No Exit by Jean Paul Sartre

Although many nineteenth century philosophers developed the concepts of existentialism, it was the French writer Jean Paul Sartre who popularized it. His one act play, Huis Clos or No Exit, first produced in Paris in May, 19944, is the clearest example and metaphor for this philosophy. There are only four characters: the VALET, GARCIN, ESTELLE, and INEZ and the entire play takes place in a drawing room, Second Empire style, with a massive bronze ornament on the mantelpiece. However the piece contains essential germs of existentialist thought such as "Hell is other people." As you read the play, put yourself in that drawing room with two people you hate most in the world.

Part 1

GARCIN (enters, accompanied by the VALET, and glances around him): So here we are?

VALET: Yes, Mr. Garcin.

GARCIN: And this is what it looks like?

VALET: Yes.

GARCIN: Second Empire furniture, I observe... Well, well, I dare say one gets used to it in time.

VALET: Some do, some don't.

GARCIN: Are all the rooms like this one?

VALET: How could they be? We cater for all sorts: Chinamen and Indians, for instance. What use would they have for a Second Empire chair?

GARCIN: And what use do you suppose I have for one? Do you know who I was?...Oh, well, it's no great matter. And, to tell the truth, I had quite a habit of living among furniture that I didn't relish, and in false positions. I'd even come to like it. A false position in a Louis-Philippe dining room-- you know the style?--well, that had its points, you know. Bogus in bogus, so to speak.

VALET: And you'll find that living in a Second Empire drawing-room has its points.

GARCIN: Really?...Yes, yes, I dare say...Still I certainly didn't expect-- this! You know what they tell us down there?

VALET: What about?

GARCIN: About...this- er--residence.

VALET: Really, sir, how could you believe such cock-and-bull stories? Told by people who'd never set foot here. For, of course, if they had--

GARCIN: Quite so. But I say, where are the instruments of torture?

VALET: The what?

GARCIN: The racks and red-hot pincers and all the other paraphernalia?

Think about the place you have chosen as your hell. Does it look ordinary and bourgeois, like Sartre's drawing room, or is it equipped with literal instruments of torture like Dante's Inferno? Can the mind be in hell in a beautiful place? Is there a way to find peace in a hellish physical environment? Enter Sartre's space more fully and imagine how it would feel to live there endlessly, night and day:

VALET: Ah, you must have your little joke, sir.

GARCIN: My little joke? Oh, I see. No, I wasn't joking. No mirrors, I notice. No windows. Only to be expected. And nothing breakable. But damn it all, they might have left me my toothbrush!

VALET: That's good! So you haven't yet got over your--what-do-you-call-it?--sense of human dignity? Excuse my smiling.

GARCIN: I'll ask you to be more polite. I quite realize the position I'm in, but I won't tolerate...

VALET: Sorry, sir. No offense meant. But all our guests aske me the same questions. Silly questions, if you'll pardon my saying so. Where's the torture-chamber? That's the first thing they ask, all of them. They don't bother their heads about the bathroom requisites, that I can assure you. But after a bit, when they've got their nerve back, they start in about their toothbrushes and what-ot. Good heavens, Mr. Garcin, can't you use your brains? What, I ask you, would be the point of brushing your teeth?

GARCIN: Yes, of course you're right. And why shouild one want to see oneself in a looking- glass? But that bronze contraption on the mantelpiece, that's another story. I suppose there will be times when I stare my eyes out at it. Stare my eyes out--see what I mean?...All right, let's put our cards on the table. I assure you I'm quite conscious of my position. Shall I tell you what it feels like? A man's drowning, choking, sinking by inches, till only his eyes are just above water. And what does he see? A bronze atrocity by-- what's the fellow's name?--Barbedienne. A collector's piece. As in a nightmare. That's their idea, isn't it?...No, I suppose you're under orders not to answer questions; and I won't insist. But don't forget, my man, I've a good notion of what's coming to me, so

don't you boast you've caught me off my guard. I'm facing the situation, facing it. So that's that; no toothbrush. And no bed, either. One never sleeps, I take it?

VALET: That's so.

GARCIN: Just as I expected. WHY should one sleep? A sort of drowsiness steals on you, tickles you behind the ears, and you feel your eyes closing-- but why sleep? You lie down on the sofa and-- in a flash, sleep flies away. Miles and miles away. So you rub your eyes, get up, and it starts all over again.

VALET: Romantic, that's what you are.

GARCIN: Will you keep quiet, please! ...I won't make a scene, I shan't be sorry for myself, I'll face the situation, as I said just now. Face it fairly and squarely. I son't have it springing at me from behind, before I've time to size it up. And you call that being "romantic!" So it comes to this; one doesn't need rest. Why bother about sleep if one isn't sleepy? That stands to reason, doesn't it? Wait a minute, there's a snag somewhere; something disagreeable. Why, now, should it be disagreeable? ...Ah, I see; it's life without a break.

Could hell be described as too much of anything without a break? Are variety, moderation and balance instruments we use to keep us from boiling in any inferno of excess,' whether it be cheesecake or ravenous sex?

VALET: What are you talking about?

GARCIN: Your eyelids. We move ours up and down. Blinking, we call it. It's like a small black shutter that clicks down and makes a break. Everything goes black; one's eyes are moistened. You can't imagine how restful, refreshing, it is. Four thousand little rests per hour. Four thousand little respites--just think!...So that's the idea. I'm to live without eyelids. Don't act the fool, you know what I mean. No eyelids, no sleep; it follows, doesn't it? I shall never sleep again. But then--how shall I endure my own company? Try to understand. You see, I'm fond of teasing, it's a second nature with me-- and I'm used to teasing myself. Plaguing myself, if you prefer; I don't tease nicely. But I can't go on doing that without a break. Down there I had my nights. I slept. I always had good nights. By way of compensation, I suppose. And happy little dreams. There was a green field. Just an ordinary field. I used to stroll in it...Is it daytime now?

VALET: Can't you see? The lights are on.

GARCIN: Ah, yes, I've got it. It's your daytime. And outside?

VALET: Outside?

GARCIN: Damn it, you know what I mean. Beyond that wall.

VALET: There's a passage.

GARCIN: And at the end of the passage?

VALET: There's more rooms, more passages, and stairs.

GARCIN: And what lies beyond them?

VALET: That's all.

GARCIN: But surely you have a day off sometimes. Where do you go?

VALET: To my uncle's place. He's the head valet here. He has a room on the third floor.

GARCIN: I should have guessed as much. Where's the light-switch?

VALET: There isn't any.

GARCIN: What? Can't one turn off the light?

VALET: Oh, the management can cut off the current if they want to. But I can't remember their having done so on this floor. We have all the electricity we want.

GARCIN: So one has to live with one's eyes open all the time?

VALET: To live, did you say?

GARCIN: Don't let's quibble over words. With one's eyes open. Forever. Always broad daylight in my eyes-- and in my head. And suppose I took that contraption on the mantelpiece and dropped it on the lamp-- wouldn't it go out?
VALET: You can't move it. It's too heavy.

GARCIN: You're right. It's too heavy.

VALET: Very well, sir, if you don't need me any more, I'll be off.

GARCIN: What? You're going? Wait. That's a bell, isn't it? And if I ring, you're bound to come?

VALET: Well, yes, that's so-- in a way. But you can never be sure about that bell. There's something wrong with the wiring, and it doesn't always work.

GARCIN: It's working all right.

VALET: So it is. But I shouldn't count on it too much if I were you. It's-- capricious. Well, I really must go now. Yes, sir?

GARCIN: No, never mind. What's this?

VALET: Can't you see? An ordinary paper-knife.

GARCIN: Are there books here?

VALET: No.

GARCIN: Then what's the use of this? Very well. You can go. (Garcin is by himself. He goes to the bronze ornament and strokes it reflectively. He sits down; then gets up, goes to the bell-push, and presses the button. The bell remains silent. He tries two or three times, without success. Then he tries to open the door, also without success. He calls the VALET several times, but gets no result. He beats the door with his fists, still calling. Suddenly he grows calm and sits down again. At the same moment the door opens and INEZ enters, followed by the VALET>)

How does Sartre create a sense of place through dialogue? Can you imagine what it feels like to stay awake all the time with the lights on with no hope of leaving a specific place? How does GARCIN react to this hell? How could you twist your daily activities around so that everyday habits become hell? Is there a pattern of circumstances that reinforces the experience of hell?

