MARTIN

So what now? You have *me* drink that? Kill *me* slowly.

PIERRE

This won't kill you slowly. This is the most lethal dose. Drink this and you will be unconscious within 40 seconds... Dead within twenty minutes. I prepared it for Martin. When I thought you were Martin. But now that I know you're Pansette, an imposter and murderer...

He places the glass down. Points the gun at Martin.

PIERRE

I can just shoot you.
Before I do though, I have one very simple question.

Suddenly, Basque enters with some rope.

BASQUE

Sir. Here is the rope you asked for.

PIERRE

What? Oh. Right. Yes.

Basque hands him the twine.

PIERRE

This is more of a twine, Basque. They will break free from this. Find me something thicker.

BASQUE
A thicker rope. I understand.

PIERRE
Don't come back till you get it right.

BASQUE
Yes, sir. Of course.

Basque exits.

PIERRE
(To Martin and Tienne)
Sorry. That ought to give us some time.
(Then)
One very simple question-

Basque re-enters with thicker rope.

BASQUE
How's this?

PIERRE
What?

BASQUE
The thicker rope you asked for, sir.

PIERRE
You found some already?

BASQUE
I did.

PIERRE
That was incredibly quick.

BASQUE
Thank you, sir.

PIERRE
But, but this won't work. This is a polyester rope. We need a nylon rope. That's the strongest type of rope. Don't come back until you find Nylon.

BASQUE
Yes sir. Absolutely. I apologize.

Basque exits again.

Pierre resumes talking to Martin and Tienne.

PIERRE

One very simple-

BASQUE

(Returning)

Nylon rope, sir!

PIERRE

What in God's name! How the hell are you doing this so fast?

BASQUE

Doing what?

PIERRE

Getting the rope.

BASQUE

This living room is adjacent to the rope closet next door.

PIERRE

We have a rope closet?

BASQUE

A very well-stocked and clearly labeled one.

PIERRE

What the hell do we need a rope closet for?

Basque approaches Martin venomously.

BASQUE

(Growing angrier by the moment)

In case there's a man who claims to be the son of a woman, only to find out that the man is the former master of the woman's servant, a man who in fact is a murderer, who killed his wife!

Beat.

PIERRE

That seems like a very rare and specific circumstance for a whole rope closet.

BASQUE

(To Martin)

How could you do it, Pansette?

MARTIN

Basque, you have to listen to me.

PIERRE

No! No, you don't! Don't listen to him.

MARTIN

Pierre is using you!

Pierre points the gun at Tienne.

PIERRE

(To Martin)

Say another word and I will shoot your servant in the face.

Martin reluctantly acquiesces.

PIERRE

(To Basque)

What about chain, Basque? Are there any chains in that rope closet?

BASQUE

I don't think so, sir. I'd have to go all the way to the chain room if you want chain.

PIERRE

Where is the chain room?

BASQUE

On the other side of the house.

PIERRE

Perfect.

BASQUE

I don't know why the architect wouldn't put the chain room next to the rope closet, that makes no sense, but there it is.

PIERRE

Go find me a chain on the other side of the house. And some kind of locking mechanism, as well.

BASQUE

Like a lock?

PIERRE

Yes. Just like lock. Take your time. Get it right. I don't want to have to correct you again.

BASQUE

Yes sir.

Basque exits.

Pierre once again turns to his captives.

PIERRE

(To Tienne)

Where was a I?

TIENNE

One simple question-

PIERRE

Yes. One simple-

Collette enters.

COLLETTE

Pierre!

PIERRE

For the love of Christ!

COLLETTE

Where the hell is your servant. I'm starving!

PIERRE

He's getting some chain in the chain room.

COLLETTE

(Excited)

You have a chain room? Do you have a rope closet, as well-

She notices the situation at hand.

COLLETTE

What's happening here?

PIERRE

I'm doing as you ask.

COLLETTE

You're killing Martin?

PIERRE

(Holding up the gun)

Is that not obvious?