Part 2

VALET: Did you call, sir?

GARCIN: (About to answer "yes", but sees INEZ and says) No.

VALET: This is your room, madam. If there's any information you require--? Most of our guests have quite a lot to ask me. But I won't insist. Anyhow, as regards the toothbrush, and the electric bell, and that thing on the mantelshelf, this gentleman can tell you anything you want to know as well as I could. We've had a little chat, him and me. (Exits.)

INEZ: Where's Florence? Didn't you hear? I asked you about Florence. Where is she?

GARCIN: I haven't an idea.

INEZ: Ah, that's the way it works, is it? Torture by separation. Well, as far as I'm concerned, you won't get anywhere. Florence was a tiresome little fool, and I shan't miss her in the least.

GARCIN: I beg your pardon. Who do you suppose I am?

INEZ: You? Why, the torturer, of course.

GARCIN: Well, that's a good one! Too comic for words. I the torturer! So you came in, had a look at me, and thought I was--er--one of the staff. Of course, it's that silly fellow's fault; he should have introduced us. A torturer indeed! I'm Joseph Garcin, journalist and man of letters by profession. And as we're both in the same boat, so to speak, might I ask you, Mrs.--?

INEZ:Not "Mrs." I'm unmarried.

GARCIN: Right. That's a start, anyway. Well, now that we've broken the ice, do you really think I look like a torturer? And, by the way, how does one recognize torturers when one sees them? Evidently you've ideas on the subject.

INEZ: They look frightened.

GARCIN: Frightened? But how ridiculous! Of whom should they be frightened? Of their victims?

INEZ: Laugh away, but I know what I'm talking about. I've often watched my face in the glass.

GARCIN: In the glass? How beastly of them! They've removed everything in the least resembling a glass. Anyhow, I can assure you I'm not frightened. Not that I take my position lightly; I realize its gravity only too well. But I'm not afraid.

INEZ: That's your affair. Must you be here all the time, or do you take a stroll outside, now and then?

GARCIN: The door's locked.
Oh!.. That's too bad.

GARCIN: I can quite understand that it bores you having me here. And I too--well, quite frankly, I'd rather be alone. I want to think things out, you know; to set my life in order, and one does that better by oneself. But I'm sure we'll manage to pull along together somehow. I'm no talker, I don't move much; in fact I'm a peaceful sort of fellow. Only, if I may venture on a suggestion, we should make a point of being extremely courteous to each other. That will ease the situation for us both.

INEZ: I'm not polite.

GARCIN: Then I must be polite for two.

INEZ: Your mouth!

GARCIN: I beg your pardon.

INEZ: Can't you keep your mouth still? You keep twisting it about all the time. It's grotesque.

GARCIN: So sorry. I wasn't aware of it.

INEZ: That's just what I reproach you with. There you are! You talk about politeness, and you don't even try to control your face. Remember you're not alone; you've no right to inflict the sight of your fear on me.

GARCIN: How about you? Aren't you afraid?

INEZ: What would be the use? There was some point in being afraid before, while one still had hope.

GARCIN: There's no more hope--but it's still "before." We haven't yet begun to suffer.

INEZ: That's so. Well? What's going to happen?

GARCIN: I don't know. I'm waiting. (Enter ESTELLE with the VALET. She looks at GARCIN whose face is still hidden by his hands.)

Part 3

ESTELLE: No. Don't look up. I know what you're hiding with your hands. I know you've no face left. What! But I don't know you!

GARCIN: I'm not the torturer, madam.

ESTELLE: I never thought you were. I --I thought someone was trying to play a rather nasty trick on me. Is anyone else coming?

VALET: No, madam. No one else is coming.

ESTELLE: Oh! Then we're to stay by ourselves, the three of us, this gentleman, this lady and myself. (laughs.)

GARCIN: There's nothing to laugh about.

ESTELLE: It's those sofas. They're so hideous. And just look how they've been arranged. It makes me think of New Year's Day--when I used to visit that boring old aunt of mine, Aunt Mary. Her house is full of horror like that...I suppose each of us has a sofa of his own. Is that one mine? But you can't expect me to sit on that one. It would be too horrible for words. I'm in pale blue and it's vivid green.

INEZ: Would you prefer mine?

ESTELLE: That claret-colored one, you mean? That's very sweet of you, but really- no, I don't think it'd be so much better. What's the good of worrying, anyhow? We've got to take what comes to us, and I'll stick to the green one. The only one which might do at a pinch, is that gentleman's.

INEZ: Did you hear, Mr. Garcin?

GARCIN: Oh-- the sofa, you mean. So sorry. Please take it, madam.

ESTELLE: Thanks. Well, as we're to live together, I suppose we'd better introduce ourselves. My name's Rigault. Estelle Rigault.

INEZ: And I'm Inez Serrano. Very pleased to meet you.

GARCIN: Joseph Garcin.

VALET: Do you require me any longer?

ESTELLE: No, you can go. I'll ring when I want you.

INEZ: You're very pretty. I wish we'd had some flowers to welcome you with.

ESTELLE: Flowers? Yes, I loved flowers. Only they'd fade so quickly here, wouldn't they? It's so stuffy. Oh, well, the great thing is to keep as cheerful as we can, don't you agree? Of course, you, too, are--

INEZ: Yes. Last week. What about you?

ESTELLE: I'm-- quite recent. Yesterday. As a matter of act, the ceremony's not quite over. The wind's blowing my sister's veil all over the place. She's trying her best to cry. Come, dear! Make another effort. That's better. Two tears, two little tears are twinkling under the black veil. Oh dear! What a sight Olga looks this morning! She's holding my sister's arm, helping her along. She's not crying, and I don't blame her, tears always mess one's face up, don't they? Olga was my bosom friend, you know.

INEZ: Did you suffer much?

ESTELLE: No. I was only half conscious, mostly.

INEZ: What was it?

ESTELLE: Pneumonia. It's over now, they're leaving the cemetery. Good-by. Good-by. Quite a crowd they are. My husband's stayed at home. Prostrated with grief, poor man. How about you?

INEZ: The gas stove.

ESTELLE: And you, Mr. Garcin?

GARCIA: Twelve bullets through my chest. Sorry! I fear I'm not good company among the dead.

ESTELLE: Please, please don't use that word. It's so--so crude. In terribly bad taste, really. It doesn't mean much, anyhow. Somehow I feel we've never been so much alive as now. If we've absolutely got to mention this--this state of things, I suggest we call ourselves--wait!--absentees. Have you been--been absent for long?

GARCIN: About a month.

ESTELLE: Where do you come from?

GARCIN: From Rio.

ESTELLE: I'm from Paris. Have you anyone left down there?

GARCIN: Yes, my wife. She's waiting at the entrance of the barracks. She comes there every day. But they won't let her in. Now she's trying to peep between the bars. She doesn't yet know I'm-- absent, but she suspects it. Now she's going away. She's wearing her black dress. So much the better, she won't need to change. She isn't crying, but she never did cry, anyhow. It's a bright, sunny day and she's like a black shadow creeping down the empty street. Those big tragic eyes of hers-- with that martyred look they always had. Oh, how she got on my nerves!

INEZ: Estelle!

ESTELLE: Please, Mr. Garcin!

GARCIN: What is it?

ESTELLE: You're sitting on my sofa.

GARCIN: I beg your pardon.

ESTELLE: You looked so--so far away. Sorry I disturbed you.

GARCIN: I was setting my life in order. You may laugh but you'd do better to follow my example.

INEZ: No need. My life's in perfect order. It tidied itself up nicely of its own accord. So I needn't bother about it now.

GARCIN: Really? You imagine it's so simple as that. Whew! How hot it is here! Do you mind if--

ESTELLE: How dare you! No, please don't. I loathe men in their shirt-sleeves.

GARCIN: All right. Of course, I used to spend my nights in the newspaper office, and it was a regular Black Hole, so we never kept our coats on. Stiflingly hot it could be. Stifling, that it is. It's night now.

ESTELLE: That's so. Olga's undressing; it must be after midnight. How quickly the time passes, on earth!

INEZ: Yes, after midnight. They've sealed up my room. It's dark, pitch-dark, and empty.

GARCIN: They've strung their coats on the backs of the chairs and rolled up their shirt-sleeves above the elbow. The air stinks of men and cigar-smoke. I used to like living among men in their shirt-sleeves.

ESTELLE: Well, in that case our tastes differ. That's all it proves. What about you? Do you like men in their shirt-sleeves?

Part 4

INEZ: Oh, I don't care much for men any way.

ESTELLE: Really I can't imagine why they put us three together. It doesn't make sense.

INEZ: What's that you said?

ESTELLE: I'm looking at you two and thinking that we're going to live together...It's so absurd. I expected to meet old friends, or relatives.

INEZ: Yes, a charming old friend-- with a hole in the middle of his face.

ESTELLE: Yes, him too. He danced the tango so divinely. Like a professional...But why, why should we of all people be put together?

GARCIN: A pure fluke, I should say. They lodge folks as they can, in the order of their coming. Why are you laughing?

INEZ: Because you amuse me with your "flukes."As if they left anything to chance! But I suppose you've got to reassure yourself somehow.

ESTELLE: I wonder, now. Don't you think we may have met each other at some time in our lives?

INEZ: Never. I shouldn't have forgotten you.

ESTELLE: Or perhaps we have friends in common. I wonder if you know the Dubois-Seymours?

INEZ: Not likely.

ESTELLE: But everyone went to their parties.

INEZ: What's their job?

ESTELLE: Oh, they don't do anything. But they have a lovely house in the country, and hosts of people visit them.

INEZ: I didn't. I was a post-office clerk.

ESTELLE: Ah, yes... Of course, in that case-- And you, Mr. Garcin?

GARCIN: We've never met. I always lived in Rio.

ESTELLE: Then you must be right. It's mere chance that has brought us together.

INEZ: Mere chance? Then it's by chance this room is furnished as we see it. It's an accident that the sofa on the right is a livid green, and that one on the left's wine-red. Mere chance? Well, just try to shift the sofas and you'll see the difference quick enough. And that statue on the mantelpiece, do you think it's there by accident? And what about the heat here? How about that? I tell you they've thought it all out. Down to the last detail. Nothing was left to chance. This room was all set for us.

ESTELLE: But really! Everything here's so hideous; all in angles, so uncomfortable. I always loathed angles.

INEZ: And do you think I lived in a Second Empire drawing-room?

ESTELLE: So it was all fixed up beforehand?

INEZ: Yes. And they've put us together deliberately.

ESTELLE: Then it's not mere chance that you precisely are sitting opposite me? But what can be the idea behind it?

INEZ: Ask me another! I only know they're waiting.

ESTELLE: I never could bear the idea of anyone's expecting something from me. It always made me want to do just the opposite.

INEZ: Well, do it. Do it if you can. You don't even know what they expect.

ESTELLE: It's outrageous! So something's coming to me from you two? Something nasty, I suppose. There are some faces that tell me everything at once. Yours don't convey anything.

GARCIN: Look here! Why are we together? You've given us quite enough hints, you may as well come out with it.

INEZ: But I know nothing, absolutely nothing about it. I'm as much in the dark as you are.

GARCIN: We've got to know.

INEZ: If only each of us had the guts to tell--

GARCIN: Tell what?

INEZ: Estelle!

ESTELLE: Yes?

INEZ: What have you done? I mean, why have they sent you here?

ESTELLE: That's just it. I haven't a notion, not the foggiest. In fact, I'm wondering if there hasn't been some ghastly mistake. Don't smile. Just think of the number of people who-who become absentees every day. There must be thousands and thousands, and probably they're sorted out by-- by understrappers, you know what I mean. Stupid employees who don't know their job. So they're bound to make mistakes sometimes... Do stop smiling. Why don't you speak? If they made a mistake in my case, they may have done the same about you. And you, too. Anyhow, isn't it better to think we've got here by mistake?

INEZ: Is that all you have to tell me?

ESTELLE: What else should I tell? I've nothing to hide. I lost my parents when I was a kid, and I had my young brother to bring up. We were terribly poor and when an old friend of my people asked me to marry him I said yes. He was very well off, and quite nice. My brother was a very delicate child and needed all sorts of attention, so really that was the right thing for me to do, don't you agree? My husband was old enough to be my father, but for six years we had a happy married life. Then two years ago I met the man I was fated to love. We knew it the moment we set eyes on each other. He asked me to run away with him, and I refused. Then I got pneumonia and it finished me. That's the whole story. No doubt, by certain standards, I did wrong to sacrifice my youth to a man nearly three times my age. Do you think that could be called a sin?

GARCIN: Certainly not. And now, tell me, do you think it's a crime to stand by one's principles?

ESTELLE: Of course not. Surely no one could blame a man for that!

GARCIN: Wait a bit! I ran a pacifist newspaper. Then war broke out. What was I to do? Everyone was watching me, wondering: "Will he dare?" Well, I dared. I folded my arms and they shot me. Had I done anything wrong?

ESTELLE: Wrong? On the contrary. You were--

INEZ: --a hero! And how about your wife, Mr. Garcin?

GARCIN: That's simple. I'd rescued her from-- from the gutter.

ESTELLE: You see! You see!

INEZ: Yes, I see. Look here! What' s the point of play-acting, trying to throw dust in each other's eyes? We're all tarred with the same brush.

ESTELLE: How dare you!

INEZ: Yes, we are criminals-- murderers-- all three of us. We're in hell, my pets; they never make mistakes, and people aren't damned for nothing.

ESTELLE: Stop! For heaven's sake--

INEZ: In hell! Damned souls-- that's us, all three!

ESTELLE: Keep quiet! I forbid you to use such disgusting words.

INEZ: A damned soul-- that's you, my little plaster saint. And ditto our friend there, the noble pacifist. We've had our hour of pleasure, haven't we? There have been people who burned their lives out for our sakes-- and we chuckled over it. So now we have to pay the reckoning.

GARCIN: Will you keep your mouth shut, damn it!

INEZ: Well, well! Ah, I understand now. I know why they've put us three together.

GARCIN: I advise you to-- to think twice before you say any more.

INEZ: Wait! You'll see how simple it is. Childishly simple. Obviously there aren't any physical torments-- you agree, don't you? And yet we're in hell. And no one else will come here. We'll stay in this room together, the three of us, for ever and ever...In short, there's someone absent here, the official torturer.

GARCIN: I'd noticed that.

INEZ: It's obvious what they're after-- an economy of man-power-- or devil-power, if you prefer. The same idea as in the cafeteria, where customers serve themselves.

ESTELLE: Whatever do you mean?

INEZ: I mean that each of us will act as torturer of the two others.

GARCIN: No, I shall never be your torturer. I wish neither of you any harm, and I've no concern with you. None at all. So the solution's easy enough; each of us stays put in his or her corner and takes no notice of the others. You here, you here, and I there. Like soldiers at our posts. Also, we mustn't speak. Not one word. That won't be difficult; each of us has plenty of material for self-communing. I think I could stay ten thousand years with only my thoughts for company.

ESTELLE: Have I got to keep silent, too?

GARCIN: Yes. And that way we--we'll work out our salvation. Looking into ourselves, never raising our heads. Agreed?

INEZ: Agreed.

ESTELLE: I agree.

GARCIN: Then--good-by.
(Inez sings to herself while Estelle has been plying her powder-puff and lipstick. She looks round for a mirror, fumbles in her bag, then turns toward Garcin.

Part 5

ESTELLE: Excuse me, have you a glass? Any sort of glass, a pocket-mirror will do. (Garcin remains silent.) Even if you won't speak to me, you might lend me a glass.

INEZ: Don't worry. I've a glass in my bag. It's gone! They must have taken it from me at the entrance.

ESTELLE: How tiresome! (Estelle shuts her eyes and sways, as if about to faint. Inez runs forward and holds her up.)

INEZ: What's the matter?

ESTELLE: I feel so queer. Don't you ever get taken that way? When I can't see myself I begin to wonder if I really and truly exist. I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn't help much.

INEZ: You're lucky. I'm always conscious of myself-- in my mind. Painfully conscious.

ESTELLE: Ah yes, in your mind. But everything that goes on in one's head is so vague, isn't it? It makes one want to sleep. I've six big mirrors in my bedroom. There they are. I can see them. But they don't see me. They're reflecting the carpet, the settee, the window-- but how empty it is, a glass in which I'm absent! When I talked to people I always made sure there was one near by in which I could see myself. I watched myself talking. And somehow it kept me alert, seeing myself as the others saw me...Oh dear! My lipstick! I'm sure I've put it on all crooked. No, I can't do wihtout a looking-glass for ever and ever. I simply can't.