COLLETTE

Wonderful.

Collette crosses to Martin.

COLLETTE

Sorry Martin, you had your chance. We could have been making love! Your bread loaf could be in my keyhole right now!

TIENNE

(Disgusted, to Pierre)

I'd like to die now, too, please.

COLLETTE

(To Pierre)

So, Pierre, you agree to my terms?

PIERRE

Yes. Yes. 50 percent.

COLLETTE

(Ecstatic)

Wonderful! 50 percent of everything will be mine! Finally.

Collette takes a lap around admiring everything that she will own a part of.

COLLETTE

50 percent of this house. This furniture. This vase. This smoothie!

She grabs the glass with the poison smoothie and drinks half of it.

Everyone looks at Collette stunned.

COLLETTE

What? What is everyone looking at? Pierre was this not your smoothie? I assumed it was your smoothie, that's why I felt I could drink half of it.

(To Martin and Tienne)

Obviously if the smoothie belonged to someone else, I apologize, I thought it was Pierre's for which I'd be entitled to 50 percent.

Everyone turns and looks at the clock that's hanging on the wall.

COLLETTE

Why are you all now looking at the clock? I feel like you've all been curiously quiet for some time now, like at least 20 seconds.

MARTIN

Collette, how tall are you?

COLLETTE

I am 5 foot 5 inches.

MARTIN

May I suggest you take that pillow from the couch and place it 5 foot 5 inches from your feet.

COLLETTE

What a strange request. But as it is your last one, I'll humor you.

She grabs a pillow and places it in front of her about 5 foot 5 inches away.

COLLETTE

Like so?

MARTIN

Perfect.

And at that moment, Collette lets out a slight gasp and collapses. Unfortunately she falls backwards, landing with a thud off stage.

PIERRE

Well, I can't say I'm too upset about that.

(Then)

And now, Pansette, my question.

He points the gun at Tienne.

PIERRE

Answer me true, or she dies. Is Martin dead?

MARTIN

...Yes. Martin is dead.

Pierre's smile is wide and evil.

PIERRE

That's all I needed to know. With Martin gone, I can finally eliminate my sister.

Basque enters with a chain and lock.

BASQUE

Sir, your chain and lock.

PIERRE

Excellent timing, Basque. I was just going to call for you.

BASQUE

You mean I arrived before you called for me? Collette would be so proud. She said she would make me a good servant if it's the last thing she did-

Basque sees the offstage and collapsed Collette.

BASQUE

Oh my gosh, what happened to Collette?

PIERRE

It doesn't matter, Basque. Listen to me. My sister needs her medicine.

BASQUE

I'll go make some.

PIERRE

No need. I have some right here.

Pierre takes out the syringe he took from Basque earlier and hands it to Basque.

PIERRE

Give this to Coralina immediately.

TIENNE
Basque, don't!

PIERRE
You be quiet!

TIENNE
Basque, he is going to kill her and frame you!

PIERRE
Shut your mouth or I will shoot you in the face!

TIENNE
I don't care! Do it if you're going to do it!

PIERRE
Very well, suit yourself!

Pierre points the gun at Coralina. Cocks it.

Suddenly, off stage we hear!

BERTRANDE (O.S.)
Nooooooooo!

Bertrande stumbles in. She is hysterically crying. She falls to her knees.

BERTRANDE
No! Coralina... is dead!

TIENNE
...What?

BERTRANDE
I just went to check on her and... She's gone.

She points to Martin.

BERTRANDE
You did this! This was your plan all along, wasn't it?

MARTIN
Bertrande, no!

BERTRANDE

And now she's dead!

TIENNE

It can't be! Please say it isn't so!

MARTIN

I'm so sorry. I thought it would work. I really thought it would work!

All three are on the ground weeping.

PIERRE

Alls well that ends well, I guess.

Basque looks at him confused.

BASQUE

Alls well that ends well? Your sister is dead. Why would you say that?

Pierre now points the gun at Basque.

PIERRE

Why don't you now stand with them, Basque.