INEZ: Suppose I try to be your glass? Come and pay me a visit, dear. Here's a place for you on my sofa.

ESTELLE: But--(points to Garcin)

INEZ: Oh, he doesn't count.

ESTELLE: But we're going to --to hurt each other. You said it yourself.

INEZ: Do I look as if I wanted to hurt you?

ESTELLE: One never can tell.

INEZ: Much more likely YOU'LL hurt ME. Still, what does it matter? If I've got to suffer, it may as well be at your hands, your pretty hands. Sit down. Come closer. Closer. Look into my eyes. What do you see?

ESTELLE: Oh, I'm there! But so tiny I can't see myself properly.

INEZ: But I can. Every inch of you. Now ask me questions. I'll be as candid as any looking-glass.

ESTELLE: Please, Mr. Garcin. Sure our chatter isn't boring you?

INEZ: Don't worry about him. As I said, he doesn't count. We're by ourselves...Ask away.

ESTELLE: Are my lips all right?

INEZ: Show! No, they're a bit smudgy.

ESTELLE: I thought as much. Luckily no one's seen me. I'll try again.

INEZ: That's better. No. Follow the line of your lips. Wait!! I'll guide your hand. There. That's quite good.

ESTELLE: As good as when I came in?

INEZ: Far better. Crueler. Your mouth looks quite diabolical that way.

ESTELLE: Good gracious! And you say you like it! How maddening, not being able to see for myself! You're quite sure, Miss Serrano, that it's all right now?

INEZ: Won't you call me Inez?

ESTELLE: Are you sure it looks all right?

INEZ: You're lovely, Estelle.

ESTELLE: But how can I rely upon your taste? Is it the same as my taste? Oh, how sickening it all is, enough to drive one crazy!

INEZ: I HAVE your taste, my dear, because I like you so much. Look at me. No, straight. Now smile. I'm not so ugly, either. Am I not nicer than your glass?

ESTELLE: Oh, I don't know. Your scare me rather. My reflection in the glass never did that; of course, I knew it so well. Like something I had tamed...I'm going to smile, and my smile will sink down into your pupils, and heaven knows what it will become.
INEZ: And why shouldn't you "tame" me? Listen! I want you to call me Inez. We must be great friends.

ESTELLE: I don't make friends with women very easily.

INEZ: Not with postal clerks, you mean? Hullo, what's that-- that nasty red spot at the bottom of your cheek? A pimple?

ESTELLE: A pimple? Oh, how simply foul! Where!

INEZ: There...You know the way the catch larks-- with a mirror? I'm your lark-mirror, my dear, and you can't escape me...There isn't any pimple, not a trace of one. So what about it? Suppose the mirror started telling lies? Or suppose I covered my eyes--as he is doing-- and refused to look at you, all that loveliness of yours would be wasted on the desert air. No, don't be afraid, I can't help looking at you. I shan't turn my eyes away. And I'll be nice to you, ever so nice. Only you must be nice to me, too.

ESTELLE: Are you really-- attracted by me?

INEZ: Very much indeed.

ESTELLE: But I wish he'd notice me too.

INEZ: Of course! Because he's a MAN! You've won. But look at her, damn it! Don't pretend. You haven't missed a word of what we've said.

GARCIN: Quite so; not a word. I stuck my fingers in my ears, but your voices thudded in my brain. Silly chatter. Now will you leave me in peace, you two? I'm not interested in you.

INEZ: Not in me, perhaps--but how about this child? Aren't you interested in her? Oh, I saw through your game; you got on your high horse just to impress her.

GARCIN: I asked you to leave me in peace. There's someone talking about me in the newspaper office and I want to listen. And, if it'll make you any happier, let me tell you that I've no use for the "child," as you call her.

ESTELLE: Thanks.

GARCIN: Oh, I didn't mean it rudely.

ESTELLE: You cad!

GARCIN: So that's that. You know I begged you not to speak.

ESTELLE: It's her fault; she started. I didn't ask anything of her and she came and offered me her-her glass.

INEZ: So you say. But all the time you were making up to him, trying every trick to catch his attention.

ESTELLE: Well, why shouldn't I?

GARCIN: You're crazy, both of you. Don't you see where this is leading us? For pity's sake, keep your mouths shut. Now let's all sit down again quite quietly; we'll look at the floor and each must try to forget the others are there.

INEZ: To forget about the others? How utterly absurd! I feel you there, in every pore. Your silence clamors in my ears. You can nail up your mouth, cut your tongue out-- but you can't prevent your being there. Can you stop your thoughts? I hear them ticking away like a clock, tick-tock, tick-tock, and I'm certain you hear mine. It's all very well skulking on your sofa, but you're everywhere, and every sound comes to me soiled because you've

intercepted it on its way. Why, you've even stolen my face; you know it and I don't ! And what about her, about Estelle? You've stolen her from me, too; if she and I were alone do you suppose she'd treat me as she does? No, take your hands from your face, I won't leave you in peace-- that would suit your book too well. You'd go on sitting there, in a sort of trance, like a yogi, and even if I didn't see her I'd feel it in my bones-- that she was making every sound, even the rustle of her dress, for your benefit, throwing you smiles you didn't see.... Well, I won't stand for that, I prefer to choose my hell; I prefer to look you in the eyes and fight it out face to face.

GARCIN: Have it your own way. I suppose we were bound to come to this; they knew what they were about, and we're easy game. If they'd put me in a room with men-- men can keep their mouths shut. But it's no use wanting the impossible. So I attract you, little girl? (Fondles her.) It seems you were making eyes at me?

ESTELLE: Don't touch me.

GARCIN: Why not? We might, anyhow, be natural... Do you know, I used to be mad about women? And some were fond of me. So we may as well stop posing, we've nothing to lose. Why trouble about politeness, and decorum, and the rest of it? We're between ourselves. And presently we shall be naked as -- as newborn babes.

ESTELLE: Oh, let me be!

GARCIN: As newborn babes. Well, I'd warned you, anyhow. I asked so little of you, nothing but peace and a little silence. I'd put my fingers in my ears. Gomez was spouting away as usual, standing in the center of the room, with all the pressmen listening. In their shirt-sleeves. I tried to hear, but it wasn't easy. Things on earth move so quickly, you know. Couldn't you have held your tongues? Now it's over, he's stopped talking, and what he thinks of me has gone back into his head. Well, we've got to see it through somehow...Naked as we were born. So much the better; I want to know whom I have to deal with.

Part 6

INEZ: You know already. There's nothing more to learn.

GARCIN: You're wrong. So long as each of us hasn't made a clean breast of it-- why they've damned him or her-- we know nothing. Nothing that counts. You, young lady, you shall begin. Why? Tell us why. If you are frank, if we bring our specters into the open, it may save us from disaster. So- out with it! Why?

ESTELLE: I tell you I haven't a notion. They wouldn't tell me why.

GARCIN: That's so. They wouldn't tell me, either. But I've a pretty good idea... Perhaps you're shy of speaking first? Right. I'll lead off. I'm not a very estimable person.

INEZ: No need to tell us that. We know you were a deserter.

GARCIN: Let that be. It's only a side-issue. I'm here because I treated my wife abominably. That's all. For five years. Naturally, she's suffering still. There she is: the moment I mention her, I see her. It's Gomez who interests me, and it's she I see. Where's Gomez got to? For five years. There! They've given her back my things; she's sitting by the window, with my coat on her knees. The coat with the twelve bullet-holes. The blood's like rust; a brown ring round each hole. It's quite a museum-piece, that coat; scarred with history. And I used to wear it, fancy! ... Now, can't you shed a tear, my love! Surely you'll squeeze one out-- at last? No? You can't manage it? ... Night after night I came home blind drunk, stinking of wine and women. She'd sat up for me, of course. But she never cried, never uttered a word of reproach. Only her eyes spoke. Big, tragic eyes. I don't regret anything. I must pay the price, but I shan't whine.... It's snowing in the street. Won't you cry, confound you? That woman was a born martyr, you know; a victim by vocation.

INEZ: Why did you hurt her like that?

GARCIN: It was so easy. A wored was enough to make her flinch. Like a sensitive-plant. But never, never a reproach. I'm fond of teasing. I watched and waited. But no, not a tear, not a protest. I'd picked her up out of the gutter, you understand...Now she's stroking the coat. Her eyes are shut and she's feeling with her fingeres for the bullet-holes. What are you after? What do you expect? I tell you I regret nothing. The truth is, she admired me too much. Does that mean anything to you?

INEZ: No. Nobody admired me.

GARCIN: So much the better. So much the better for you. I suppose all this trikes you as very vague. Well, here's something hou can get your teeth into. I brought a half-caste girl to stay in our house. My wife slept upstairs; she must have heard-- everything. She was an early riser and, as I and the girl stayed in bed late, she served us our morning coffee.

INEZ: You brute!

GARCIN: Yes, a brute, if you like. But a well-beloved brute. (Far-away look comes to his eyes.) No, it's nothing. Only Gomez, and he's not talking about me... What were you saying? Yes, a brute. Certainly. Else why should I be here? Your turn.

INEZ: Well, I was what some people down there called " a damned bitch." Damned already. So it's no surprise, being here.

GARCIN: Is that all you have to say?

INEZ: No. There was that affair with Florence. A dead men's tale. With three corpses to it. He to start with; the she and I. So there's no one left. I've nothing to worry about; it was a clean sweep. Only that room. I see it now and then. Empty, with the doors locked.... No, they've just unlocked them. "To Let." It's to let; there's a notice on the door. that's -- too ridiculous.

GARCIN: Three. Three deaths, you said?

INEZ: Three.

GARCIN: One man and two women?

INEZ: Yes.

GARCIN: Well, well. Did he kill himself?

INEZ: He? No, he hadn't the guts for that. Still, he'd every reason; we led him a dog's life. As a matter of fact, he was run over by a tram. A silly sort of end... I was living with them; he was my cousin.

GARCIN: Was Florence fair?

INEZ: Fair? You know, I don't regret a thing; still, I'm not so very keen on telling you the story.

GARCIN: That's all right..... So you got sick of him?

INEZ: Quite gradually. All sorts of little things got on my nerves. For instance, he made a noise when he was drinking-- a sort of gurgle. Trifles like that. He was rather pathetic really. Vulnerable. Why are you smiling?

GARCIN: Because I, anyhow, am not vulnerable.

INEZ: Don't be too sure... I crept inside her skin, she saw the world through my eyes. When she left him, I had her on my hands. We shared a bed-sitting-room at the other end of the town.

GARCIN: And then?

INEZ: Then that tram did its job. I used to remind her every day: "Yes, my pet, we killed him between us." I'm rather cruel, really.

GARCIN: So am I.

INEZ: No, you're not cruel. It's something else.

GARCIN: What?

INEZ: I'll tell you later. When I say I'm cruel, I mean I can't get on without making people suffer. Like a live coal. A livek coal in others' hearts. When I'm alone I flicker out. For six months I flamed away in her heart, till there was nothing but a cinder. One night she got up and turned on the gas while I was asleep. Then she crept back into bed. So now you know.

GARCIN: Well! Well!

INEZ: Yes? What's in your mind?

GARCIN: Nothing. Only that it's not a pretty story

INEZ: Obviously. But what matter?

GARCIN: As you say, what matter? Your turn. What have you done.

ESTELLE: As I told you, I haven't a notion. I rack my brain, but it's no use.

GARCIN: Right. Then we'll give you a hand. That fellow with the smashed face, who was he?

ESTELLE: Who-- who do you mean?

INEZ: You know quite well. The man you were so scared of seeing when you came in.

ESTELLE: Oh, him! A friend of mine.

GARCIN: Why were you afraid of him?

ESTELLE: That's my business, Mr. Garcin.

INEZ: Did he shoot himself on your account?

ESTELLE: Of course not. How absurd you are!

GARCIN: Then why should you have been so scared? He blew his brains out, didn't he? That's how his face got smashed.

ESTELLE: Don't! Please don't go on.

GARCIN: Because of you. Because of you.

INEZ: He shot himself because of you.

ESTELLE: Leave me alone! It's -- it's not fair, bullying me like that. I want to go! I want to go!

GARCIN: Go if you can. Personally, I ask for nothing better. Unfortunately the door's locked.

ESTELLE: You're hateful, both of you.

INEZ: Hateful? Yes, that's the word. Now get on with it. That fellow who killed himself on your account-- you were his mistress, eh?

GARCIN: Of course she was. And he wanted to have her to himself alone. That's so, isn't it?

INEZ: He danced the tango like a professional, but he was poor as a church mouse-- that's right, isn't it?

GARCIN: Was he poor or not? Give a straight answer.

ESTELLE: Yes, he was poor.

GARCIN: And then you had your reputation to keep up. One day he came and implored you to run away with him, and you laughed in his face.

INEZ: That's it. You laughed at him. And so he killed himself.

ESTELLE: Did you use to look at Florence in that way?

INEZ: Yes.

ESTELLE: You've got it all wrong, you two. He wanted me to have a baby. So there!

GARCIN: And you didn't want one?

ESTELLE: I certainly didn't. But the baby came, worse luck. I went to Switzerland for five months. No one knew anything. It was a girl. Roger was with me when she was born. It pleased him no end, having a daughter. It didn't please me!

GARCIN: And then?

ESTELLE: There was a balcony overlooking the lake. I brought a big stone. He could see what I was up to and he kept on shouting: "Estelle, for God's sake, don't!" I hated him then. He saw it all. He was leaning over the balcony and he saw the rings spreading on the water--

GARCIN: Yes? And then?

ESTELLE: That's all. I came back to Paris-- and he did as he wished.

GARCIN: You mean he blew his brains out?

ESTELLE: It was absurd of him, really, my husband never suspected anything. Oh, how I loathe you!

GARCIN: Nothing doing. Tears don't flow in this place.

ESTELLE: I'm a coward. A coward! If you knew how I hate you!

INEZ: Poor child! So the hearing's over. But there's no need to look like a hanging judge.

GARCIN: A hanging judge? I'd give a lot to be able to see myself in a glass. How hot it is! (Takes off coat.) Oh, sorry! (Puts it on again.)

ESTELLE: Don't bother. You can stay in your shirt-sleeves. As things are--

GARCIN: Just so. You mustn't be angry with me, Estelle.

ESTELLE: I'm not angry with you.

INEZ: And what about me? Are you angry with me?

ESTELLE: Yes.

Part 7

INEZ: Well, Mr. Garcin, now you have us in the nude all right. Do your understand things any better for that?

GARCIN: I wonder. Yes, perhaps a trifle better. And now I suppose we start trying to help each other.

INEZ: I don't need help.

GARCIN: Inez, they've laid their snare damned cunningly-- like a cobweb. If you make any movement, if you raise your hand to fan yourself, Estelle and I feel a little tug. Alone, none of us can save himself or herself; we're linked together inextricably. So you can take your choice. Hullo? What's happening?

INEZ: They've let it. The windows are wide open, a man is sitting on my bed. MY bed, if you please! They've let it, let it! Step in, step in, make yourself at home, you brute! Ah, there's a woman, too. She's going up to him, putting her hands on his shoulders...Damn it, why don't they turn the lights on? It's getting dark. Now he's going to kiss her. But that's my room, MY room! Pitch-dark now. I can't see anything, but I hear them whispering, whispering. Is he going to make love to her on MY bed? What's that she said? That it's noon and the sun is shining? I must be going blind. Blacked out. I can't see or hear a thing. So I'm done with the earth, it seems. No more alibis for me! I feel so empty, desiccated-- really dead at last. All of me's here, in this room. What were you saying?

Something about helping me, wasn't it?

GARCIN: Yes.

INEZ: Helping me to do what?

GARCIN: To defeat their devilish tricks.

INEZ: And what do you expect me to do in return?

GARCIN: To help ME. It only needs a little effort, Inez; just a spark of human feeling.

INEZ: Human feeling. That's beyond my range. I'm rotten to the core.

GARCIN: And how about me? All the same, suppose we try?

INEZ: It's no use. I'm all dried up. I can't give and I can't receive. How could I help you? A dead twig, ready for the burning. FLorence was fair, a natural blonde.

GARCIN: Do your realize that this young woman's fated to be your torturer?

INEZ: Perhaps I've guessed it.

GARCIN: It's through her they'll get you. I, of course, I'm different-- aloof. I take no notice of her. Suppose you had a try--

INEZ: Yes?