BASQUE

I don't understand.

PIERRE

(Threateningly)

Stand with them!

Basque moves towards the others.

TIENNE

This is what he wanted all along. He's been poisoning Coralina for months. He hired you in case he needed someone to take the fall.

BASQUE

(To Pierre)

Sir?

PIERRE

(Proudly)

Guilty.

MARTIN

And he hired me to kill Martin.

PIERRE

You killed your wife. I assumed you could kill my nephew.

MARTIN

I didn't kill my wife!

PIERRE

That's irrelevant! Everyone thinks you did. Any time anyone saw you, all they saw was-

MARTIN

Something I wasn't.

PIERRE

But you are now, aren't you? A killer. We are what we do, Pansette! We are what we do.

BASQUE

(To Martin)

Did you? Kill Martin?

Martin doesn't answer.

PIERRE

(To Basque)

Of course he did. After his wife died, he lost every cent he had trying to exonerate himself, find out what really caused her death, maybe even find a cure. Who knows? Who cares? I knew if I threw some money his way I could convince him to do anything I wanted.

BASQUE

And you wanted Martin dead?

PIERRE

I'm a bad man, Basque. I'm sorry you're just finding out about this now. I want money and I'm willing to do anything to get it. I'm not a good person!

TIENNE

Or good looking. You're so ugly you turn milk into yogurt just by looking at it.

PIERRE

(Hurt)

That's enough out of you!

He re-cocks his gun.

PIERRE

Out of all of you! Time for everyone to die. This is actually working out a lot better than I planned. The way I'm going to spin it now is that you, Basque, have been working with your former master this whole time. You and he and Tienne and Bertrande, she was in on it, too. You all plotted a scheme to kill Martin, take his place, kill Martin's mother, and take Martin's inheritance. Thankfully, I found out about it and shot you all. But not before my beloved sister succumbed to your sinister plot, consequently leaving everything to me. I think, given the circumstances, this story is... quite believable.

He takes aim to shoot.

PIERRE

Farewell.

Suddenly, walking with a cane, Coralina enters.

CORALINA

I don't know. I think that story is the biggest bunch of bullshit I've ever heard.

Pierre turns and is stunned.

PIERRE

Coralina?

With Pierre momentarily distracted, Basque uses the opportunity to go for the gun.

BASQUE

I will stop you!

There is a struggle, during which the gun slowly gets pointed at Tienne, then Bertrande, then Martin, then maybe someone in the audience... then on the other side of the stage, Collette stumbles in.

COLLETTE

That smoothie didn't agree with me. No worries though, I think I'm all right now-

Bang! The gun goes off. Collette falls back offstage again.

Finally, when the chaos ends, Basque is now holding the weapon.

BASQUE

Put your hands up, Mr. Pierre. From now on, you'll be doing your own cooking! In Prison!

Beat as Basque basks in his accomplishment, as well as what he perceives to be a very clever zinger.

MARTIN

Actually, they often cook for you in prison.

BASQUE

They do?

MARTIN

They do, but I get what you were going for and I appreciate you.

CORALINA

(To Basque)

Yes. Well done, you. What's your name?

BASQUE

Basque, ma'am. I'm actually your servant.

CORALINA

Probably the best damn servant I've ever had. We'll need to pay you more.

PIERRE

This can't be! This is impossible!

Pierre turns to Bertrande.

PIERRE

You said she was dead. You were crying there on the ground!

BERTRANDE

I had to do something to keep you from hurting her. From hurting any of them.

PIERRE

That was a show?

Bertrande smiles. Looks at Tienne.

BERTRANDE

And you thought I'd make a terrible actor.

TIENNE

Well played.

Pierre turns to Coralina, desperate.

PIERRE

Coralina, you have to believe me. This imposter came here pretending to be your son. I was just trying to protect you and root out their evil scheme.

CORALINA

You think I wouldn't know my own child, Pierre?

Coralina crosses to Martin and Tienne. She opens her arms.

CORALINA

You've come home.