GARCIN: It's a trap. They're watching you, to see if you'll fall into it.

INEZ: I know. And you're another trap. Do you think they haven't foreknown every word you say? And of course there's a whole nest of pitfalls that we can't see. Everything here's

a booby-trap. But what do I care? I'm a pitfall, too. For her, obviously. And perhaps I'll catch her.

GARCIN: You won't catch anything. We're chasing after each other, round and round in a vicious circle, like the horses on a roundabout. That's part of their plan, of course... Drop it, Inez. Open your hands and let go of everything. Or else you'll bring disaster on all three of us.

INEZ: Do I look the sort of person who lets go? I know what's coming to me. I'm going to burn, and it's to last forever. Yes, I KNOW everything. But do you think I'll let go? I'll catch her, she'll see you through my eyes, as Florence saw that other man. What's the good of trying to enlist my sympathy? I assure you I know everything, and I can't feel sorry even for myself. A trap! Don't I know it, and that I'm in a trap myself, up to the neck, and there's nothing to be done about it? ANd if it suits their book, so much the better!

GARCIN: Well, I, anyhow, can feel sorry for you, too. Look at me, we're naked, naked right through, and I can see into your heart. That's one link between us. Do you think I'd want to hurt you? I don't regret anything, I'm dried up, too. But for you I can still feel pity.

INEZ: Don't. I hate being pawed about. And keep your pity for yourself. Don't forget, Garcin, that there are traps for you, too, in this room. ALl nicely set for you. You'd do better to watch your own interests. But, if you will elave us in peace, this child and me, I'll see I don't do you any harm.

GARCIN: Very well.

ESTELLE: Please, Garcin.

GARCIN: What do you want of me?

ESTELLE: You can help ME, anyhow.

GARCIN: If you want help, apply to her.

ESTELLE: I implore you, Garcin-- you gave me your promise, didn't you? Help me quick. I don't want to be left alone. Olga's taken him to a cabaret.

INEZ: Taken whom?

ESTELLE: Peter....Oh, now they're dancing together.

INEZ: Who's Peter?

ESTELLE: Such a silly boy. He called me his glancing stream-- just fancy! He was terribly in love with me... She's persuaded him to come out with her tonight.

INEZ: Do you love him?

ESTELLE: They're sitting down now. She's puffing like a grampus. What a fool the girl is to insist on dancing! But I dare say she does it to reduce...No, of course I don't love him. He's only eighteen, and I'm not a baby-snatcher.

INEZ: Then why bother about them? What difference does it make?

ESTELLE: He belonged to me.

INEZ: Nothing on earth belongs to you any more.

ESTELLE: I tell you he was mine. All mine.

INEZ: Yes, he was yours-- once. But now---try to make him hear, try to touch him. Olga can touch him, talk to him as much as she likes. That's so, isn't it? She can squeeze his hands, rub herself against him--

ESTELLE: Yes, look! She's pressing her great fat chest against him, puffing and blowing his his face. But, my poor little lamb, can't you see how ridiculous she is? Why don't you laugh at her? Oh, once I'd have only had to glance at them and she'd have slunk away. Is there really nothing, nothing left of me?

INEZ: Nothing whatever. Nothing of you's left on earth-- not even a shadow. All you own is here. Would you like that paper-knife? Or that ornament on the mantelpiece? That blue sofa's yours. And I, my dear, am yours forever.

ESTELLE: You mine! That's good! Well, which of you two would dare to call me his glancing stream, his crystal girl? You know too much about me, you know I'm rotten through and through... Peter, dear, think of me, fix your thoughts on me, and save me. All the time you're thinking "my glancing stream, his crystal girl," I'm only half here. I'm only half wicked, and half of me is down there with you, clean and bright and crystal-clear as running water...Oh, just look at her face, all scarlet, like a tomato. No, it's absurd, we've laughed at her together, you and I, often and often... What's that tune? -- I always loved it. Yes, the "St. Louis Blues"....All right, dance away, dance away. Garcin, I wish you could see her, you'd die of laughing.Only--she'll never know I SEE her. Yes, I see you, Olga, with your hair all anyhow, and you do look like a dope, my dear. Oh, now you're treading on his toes. It's a scream! Hurry up! Quicker! Quicker! He's dragging her along, bundling her round and round-- it's too ghastly! He always said I was so light, he loved to dance with me. I tell you, Olga, I can see you. No, she doesn't care, she's dancing through my gaze. What's that? What's that you said? "Our poor dear Estelle"? Oh, don't be such a humbug! You didn't even shed a tear at the funeral...And she has the nerve to talk to him about her poor dear friend Estelle! How dare she discuss me with Peter? Now then, keep time. She never could dance and talk at once. Oh, what's that? No, no. Don't tell him. Please, please don't tell him. You can keep him, do what you like with him, but please don't tell him about-- that! All right. You can have him now. Isn't it FOUL, Garcin? She's told him everything, about Roger, my trip to Switzerland, the baby. "Poor Estelle wasn't exactly--" "No, I wasn't exactly--- True enough. He's looking grave, shaking his head, but he doesn't seem so much surprised, not what one would expect. Keep him then-- I won't haggle with you over his long eyelashes, his pretty girlish face. They're yours for the asking. His glancing stream, his crystal. Well, the crystal's shattered into bits. "Poor Estelle!" Dance, dance, dance. On with it. But do keep time. One, two. One, two. How I'd love to go down to earth for just a moment, and dance with him again. The music's growing fainter. They've turned down the lights, as they do for a tango. Why are they playing so softly? Louder, please. I can't hear. It's so far away, so far away. I--I can't hear a sound. All over. It's the end. The earth has left me. Don't turn from me-- please. Take me in your arms.

INEZ: Now then, Garcin!

GARCIN: It's to her you should say that.

ESTELLE: Don't turn away. You're a man, aren't you, and surely I'm not a fright as all that! Everyone says I've lovely hair and after all, a man killed himself on my account. You have to look at something, and there's nothing here to see except the sofas and that

awful ornament and the table. Surely I'm better to look at that an lot of stupid furniture. Listen! I've dropped out of their heart like a little sparrow fallen from its nest. So gather me up, dear, fold me to your heart--and you'll see how nice I can be.

GARCIN: I tell you it's to that lady you should speak.

ESTELLE: To her? But she doesn't count, she's a woman.

INEZ: Oh, I don't count? Is that what you think? But, my poor little fallen nestling, you've been sheltering in my heart for ages, though you didn't realize it. Don't be afraid; I'll keep looking at you for ever and ever, without a flutter of my eyelids, and you'll live in my gaze like a mote in a sunbeam.

ESTELLE: A sunbeam indeed! Don't talk such rubbish! You've tried that trick already, and you should know it doesn't work.

INEZ: Estelle! My glancing stream! My crystal!

ESTELLE: YOUR crystal? It's grotesque. Do you think you can fool me with that sort of talk? Everyone know by now what I did to my baby. The crystal's shattered, but I don't care. I'm just a hollow dummy, all that's left of me is the outside--but it's not for you.

INEZ: Come to me, Estelle. You shall be whatever you like: a glancing stream, a muddy stream. And deep down in my eyes you'll see yourself just as you want to be.

ESTELLE: Oh, leave me in peace. You haven't any eyes. Oh, damn it, isn't there anything I can do to get rid of you? I've an idea. (Spits in Garcin's face.) There!

INEZ: Garcin, you shall pay for this.

GARCIN: So it's a man you need?

ESTELLE: Not any man. You.

GARCIN: No humbug now. Any man would do your business. As I happen to be here, you want me. Right! Mind, I'm not your sort at all, really; I'm not a young nincompoop and I don't dance the tango.

ESTELLE: I'll take you as you are. And perhaps I shall change you.

GARCIN: I doubt it. I shan't pay much attention; I've other things to think about.

ESTELLE: What things?

GARCIN: They wouldn't interest you.

ESTELLE: I'll sit on your sofa and wait for you to take some notice of me. I promise not to bother you at all.

INEZ: That's right, fawn on him, like the silly bitch you are. Grovel and cringe! And he hasn't even good looks to commend him!

ESTELLE: Don't listen to her. She has no eyes, no ears. She's-- nothing.

GARCIN: I'll give you what I can. It doesn't amount to much. I shan't love you; I know you too well.

ESTELLE: Do you want me, anyhow?

GARCIN: Yes.

ESTELLE: I ask no more.

GARCIN: In that case--

INEZ: Estelle! Garcin! You must be going crazy. You're not alone. I'm here too.

GARCIN: Of course-- but what does it matter?

INEZ: Under my eyes? You couldn't-- couldn't do it.

ESTELLE: Why not? I often undressed with my maid looking on.

INEZ: Let her alone. Don't paw her with your dirty man's hands.

GARCIN: Take care. I'm no gentleman, and I'd have no compunction about striking a woman.

INEZ: But you promised me; you promised. I'm only asking you to keep your word.

GARCIN: Why should I, considering you were the first to break our agreement?

INEZ: Very well, have it your own way. I'm the weaker party, one against two. But don't forget I'm here, and watching. I shan't take my eyes off you, Garcin; when you're kissing her, you'll feel them boring into you. Yes, have it your own way, make love and get it over. We're in hell; my turn will come.

GARCIN: Now then. Your lips. Give me your lips.

ESTELLE: Really! Didn't I tell you not to pay attention to her?

GARCIN: You've got it wrong. It's Gomez; he's back in the press-room. They've shut the windows; it must be winter down there. Six months since I--Well, I warned you I'd be absent-minded sometimes, didn't I? They're shivering, they've kept their coats on. Funny they should feel the cold like that, when I'm feeling so hot. Ah, this time he's talking about me.

ESTELLE: Is it going to last long? You might at least tell me what he's saying.

GARCIN: Nothing. Nothing worth repeating. He's a swine, that's all. A god-damned bloody swine. Let's come back to-- to ourselves. Are you going to love me?

ESTELLE: I wonder now!

GARCIN: Will you trust me?

ESTELLE: What a quaint thing to ask! Considering you'll be under my eyes all the time, and I don't think I've much to fear from Inez, so far as you're concerned.

GARCIN: Obviously. I was thinking of another kind of trust. Talk away, talk away, you swine. I'm not there to defend myself. Estelle, you MUST give me your trust.

ESTELLE: Oh, what a nuisance you are! I'm giving you my mouth, my arms, my whole body-- and everything could be so simple...My trust! I haven't any to give, I'm afraid, and you're making me terribly embarrassed. You must have something pretty ghastly on your conscience to make such a fuss about my trusting you.

GARCIN: They shot me.

ESTELLE: I know. Because you refused to fight. Well, why shouldn't you?

GARCIN: I--I didn't exactly refuse. I must say he talks well, he makes out a good case against me, but he never says what I should have done instead. Should I have gone to the general and said: "General, I decline to fight"? A mug's game; they'd have promptly locked me up. But I wanted to show my colors, my true colors, do you understand? I wasn't going to be silenced. So I--I took the train.... They caught me at the frontier.

ESTELLE: Where were you trying to go?

GARCIN: To Mexico. I meant to launch a pacifist newspaper down there. Well, why don't you speak?

ESTELLE: What could I say? You acted quite rightly, as you didn't want to fight. But, darling, how on earth can I guess what you want me to answer?

INEZ: Can't you guess? Well, I can. He wants you to tell him that he bolted like a lion. For "bolt" he did, and that's what biting him.

GARCIN: "Bolted," "went away,"-- we won't quarrel over words.

ESTELLE: But you had to run away. If you'd stayed they'd have sent you to jail, wouldn't they?

GARCIN: Of course. Well, Estelle, am I a coward?

ESTELLE: How can I say? Don't be so unreasonable, darling. I can't put myself in your skin. You must decide that for yourself.

GARCIN: I can't decide.

ESTELLE: Anyway, you must remember. You must have had reasons for acting as you did.

GARCIN: I had.

ESTELLE: Well?

GARCIN: But were they the real reasons?

ESTELLE: You've a twisted mind, that's your trouble. Plaguing yourself over such trifles!

GARCIN: I'd thought it all out, and I wanted to make a stand. But was that my real motive?

INEZ: Exactly. That's the question. Was that your real motive? No doubt you argued it out with yourself, you weighed the pros and cons, you found good reasons for what you did. But fear and hatred and all the dirty little instincts one keeps dark--- they're motives too. So carry on, Mr. Garcin, and try to be honest with yourself-- for once.

GARCIN: Do I really need you to tell me that? Day and night I paced my cell, from the window to the door, from the door to the window. I pried into my heart, I sleuthed myself

like a detective. By the end of it I felt as if I'd given my whole life to introspection. But always I harked back to the one thing certain--- that I had acted as I did, I'd taken that train to the frontier. But why? Why?Finally I thought: My death will settle it. If I face death courageously, I'll prove I am no coward.

INEZ: And how did you face death?

GARCIN: Miserably. Rottenly. Oh, it was only a physical lapse--- that might happen to anyone; I'm not ashamed of it. Only everything's been left in suspense forever. Come here, Estelle. Look at me. I want to feel someone looking at me while they're talking about me on earth... I like green eyes.

INEZ: Green eyes! Just hark to him! And you, Estelle, do you like cowards?

ESTELLE: If you knew how little I care! Coward or hero, it's all one-- provided he kisses well.
GARCIN: There they are, slumped in their chairs, sucking at their cigars. Bored they look. Half-asleep. They're thinking:"Garcin's a coward." But only vaguely, dreamily. One's got to think of something. "That chap Garcin was a coward." That's what they've decided, those dear friends of mine. In six months'time they'll be saying: "Cowardly as that skunk Garcin." You're lucky, you two; no one on earth is giving you another thought. But I--I'm long in dying.

INEZ: What about your wife, Garcin?

GARCIN: Oh, didn't I tell you? She's dead.

INEZ: Dead?

GARCIN: Yes, she died just now. About two months ago.

INEZ: Of grief?

GARCIN: What else should she die of? So all is for the best, you see; the war's over, my wife's dead, and I've carved out my place in history.

ESTELLE: My poor darling! Look at me. Please look. Touch me. Touch me. There! Keep your hand there. No, don't move. Why trouble what those men are thinking? They'll die off one by one. Forget them. There's only me, now.

GARCIN: But THEY won't forget me, not they! They'll die, but others will come after them to carry on the legend. I've left my fate in their hands.

ESTELLE: You think too much, that's your trouble.

GARCIN: What else is there to do now? I was a man of action once... Oh, if only I could be with them again, for just one day--I'd fling their lie in their teeth. But I'm locked out; they're passing judgment on my life without troubling about me, and they're right, because I'm dead. Dead and done with. A back number.

ESTELLE: Garcin.

GARCIN: Still there? Now listen! I want you to do me a service. No, don't shrink away. I know it must seem strange to you, having someone asking you for help; you're not used to that. But if you'll make the effort, if you'll only WILL it hard enough, I dare say we can really love each other. Look at it this way. A thousand of them are proclaiming I'm a coward; but what do numbers matter? If there's someone, just one person, to say quite positively I did not run away, that I'm not the sort who runs away, that I'm brave and decent and the rest of it-- well, that one person's faith would save me. Will you have that faith in me? Then I shall love you and cherish you for ever. Estelle-- will you?

ESTELLE: Oh, you dear silly man, do you think I could love a coward?

GARCIN: But just now you said--

ESTELLE: I was only teasing you. I like men, my dear, who're real men, with tough skin and strong hands. You haven't a coward's chin, or a coward's mouth, or a coward's voice, or a coward's hair. And it's for your mouth, your hair, your voice, I love.

GARCIN: Do you mean this? REALLY mean it?

ESTELLE: Shall I swear it?

GARCIN: Then I snap my fingers at them all, those below and those in here. Estelle, we shall climb out of hell. (Inez laughs.) What's that?

INEZ: But she doesn't mean a word of what she says. How can you be such a simpleton? "Estelle, am I a coward?" As if she cared a damn either way.

ESTELLE: Inez, how dare you? Don't listen to her. If you want me to have faith in you, you must begin by trusting me.

INEZ: That's right! That's right! Trust away! She wants a man-- that far you can trust her-- she wants a man's arm round her waist, a man's smell, a man's eyes glowing with desire. And that's all she wants. She'd assure you you were God Almighty if she thought it would give you pleasure.

GARCIN: Estelle, is it true? Answer me. Is it true?

ESTELLE: What do you expect me to say? Don't you realize how maddening it is to have to answer questions one can't make head or tail of? You do make things difficult...Anyhow, I'd love you just the same, even if you were a coward. Isn't that enough?