Coralina turns and faces Tienne.

TIENNE

(With emotion)

Mother? You know it's me?

Coralina nods.

CORALINA

I'd recognize you anywhere. This has always been you. I only wish I realized it sooner.

TIENNE

...Oh mom!

Tienne cries and hugs her mother.

Pause.

PIERRE

What the hell is going on?

BASQUE

Is it not apparent? Obviously that's her daughter.

PIERRE

She doesn't have a daughter.

BASQUE

Clearly she does. Let's go, Pierre!

Basque starts to escort Pierre towards the exit.
Pierre yells back to Martin.

PIERRE

(To Martin)

Wait! You said you killed Martin! You said you killed Martin!

MARTIN

I never said I *killed* Martin.

He looks at Tienne. She smiles back at him.

MARTIN

I simply said Martin was dead.

Basque pushes Pierre offstage. Bertrande
crosses to Martin.

BERTRANDE

(To Martin)

Sorry if I scared you back there. Crying and all.

MARTIN

It was a marvelous performance.

BERTRANDE

Yours, as well.

MARTIN

Did you know?

BERTRANDE

Did I know what? That you were not my husband?

MARTIN

That *Tienne* was.

BERTRANDE

I wasn't one hundred percent sure at first. When she brought me my drink, however, it was clear.

MARTIN

The Vodka Gimlet?

BERTRANDE

With no lime. I'm allergic. My husband knew that.

Tienne walks over with her mother.

TIENNE

Mother, I'd like to introduce you to someone. This is...

(To Martin, smiling)

Well, I don't know what to call you now. Are you Martin or Pansette? Who are you?

MARTIN

I'm not sure anymore. I don't know what to call me.

Coralina gets close to Martin.

CORALINA

Why did you take the money from Pierre when he hired you to do such an awful thing?

MARTIN

(With great shame)

It was a moment of weakness. I was desperate. People only saw a murderer when they looked at me... so in that drunken moment I thought... maybe that's what I am?

CORALINA

And when you came across my child, why did you not do what Pierre paid you to do?

MARTIN

Because your child taught me that... I'm the only one who gets to define who I am.

Coralina nods.

CORALINA

I concur... Doctor. You are what you do. Thank you. For everything.

Coralina crosses upstage.

Bertrande grabs Tienne's hands.

BERTRANDE

It's so nice to have you back, my friend.

TIENNE

I'm so glad I returned.

Tienne joins her mother upstage to take in the portraits of themselves hanging on the wall.

MARTIN

(To Bertrande)

I am going to check on Collette. See if it's not too late to save her.

BERTRANDE

I think she has eyes for you.

MARTIN

(Facetiously)

Really? I didn't get that.

BERTRANDE

I'll go with you. Just in case.

Bertrande exits ahead of him. Martin goes to leave but then remembers to grab his bag. He pulls out of it a stethoscope and puts it on.

Basque enters and crosses to him.

BASQUE

Sir.

MARTIN

Basque.

BASQUE

(With great remorse)

I'm so sorry I doubted you.

MARTIN

You make me your bouillabaisse, we'll call it even.

The two smile and shake hands.

Martin exits. Basque crosses to Coralina and Tienne.

BASQUE

I secured Pierre in the other room. Now I thought I'd get some champagne for everyone. To celebrate.

CORALINA

Good thinking, Basque. Thank you. I'd love some.

BASQUE

Ms. Tienne?

Tienne nods.

CORALINA

(To Tienne)

Tienne? Is that what you call yourself now?

TIENNE

Yes.

BASQUE

Tienne! Of course. It's French. It means, "Yours."

(To Coralina)

As in, *she's* yours.

(To Tienne)

Very clever.

TIENNE

Thanks, Basque.

Basque exits.

TIENNE

It's actually just the letters, mom. T... N... It's short for Tenet Nosce.

She points to the latin plaque hanging between their two portraits.

TIENNE

Know Thyself.

Mother and daughter smile as we fade to black.

The end.