Part 8

GARCIN: You disgust me, both of you.

ESTELLE: What are you up to?

GARCIN: I'm going.

INEZ: You won't get far. The door is locked.

GARCIN: I'll MAKE them open it.

ESTELLE: Please! Please!

INEZ: Don't worry, my pet. The bell doesn't work.

GARCIN: I tell you they shall open. I can't endure it any longer, I'm through with you both. Go away.(to Estelle) You're even fouler than she. I won't let myself get bogged in your eyes. You're soft and slimy. Ugh! Like an octopus. Like a quagmire.

ESTELLE: I beg you, oh, I beg you not to leave me. I'll promise not to speak again, I won't trouble you in any way-- but don't go. I daren't be left alone with Inez, now she's shown her claws.

GARCIN: Look after yourself. I never asked you to come here.

ESTELLE: Oh, how mean you are! Yes, it's quite true you're a coward.

INEZ: Well, my little sparrow fallen from the nest, I hope you're satisfied now. You spat in my face-- playing up to him, of course-- and we had a tiff on his account. But he's going, and a good riddance it will be. We two women will have the place to ourselves.

ESTELLE: You won't gain anything. If that door opens, I'm going too.

INEZ: Where?

ESTELLE: I don't care where. As far from you as I can.

GARCIN: Open the door! Open, blast you! I'll endure anything, your red-hot tongs and molten lead, your racks and prongs and garrotes-- all your fiendish gadgets, everything that burns and flays and tears-- I'll put up with any torture you impose. Anything, anything would be better than this agony of mind, this creeping pain that gnaws and fumbles and caresses one and never hurts quite enough. Now will you open? (THE DOOR FLIES OPEN: a long silence.)

INEZ: Well, Garcin? You're free to go.

Part 9

GARCIN: Now I wonder why that door opened.

INEZ: What are you waiting for? Hurry up and go.

GARCIN: I shall not go.

INEZ: And you, Estelle? So what? Which shall it be? Which of the three of us will leave? The barrier's down, why are we waiting? But what a situation! It's a scream! We're inseparables!

ESTELLE: Inseparables? Garcin, come and lend a hand. Quickly. We'll push her out and slam the door on her. That'll teach her a lesson.

INEZ:(Struggling with Inez) Estelle, I beg you, let me stay. I won't go, I won't go! Not into the passage.

GARCIN: Let go of her.

ESTELLE: You're crazy. She hates you.

GARCIN: It's because of her I'm staying here.

INEZ: Because of me? All right, shut the door. It's ten times hotter here since it opened. Because of me, you said?

GARCIN: Yes. YOU, anyhow, know what it means to be a coward.

INEZ: Yes, I know.

GARCIN: And you know what wickedness is, and shame, and fear. There were days when you peered into yourself, into the secret places of your heart, and what you saw there made you faint with horror. And then, next day, you didn't know what to make of it, you couldn't interpret the horror you had glimpsed the day before. Yes, you know what evil costs. And when you say I'm a coward, you know from experience what that means.

Is that so?

INEZ: Yes.

GARCIN: So it's you whom I have to convince; you are of my kind. Did you suppose I meant to go? No, I couldn't leave you here, gloating over my defeat, with all those thoughts about me running in your head.

INEZ: Do you really wish to convince me?

GARCIN: That's the one and only thing I wish for now. I can't hear them any longer, you know. Probably that means they're through with me. For good and all. The curtain's down, nothing of me is left on earth-- not even the name of coward. So, Inez, we're alone. Only you two remain to give a thought to me. She- she doesn't count. It's you who matter; you who hate me. If you'll have faith in me I'm saved.

INEZ: It won't be easy. Have a look at me. I'm a hard-headed woman.

GARCIN: I'll give you all the time that's needed.

INEZ: Yes, we've lots of time in hand. ALL time.

GARCIN: Listen! Each man has an aim in life, a leading motive; that's so, isn't it? Well, I didn't give a damn for wealth, or for love. I aimed at being a real man. A tough, as they say. I staked everything on the same horse... Can one possibly be a coward when one's deliberately courted danger at every turn? And can judge a life by a single action?

INEZ: Why not? For thirty years you dreamt you were a hero, and condoned a thousand petty lapses--because a hero, of course, can do no wrong. An easy method, obviously. Then a day came when you were up against it, the red light of real danger-- and you took the train to Mexico.

GARCIN: I "dreamt," you say. It was no dream. When I chose the hardest path, I made my choice deliberately. A man is what he wills himself to be.

INEZ: Prove it. Prove it was no dream. It's what one does, and nothing else, that shows the stuff one's made of.

GARCIN: I died too soon. I wasn't allowed time to--to do my deeds.

INEZ: One always dies too soon-- or too late. And yet one's whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing up. You are-- your life, and nothing else.

GARCIN: What a poisonous woman you are! With an answer for everything.

INEZ: Now then! Don't lose heart. It shouldn't be so hard, convincing me. Pull yourself together , man, rake up some arguments. Ah, wasn't I right when I said you were vulnerable? Now you're going to pay the price, and what a price! You're a coward, Garcin, because I wish it! I wish it-- do you hear?-- I wish it. And yet, just look at me, see how weak I am, a mere breath on the air, a gaze observing you, a formless thought that thinks you. Ah, they're open now, those big hands, those coarse, man's hands! But what do you hope to do? You can't throttle thoughts with hands. So you've no choice, you must convince me, and you're at my mercy.

ESTELLE: Garcin!

GARCIN: What?

ESTELLE: Revenge yourself.

GARCIN: How?

ESTELLE: Kiss me, darling---then you'll hear her squeal.

GARCIN: That's true, Inez. I'm at your mercy, but you're at mine as well.

INEZ: Oh, you coward, you weakling, running to women to console you!

ESTELLE: That's right, Inez. Squeal away.

INEZ: What a lovely pair you make! If you could see his big paw splayed out on your back, rucking up your skin and creasing the silk. Be careful, though! He's perspiring, his hand will leave a blue stain on your dress.

ESTELLE: Squeal away, Inez, squeal away!...Hug me tight, darling; tighter still---that'll finish her off, and a good thing too!

INEZ: Yes, Garcin, she's right. Carry on with it, press her to you till you feel your bodies melting into each other; a lump of warm, throbbing flesh... Loe's a grand solace, isn't it, my friend? Deep and dark as sleep. But I'll see you don't sleep.

ESTELLE: Don't listen to her. Press your lips to my mouth. Oh, I'm yours, yours, yours.

INEZ: Well, what are you waiting for? Do as you're told. What a lovely scene: coward Garcin holding baby-killer Estelle in his manly arms! Make your stakes, everyone. Will coward Garcin kiss the lady, or won't he dare? What's the betting? I'm watching you, everybody's watching, I'm a crowd all by myself. Do you hear the crowd? Do you hear them muttering, Garcin? "Coward!Coward!" ---that's what they're saying...It's no use trying to escape, I'll never let you go. What do you hope to get from her silly lips? Forgetfulness? But I shan't forget you, not I! "It's I you must convince." So come to me. I'm waiting. Come along, now...Look how obedient he is, like a well-trained dog who comes when his mistress calls. You can't hold him, and you never will.

GARCIN: Will night never come?

INEZ: Never.

GARCIN: You will always see me?

INEZ: Always.

GARCIN: This bronze. Yes, now's the moment; I'm looking at this thing on the mantelpiece, and I understand that I'm in hell. I tell you, everything's been thoughtout beforehand. They knew I'd stand at the fireplace stroking this thing of bronze, with all those eyes intent on me. Devouring me. What? Only two of you? I thought there were

more; many more. So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. HELL IS--OTHER PEOPLE!

ESTELLE: My darling! Please-

GARCIN: No, let me be. She is between us. I cannot love you when she's watching.

ESTELLE: Right! In that case, I'll stop her watching. (She picks up the PAPER knife and stabs Inez several times.)

INEZ: But, you crazy creature, what do you think you're doing? You know quite well I'm dead.

ESTELLE: Dead?

INEZ: Dead! Dead! Dead! Knives, poison, ropes--useless. It has happened already, do you understand? Once and for all. SO here we are, forever.

ESTELLE: Forever. My God, how funny! Forever.

GARCIN: For ever, and ever, and ever.
(A long silence.)

GARCIN: Well, well, let's get on with it...